

**YOUNG PEOPLE'S NARRATIVES OF THEIR PARENTS' SEPARATION  
AND/OR DIVORCE**

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## ABSTRACT

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**BACKGROUND AND AIMS:** The psychological impact of parental divorce or separation upon children has long been debated. There is a wealth of quantitative research which offers contradictory findings yet young people who experience their parents' divorce or separation are over represented in the clinical population. Qualitative research has offered support that children are active in the process of divorce and has developed understanding about the lived experiences of young people. There have been few studies that take account of the experiences of young people in late adolescence from a clinical population. Adolescence is understood as a key transitional phase whereby a sense of self is developed. Nevertheless, little research specifically explores how young people reconcile this disruptive life event with their emerging sense of self. In an attempt to address this gap in the literature, this study sought to hear the narratives of young people, with the aim to further understand and inform clinical practice. **METHODOLOGY:** A qualitative approach was employed. A purposive sample of five females aged 16 years old and currently receiving support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services were recruited. An interview was conducted with each participant to explore the young person's narratives. These were audio-recorded and transcribed. Narrative analysis was used paying attention to both what was said, how it was said and for what purpose. **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:** Initially each narrative was considered individually and the researcher's 'Global Impressions' were presented. Following this, the narratives were considered collectively, recognising the shared storylines. Each person's unique connection with the shared storyline was considered, through attending to the participants' emotional experiences and identity work that was interwoven in their stories. It was found that each young person presented accounts whereby their mother's emotional absence was a dominant storyline. In relation to this experience the young people performed the identity of being mature and taking on additional responsibilities. They additionally narrated accounts of coping with their difficulties alone. It emerged that stories of an imagined future were missing from the narratives. These findings are discussed with reference to the clinical implications, strengths, and limitations of the methodology, and directions for future research.

## A BEGINNING

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“...a story may often serve more than one purpose – above its informative function, it may entertain, be a piece of moral advice, extend an offer to become more intimate, seek audience alignment for the purpose of joint revenge and serve as a claim as to who I really am and all at the same the time.”

(Bamberg 1997, pg. 341-342)

## Chapter 1: AN INTRODUCTION

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The aim of this study is to develop the current limited research investigating the way in which young people, in a clinical population, make sense of their parents' divorce or separation. It is therefore an exploration of the way in which co-constructed stories can develop and shape young people's identities.

### 1.1 OVERVIEW

To begin, a brief explanation of the terms adopted and style of writing used for this thesis will be offered. This will be followed by offering the reader insight into the lenses through which the author approached this research. Hoffman (1990) states that we see the world through our own lenses made up of our experiences, values and beliefs. Being open about the researcher's interest and stance in the topic in question is in accordance with the recommendations by Emerson and Frosch (2004). It hopes to then orientate the reader to the theoretical underpinnings of this research through offering an exploration of the development of identity in adolescence. There will then be an exploration of the literature in this field of research, followed by the ways in which this study hopes to further elaborate our knowledge and inform our practice. Finally, the aims of the study will be stated.

### 1.2 LANGUAGE AND WRITING STYLE

To avoid ambiguity an explanation of adopted terms and the style of writing is necessary. The term 'divorce' is adopted by this research to refer to the final termination of marital union. With many parents today cohabiting, but choosing to remain unmarried, it is assumed that the experience of children brought up in these circumstances, is comparable

with those children of married two-parent families. The term 'separation', therefore, refers to the *permanent* termination of parents' relationships that were unmarried.

This research has used a sample of 16-18 year olds, late adolescents, thus I have chosen to use the term 'young person' or 'young people'. However, many of the studies referenced in this literature review used samples ranging from 11 to 17 years thus referred to their participants as 'children.' Therefore throughout this paper, I have honoured the terms selected by the researchers.

I have used 'first person' to begin and to conclude this thesis in order to ensure that the position of the researcher is transparent. However, the use of 'third person' has been adopted throughout the main body of the thesis in line with academic reports.

### 1.3 MY STORIES

One of the most important forms for creating meaning in human existence is the narrative...

(Polkinghorne, 1988, p.183)

This research accepts that we make sense of ourselves and the world around us through the use of stories. It is therefore in keeping that I shall begin by narrating some of my own stories. When considering a research topic I was continually drawn to the area of parental divorce and found myself engaged with the literature. Being both a child from a divorced family and a clinical psychologist in training, I was interested to read the research that suggested that children from divorce families were more susceptible to poor mental health.

### 1.3.1 Personal

During my childhood my family adopted a dominant shared story of drawing strength from our experience of divorce. My mother, who was a single parent of four children, required us all to pull together, encouraging us to develop supportive familial bonds and placing huge value on helping others. The absence of one parent was my norm. I often looked to other two parent families, who I considered 'unusual' and sympathised that the parents needed to make compromises with one another, whereas my mother could bring us up how she wished. Having a strong independent female role model shaped my interest in human rights and equality and I longed to take an active role in looking after people and advocating for people who were less fortunate.

On my regular flights over the Atlantic to visit my father I would sit next to strangers and be fascinated by the stories I would hear of people visiting relatives or being reunited with estranged family members. Those conversations enriched my journeys and shaped the stories told by others about me. My 'chatty nature' and 'interest in people' became a defining part of my personality. These stories contributed to my path into clinical psychology which I had firmly decided upon by the time I had reached the age of 16. Choosing this career so young left the reasons for my decision unquestioned until I began clinical training at the University of Hertfordshire. The University's emphasis on reflective practice (Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, Handbook, 2011) called for me to consider why I had such an interest in psychology. Being asked explicitly on the first day of training in a room full of strangers why I had chosen the field of psychology, drew the response: *'I would like to help people, to ensure their disadvantaged circumstances do not determine who they become'*.

To clarify, my hope was that difficult life experiences should not dictate a life of struggle and lack of opportunity. This hope was influenced by my own experiences which, on paper and supported by quantitative research, would suggest my achievements were 'against the odds'. Whilst I continue to believe people born into adverse circumstances are not destined to a life of struggle, I have developed an appreciation that it *is* these experiences that shape both the stories we tell and the stories that are told about us which create our own sense of self; 'identity is a life story' (McAdams, 1993). I believe that adverse experiences do not inevitably predict stories of struggle; from them can also grow stories of resilience and strength. There are multiple ways in which people can make sense of their experiences through the use of stories.

Parts of my story were left untold or unheard in my family, as it was difficult to hold a 'both/and' position (e.g., Maturana, 1978), that whilst we were a supportive and loving family we also experienced a loss. There were many questions I left unasked as they seemed to compromise our dominant story. My personal experience of divorce has been a tension of opposites, as whilst I value the closeness I have with my siblings, our strong loving and supportive bond as a family and our strong sense of independence, I also feel the sadness of the absence of a parent. Reflecting on my past experiences ignited my interest in why some stories are privileged, while others are marginalised, and subsequently how these marginalised stories can come to be stories that hinder or propel people on their chosen paths. This has fuelled my interest in Narrative Therapy which suggests that 'who we are' is situated in the stories that we tell and hear about ourselves (e.g., Epston & White, 1990; Morgan, 2000).

I recognise that no two people will tell the same story of the same event, owning the ideas of multiple meanings of many possible worlds (Maturana, 1978; Gergen, 1985, 2009). For example, in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, the teenage son of the protagonist, portrayed as wise before his years, at a baseball game, thoughtfully illustrates this idea:

...I got this weird idea about how all those different people see what they see just a little different from everybody else....I mean that because we were sitting where we were sitting tonight, we saw a game that was a little different from those guys with the beer next to us. It was the same game, but I could've noticed something those guys didn't. And then I thought, if I was sitting over there, I'd see something else. And not just the game. I mean they saw me and I saw them, but I didn't see myself and they didn't see themselves.

(Hustvedt, 2003, p.127)

Like the boy in the passage above, I am aware of the differences in the stories my sisters and I would tell about the same 'observable' experience of divorce. Stories are not understood merely as 'accounts' of what happened. Instead, they become part of the lens through which we interpret past and future events (Smart, 2006). Nor is it just between people that stories vary. Stories can also develop and change over time. Through the years my own story has changed enormously as my sense making adjusts to integrate new experiences into the telling and retelling of the story. I now feel able to assimilate the feelings of loss without compromising the strength and resilience that I also gained.

### 1.3.2 Professional

Whilst working in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) I noticed that in accordance with research, many of the children and families had experienced divorce. However, I noticed these experiences and their impact was often absent from much of the clinical work. It made me wonder about the clinical work with this population. My experience has been that divorce is accepted as *a trigger*, a cause for increased stress and subsequent symptomatology. 'Parental divorce' is often included in psychological formulations to understand the onset of difficulties, yet as it is such a well-known 'stressful life event' it can be left unexplored. Thus the mechanisms for why for this client, at this time, had negative implications can be left unknown as interventions are targeted upon the 'problem'. Researchers have noted how children's stories of parental divorce have remained 'silenced' in the aftermath of divorce and are often unheard (Dowling, 1993). It has made me question whether clinical practice maintains this phenomenon, and clients' stories of divorce remain untold.

Both my personal and professional experiences have shaped my belief that exploration of young people's meaning making of parental divorce or separation is a valuable and necessary area of research.

### 1.4 IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN ADOLESCENCE

A 'narrative approach' has been adopted in order to explore the sense making and identity work of young people who have experienced parental divorce or separation (Riessman, 1993, 2008; Bamberg, 2004, 2004a, 2007, 2011). This research methodology is informed by social constructionist thinking (Gergen, 1985, 2009). The epistemology will be explored in

greater detail in the *Methodology* (section 2.2.2). An introduction to adolescence and identity development will now be offered.

#### 1.4.1 Adolescence; the emergence of a sense of self

Whilst identity development is considered a lifelong process, adolescence is a key transitional phase whereby important 'identity work' occurs (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Erikson (1968) suggested that without a sense of a 'unique' self, with a commitment to values and beliefs, it is not possible to complete the tasks of adulthood: developing intimate bonds, caring for future generations and coming to terms with the life ones lived. Erikson's (1968) theory was in line with the modernist models of identity which argued that identity is an inherent phenomenon which exists within the individual. The modernist models of identity have a view that there is a 'true self' that is both identifiable and examinable (McCrea & Costa, 1999). However, in keeping with the epistemological position of the study, a social constructionist model of identity has been adopted for this research. This postmodernist position of identity asserts there is no such thing as a 'fixed' self (Foucault, 1972); it is socially and linguistically formed, shaped by dominant narratives and the context in which we are situated (Elliott, 2005).

It is during adolescence when identity begins to be formed, using the precursors of childhood and setting the stage for the consolidation in adulthood

(Pasupathi & McLean, 2010, p. xxv)

In place of predefined ideas about what it means to be an 'adolescent', which are argued to belong to a specific socio-historic context, Bamberg (2004) centralises *narratives*. Bamberg

(2004) believes these assumptions can place restrictions upon 'real stories' whereas through narrative, adolescents can share accounts on topics that are relevant to them and *reveal* their identity. Bamberg (2004) believes that the stories we tell, about any life event regardless of content, brings the *self* and *identity* into existence. The identity question 'Who am I?' is not believed to presuppose that there is a 'unitary subject' for investigation as modernist models suggest. The claims of 'who I am' are both 'interactively and situationally' accomplished (Bamberg, 2004).

#### 1.4.2 A narrative identity

The social contexts in which adolescents are located (interactions with parents and peers) are influential in the process of them constructing 'viable identities' (Pasupathi & McLean, 2010). Mischler (1999) argues that stories are a discursive achievement and thus the act of storytelling requires both a story teller and an audience to hear them. The present research considers 'narratives' to be *situated stories*, that is, co-constructed with the person that they are told to, and belonging to that particular time and space (e.g. Bamberg, 2004; Pasupathi, 2001). McLean, Pasupathi and Pals (2007) argue that it is through these situated stories that our sense of self is developed and maintained. The current research recognises that stories occur within a local, historical and social context which informs and constrains the possibilities for an individual's identity construction (Taylor & Littleton 2005).

'Narrative' has been understood and analysed in various ways. The 'life story' approach (Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000; McAdams, 1993) argues that 'narrative' is a form of 'stating' one's identity. It is defined as creating a meaningful story about chosen events, replacing "one thing *after* another" with "one thing *because* of another" (Ricoeur, 1992, p.

425). However an alternative understanding, which elaborates upon the 'life story' approach, argues that narration is a form of 'shaping' one's construction of identity (e.g. Bamberg, 2004; Fivush, Hazzard, McDermott Sales, Sarfati & Brown, 2003; McLean et al., 2007). It is argued that through the telling of one's story beliefs, self-views and value commitments can be shaped and communicated to others. Pasupathi and McLean (2010) explicate that it is through narration that identities can be "explored, committed to, evaluated, discarded and maintained" (p. xxi). The understanding that *narration* influences the development of identities will inform this research.

#### 1.4.3 Narrating a sense of self over time

Kroger (1989) argues that identities are formed through a reciprocal process between the psychological interior of individuals and her/his socio-cultural environment. Inevitably life circumstances change and the constructed identity can be amended, maintained or castoff in place of a reconstruction (McLean, 2008). These fluid constructions of identity form the foundations for which adolescents can enter adulthood. This idea varies from modernist models of identity whereby people would be classified into a category or dimension. Pasupathi and McLean (2010) argue that to classify young people on dimensions overlooks the *process* of identity development. They identify two main processes: the exploration of self and the commitment to the integration of self (Pasupathi & McLean, 2010). These two processes can feel at times opposing, as through exploration people can unveil various complexities and contradictions with which the person needs to develop a sense of coherence (Pasupathi & McLean, 2010).

Narratives offer interpretations of the past they are not merely representations (Riessman, 2003). Past and future selves are represented and interpreted by the present self therefore allows individual's to develop a sense of continuity over time. (McLean et al., 2007; Pasupathi, 2001). As Polkinghorne (1988) states "...self-identity holds the two notions of difference and sameness in tension" (p. 146). A narrative model of identity recognises how our identities are not static; they change with changing life circumstances whilst maintaining a consistent sense of self. The work of Maggie Kirkman (2002) has suggested that the way in which one *has been* and *will be* affects the way one *is now*. Creating stories of our lives enables the organisation of order out of the 'disorder of reality' (Kirkman, 2002). Thus events and experiences which occur in the environment can require revision of the autobiographical narrative whereby the current explanations are unsatisfactory (Kirkman, 2002).

#### 1.4.4 Parental divorce or separation; a disruptive life event

Life events, such as parental divorce or separation, can impact upon an individual's sense of self (Weatherhead, 2011). It is understood that they can cause autobiographic disruption whereby the *narrative* needs to be revised (Kirkman, 2002). It is estimated that around half of marriages in the UK end in divorce. It is approximated, in the 'Think Family Paper,' that by the age of 16 one in three children's parents' will divorce (2007, Cabinet Office).

Parental conflict and hostility both within and outside of marriage or a civil partnership can have significant social and psychological impacts on children, including increased risks of anxiety and depression.

(Cabinet Office, 2007, p.21)

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) list 'family discord' as a psychosocial risk factor for the development of depression symptoms (NICE, 2005). Research has recognised that parental conflict can have implications upon the well-being of children. Children who experience divorce are more likely to appear in a clinical population (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Hetherington and Kelly (2002) state that 10% of children in continuously married families have serious psychological and social problems compared to 20–25% of children from divorced families.

This research is concerned with the psychological impact of parental divorce or separation in adolescence as it is recognised that those young people are over represented in a clinical population. Pasupathi and McLean (2010) have argued that a 'narrative approach' is a useful way to understand the process of identity development in adolescence. Thus a narrative approach has been adopted to explore how 'identity work' is influenced by experiences of this disruptive life event. With the rates of divorce rising, clinicians are more likely to work with this population thus research can offer guidance for clinical practice. The next section will consider what is already known about the psychological impact of experiencing parental divorce or separation.

### 1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic literature review<sup>1</sup> was conducted over an 18 month period to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research conducted in this area. The main findings of the studies will be summarised, and comments offered on the relevance and credibility of the

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<sup>1</sup> The literature review search strategy is included in Appendix A.

paper.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, there will be consideration of the socio-historic context within which this research is positioned, followed by an overview of the quantitative findings that have informed public opinion and social policy. Then there will be consideration of the qualitative research which offers some explanations for the contradictory findings.

### 1.5.1 Societal and psychological narratives of divorces

The social context within which divorce exists, influences opinion, professional practice and research (Ahrns, 2007). Over the years media and politicians have raised concern about the rising divorce rate and the breakdown of the nuclear family. Marital separation interferes with the traditional family structure, relationships between parents and children are ultimately disrupted and new relationship patterns and roles are required (Amato, 2000). Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1982) found that the majority of children continue to live with their mother, which can mean fathers become absent.

Adams and Coltrane (2007) are critical of the 'divorce reform policy' in the United States, and condemn the move to promote marriage rather than improving the lives of children and families following divorce. This is illustrative of how there might be a substantial fear of rising divorce rates which carries with it the implicit assumption that two parent families are the best environment for children to be brought up in. These instances can shape societal discourse and create negative stereotypes and anecdotes about single parent families. The media have often portrayed the breakdown of 'the family' as the explanation for various social problems. For example various politicians cited the absence of fathers as the cause for

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<sup>2</sup> It is customary for the 'quality' of the papers to be considered in order for the reader to make a judgement on the weight of the findings. Arskey and O'Malley (2005) suggest that what substantiates 'quality' can vary greatly dependent upon the author's position and epistemological stance, and therefore any critique can only be offered in comparison to the author's conception of quality.

the anti-social behaviour demonstrated in the 2011 London riots (BBC news). With anecdotal evidence and societal discourse subject to political and media debate, opinions about the detrimental effects of divorce are likely to be perpetuated; possibly constraining and shaping possibilities available to young people whose parents have divorced. However, there is an argument that with the increased commonality of divorce, there has been a shift in public perception and there is greater social acceptance of divorce (Pinsof, 2002).

Societal discourse about divorce has been shown to influence outcomes. There is evidence that within communities where single-parent families are believed to be a viable option there are more favourable outcomes (Fine & Schwebel, 1987). Studies in the 80s yielded smaller effect sizes, about the detrimental effects of divorce, than those conducted in the 60s and 70s (Amato & Keith, 1991). Therefore it seems a fair assumption that as public perception softens, so do the negative outcomes. The narrowing of this gap did not continue into the 90s (Amato, 2000). Nevertheless, with greater understandings of the potential negative effects that divorce can have upon children, efforts have been made to reduce them. Adaptations have been made to psychological theory, for example, the 'family life cycle' was expanded to include divorce as a normative process (Carter & McGoldrick, 1998) and children's welfare has been made the 'top priority' in divorce proceedings (Divorce Reform, 2010).

There is support to the contrary of historical societal discourse that on occasions divorce can be the best solution for families. Children from divorced families have been found to fare better than those children from two parent families whereby there is high conflict (e.g., Amato & Afifi, 2006). Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) argued that divorce can offer

an opportunity to escape from conflict and facilitate personal growth and well-being. Due to the abolition of conflict following divorce it is argued to “help fewer children than it hurts” (Amato, 2000, p. 1278). Yet conflicting evidence exists in the literature, with the implications of divorce ranging from gravely detrimental effects to positive outcomes.

Some of the negative effects of divorce include; children from divorced families are more likely to be judged as having higher levels of depression and anxiety (Hoyt, Cowen, Pedro-Carroll & Alpert-Gillis, 1990), lower academic achievement, more behavioural difficulties, a lower sense of well-being, and suffer with low self-esteem (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Rollens & Thomas, 1979). Youths of divorced families have been found to struggle in developing and maintaining intimate relationships and are more likely to report dissatisfaction with their marriage (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kierman, 1995). Mitchell (1985) found that the majority of children from divorced families reported feelings of anger or upset, and a sense of rejection by their non-custodial parent. Wallerstein (1985) found children reported feelings of sadness and a sense of deprivation. Some research has suggested grave impacts of divorce: feelings of abandonment, loss and grief that cannot be rectified by having a supportive and loving relationship with others (Wade 1995); young adults regard their parents’ divorce as a continuing major influence on their lives (Wallerstein, 1985). Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blackeslee (2000) suggested that the negative effects of divorce are immutable. A more recent study conducted by Storksen, Espen, Holmen and Tambs (2006) found that adolescents exposed to parental divorce resulted in a high prevalence of distress symptoms. Storksen et. al, (2006) found that there were long term effects upon symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Conversely, Kelly and Emery (2003) argued that children whose parents are divorced are non-distinguishable from their peers whose parents are not. There is evidence that has suggested children deal 'reasonably well' following divorce after an initial transition stage (Kelly, 2007), and 75% - 80%, of children from divorced families do not suffer from major psychological problems (Kelly & Emery, 2003). There is also some research that has suggested the positive effects of divorce. It has been found that children demonstrate resilience in light of family disruption through adolescence (Ruschena, Prior, Sanson & Smart, 2005) and relationships between custodial mothers and daughters can become especially close (Arditti, 1999).

#### 1.5.2 Understanding the contradictory findings

Divorce benefits some, causes others to experience temporary lapses in wellbeing, and forces others on a downward trajectory from which they may never recover (Amato, 2000). Research has struggled over the years to offer good enough explanations as to why when two people are exposed to the same stressful life event (such as a divorce) they might respond in different ways. Whilst it is not uncommon for there to be complexity and controversy in findings, it is of particular importance in divorce literature, as findings are likely to influence government policy and effect legal and mental health practices (Ahrons, 2007). Thus this poses the question, how can this complexity be understood?

Research has offered various explanations for the phenomenon of differential outcomes for children. Common among the literature is a 'Risk and Resilience' perspective which suggests that various factors increase or decrease children's vulnerability to unfavourable outcomes (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Various models have been proposed, e.g., 'The Challenge Model'

(Gately & Schwebel, 1991) and the 'Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective' (Amato, 2000). These models represent divorce as a process with multiple stages, rather than a discrete event. They suggested that outcomes are reflective of the child's adjustment to each stage which involves their own unique eventualities (Gately & Schwebel, 1991) and is mediated and moderated by various factors, such as personal characteristics or social support (Amato, 2000). Other explanations include changes in family structure such as poorer living standards associated with living with lone mothers (Maclean, 1991), or the emotional distress caused by multiple step parents (Flowerdew & Neale, 2003). Yet, on the contrary, some authors suggest that the introduction of new family members can improve well-being due to expanding resources (Stacey, 1996). Various protective factors have been acknowledged including social support, low conflict, and appropriate contact with the non-custodial parent and adequate parenting of the custodial parent (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Sandler, Tein and West (1994) argued that children who engaged in active coping, such as problem solving, adjusted more successfully than those who adopted the use of distraction or avoidance. Kelly and Emery (2003) concur that the vast variation in outcome is because divorce is a process that varies from family to family, and you have to take account of the child's own resources to cope.

A factor that continually appears in the literature is the quality of the relationships between parent and child. Research found that behavioural and emotional problems at kindergarten were particularly affected by parental separation, in cases where children had negative parental representations (Stadelmann, Perren, Groeben & von Klitzing, 2010). Emery, Kitzmann and Waldron (1999) claimed that the psychological adjustment of the custodial parent is the best predictor of children's psychological functioning post-divorce.

Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) argued that “the well-being of the child is associated with the well-being of the parents” (p. 138). Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) reported that the emotional distress caused to parents following divorce has implications for children, as they become unavailable to offer support. The role of parents can become distorted, and children can step in to adopt the role themselves, fulfilling ‘pseudo-parenting roles’ (Byng-Hall, 1995). Girls have been found to benefit, gaining independence from adopting additional responsibilities whereby it occurs within a supportive environment (Hetherington, 1989), however adopting that position can come at a cost (Hetherington, 1993). Hetherington (1993) warned that children can become ‘overburdened’ with responsibilities including offering emotional support to a parent, known as ‘excessive parentification’. In the same vein Amato (2005) has argued that children whose parents are divorced can have ‘weaker emotional bonds’ with their mothers and father’s than their peers whose parents are married. Yet, Amato (2005) recognised that some children cope well following parental divorce as a result of parents separating amicably and engaging in productive co-parenting.

Despite the developments in research, Amato (2010) maintains that the heterogeneity of outcomes can still not be accounted for. One obvious answer is that more research is needed. Amato (2010) suggested future research should be conducted using longitudinal samples, genetically informed designs and statistical models. This assumes that the explanation for the complexity of the findings exists ‘out there’; that is, factors that are quantifiable, such as age or finances. However, some researchers have been critical of the historically ‘top-down’ driven approach to research regarding divorce, whereby children are considered passive recipients of their parents’ divorce (Kuczynski & Lollis, 2004). This

research accepts that people actively make sense of their experiences and thus denies the suggestion of an 'objective truth' in which positivist research is in search of. Riessman (1989) argues that rather than conceptualising life events as objective, it is "the differences in the meaning of life events that influences health outcome" (p. 743). Similarly, Gergen (2009) argues that 'first-hand accounts' move away from traditional research, testing hypotheses and the dominance of the investigator's voice, and begins to consider individuals' experiences. From this perspective, rather than only relying upon measurable factors which deem individuals as passive recipients, interviews with young people can help develop our understanding of how individuals actively 'make sense' of their experiences and subsequently their 'sense of self'.

### 1.5.3 Stories of divorce

Some research has been conducted that places children at the centre of the research whereby young people have been given the opportunity to have their experiences heard. An overview of the existing qualitative literature will now be presented.

#### *Hearing children's voices*

Researchers have advocated on behalf of children and young people arguing for their involvement in divorce and separation proceedings. It is argued that children are the most reliable witnesses to their own experiences (Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas & Murch, 2002) and should be viewed as "competent social actors rather than invisible, voiceless victims" (Smith, Taylor & Tapp, 2003, p. 213).

Butler et al. (2002) suggested that the reluctance of people to hear the stories of children's experiences of divorce acts as a defence against the recognition that children have been adversely affected by their parent's separation: "It is not that we do not know what they have to say or couldn't find out. It is more that we simply do not want to hear it" (Butler et al., 2002, p. 99). Interviews conducted by Butler et al. (2002) offered an important insight into experiences of children whose parents' have divorced. They dispelled the myth that children were passive recipients in the process of family dissolution. The majority of children described their experience as some form of crisis which required the development of a new approach to coping (Butler et al., 2002). The interviews offered insight to the role of children in managing the crisis for others and "their involvement is an active, creative and resourceful one" (Butler et al., 2002, p. 99).

Smith et al. (2003) have also advocated on behalf of children. They believe it can be 'disrespectful' of courts to adjust the value of children's perspectives based upon their age and perceived maturity. Rather, what is more important is whether the adults have the ability to provide trusting, supportive and reciprocal relationships which enable children's perspectives to be heard or observed (Smith et al., 2003). Smith et al., (2003) centralise the social context and recognise the role of all social actors, moving beyond the more reductionist ideas of relying upon developmental theory to dictate decisions about how much children are involved. The advice offered is for adults to ensure children know that they will be listened to seriously, but also that it may not be possible to accommodate their wishes completely (Smith et al., 2003).

In addition, Butler et al. (2002) found discrepancies between the interviews of a parent and child dyad. This poses an interesting critique for research that seeks to find an objective reality and therefore argues that it is more useful to hear the voices of young people directly. Useful recommendations to various avenues have been made following research with children, including how to 'divorce properly'.

### *Divorcing 'Properly'*

Research has suggested that the pain experienced by children following divorce can be avoided; "parents damaged their lives, not by divorcing but by failing to divorce in the proper manor" (Smart, 2006, p. 168). Listening seriously to children's ideas about how to 'divorce properly' has enabled guidance to be offered. Maes, De Mol and Buysse (2011) applied existentialist thematic analysis to conducting various focus groups with children experiencing their parents' divorce. They used two guiding concepts, firstly the idea that children feel that they 'matter' in the process, and secondly an ability to construct an understanding about their parents' divorce. The children talked about their relationships to these components in different ways. They included ideas about a need to have an understanding, and how in their search they interpreted clear and less clear signals that the divorce was happening (Maes et al., 2011). Maes et al. (2011) found that some children felt that they 'mattered' in the context of their parents' divorce whereas others' did not. It may not be surprising that this variation was found in the study given that the sample were recruited from public media; this mix may not be reflective of a clinical sample. The group of children who were less happy with the arrangements that were made post-divorce perceived that at least one parent did not listen to them, and interestingly some of these children perceived that professionals had not listened either (Maes et al., 2011). This may

provide further evidence that the way in which children can make sense of their experiences can shape how they experience future events. The study illustrated children's ability to offer useful insights in divorce proceedings (Maes et al., 2011). Recommendations were offered to divorcing parents: "parents should be attentive to the children as it is a difficult situation for them", and for children: "children experiencing divorce should recognise that their parents are going through difficult times too" (Maes et al., 2011, p. 276). It could also be inferred that this illustrated the children's sensitivity to their parent's needs suggested in other research (e.g., Brooks & Dallos, 2009).

A scoping review conducted by Birnbaum and Saini (2012) combined qualitative research from various disciplines conducted for many audiences (parents, mental health professionals and the legal profession). The review concluded that children wish to be better informed and that adults should provide children with the time, space and voice to facilitate their ability to choose how they would like to participate, rather than act as 'gatekeepers' (Birnbaum & Saini, 2012).

The interest in young people's stories has had various implications, informing court proceedings (Smith et al. 2003; Butler et al. 2002) and guiding parents to 'divorce properly' (Maes et al., 2011). Reviewing the research offers an appreciation of the active role children can play in divorce proceedings and insight into their preferences. However, what of the emotional experiences and the meaning making of the event?

### *The personal experience*

Some studies have centralised the personal experiences of young people whose parents have divorced and separated. Smart (2006) explored the narratives of younger children (aged 12 – 15) from the general population and listened to the types of account that the children told. Smart (2006) applied two axis' with which to position the stories told by the children: the family structure and emotional content told by the children. The type of story told influenced how they had come to think of themselves, and the world in which they live (Smart, 2006). Where there were stories of 'coping and strength' children developed a past which would shape how they may deal with stressful life events in the future. Smart's (2006) findings illustrated how children developed skills in coping with adversity through the way in which they made sense of their experiences. Alternative stories were also told whereby parents were blamed, which Smart (2006) suggested may lead to constructing broader experiences of 'victimisation or abandonment'. It was also found that children appeared to develop an 'ethical disposition' (Smart, 2006). The notion of a moral code for behaviour was learnt through observing their parent's behaviour whether it had been good, bad or somewhere in-between. Smart (2006) noticed that children specifically developed opinions on how parents should treat each other and their children. It is possible that this hints at the development of strength in children following divorce that may not be present had they not had the experience.

Further research, using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) developed classifications for the types of accounts told by young people, offering new understanding to the area of divorce literature (Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia & Greenbaum, 2009). The young adults interviewed were recruited from various places, suggesting that this research has

relevance in application to the general population. It seems a rigorous process was adopted to create themes which facilitated the identification of the typologies. The research considered the young adults “perceptions of themselves, functioning and ability to handle the developmental tasks of adulthood” (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009, p. 34). Eldar-Avidan et al. (2009) theorised that there are three typologies: resilience, survival and vulnerability. Resilience refers to people who illustrate beliefs that their custodial parent was a good source of support; divorce was an appropriate decision to end an unhappy relationship and value the influence divorce has had upon development. *Resilient* young adults were recognised to be proud of their independence and view their ability to adjust emotionally as a quality (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009). *Survivors* were distinctive through their ambivalence, interpreting divorce as a complex event, yet eventual gains outweighed the loss experienced. Unlike resilient young adults, survivors did not experience their parents as supportive yet were able to identify alternative sources of support, and had to negotiate a position between dependence and independence (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009). Those categorised under *vulnerability* experienced divorce as a ‘painful event’ that had negative consequences on the rest of their lives. They described a huge sense of loss, parents unable to respond to their needs, and they remained critical and blaming of parents throughout young adulthood. Independence was thought of as a coping mechanism required in the absence of parents, not as a quality to be proud of (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009). Eldar-Avidan et al., (2009) centralised the interpretations of the young adults to create new understanding. The focus upon ‘the content’ of the interviews, as opposed to the performance or purpose that the interpretations served, is reflective of the epistemological stance of the paper which seems to hold a ‘realist’ position. The ‘realist’ position would hold the assumption that the stories heard were reflective of the experience as if it were the ‘one

truth'. The authors suggest that the limitations of the study include the fact that the data collected could have been affected according to the interviewee's needs and aims. Conversely the current research accepts the phenomenon of tailoring accounts to meet 'needs and aims' integral to 'interactive accounting.' These points and *performative* aspects of the stories are regarded as worthy of analysis, as they offer insight into the teller's identity claims that are complex and multifaceted (Korobov & Bamberg, 2007) rather than limitations as suggested by Eldar-Avidan et al. (2009).

### *Relationships with others*

Research has consistently recognised the importance of relationships, both as constructs of struggles and support. Eldar-Avidan et al. (2009) observed that all the young adults in their study mentioned their hesitation or concerns about finding intimacy, a primary developmental task for their age-group. The quality of the concerns varied according to the classification. Another study explored young adults' 'lived experience' of father absence following parental separation using a phenomenological approach (East, Jackson and O'Brien, 2007). The young women in the study believe their relationships with their fathers had a detrimental impact on their ability to develop intimate sexual relationships (East et al., 2007). The authors concluded that the participants who had negative feelings of abandonment, mistrust, and a lack of respect towards their fathers, demonstrated beliefs that loving relationships with other men wasn't possible (East et al., 2007).

However, according to Erikson (1968) the task of finding intimacy is not 'developmentally' relevant for late adolescents. Dennison and Koerner (2008) were interested in the 'hopes and worries' about marriage of younger people (aged 11 – 17 years) whose parents'

relationship had terminated. Using open ended questions in a survey, they employed an inductive content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) which demonstrated that these young people were anxious about their own marriage. Anxieties included worry about the marriage ending, or experiencing marital problems in some cases these concerns mirrored their parents' difficulties (Dennison & Koerner, 2008). However, the young people also reported hopes, including finding happiness, financial stability, and desire that their worries should not be realised and culminate in divorce (Dennison & Koerner, 2008). Using open ended questions in the large scale survey design using court records (n=238) offered a wealth of information which could be qualitatively analysed. A critique of the design is that through the very act of asking the questions, one about hopes and one about worries, responses were elicited about the respective topic, presuming that it is a salient issue for this population. Although, a small proportion (9%) of young people did respond 'I have no worries' to the question about worries.

There is some evidence to suggest supportive relationships between siblings can develop following parental divorce (Abbey & Dallos, 2004). Abbey and Dallos (2004) interviewed eight young women and through the use of diagrammatic 'sociograms' two main observations were made. Following divorce the relationship between participant and sibling became closer, and relationships to fathers became more distant (Abbey & Dallos, 2004). They applied the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA: Smith, 2004) to analyse the interviews, and generated the theme '*sibling as support*'. It was suggested that siblings turn to each other for support in the absence of closeness to their parents (Abbey & Dallos, 2004). Abbey and Dallos (2004) observed a sense of powerlessness pervading the accounts heard with the young people feeling like they had no choice with the post-divorce

arrangements and decisions. Young people reported feeling pulled in to parental conflict, which was conceptualised as *'triangulation'*. The interviews suggested that *'side-taking'* was common and blame was placed on the parent with whom they were most distant prior to the divorce (Abbey & Dallos, 2004). Interestingly siblings were found to be in disagreement about who was to blame. Abbey and Dallos (2004) highlighted that the sibling relationships can be a *'valuable clinical resource'* when working with families.

In another study Menning (2008) explored how adolescents manage difficulties in relationships with their parents following divorce or separation. The study further supported the claim that adolescents take an *'active'* role post-divorce and are not passive recipients of the event. Menning (2008) focussed upon the adoption of various strategies by adolescents in order to take advantage of the dual-household family structure to mitigate the difficulties in relationships with custodial and non-resident parent. The strategies fell under two broad categories: firstly *'controlling information'* (e.g., offering minimum information), and secondly *'contact control'* (e.g., minimising contact with the non-resident parent). Menning (2008) argued that these strategies should be recognised as indicative of appropriate development rather than psychopathology. Menning (2008) also stated that the strategies allow adolescents to portray an idealised self or *'mystification of the self'* (Goffman, 1959) through the actions of controlling information and contact. Menning (2008) concluded that there is evidence of adolescents' adopting some agency in the aftermath of parental divorce or separation, that is, she/he is interested in having a say in regard to organisation of family structure, and in contributing to her/his own social development. Menning (2008) adopted the use of ethnographic interviews, and analysed using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The study made an important contribution to the literature

as offered evidence that adolescents can be empowered following divorce to manage the struggles encountered in adjusting to changing life circumstances.

These studies have considered the experiences or relationships of young people in a non-clinical population and it is therefore not known whether the relevance of the findings can be extended to a clinical population. Research looking at a clinical population will now be considered.

### *Narratives of a clinical population*

An important contribution to understanding a clinical population was conducted at the Child and Family Department of the Tavistock Clinic (Dowling & Gorrell-Barnes, 1999). Dowling and Gorell-Barnes (1999) interviewed both parents and children (3 – 13 years old), separately and together which enabled the development of guiding principles of clinical work with families who have transitioned through divorce. Dowling (1993) identified that following divorce children's voices were very difficult to be heard. The authors' wanted to provide an opportunity for children to have their voices heard and had observed that there were connections between the difficulties children faced during the divorce and the difficulties that were triggering input from services (Dowling & Gorell-Barnes, 1999). Dowling and Gorell-Barnes (1999) interviewed children alone in response to the findings of Dowling (1993) who claimed that if a child wishes to maintain a positive relationship with both parents working with families' together can position the child in a 'loyalty bind.' They employed the use of a semi-structured design focusing on the aftermath of divorce including relationships with the 'out-of-house' parents and contact arrangements. Interviews with children disclosed the tension of opposites, as whilst they experienced

feelings of 'relief' from parental conflict they also felt 'tremendous loss', particularly for the parent that they no longer resided with (Dowling & Gorell-Barnes, 1999). Dowling and Gorell-Barnes (1999) state various clinical considerations, including helping parents resolve conflict without using children as mediators. They also state children need support in expressing their feelings to their parents, whilst recognising that parents can have a difficulty in hearing them as they may feel responsible for causing their child's distress. The research offers a helpful applicable framework to improve clinical work with families experiencing divorce (Dowling & Gorell-Barnes, 1999). The interview design guided children to offer stories about the practical organisation of the family following divorce, employing a more researcher-led interview style.

Brooks and Dallos (2009) researched the biographical narratives of young women accessing CAMH services. Whilst divorce was not the authors' primary focus, when young people talked about life events, four of the five participants opted to mention their parents' divorce. Interviews with the young women identified a contradiction for individuals experiencing divorce. On the one hand, societal discourse about divorce being a 'common occurrence' and 'better for everyone than a continually married conflicting couple', and on the other, the lived experience of 'sadness, distress and loss' (Brooks & Dallos, 2009). The concept of children having to negotiate opposing feelings also appears in other research (e.g., Dowling & Gorell-Barnes, 1999). It is understood by Brooks and Dallos (2009) that young people can internalise or hide these feelings because a parent is unavailable or unresponsive to their needs. This can be a compromising position, as during adolescence it is felt that young people use their parents as a secure base to explore the challenges of the world. Brooks and Dallos (2009) identify that this may be a struggle if the adolescents are

concerned or aware of the parents' needs or feelings of distress. The young women in Brooks and Dallos' (2009) research talked about experiencing emotionally unavailable parents and appear to develop coping mechanisms such as 'excessive self-reliance', 'denial' or 'pre-occupying anxiety'.

### *De-centralising divorce*

Brooks and Dallos (2009) did not make the topic of 'parental divorce' the focus of their study unlike all the other research reviewed. This idea of 'de-centralising' divorce within research was advocated by Flowerdew and Neale (2003). They concluded that both research and policy should de-centralise divorce (Flowerdew & Neale, 2003). The suggestion developed out of the assumption that the difficulties or resilience bred from experiencing divorce are a result of managing 'multiple transitions'. Flowerdew and Neale (2003) studied 60 children (11 – 17 years old) recruited from various avenues, (both therapeutic and from the courts) who were followed over three to four years post-divorce. The children talked about becoming accustomed to step parents, financial struggles, moving homes and the arrival of new half-siblings or step siblings. They used the findings to ascertain that various factors make transitions more or less difficult, such as one parent re-partnering at one time, and transitions happening at the right pace are found easier (Flowerdew & Neale, 2003). This is not aligned with the present research position which values subjective meaning making rather than generalisations about objective 'realities'. However, the authors do observe the importance of the quality of the relationships with parents to help manage transitions. Flowerdew and Neale (2003) make note of the personal experiences of children such as friendships, loss of schooling, which are unrelated to what their parents are experiencing and are likely to be just as, if not more significant for them. They conclude that

transitions are experienced by all children: “we cannot assume that what is most difficult or most challenging in their lives is related solely to the fact of their parents’ divorce” (Flowerdew & Neale, 2003, p. 157). The appreciation that children are active in the development of their own social identities resonates with the purpose of this study which places young people at the heart of the research. Yet, the promotion of the idea that children should not be ‘typecast as children from divorce’ seems a more complex request. The research reviewed above seems to illustrate that there is no ‘typecast’ of a child from divorce since there are a multitude of ways in which the experience is ‘made sense of’ and has influence. Whilst some children in the study defined divorce as ‘nothing’ in comparison to other challenges they have faced (Flowerdew & Neale, 2003) for others divorce can be experienced as a crisis and can have a lasting impression. This proposed research believes that giving young people a voice, offers a platform from which they can discount the importance of divorce if they so wish. But, to ‘de-centralise’ divorce from research would seem to disrespect the wealth of evidence that suggests its importance in the lives of children. To compare parental divorce to any other life-time transition or upheaval might be to invalidate children’s experiences and continue to silence a historically unheard population.

## 1.6 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE

Polarised findings have dominated research into the effects of divorce upon young people (Ahrons, 2007). Researchers have offered various explanations for the contradictory findings (e.g., Amato, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003). However, the ‘Risk and Resiliency’ model could not account for all the variation in findings. Studies have illustrated that children are not passive recipients of their parents’ divorce (Butler et al., 2002; Smith et al, 2003) and

children have clear ideas about how parents can 'divorce properly' (Maes et al. 2011; Smart, 2006). Riessman (2005) notes that whilst on the surface events can appear the same, closer attention needs to be paid to the personal meanings of life events.

Eldar-Avidan et al. (2009) offered a new theory that that young people who experience parental divorce can fall into one of three classifications: *resilient*, *survivor*, *vulnerable*. The theme of 'relationships' was central to much of the research, for example, siblings have been found to be a great source of support for children in the aftermath of divorce (Abbey & Dallos, 2004). Young people have been found to demonstrate agency in managing difficult relationships post-divorce (Menning, 2008). Young people have been found to have awareness that parental divorce is a difficult situation for both themselves and their parents (Dowling & Gorrell-Barnes, 1999). Yet, Brooks and Dallos (2009) found that this concern with parents needs did come at a cost as in response to 'emotionally unavailable' parents they appear to have developed coping mechanisms such as 'excessive self-reliance.' Children have been found to experience complex emotions following divorce: feelings of relief can be experienced at the same time as loss (Brooks & Dallos, 2009).

In reviewing the literature there appears to be various gaps. Research with young people in later adolescence and those who fall in a clinical population is sparse. The primary developmental tasks differ according to age (Erikson, 1968) and therefore further research into young people of later adolescents is required. Although there is support that young people who experience parental divorce or separation are over represented in mental health services (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Cabinet Office, 2007), it is not reflected in the current literature. Whilst the above studies offer important qualitative information findings

from papers that recruited from the courts (e.g. Smart, 2006; Butler et al., 2002) or public media (Maes et al., 2011) they may not be directly comparable to a clinical population. Therefore it seems likely that this is a worthy area for more research. The literature review also indicated that further research within the United Kingdom would be an important contribution. As the studies of both Maes et al. (2011) and Eldar-Avidan et al. (2009) were completed outside of the United Kingdom, their application to practice could be disputed. Eldar-Avidan et al. (2009) recognise that using a Jewish population from Israel is distinctive from other Western cultures by 'the centrality of the family to the individual and to society'.

Research has illustrated that 'divorce' is a *process* and it is recommend that research should follow young people's stories longitudinally, recognising the multiple transitions (Maes et al., 2011). This research hopes to follow young people's stories from before, during and after divorce in order to establish a sense of how young people cope with the multiple changes. Rather than adopting a pre-defined structure, the young people's stories will be centralised permitting their own unique sense making, ensuring that their voices are heard.

## 1.7 CLINICAL RELEVANCE

There is still very little known about how young people, who receive support from CAMHS, come to make sense of their experiences of parental divorce or separation and thus develop their sense of self. The high incidence of young people who have experienced parental divorce in mental health services suggests that clinicians need to be knowledgeable and skilled to work with this population. Popay and Williams (1998) recognise that people's subjective experience is arguably more valuable to clinical understanding than frequency and likelihood of events possible with quantitative research. Barbour (2000) advocates for

the application of findings from qualitative research and claims that it produces “knowledge for use” and argues that “it can offer more than a thick description - it can furnish explanations” (p. 157). Whilst this study recognises that the sample cannot be representative of all these young people, the research can be used to inform clinical practice.

### 1.8 AIMS OF THE STUDY

This research will listen to and co-construct stories of parental divorce or separation with young people who fall within a clinical population. It is envisaged that the research will widen knowledge about experiences of parental divorce or separation. This study hopes to further our understandings of identity development and sense making within this population in order to aid clinical practice.

The main research question is: **How do young people in a clinical population narrate their parents’ divorce or separation?**

This will be explored through the following specific research questions:

- (i) How do the narrators describe and account for their subjective experiences of parental divorce or separation?
- (ii) How do the narrators position themselves relative to themselves, others, and the broader societal narratives available to them?

## Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 OVERVIEW

The chapter begins with offering the rationale for the method adopted which has been inextricably linked to the epistemological position taken in this study. This will be followed by the research design and the ethical considerations. The procedure for collecting stories will be presented followed by an explanation of the way in which the stories were analysed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion about the credibility, rigour and pragmatism of the study to provide an opportunity for the reader to assess the quality of the research. It is hoped that this chapter will ensure that the reader is in a position to evaluate the suitability of the design and chosen analysis.

### 2.2 METHOD

#### 2.2.1 Qualitative Research

Silverstein, Auerbach and Levant (2006) have argued that qualitative research enhances clinical practice, gathering rich description of both local context and individual subjective experience. Qualitative research is essentially exploratory, setting out to describe, understand and explain a particular phenomenon. Roberts (2000) contrasts the qualities of narrative evidence with quantitative research. He compares what is personally meaningful with what is generally measurable, and the contextualised versus the controlled. Strauss (1994) argues that an increase in research which makes the study of personal narrative the focus, can overcome a tendency in psychiatry to ignore the 'personal and subjective aspects of individual experience'. Taking full account of narrative explores the uniqueness of personal experience; phenomena which can be lost when the emphasis is upon the 'gross averaging' of quantitative research (Roberts, 2000).

The move towards qualitative research has been observed in the history of divorce literature. Evidence suggests that young people from divorced families are overrepresented in the clinical population, yet there is limited research exploring the subjective experiences of these young people. In order to capture the individuality and uniqueness of these experiences, and explore this area in depth a qualitative methodology has been chosen. There is a broad array of qualitative methods used in the field of psychology (see Madill & Gough, 2008, for a structured overview of the methods available). The type of qualitative methodology chosen is underpinned by the epistemology of the research; the relationship between the knower and what can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### 2.2.2 Epistemological Position

The qualitative “paradigm rejects the idea that there is an *objective reality* that can be studied without bias” (Silverstein et al., 2006, p. 351). Roberts (2000) discusses how the renewed interest in using narrative in the study of psychotherapy ‘*is inextricably linked with the impact of post-modernism*’. Post-modernism disputes the view that ‘truth is out there’ and that it can be known through objective study (Gergen, 1985, 2009). There is an acceptance from a post-modern perspective that there are multiple truths which are constructed by individuals through their interactions with others and their environment and thus are dependent upon the context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Maturana, 1978; Gergen, 1985, 2009). The present research is located within a social constructionist framework which argues that our individual realities are developed through language and our interactions with others (Gergen, 1985, 2009). Gergen (1985) rejects the idea that phenomenon can be understood through observation alone. Thus to consider the impact of

divorce by looking at the quantifiable facts is ignoring the significance of the individual realities and the meanings of the event.

### 2.2.3 Narrative Inquiry (NI)

Riessman and Speedy (2007) acknowledge that there are a number of strands of NI that fit with a host of epistemological positions. Yet there are some assumptions that are consistent among them all. Engel (2005) argues that stories are a useful insight into both ‘what’ children think and feel, and ‘how’ they think and feel. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) posit that “people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and they interpret their past in terms of these stories” (p. 375). In the light of this NI would appear to be an appropriate vehicle through which to understand children’s experiences of their parental divorce or separation. In addition, how their stories about these experiences “provide their lives with unity and purpose by constructing internalized and evolving narratives of the self” (McAdams, 1993, p. 100). The relationship between identities and stories has been explored in greater depth in the *Introduction* (see section 1.4, e.g., Bamberg, 2004; McLean et al., 2007; Pasupathi & McLean, 2010).

NI is interested in investigating the experience on three ‘commonplaces’; *temporality*, *sociality*, and *place*, which is argued, in part, to distinguish NI from other methodologies (Clandinin & Huber, *in press*). *Temporality* refers to the past, present and future of stories whereby we are “constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along” (Carr, 1986, p. 76). *Sociality* refers to the relational activity of story-telling. Stories are not isolated, they occur within a context, and are told for particular purposes (Engel, 2005). Personal narratives bring with them the social and historical context. Finally *place*, refers to how

narratives belong to that particular time and space, often referred to as *situated stories* (e.g., Bamberg, 2004; Pasupathi, 2001; McLean et al., 2007).

McLean et al. (2007) argue that our sense of self is developed and maintained through our situated stories. They propose a conceptual process model whereby situated stories become the way in which individuals perceive themselves, and subsequently bring these parts of themselves to their experience and their construction of their situated stories. Therefore they can develop and change over time; they are not intended to be an assessment of the internal representation.

The extent to which stories are understood as a relational activity between listener and teller varies (Clandinin & Huber, *in press*) and the extent of the acceptance of 'co-construction' is where narrative inquiry can become divided. Some narrative inquirers understand the relational aspects of the construction of stories as less important whereas others, including this researcher, assume the co-construction of narratives between researcher and participant. The role of the interviewer is paramount for the analysis chosen for the research as it is recognised that the stories gathered are in relation to the questions asked by this particular researcher at this particular time. With this in mind the stories that researchers will hear will not be the same as stories shared within a peer-group.

#### 2.2.4 The choice of Narrative Analysis (NA)

NA was chosen for this research, as the co-construction of narratives is central to the researcher's social constructionist position. A primary assumption of NA is that telling

stories is a way to both construct and express meaning (Mishler, 1999). This research is interested in what stories are told, how they are told, and the performative aspects of the story telling. This goes beyond the *content* of stories and is the focus of alternative qualitative methodologies, e.g., IPA (Smith, 2004). Narrative analysis asks: *Why was the story told in that way?* (Riessman, 1993). NA is interested in how people construct self-accounts and ‘emplot’ their experience and its implications (Burck, 2005). Alternative methods of analysis suited to researching the meaning of subjective experiences, such as ‘Discourse Analysis’ or ‘Grounded Theory’ were considered but eventually discounted in favour of NA. NA considers the contextual factors that have shaped the narratives, whereby discourse analysis has a focus upon the language used (Burr, 2003).

Linde (1993) suggests that narrations are both ‘constructions and claims of identity’. Concepts of emerging identities<sup>3</sup> will be central to this research with young people appearing in a clinical population, who have experienced parental divorce. NA lends itself to exploring such emerging identities, and has commonly been applied to the study of divorce and other disruptive life events (Riessman, 2005). It is primarily concerned with the way events have impacted upon an individual’s sense of self (Weatherhead, 2011).

## 2.3 DESIGN

### 2.3.1 Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling method (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 2002) was employed in order to select participants based upon particular characteristics which are in accordance with the

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘identities’ has been used in place of identity in order to recognise that people can have multiple identities and are not fixed (e.g., Foucault, 1972).

fundamental interest of the research. Unlike quantitative methods, this sampling strategy does not claim to be representative of all young people in a clinical sample who experience parental divorce or separation. The research was interested in hearing the stories of young people who have experienced parental divorce or separation. After consultation with the principal supervisor to select participants, the following criteria were developed:

- *Aged between 16 – 18 years old*
- *Parents must be currently permanently separated or divorced:* parents were not required to have been married, though they must have been living together as a couple consistently since the birth of the young person being interviewed until they were aged five. The decision to have a minimum age of parental divorce or separation was to ensure the young person could recall memories of the divorce/separation.
- *The divorce/separation must have occurred at least one year previously:* this was to reduce the likelihood of participants finding the interview distressing.
- *The young person must have an assigned care coordinator<sup>4</sup>:* this was felt important in order to ensure that it was appropriate for the young person to participate in the study. In addition, the care coordinator would act as the point of contact in the unlikely occurrence of the participant becoming distressed, or in the event that the young person shared information that might concern the researcher about a risk to themselves or others.
- *Fluent English Speaking:* the qualitative methodology chosen relies heavily on language use, both in the production of narratives (during interviews) and in the

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<sup>4</sup> A care coordinator refers to the young person's named clinician who is responsible for organising their care. This is usually the young person's therapist.

analysis, where the emphasis is not only on the content of what is said but the subtleties of language used (for example, the use of metaphor). As the richness and meaning of language can be lost when using translators, only fluent English speakers were included in the study.

### 2.3.2 Recruitment Process

Participants were recruited from two CAMHS sites. This was organised with the help of two field supervisors who acted as the local collaborators at the respective sites. To recruit via these NHS sites, ethical approval from the National Research Ethics Committee (NRES) and the local Research and Development (R&D) office was obtained<sup>5</sup>.

Potential participants, who met the inclusion criteria, were identified by their clinician. Clinicians were asked to make a clinical judgement about whether it would be appropriate for the young person, who was actively engaged in the service, to participate. With their consent, contact details were provided for the potential participants, which averted the need for the researcher to access clinical documents and personal data. Potential participants were contacted via their preferred method of communication; email, text or phone. Where contact was not made with participants directly, they were advised to be in contact with the researcher should they wish to participate or find out more about the study. Potential participants were given seven days to respond to the researcher if they did not a reminder was provided. They were informed that if they did not contact the researcher within a week of this reminder, it would be assumed that they did not wish to participate and they would not be contacted again.

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<sup>5</sup> A copy of the favourable opinion letter is provided in Appendix B

Where the young person wished to participate, an initial telephone conversation confirming the inclusion criteria was made by the researcher. Any queries were answered, and arrangements were made for the location and time of the interview. Young people were offered a choice of locations, including their home or their respective clinic. The young person's named clinician was then informed and provided with interview details.

### 2.3.3 Participants

Eight young people were identified by clinicians as being suitable for the study and their details passed on to the researcher. Of these, six were interviewed, with two young people not expressing further interest in the study. Clinicians were asked to stop recruiting when six interviews were completed. Some demographic information was gathered at the time of the interview to provide a brief context for the participants<sup>6</sup>. Young people were reminded that they could choose not to answer if they would rather

Following consultation with the supervision team the decision was made to exclude one of the interviews from analysis. The young person was a 16 year old male who had a diagnosis of 'Aspergers Syndrome.' He presented with a restricted use of language and a concrete thinking pattern. Only very brief and un-storied answers were provided by the participant and the interviewer was unable to elicit more elaborated responses whilst adhering to the interview design. The decision to exclude the interview was made due to the inability to use narrative analysis to interpret the collected data.

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<sup>6</sup> A short questionnaire was administered by the researcher, a copy can be seen in Appendix G, the demographic information is presented in Table 1 on page 48.

Table 1: Demographic information for the participants, including the title of 'Global Impression'<sup>8</sup>

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Age at separation	Presenting problems	Contact with CAMHS	Global Impression
Jo	16	White British	15	Self-harm and attempted suicide	6 months	<i>"Pick yourself up and carry on"</i>
Carly	16	White British	8	Bulimia	1 year input	<i>"A calm, peaceful, atmosphere in our house now"</i>
Leila	16	White British	5	Difficulties resulting from sexual abuse	1 year input	<i>"I don't think I was really upset...things were changing all the time"</i>
Emily	16	White British	6	Family relationship difficulties	1 year input	<i>"You're the adults. I'm the child. Sort it out yourself"</i>
Fran	16	White British	13	Chronic Fatigue	1 year input	<i>"I had to grow up very, very quickly"</i>
Paul <sup>7</sup>	16	White British	13	Behavioural difficulties at school	1 year input	N/A

<sup>7</sup> Paul's narrative was not included in the analysis, this is discussed in section 2.3.3

<sup>8</sup> Each interview was initially analysed individually and a *Global Impression* was written (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). This analysis is explored further in section 2.6. It was felt that the inclusion of an assigned title for each young person's *Global Impression* would facilitate quick reference for the reader to orientate themselves to the young person when reading the findings and discussion.

## 2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 2.4.1 The Process of Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for the study was sought from the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) who oversee research conducted within NHS settings (local approval was obtained from the R&D Hertfordshire Partnership Trust). To obtain NRES approval, several amendments to the protocol were requested by the NRES review committee. A favourable opinion letter was received on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 2012 which approved the research.

### 2.4.2 Explaining the Research

There were various stages to explaining the research to the participants to ensure that participants were able to provide informed consent for the study. Team meetings were attended at both sites in order to present the research to the clinicians. The attendance offered an opportunity for questions and ensured that clinicians were knowledgeable about the research to enable discussions with potential participants. The research was initially discussed with the participants' care-coordinators; young people were either identified by the clinician or by the participant expressing interest in the research<sup>9</sup>. Potential participants were given the participant information sheet<sup>10</sup> explaining the activities of the research, the aims of the study, the requirements from participants, and their rights as participants. The participants had a minimum of 24 hours to read the information prior to being contacted by the researcher, at which time the participant would have the opportunity to ask any further

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<sup>9</sup> A poster presenting the research was displayed in the waiting rooms at both CAMHS sites. Young people were not directly recruited from the poster though it was hoped that the poster would elicit interest. A copy can be found in Appendix C.

<sup>10</sup> A copy of the participant information sheet is in Appendix D.

questions. The methods employed to inform participants of the research and role of the researcher satisfied ethical considerations.

#### 2.4.3 Informed Consent and Anonymity

Once the research had been successfully explained to the participants, they were able to make an informed decision whether to participate. Only when the researcher was confident that the participants had correctly understood what was expected of them, were they then asked to sign a consent form<sup>11</sup>. Participants were informed that all information would be anonymous. Pseudonyms were given to all participants, characters and places mentioned in the stories, and where data would deem the participant identifiable, the information was altered, without jeopardising the narrative, to ensure anonymity. The decision to recruit young people from two different CAMHS added an additional precaution against the likelihood of their stories identifying them. All data was stored in password protected files and any copies locked in filing cabinets accessible only to the researcher.

#### 2.4.4 Avoidance of Harm and Debrief

Whilst it was believed that the interviews would not cause permanent distress, and nor would they be detrimental for the participants, it was possible that discussing their experiences could cause some upset. Consequently, throughout the interview the researcher maintained sensitivity to signs of distress from participants, and used her clinical skills to support communication about difficult emotions. Prior to the interview, participants were informed of the potential risks of participating and they were reminded that they were

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<sup>11</sup> A copy of this consent form can be found in Appendix E

not required to answer every question. They were informed that they had the choice, at any time, to request a break or to ask that the interview be terminated without any implications upon their care. No participants requested that the interview was terminated. Following the interview participants were offered a space to reflect on the experience of being interviewed. Participants were all given a letter to thank them for their time<sup>12</sup>. The letter also gave information about who they could contact should they want to discuss anything that was mentioned in the interview. It is possible that the interviews were experienced as therapeutic as it has been argued that narratives are an engine for self-development (McLean et al., 2007).

Ensuring that all participants were actively involved with CAMHS and had a care co-ordinator allowed risk to be managed effectively. Participants were reminded that the content of their interview would not be shared with others unless something that was said should cause the researcher concern about risk to themselves or others. Following interviews, care co-ordinators were informed that their clients had participated in the study. This enabled them to check with clients if there was anything mentioned in the narrative that required further exploration. On one occasion a care co-ordinator was contacted with concerns about risk.

Recognising the personal connection with the topic, it was important to consider the possibility of personal distress to the researcher. It was therefore important to ensure that the researcher used reflective space effectively, using both supervision and a reflective journal.

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<sup>12</sup> A copy of the thank you and debrief letter is available in Appendix F

## 2.5 PROCEDURE

### 2.5.1 Collecting Stories

The research adopted the most common strategy used in narrative inquiries; interviews, whereby a researcher interviews a participant (Riessman, 2008; Clandinin & Huber, *in press*). There was careful consideration of the interview design, outlined below, in order to ensure that the procedure facilitated the young people to tell their own unique stories.

### 2.5.2 Interview Process

Four of the interviews took place in clinic rooms, at the two local CAMHS sites approved by NRES, and two interviews took place at the participants' home. The Hertfordshire Partnership Trusts' lone worker policy was followed<sup>13</sup>. The interviews lasted between thirty six minutes and one hour fifteen minutes.

### 2.5.3 Narrative Interview

Qualitative interviews have digressed from the use of formal structures whereby particular questions are asked in a particular way in a particular order (Burck, 2005). For Mischler (1999), question and answer exchanges are restrictive. He recognises interviews as a *discursive accomplishment*, whereby both interviewer and participant work collaboratively to render events meaningful. Riessman (2008) argues that the role of the interviewer is to ask questions that open up possibilities to allow participants to organise their narrative account in a way that is meaningful to them. Narrative interviewing endeavours to generate detailed accounts rather than brief accounts (Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008)

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<sup>13</sup> A colleague was informed of the agreed time of interview, and a phone call made following completion of the interview.

understands the less structured interview to be a stance to 'give up power, and follow participants down their associative trails'.

The interview design was developed through consultation with the supervision team. The interview method chosen for this research was less dominating and more relational, which reflects and respects participants' ways of organizing meaning in their lives (Riessman, 2008). Having an unstructured approach enabled the participants' important themes and narratives to emerge naturally. "If extended accounts are welcomed, some participants and interviewers collaboratively develop them," (Riessman, 2008, p. 26). Therefore, it was agreed that after offering an introduction to the topic, an open question was asked; 'I would like you to tell me your story?' The decision to have a one question design was to privilege the participant's stories rather than impose a pre-defined structure which could determine the data collected. It was hoped that this would encourage extended storied accounts. In anticipation of a participant choosing not to offer an extended narrative, a prompt sheet was developed<sup>14</sup>. The interviewer responded to the story to co-construct the telling of 'details, turning points, and shifts in cognition, emotion and action' (Riessman, 2008). It was decided that, in accordance with Burck's (2005) suggestion, it would be helpful to complete the interview by asking participants to reflect on what it was like to be asked the questions, and give participants an opportunity to add any questions they anticipated being asked. It was assumed that this would reduce the impact of participants' stories being limited by the nature of being asked particular questions. A pilot interview was conducted in order to test the planned structure, this will be discussed below.

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<sup>14</sup> To make reference to this prompt sheet please refer to Appendix H

#### 2.5.4 Pilot Interview

In order to establish the feasibility of the interview design a pilot interview was conducted as recommended by Burck (2005). A fellow trainee clinical psychologist volunteered to participate in a pilot interview. The purpose of the interview was explained clearly to ensure the trainee was aware that participation was entirely voluntary. The trainee understood that he could answer as little or as much as he so chose. The pilot interview was conducted prior to beginning the recruitment process. Useful reflections were made about the format which influenced and shaped the procedure adopted. Three adaptations were made:

1. The interviewee reflected that in moments of silences he was recalling events and details that he wanted to narrate, however, on occasion these were interrupted with another question. The researcher had assumed that the silence was 'exit-speak' or believed another prompt was required to help scaffold the telling. In order to obtain extended narratives, self-reflexivity on the part of the interviewer was required, to sit with silences in order to allow the participants' time to organise their narratives and offer extended accounts. This was a useful outcome of the pilot interview as the presence and length of 'pauses' in the narratives were included in the analysis<sup>15</sup>.
2. Following the pilot interview, the interviewee felt a little unsatisfied as he would have liked therapeutic feedback in relation to his story. Story telling in this interview format does mimic a therapeutic session and it is possible that they would be experienced as therapeutic (McLean et al., 2007); however, this was not the primary purpose of the interview. It was anticipated that this association would be enhanced for the participants as the majority of interviews took place in the same place that the young person

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<sup>15</sup> Langellier (2001) considers story-telling to be a performance. These moments of silence are important for the analysis as may form part of the tellers identity work.

attended therapy sessions. In order to manage expectations, it was decided that a statement prior to the interview would be included<sup>16</sup>.

3. The open, unstructured style of interviewing left the interviewee uncertain if they were giving the 'right' information. The lack of guidance was experienced as unsettling, therefore it was decided that the participants would be reassured that they could tell their story how they chose and that there would be no right or wrong way of doing so. It was hoped that this adaptation would allow the participants to feel at ease and encourage extended narratives.

#### 2.5.5 Transcription of the stories

It was decided that the researcher would complete all the transcription as formed part of the initial phase of analysis; to become immersed in the data. The process of transcription is considered an interpretive act (Riessman, 1993), as decisions are required as to how to record pauses, loudness of speech and pace for example. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, including the utterances of both the participant and researcher. All expressions (e.g. laughs and sighs) and length of pauses were also noted. Although it is seemingly simple to record what is said there is warning that people can record what they expect to hear (Barker et al., 2002). Therefore, in accordance with the recommendation of Barker et al., (2002) all transcripts were checked for accuracy.

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<sup>16</sup> For details of this statement please refer to the interview prompt sheet in Appendix H

### 2.5.6 Participants' Review of Results

Participants were not asked to review the analysis of the stories. This is in accordance with the epistemological position of the research that understands there to be multiple truths which are co constructed between people, and that stories are in relation to a particular time, place and purpose (e.g. Bamberg, 2004; Pasupathi, 2001). Riessman (2008) recognises how audiences can read events differently to the narrator's intentions which may lead to contested meanings. It is understood that the analysis is the researcher's interpretation of the story and not the 'absolute truth'.

## 2.6 ANALYSING THE STORIES

Personal narratives are understood in a variety of ways, and therefore dictate a vast array of methodological variation (Riessman, 2008). Riessman (1993) stated that there is 'no set way' of conducting NA which means that there is great variation among studies. It is hoped that this section will offer an explanation of the particular type of NA which acted as a guide for analysis. The process of analysis will be discussed including the process researcher reflexivity. This section will be concluded by explaining the way in which the analysis is presented.

### 2.6.1 A Guiding Framework

This research is interested in how young people construct a sense of who they are and the emergence of identity through their 'narrative-in-interaction' (Bamberg, 2004). The

narratives are understood as a construction between themselves and the audience as opposed to stories as 'representations' of who they are. Further elaboration of 'narrative identity' is discussed in the *Introduction* (see section 1.4).

NA can take many different approaches; a focus upon the content of the stories (Lieblich, et al., 1998) which bears most similarity to alternative qualitative methods of Grounded Theory and IPA (Riessman, 2008), upon the structure (Labov, 1982) or upon the performative and dialogic aspects of the narrative (Frank, 2011; Bamberg 2004; 1997; Riessman, 2004; Langellier, 2001) e.g., what does the teller *do* when they tell their story? Patterson (2008) is critical of the *structural* method suggested by Labov (1982) as it has an emphasis upon looking at stories in isolation from the rest of the transcript. Patterson (2008) suggests that removing stories from their context can only produce over simplistic reductive analysis. Neither the structural or thematic approach takes into consideration the discursive function i.e. when, why and what is the *purpose* of the story (Bamberg, 1997). Bamberg, (2004) argues that stories provide the opportunity for people to facilitate a sense of 'who I am' in the here and now.

The method of analysis was developed building on performative analysis (Riessman, 2000, 2008; Langellier, 1989, 2001) and 'dialogical narrative analysis' (DNA, Frank, 2011). The 'way' in which a story is told offers a performance both in its manner, for example through the use of reported speech and gesticulation (Bauman, 1986) and through 'positioning' (Bamberg, 1997). The teller can choose how characters are positioned in relation to each

other, both how the speaker positions her/himself to the audience and her/himself to her/himself (Bamberg, 1997, 2004). For example, tellers can give themselves agency in stories demonstrating their power to facilitate change, or position the self as a victim in response to an unjust situation, excusing their inability to facilitate action. This fluidity represents the teller's adoption of a strategy in order to cope with the complexities and contradictions (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999). Langellier (2001) argues that when we tell our stories we 'perform' our preferred identities. Identifying this 'performative aspect' of storytelling is not to suggest inauthenticity rather it suggests that identities are accomplished in social interaction (Riessman, 2000). Riessman (2000) clarifies that tellers do not 'reveal' a consistent self as modernist theories on identity would suggest; she suggests they choose from a 'multiplicity of selves' to perform their preferred self. It was felt that 'performative analysis' best served the interest of the research.

Choosing stories for analysis is in and of itself an interpretive act. Some theorists have regarded not all talk in interviews as 'narrative' (Riessman, 2008). This understanding would dictate segmenting large accounts, which Frank (2011) argues is a crucial task. However, Bamberg's (2004) approach to narrative is less interested in what substantiates a 'narrative' worthy of analysis. In accordance with the theoretical underpinnings of this research, the concept of a 'small stories' has been adopted (see Bamberg, 1997, 2004; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). This refers to privileging all 'narratives-in-interaction' i.e. all day-to-day conversations. Bamberg, DeFina, and Shiffrin (2011) regard all conversations as opportunities to practice and test out identities, and thus equally important. The hope of

the researcher was to keep the co-constructed stories intact and to consider all the narratives that were regarded as relevant to the teller.

### 2.6.2 The Process of Analysis

All narratives were analysed following the same steps to ensure that they all received the same level of analysis<sup>17</sup>. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher which helped to familiarise the researcher with the data. At the start of the analysis, following the first review of the transcript, the researcher referred to the reflective journal which was completed following the interviews. These moments of reference permitted the researcher to recall the overall feel of the interview and consider the responses which were relevant to consider the co-construction of the narrative.

To complete the analysis it was imperative that the researcher became immersed in each interview. The interviews were read through four times. Initially each interview was approached and read for *what* was said (themes of the narrative), they were then read for *'how'* it was said (structure of the narrative) and *why* and *when* it was said (the performative and dialogic aspects of the narrative). The narratives were also considered thinking about the characters, point of view, genre and suspense (Frank, 2011). Attention was paid to the elaboration, complexity and coherence of the narratives, which are suggested points of interest for researching narrative identity development (Pasupathi & McLean, 2010).

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<sup>17</sup> Please see an example the stages of the analysis please see Appendix I. This provides one full transcript with the researcher's notes to demonstrate the analysis adopted.

The overarching question when reading for performance was what is the teller's *discursive purpose* (Bamberg, 1997) or *strategic aims* (Riessman, 2008). Frank (2011) argues that people's stories both report their reality as they need to tell it as well as reporting what they believe their listeners are prepared to hear. When reading for 'performative' aspects of the narrative, attention was paid to the inconsistencies and contradictions. These moments warranted further analysis according to the recommendations of Korobov and Bamberg (2007). In these moments the young person was required to negotiate these challenges or contradictions, through their narrative, in order to make their identity claims. They demonstrated the young person's careful finessing in order to make identity claims that appeared 'complex, reportable, and authentic' (Korobov & Bamberg, 2007). The narratives were also read for the emotional content underpinning them to understand how stories emerging in the narrative were experienced (Greenberg & Angus, 2004). Various questions were asked of the data when analysing the transcripts (Bamberg 1997; Frank, 2011; Riessman, 2008):

1. In what kind of story does the narrator place herself?
2. How does she position herself to the researcher?
3. How does she position herself to herself?
4. Who is the intended audience?
5. Who are the characters? How does she position characters in relation to one another and in relation to herself?
6. What resources shape how the story is being told?<sup>18</sup>
7. How did the researcher respond? How might this have influenced the development of the story?

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<sup>18</sup> The setting of the interviews was considered in the analysis. Interviews that took place in the clinical setting is likely to have shaped the resources available to the story teller e.g. their own expectations of what's expected 'in that place', and what's gone on before 'in that place' is likely to have shaped what they say. Whereby the interviews took place in the participants' home these resources may have been less influential yet other resources may have been mobilised.

The narratives were then considered collectively. Reading for content, structure and performance enabled the researcher to identify broad storylines. These storylines were collaborated and similarities were identified; either in the way in which the narrative was performed, with respect to the identity work or emotional experience, or the content of each storyline.<sup>19</sup> It was decided to allow the stories to emerge through reading and listening to the interviews, known as ‘phronesis’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Flyvbjerg (2001) defined this process as feeling the stories ‘hear you’ and the selection of stories is based upon a specific value commitment. As Riessman (2000) clarifies the segments of narrative analysed are shaped by the researchers emerging theories and interests<sup>20</sup>. Thus researcher reflexivity was required.

### 2.6.3 Researcher Reflexivity

Self-reflexivity and transparency is central to constructionist ideals and contributes to the overall validity and credibility of the research findings (Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). In order to ensure ‘reflexivity’ the researcher adopted the use of a reflective journal recommended by Ortlipp (2008). It was decided that the researcher would pay particular attention to when the researcher responded as a clinician and when as a researcher, a dilemma recognised by Burck (2005). Other entries considered; why did that story told in that way trigger that response from the researcher? The analysis chosen is embedded in the belief that stories are co-constructed between interviewer and interviewee. The reflective journal was

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<sup>19</sup> A clinical audit has been presented to provide an example of how the collective storylines were constructed and analysed (Appendix I)

<sup>20</sup> In the *discussion* there is consideration about why storylines received particular attention. Adopting the ethical commitment stated by Frank (2010) it is also asserted that the chosen storylines are not claiming or hoping to offer the last word on the narratives

completed following each interview and throughout the transcription process<sup>21</sup>. The reflective journal was used to inform the findings and discussion.

#### 2.6.4 Representing the narratives

Following the analysis there was consideration about how to best represent the narratives and interpretation. Polkinghorne (1988) argues that “the uniqueness of the particular narrative being described by the researcher is as important as the features it has in common with the other stories” (p. 169). Therefore it was decided that the individual narratives would be considered initially followed by considering the narratives collectively. Quotes, written in italics, are woven into the findings to ground the interpretation to the data (Riessman, 2008).

The individual stories are presented; firstly introducing the reader to the participants followed by a ‘Global Impression’ of each narrative (Lieblich, 2002). The ‘Global Impressions’ were written to provide ‘a feel for the life’ of the individual and define the themes of the interview (Lieblich, 2002). They included a focus on how the teller ‘wants to be understood’ considering the identity work that has taken place in the interaction between the teller and audience (Bamberg, 1997, 2004). They were written in third person in order to ensure it is known that they are the interpretations of the researcher and do not represent the teller’s ‘true’ meaning. The identity work of the young people was thought about paying particular

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<sup>21</sup> For each interview a process note was completed following the interview an example of a process note is included in Appendix J. Personal reflections also form a section of the transcript (H) which illustrates how the self-reflexivity aided the analysis.

attention to how the narrative influences the identity development through the act of the telling<sup>22</sup> (e.g., Fivush et al., 2006; McLean et al., 2007). Two main shared storylines are then presented a diagram is offered to illustrate the analysis. The individual ‘sense making’ varied across the narratives making stories more or less similar. These idiosyncrasies are understood through the exploration of the emotional experience and identity work that is unique to each person’s narrative.

The findings of the study are represented in isolation from the discussion to enable a clear statement of what was found in this study prior to becoming entwined with previous research. The discussion of the findings follows.

## 2.7 CREDIBILITY, RIGOUR, AND PRAGMATIC USE OF THE STUDY

The study of ‘self’ was previously absent from human sciences as could not be deemed a researchable mental object when applying the ‘positivist’ scientific model (Polkinghorne, 1988). However, studies of the ‘self’ have appeared in literature as they are fundamental to account for the variation in human behaviour, so alternative models have been required. Measures of reliability and validity, as evident in positivist methods, are not applicable to qualitative methodology. In order to ensure the quality of qualitative research it is paramount that criterion are considered; the credibility, the rigour and the pragmatic usefulness.

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<sup>22</sup> This understanding is elaborated in the theoretical underpinnings of the research (section 1.4).

Credibility refers to the extent to which interpretations are plausible and meaningful. The researcher has been transparent about the process of data collection and analysis which enables the reader to make a judgement about the plausibility and meaning of the interpretations. Rigour refers to whether the interpretations can be supported by the original data. In order to meet this criterion the researcher has been transparent about the process of transcription<sup>23</sup>. This is in accordance with the recommendation by Polkinghorne (1988) that transcripts be available for other researchers to enable them to “follow the move from data to interpretations” (p. 169). In the write-up of the findings, quotes have been woven through to offer the reader an opportunity to judge whether the interpretation can be supported by the data. Polkinghorne (1988) identifies that the “argument does not produce certainty, it produces likelihood” (p. 175). In accordance with the epistemological stance of this research the results are not claiming to be a ‘truth’; the conclusions of this research will remain open-ended. Finally the pragmatic usefulness of the research, i.e. the clinical relevance, has been thoroughly considered in the *Introduction* and the *Discussion*. In addition to the usefulness of informing clinical practice, it is also an ethical criterion to ensure the clinical application. Riessman (2008) argues that the usefulness of a piece of research can be defined by its accessibility by the appropriate communities. The researcher will ensure that the findings of the research are widely disseminated.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A full transcription is provided including the stages of analysis in Appendix I

<sup>24</sup> It is hoped that the research findings will be disseminated to the entire Trust via the weekly e-newsletter and presented at relevant conferences. At this time arrangements have been made to deliver a presentation to clinicians at the two CAMHS sites working with young people who experience parental divorce or separation. In addition, the researcher will submit a copy of the paper to a peer reviewed journal; *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

## Chapter 3: FINDINGS

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### 3.1 OVERVIEW

In this section a narrative of interpretations and co-constructions<sup>25</sup> of the verbal accounts of five young people in CAMHS, who have experienced their parents' divorce or separation are presented. First a summary will be provided of each participant containing basic information about demographics<sup>26</sup>, the circumstances of the parents' divorce or separation and how the person came to be known to CAMHS. It is hoped that this will provide the reader with a context in which to position the analysis. This will be followed by the researcher's interpretation of each narrative presented by providing a 'Global Impression' (Lieblich et al., 1998). The 'Global Impression' extends beyond the content of the interview and asks 'Why was the story told in that way, for what purpose?'

The second part of the analysis considers the narratives collectively and observes the 'Emerging Storylines'. Narratives that sit outside the shared storyline will also be discussed. Each co-constructed story is unique and the young people have different relationships with the shared plot which is considered through the exploration of the identity work (e.g., Bamberg 1997, 2004) and emotional experiences (Greenberg & Angus, 2004). An elaborated explanation to this part of the findings will be provided.

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<sup>25</sup> Co-construction refers to the discursive accomplishment of the narratives produced; identifying the role of researcher in shaping and influencing the construction this has been discussed further in the *Introduction* (1.4) and in the *Methodology* (2.2)

<sup>26</sup> For quick reference please refer to table 1 in chapter 2: *Methodology*.

## 3.2 THE INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES

### 3.2.1 Jo (16 years, White British)

Jo<sup>27</sup> is a 16 year old female who lives with her Mother, her Mother's partner and her younger brother. Her mother and father permanently separated one year previous to the interview, after multiple separations throughout her life since the age of six or seven. Jo spoke about feeling relieved when her parents separated in the context of her father being an alcoholic and physically abusive towards her. Jo has been having input from CAMHS for eight months following an overdose and continuous self-harm. Jo arrived at her usual CAMHS clinic with her boyfriend. The interview lasted for one hour and 15 minutes.

#### *Global Impression*

Jo's narrative portrayed an identity of an individual who was different from her peers having to cope with experiences far removed to the average teenager "*my reality isn't nice, (2) like most other people's reality is*"<sup>28</sup>. Jo's narrative was developing a sense of self as being thoughtful, illustrated through lowering her voice when using swear words, or by stating "*excuse my language*". These characteristics were contrasted with her father, the dominant character in her story, who was positioned as having no regard for others' feelings. Her father was positioned as having negative influence over many areas of her life, for example, "*I spent nights on the streets, loads of nights, 'cause of my Dad*". Jo constructed a vivid image of the struggles she had to endure, through the use of historical past tense (Riessman, 2008): "*why are you putting me through this?*" The adoption of such a technique

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<sup>27</sup> Pseudonyms have been adopted for the young people to ensure their anonymity

<sup>28</sup> Quotes from the transcripts are illustrated through the use of italics and double inverted commas. The number provided in brackets reflects the length of pause in the speech.

and positioning her father as the perpetrator serves the discursive purpose to align the audience with Jo, in a moral stance against the other: 'Dad'.

She makes an identity claim that she is independent and self-reliant: *"Well like learning to pick yourself up and carry on, I don't have to, like, blab on about it and ask for sympathy from people."* This serves to demonstrate to the audience that she does not wish to be perceived as a victim, but as a survivor. Jo positioned herself as a strong character able to overpower her father: *"I mean he won't beat me now because I stand up to him."* Careful narration of 'self as powerful' may have also enabled her, and signal to the audience, not to apportion blame to her mother who *"would walk out, so my dad would take it out on me."*

The co-construction of Jo's narrative appeared to present two dominant storylines: the enormity of the struggles that she had to endure at the hands of her father leading to using self-harm, and her strength and ability to cope and survive.

### 3.2.2 Carly (16, White British)

Carly is a 16 year old female who lives with her mother and younger sister. Her mother and father divorced when she was eight years old following her father having an affair. Carly spoke of finding the divorce *"very upsetting"* and described how things were now *"peaceful and calm."* Carly had been attending psychological therapy sessions for one year to treat 'bulimia', and she had one session remaining following our interview. She arrived alone to the interview ten minutes early and reported that she felt excited about participating in the interview. The interview took place at her usual CAMHS clinic and lasted 51 minutes.

### *Global Impression*

Carly told her narrative in an eager manner. Occasionally she talked quickly and became tongue tied so had to correct what she said. Carly's enthusiasm to participate in the interview seemed to fit with her desire to make sense of what happened.

*"I just didn't understand, what drove him to it, was it us, was it his work, was it, you know, was he drinking too much, it was all kind of like, why did he do it? Why did it have to happen?"*

In Carly's narrative she positioned both her mother and father as thoughtful in their handling of the divorce, offering various asides and stating the motivations for their actions, for example, *"they helped me get through it."* This serves a purpose to present an image of a caring, thoughtful and 'normal' family to the audience which perhaps reflects the pertinence to her preferred sense of self. She positioned her parents as having repaired previous animosity.

*"...they just became best friends, and it's not a false friendship, they are really really close, you know. And they've just completely moved on...it's kind of, quite calm, peaceful, atmosphere in our house now, at the moment, so that's good."*

Carly often repeated the statement, *"so that's good"*, which seemed to offer both herself and the audience some reassurance. Carly's extended account upon the peaceful arrangements following divorce serves to restore the image of 'normality'. This was emphasised by repeating the term *"normal"* many times in her description of family life prior to the divorce. She used the example of how going out for food became *"not normal"*

because *“it felt a bit unnerving, because, it felt a bit like something could happen at any time.”* The co-constructed narrative suggested feelings of shame and embarrassment for Carly during the divorce process. During the arguments *“we could hear outside the front door, it was absolutely, sooo embarrassing.”*<sup>29</sup>

Carly revealed an identity of putting others needs ahead of her own consistent with her claim: *“[at] all costs to keep people around me happy.”* This was illustrated in her account about making a personal sacrifice leaving many questions unanswered to ensure her father did not *“feel attacked.”* She makes sense of this decision in order to maintain the current status quo which is *“quite calm, peaceful”* owing to her preferred sense of self as *“normal”*.

### 3.2.3 Leila (16, White British)

Leila is a 16 year old female who lives with her mother and younger sister. Her Dad was often away with work and then when she was six, he moved abroad permanently. Following their separation Leila was told by Mum that she was *“gay”* and has since had same sex partners. Prior to the interview Leila reported that she has a history of sexual abuse, but this was not discussed further in the research interview. She has on-going support from CAMHS (who is aware of this experience) and recently had an inpatient admission. Leila was interviewed at her home whereby she was on her own. The interview was conducted at her dining room table and lasted one hour.

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<sup>29</sup> The use of underlined speech represents emphasised speech

### *Global Impression*

Leila's story was told tentatively, she spoke quietly and she provided hesitant accounts giving the researcher a feel of a painful story that was previously untold. Her narrative triggered a response from the interviewer to be cautious in exploring potentially sensitive subjects. Beginning the interview Leila offered a limited self-description giving the character 'I' little elaboration. Leila was able to share with the audience a little more about herself through a description of her mother's character: "[Mum's] *a bit like me. She's like, really sensitive, erm she's really friendly (2) sometimes a bit too emotional*". Using a description of herself through her mother seems to distance Leila from her self-description which performs an identity of lacking self-confidence. She presented a sense of self of being less important to others: "*I was happy if everyone else was happy*".

Leila's account of her parents' divorce presented her uncertainty at the time whereby she was unclear: "*I thought he was going on holiday*". Her father moving away was mentioned as one event in a list of many things that Leila had to deal with and she positioned herself as not especially affected by the separation.

*"I don't think I was really upset, I was just like (.) I think I'd, I'd just felt like I'd been like, like things were changing all the time. So I dunno, I wasn't dunno."*

Leila adopted the use of laughter in her narrative which contributed to construct a sense of her being unfazed by the separation possibly in an attempt to convince the audience of her position. The term 'separation' was not spontaneously mentioned by Leila throughout her entire narrative, which is possibly reflective of it not being a particularly salient story, or

perhaps not as important in her current identity development as another story. Equally, it is possible that the absence of stories about her parent's separation were a reflection on how painful or difficult they are to recount. A more elaborated story was her mother's sexuality with which Leila recounted feeling *"really upset."* Leila asserted *"I wasn't like homophobic or anything, but like, I didn't really understand."* It seemed important for Leila to qualify to the audience that her upset was not due to a dislike of her mother's sexuality but her own confusion.

Yet, as her narrative progressed, she presented her feelings of sadness when her father returned abroad *"I do miss him when he's gone, (3) now (2) but, I don't think I did. But I don't spend much time with him (.)." <sup>30</sup>* The multiple pauses suggest that this may be a development in her own sense of her feelings about her father. Her story included moments whereby she was actively creating meaning as she heard her own telling: *"Thinking about it, I'm not sure my Dad is happy, or he's just like surrounding himself in a load of like fake things (.) to be alright"*.

Leila's narrative presented an identity claim of 'lacking confidence'; she had been unclear about the circumstances of her parents' separation. She understood that her reaction in response to her parent's separation, *"I don't think I was really upset,"* was a result of having to deal with multiple changes.

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<sup>30</sup> A full stop within brackets is reflective of a brief pause, shorter than one second

### 3.2.4 Emily (16, White British)

Emily is a 16 year old female who lives at home with her younger sister and mother. She has an older brother who no longer resides with them and her father visits daily. Her parents never married and first separated when she was six years old. This was followed by periods of resuming their relationship however when Emily was 13 they permanently separated. She was interviewed at her home on a Thursday evening, whereby she answered the door in her pyjamas and proceeded to be seated under her duvet on the sofa. Emily was feeling unwell with flu. The interview was interrupted several times, by two phone calls from her brother who was having an argument with their mother and her father returning home. As a result there was a brief break in the middle of the interview. Emily explained she was having input from CAMHS was to manage her 'family difficulties at home'. The interview lasted one hour and 15 minutes.

#### *Global Impression*

Emily spoke in a confident and laid back manner, yet at times her stories were confused whereby she moved between time periods and subjects leaving the interviewer somewhat lost at times. The structure of her narrative mirrored her account of being confused regarding her parents relationship:

*"I could never ever work it out, as in like, 'are they going to be together this time?' or 'are they not?' (.) 'Are they going to break up forever?', 'Are they gonna get back together', it was just a constant like, ifs and maybes and everything. It was just, I dunno, I could never put my finger on it (.)"*<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Single inverted commas used with a quotation reflect the use of animated speech in the narrative

The absence of a clear beginning, middle and end to her individual stories and entire narrative meant a coherent thread between stories was lacking. This triggered a response from the interviewer to use the prompt sheet in order to guide the narrative<sup>32</sup>. This phenomenon was named by Emily who commented: *“my whole past is just all jumbled up, I don’t quite know the chronological order of everything”*. The disjointed narrative was embodied in the interview by the various breaks in the interview to accommodate interruptions.

Emily’s narrative presented a sense of self as independent and self-reliant illustrated by her account of earning money: *“I’m trying to save for a car this year.”* Emily positioned herself as able to fulfil the adult role in relation to her parents who were *“so childish.”* She positioned herself as having a clear understanding of how her parents (as the adults) should have managed it better: *“I would say to them, like, do it yourselves, you’re like adults, you don’t need a little child to like pass on your messages and stuff”*. Reflecting upon herself in the past as a vulnerable child, distinct from her current sense of self as self-reliant, served the purpose to align the audience in their judgement that the parents handled the separation badly: *“bearing in mind I’m like 6 years old, and my Mum’s like to me ‘who do you want to live with, me or your Dad?’”*

### 3.2.5 Fran (16, White British)

Fran is a 16 year old female who is an only child and lives with her mother. She was informed by her father about the proposed separation aged seven. However, this was

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<sup>32</sup> The prompt sheet (Appendix H) that was used to guide the interview, should the stories become stuck or confused, was designed to elicit narratives across time. Riessman (1993) observes that this desire to chronologically order stories is a preference and an expectation of Western researchers.

followed by a period of three years during which her father would leave and return periodically. He permanently moved out of the family home when Fran was ten years old, and a divorce was agreed when she was aged 13. Fran has received on-going input from CAMHS following a diagnosis of 'chronic fatigue syndrome'. Fran arrived at the interview with her Mother, at a CAMHS clinic on a Tuesday evening. A finish time was agreed as her Mother had to go to work and Fran set an alarm to ensure it didn't run over. The interview lasted 55 minutes.

### *Global Impression*

Fran spoke in a confident and articulate manner. She produced a coherent narrative; beginning each story with a clear abstract and finishing with clear exit speak offering a clear summary. Fran performed an identity as a 'mature' individual her narrative included the claim that she is *"a much older person"*. She stated that she likes to help people, and people come to her for advice as she is able to offer an *"older perspective"*. She storied that her mother's emotional response to the separation called for Fran to *"grow up very, very quickly... 'cause I had to look after her."* Fran's use of language to define her behaviour such as *"I had to look after her"*, *"I had to get through it"*, removes a sense of choice from her actions and contrasts Fran's position to the fluidity of the position of her father, who was constructed as *"to-ing and fro-ing"* and *"coming and going"*. Her narrative seems to fulfil a discursive purpose of making her identity claim as someone who can be relied upon contrasted with her father's character who was someone: *"very much living the single life"*.

*"Any child when they see their parent coming and going, and you don't know where they are, and you don't know what they are doing,*

*and they don't really have an interest in you an', that's quite hard, to deal with"*

The use of general pronouns throughout Fran's narrative seems to remove agency and positions her as responding the same as others would, should they be in the same position and rationalise and normalise both her physical and emotional responses. This may serve to indicate to the audience that she does not require empathy. The use of 'matter of fact' speech and the absence of stories about her emotional experience may suggest that there was an untold story of a 'missed childhood' as a result of taking care of her mother.

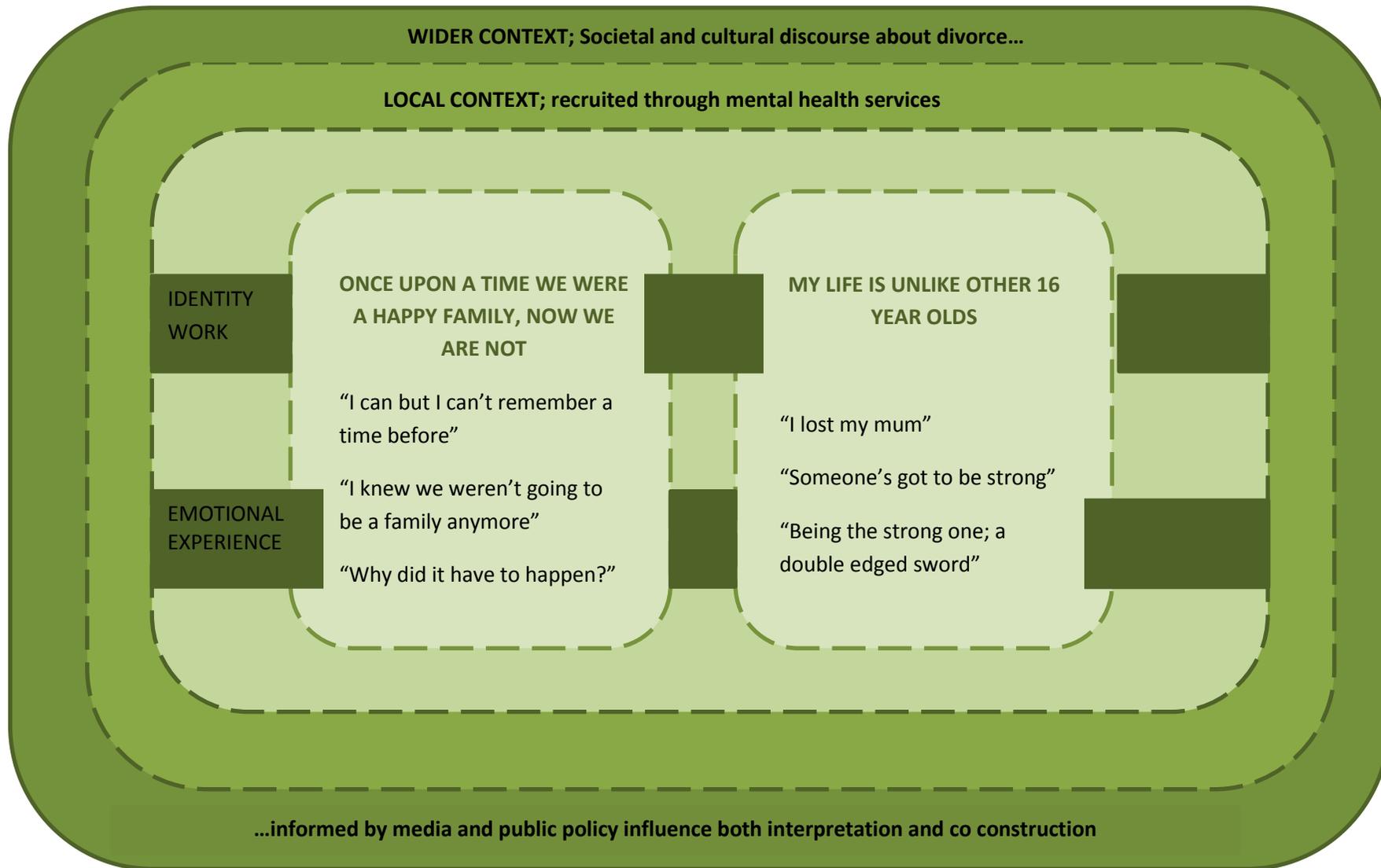
### 3.3 EMERGING STORYLINES

This section will consider the collective storylines, identity work and emotional experiences emerging in the five interviews. Two main shared plots have been selected; 'once upon a time we were a happy family, now we are not' and 'my life is different to other 16 year olds' (see Figure 1). Within each main plot, further sub-plots have been identified. The task of identifying and constructing the shared plots is an interpretative task and as stated in the methodology it is not intended to offer a finite analysis of the interviews (Frank, 2011). The collective storylines are not intended as 'a general unifying view' but intended as listening devices with which to hear the stories (Frank, 1995). Within the shared plots individuals take different positions which are considered so as to highlight the diversity in their sense making. The narrators' stories frequently moved around between times and place both independently and in response to questions from the interviewer. Thus the narratives did not invite chronological ordering but rather narratives were topic centred and so organised in that way (Riessman, 1993).

In order to present the findings, plots and sub-plots have been identified and distinguished from one another (Figure 1). Frank (1995) argues that no story can be understood in isolation and the plots are defined as permeable. This refers to the interplay between the subplots within the same narrative illustrated by using a dashed line marking the 'boundary'. Both the emotional experience (Greenberg & Angus, 2004), argued to have an organising role in human experience, and the identity work (Bamberg, 1997) is woven through the storylines. A quilting metaphor (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Saukko, 2000) is used to illustrate how these parts of the analysis are entwined (Figure 1).

Frank (2011) discusses the importance of having an awareness of the resources which shape how the story is being told. All participants were recruited through two CAMHS sites. This setting provides part of the local context that will have shaped and placed restrictions on both the types of stories the young people told and the researcher's responses and interpretation (Figure 1). These narratives also occurred within a wider context, the societal and cultural narratives about divorce, which have been discussed further in the *Introduction* (section 1.5.2).

This section will now discuss each shared main plot in turn using quotes from the narratives to support the analysis.



*Figure 1; a diagram to illustrate the analysis of the emerging storyline*

### 3.3.1 Once upon a time we were a happy family, now we're not

Present in the narratives of the young people involved in this study was the active sense making of the changes associated with their parents' divorce or separation and maintaining a consistent sense of self that accommodates this change. This emerging storyline has been organised into three sub-plots (refer to Figure 1).

The young people's narratives included ambivalent memories about a time before, explored in the sub-plot; 'I can but I can't remember'. The concept of a 'time before' lends itself to the existence of a 'turning point'; the moment when they knew their lives were not going to remain the same<sup>33</sup>. These narratives are explored in the sub-plot; 'I realised we weren't going to be a family anymore'. The final sub-plot is entitled; 'Why did this have to happen?' This sub-plot will consider how the young people have come to make sense of their parents' divorce or separation.

#### *I can but I can't remember*

The concept of memories before their parent's divorce is complex as for the young people interviewed parental 'divorce' or 'separation' was not an *event*. The young people experienced divorce or separation as a *process* where there was not a definite 'before'. Young people narrated accounts of "*intense arguments*" which occurred before the decision was made or disclosed presented in Carly, Jo and Emily's narratives. Yet the young people also narrated times, of possibly an idealised past, whereby they were a "*happy family*." Both will be considered here.

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<sup>33</sup> Some young people narrated a 'turning point' spontaneously however in other stories were told in response to a prompt asked by the interviewer in accordance with the interview schedule (Appendix H).

Carly's narrative seemed to suggest an idealised past: *"when I was kid I, er, I can't remember them arguing at all, you know, they were always, really lovely and happy."* This is similar to Fran who recalled: *"for the first seven years of my life I'd grown up with a really happy family, and er, a really happy home."* Whilst Fran provided an overview of a happy childhood, similar to the narratives of Emily and Jo, she also storied having a vague memory of happier times. All three narratives seemed to hint at memories of happier times yet lacked elaboration.

Jo: *"I remember them being happy and stuff I mean, I was bridesmaid at their wedding. So it's like vivid memories, like, quite vague as well though"*

For Jo these stories of happier times, were possibly immobilised as they may have felt inconsistent with her dominant story about her father's character: *"a nasty piece of work,"* and also inconsistent with her account that the arguments went on *"for as long as I can remember."* This type of vague construction was shared with Emily who also suggested a blurred memory *"I think I was happy"* though claims *"I don't remember much of my childhood"*. Emily told stories of two distinct memories, thus perhaps more relevant for her identity work, of her mother and father arguing. Emily emphasises the clarity of these memories through her description that they are *"like a film or something, or a picture and I've just looked at it loads and I've memorised it."* For Jo and Emily it seems that the memories of being happy are overshadowed by stories about difficulties and struggles. The stories are possibly kept unelaborated in order to maintain the dominant storyline of their parents' marital difficulties.

Fran's narrative on the other hand, included reference to two seemingly contradictory phenomena: memories of a happy childhood and a denial of remembering a happy childhood; *"I was a bit young to kind of remember"*. Her account included her motive: *"I just kind of block it out mentally, I don't want to think about it, because that brings a lot of pain and a lot of hurt."* Whilst Fran positions herself with agency, *"blocking out"* her memories of her past, she positions her father as actively recalling happier memories: *"he'll reminisce to himself, and, I'm just like pfft, you know he, he remembers all our happy times, and that's quite hard to hear."* The co-construction of Fran's narrative presented images of happier times by proxy, through the use of her father's accounts, which offers evidence to the audience without Fran owning the memories herself. This is consistent with her claim that *"for me, I would kind of forget everything, you wouldn't wanna remember that, because it's hard."* Her narrative carefully presented an image of a happier family, without contradicting her claim of being unable to remember, which facilitated Fran to position herself within a *tragedy*, whereby the family happiness was destroyed by her father's actions.

Carly's narrative has a different feel to those explored above. She was selective with the memories which she storied and offered limited accounts of her father's behaviour. The interviewer responded to this lack of elaboration by using the interview guide to ask a question about a time before her parents' separation. In response she offered further elaboration of her father's abusive behaviour. It is possible that the information would have remained unsaid in the absence of an interview guide which may reflect that she was unsure if the audience were prepared to hear the stories (Frank, 2011). Alternatively the avoidance of an extended account may have been to avoid compromising the discursive purpose of her narrative to assert that everything is *"really good"* and her relationship with her father is

*“really close”*. Carly negotiated this complexity through minimising her father’s behaviour: *“Dad used to get quite drunk, and a couple of times he was abusive but, it was nothing like major.”* Also, through offering explanations of her father’s behaviour:

*“[Dad] obviously knew that he was having an affair, and I think, he was so worried, about my Mum, not finding out, that he just got so stressed, and he drunk a lot to try and forget things”*

Carly distinguished herself from her little sister who is *“very good at holding on to things”* which allowed Carly to make the identity claim of being forgiving whilst also illustrating to the audience that there had been a significant amount of arguments. She makes sense of this difference through their individual experiences: *“...‘cause obviously I can remember a lot before that, about like when my Mum and Dad were happy”*.

Leila’s story sits outside this shared sub-plot as there was an absence of memories of an idealised happier time. Leila included an account of going on holiday as *“a family”*:

*“They had separate rooms, (.) erm (3), don’t know whether they were together though, I just thought like, maybe they’re like too old for like (.) holding hands, and like kissing in public and things like that I didn’t, I dunno, it was just normal, I just thought it was normal anyway (.)”*

Leila makes sense of her past sense of self as not being fazed by her parents relationship: *“I wasn’t like ‘oh why aren’t Mum and Dad like doing that’ I was just like, more upbeat, like, I don’t really care”*. It seems that this serves to further support her claim of not being upset by their separation.

Shared among the other narratives was the phenomenon of making an acknowledgement of the existence of happier times yet without offering elaboration. It is possible that this serves to protect themselves from the feelings of loss. Fran did explicitly acknowledge the pain she felt when recalling memories of happier times. Whilst at the same time the balance of having some recognition seems to offer justification for their relationship in the first instance. For example, Jo made reference to her limited memories: *"I have bits and pieces, enough to carry on with."* This may illustrate that it is useful for her sense of self to acknowledge that her parents were happy once.

*I knew we weren't going to be a family anymore*

Presented in the young people's stories was the shared plot about the moment they came to realise there was going to be a change. Emily, Jo and Fran spontaneously told stories about a 'turning point.' Whereas, Leila and Carly responded to a prompt from the interviewer thus it may be inferred that either these turning points are not as central to their identity work or are too painful to recollect.

Not all the narratives storied the same 'turning point' illustrating the idiosyncrasies of their sense making of their experiences. Fran and Carly defined a specific moment whereby they were *'sat down'* and told by their parents that they were separating. Interestingly, however, for both Emily and Jo the moment they constructed as 'the turning point' was not when they initially found out about their separation. Jo's turning point was some time before the final separation and Emily's was some time after. Leila's narrative differed, she described the moment when she was told about her father moving out yet it was not presented as a pivotal moment that would be followed by a significant change.

Leila constructed the experience of her parents' separation being as one of a list of many things she had to manage. Leila's co-constructed story diminished the importance of her parent's separation upon her sense of self by claiming that she did not feel upset as *"I don't really feel like I'm part of the family anyway."* Her narrative contained a feeling of sadness as she performed an identity of not belonging. Leila offered an elaborated account of her mother telling her about her sexuality which appeared more relevant to her current identity work: *"...erm, I think I like knew, anyway. I don't know. I guess I did, I couldn't really not."* Using her current self she reflected upon herself in the past both as a *"naïve child"* unaware about her mother's sexuality and that she intentionally did not know by *"turning a blind eye"*. Her narrative included an uncertain sense of self and an uncertainty in her sense making.

The other narratives offered a more clearly defined 'turning point'. The use of language built vivid images suggestive of a drastic change whereby life as it was known was destroyed:

Fran: *"all of a sudden (2) we get this like bomb dropped on us"*

Jo: *"my little brother was born an', (.) and everything went tits up basically."*

In Fran's narrative she constructed an image of an unavoidable catastrophe within which she did not have any control: *"stuck in the situation there was nothing I could do."* The sense of being out of control was similar in Carly's story who, like Fran, experienced shock: *"it was kind of surreal to be honest."* The feeling of unreality that Carly presented illustrated that her sense of self as 'normal' was altered as she was told about the separation: *"I wasn't going to be like all the other kids."* The vague memories that accounted about the aftermath, *"I can't*

*remember all bits of it,"* serve to illuminate the moment that she regards as the 'turning point' and thus she understood that her parental divorce had a significant impact upon her sense of self. Carly's account included reference to finding out about her father's affair earlier however she stated *"I didn't really mention it, or tell anyone that I knew, and I didn't really believe it."* This co-constructed story of disbelieving what she had heard emphasises how unexpected and shocked she was at the information that her father was having an affair.

Emily stated 'the turning point' for her was when she *"literally just gave up hope"* after her parents' cancelled their marriage plans. Emily's account tracks her identity development over time. She positioned the 'I' character of the past as being hopeful whereby she constructed a sense of self as believing *"life has happy endings."* This reflection of herself in the past illustrated to the audience 'me', her sense of self in the here and now whereby she is a realist: *"they are never going to get back together"*. Emily adopted strong language which seemed to serve the purpose of illustrating her stark transition in her sense of self.

*"My Mum and Dad were like 'we're gonna get married' and then I was like ecstatic...and then, like literally crashed and burned after a couple of weeks. And then, I literally just remember being distraught and devastated, it was horrible (.)"*

The point in which the young people narrated as the 'turning point' varied across narratives. They appeared reflective of moments which required identity work as the change in the external world shifted the young person's sense of self. These experiences of memories and

'turning points' required meaning making to develop a coherent sense of self amongst the changes.

*Why did this have to happen?*

Consistent among the narratives was the active sense making of the young people. In the absence of sufficient explanations about the relationship breakdown the young people questioned and developed beliefs about the motives behind their parents' behaviour. However, Leila co-constructed a stance of 'not knowing' and confusion about the reasons for the relationship breakdown.

Leila's account co-constructed dichotomous characters; her father was repeatedly described as *"not very open"* and her mother was storied as talking candidly. She narrated a sense that neither her father nor her mother gave complete and direct answers to her questions, which contributed to Leila's confusion, an experience which seems consistent across time.

*"[mum] said like, like, 'if I'm not going to tell you, like what do you think the answer is?' So that's when I kind of realised my Dad was gay, but he's never told me that. (.) Like himself"*

Leila constructed a sense of having to make guesses in the absence of being given direct answers. Her sense of self seemed to shape her understanding of her father's motives to *"make me do a load of work"* towards her education: *"I don't know if that's out of like care and like love, or the fact that like (3) dunno, he wants to like show me off <Jenny: mmm> as like someone successful as well."* Leila stated concern that *"he's expecting like too much of me"* which informs the audience of her sense of self of not being good enough.

Unlike Leila's sense of confusion, Emily presented a more certain understanding of the divorce process and her parent's relationships and stated: *"I knew absolutely everything."* Yet, in a similar vein Emily doubted that her mother's actions were a reflection of her love and care for her. Similarly, Emily co-constructed an understanding that her mother's actions were to get back at her father.

*Emily: "...my Mum was just like, OK your both living with me then."*

*Jenny: "Why did Mum make that decision?"*

*Emily: "I've never really thought about it, but when I think about it I think she did it generally to spite my Dad...I don't know like I think she did it because if she know if me and Becky<sup>34</sup> lived with her, she would get like, is it like maintenance money that you get or whatever? (looks to interviewer for clarification) <Jenny: mmm> Yea, so she knew she would get that, there'd be more like 'ha look, I've got our kids', 'our kids are living with me' kind of thing. Kind of like, kind of like, payback, for (.) my Dad like (.) cheating on her."*

Neither Emily nor Leila included a sense that their parents acted in their best interests which differed to Carly's account that her parent's always did what was best for her. She provided examples of how they wanted to ensure her and her sister were happy, *"they made it so, you know, we never had any set dates that we could see our dad."* Carly presented a very forgiving and understanding perspective of her parent's arguments and her fathers' affair: *"I don't think, they ever, meant to, ever hurt us."* Present in Carly's narrative was an absence of having to 'guess' as she included an account of her father offering an explanation *"that him and my Mum were very very different ...But I just don't understand why he couldn't of,*

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<sup>34</sup> All characters in the stories have also been assigned pseudonyms.

*waited.*” However, she illustrated that she was still curious about various things yet would not ask her father through fear of him feeling *“attacked”*.

Fran’s story also contained a sense of certainty and clearly presented that her father to blame for the breakdown of her family *“he’s ruined my life, he broke up my family”*. The idea of holding one parent responsible was also evident in Jo’s narrative: *“mum did love dad at first, and she did want to marry him because he did make her happy and then he started drinking, so.”* Jo also seemed to categorise her parents into opposing camps. Her mother was described as the ‘loveliest women’ and her father as ‘an arsehole’. Despite her certainty in her co-constructed parents’ characters she narrated feeling confused about her father’s feelings towards her mother and his physical abuse to her. Jo narrated that her father had also been beaten by his father yet stated: *“I never really figured out why, I still don’t know to this day why he’d want to do it to someone else, if it was that bad”*. In her attempt to make sense, Jo co-constructed the idea that it is possible that her father had *“conjured [it] up in his head”* about being beaten when he was a child.

It seems that in the aftermath of their parents’ divorce or separation the young people were required to make sense and create a coherent story. Fran’s narrative created a sense of certainty yet unlike the other narratives did not offer elaborated stories about why her parents acted thus perhaps not central to her current identity work. Like Jo, who questioned her father’s integrity, Emily and Leila presented doubt that their parents’ behaviour was reflective of feelings of love and care. Whereas Carly, who storied being offered a clear explanation, co-constructed a certain claim that she was held in mind by her parents.

### 3.3.2 My life is different to other 16 year olds

This storyline; ‘my life is different to other 16 year olds,’ emerged from the accounts by the young people who positioned themselves and their families as unlike other families. As Fran stated, *“I would go around my friends’ house and their parents are together, an (.) you kind of know that it’s not normal, you know your situation isn’t normal”*.

All the young people spoke about the unavailability of their parents. Whilst a storyline about the presence and absence of fathers could have been developed<sup>35</sup> the narratives included more of an pre-occupation with the absence of mothers. Therefore a storyline specifically considering the emotional, and in Jo’s account the physical, absence of mothers was developed. It followed that the young people constructed stories about taking on more responsibility and fulfilling the position; ‘Someone’s got to be strong’. The co-constructions of fulfilling the role as ‘the strong one’ resulted in consequences for the young people discussed in the sub-plot ‘being the strong one; a double edged sword’. These included detrimental effects upon their mental health, whilst at the same time accomplished preferred aspects of their identity.

#### *I lost my Mum*

Shared among the narratives were accounts about mothers’ being unavailable for a time due to struggling to cope themselves. The narratives of Fran, Leila and Emily contained references that their mothers were *“depressed”* and Carly presented her mother as *“really upset”* following separation. Leila’s experience of her mothers’ depression varied to that of Emily and Fran who presented being very aware of what was going on. Whereas Leila

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<sup>35</sup> For example; the stories told by Leila and Fran offered various references to their father’s physical absence whereas both Emily and Carly asserted that their fathers were available; *“he still came round all the time, like, my Dad’s never like not been here.”*

constructed a sense of being oblivious to her mother's difficulties and at the time she felt excited about getting the time off school or staying up late:

*"I remember being like, 7 an' 6, an' like, it was 9 O'Clock an I was like (gasps) it's 9 O'clock, oh no' (2) an' I thought it was a good thing <Jenny: mmm> So naïve (laughs)."*

Leila adopted a different tone of voice, signalling a younger child, to tell her story whereby her mother *"forgot to take me to bed"*. This story, located in the past, seems to further assert her identity claim of previously not understanding; a *"naïve child"* whereby she enjoyed the personal gains of her mother's inactions. Yet, her defensiveness may illustrate feelings of guilt or regret at her lack of understanding: *"I dunno, I didn't see it as like a bad thing obviously"*.

The other narratives constructed a different sense whereby the young people had been sensitive to their mothers' difficulties and absence. Emily's narrative constructed multiple reasons whereby she and her mother *"lost our relationship entirely"* including; her mother's illness whereby *"she couldn't walk or get out of bed"*. Whilst both she and Fran included a more certain understanding of their mother's absence, Fran presented a more empathetic position: *"she took it really badly, as you would I guess."*

Carly also narrated understanding that her mother was *"very upset"* following her father leaving and *"there was a lot of staying with Nan"*. Unlike the other narratives, for Carly her mother's absence was compensated by other characters in her story who offered *"such a big*

support". In Carly's narrative, 'absence' was a plot evident both during the *"intense arguments"* and in the aftermath of the divorce.

*"What I wanted to do was just, stop everything, to kind of go down and say to my Mum and Dad; 'Stop it' you know, 'shut up', and you know ... but it kind of, it was really weird because, you'd go down there, and they'd just be shouting, and it wasn't like they were your parents' it was like completely different people."*

For Carly her parents' preoccupation with arguing deemed them unavailable to offer support. However, Carly was required to negotiate this with her claim that her mother and father are very thoughtful: *"we've got to make sure we're here for the kids"*. She achieves a coherent story by suggesting that her parents weren't acting themselves therefore deeming the behaviour exempt from their true selves.

Jo's story included reference to her mother's physical absence rather than the less obvious 'emotional unavailability' in the other narratives; her mother would *"walk[ing] out so Dad could take it out on me"*. According to Jo, the physical absence of her mother placed her in physical danger, which differs to the emotional deprivation noted in the other narratives. This story seems to pose a dilemma for Jo, as her account of her mother's actions may be in conflict to the description of her mother: *"a lovely woman"*. It seemed that Jo was able to negotiate this complexity in her narrative through the lack of elaboration of the character: 'Mum'.

All the young people told stories of their mother's being absent. In this absence the young people narrated accounts whereby they fulfilled the responsibilities that their mothers were unable to fulfil, this will be explored in the following sub-plot; 'someone's got to be strong'.

### *Someone's got to be strong*

In the absence of parents, the majority of the young people spoke about dealing with difficulties alone and supporting others, e.g., looking after the needs of siblings and/or parents. Both Jo and Carly stated how they needed to *"pick myself up and carry on"*. Leila's narrative deviated from the dominant storyline by co-constructing a story of her resistance to adopt the position of 'the strong one'.

All the young people participating in the research had younger siblings except Fran. Siblings were very prevalent throughout the stories told, however Leila did not speak about her sister. Jo, Emily and Carly spoke with great conviction that they felt it was their responsibility to care for their younger siblings. Emily's narrative: *"I had to step up and become Mum,"* presented her position as determined due to being the only person able to fulfil the role:

*"When I was like 10 I had to like take over the house and kind of become Mum, 'cause my Dad wasn't here, my brother was kicked out, and so it was kind of like me looking after my little sister and my Mum."*

The language used constructed a sense that it was a forced position as opposed to an active choice, yet there is a feeling of pride in Emily's story as her identity work included a sense of being mature and able. Her story stated that she undertook various practical tasks in

response to the unavailability of mother: *“getting my sister up for school, taking her to school, go to school, doing the house work, like everything. Cooking, cleaning.”* Emily co-constructed a story that positioned herself as unappreciated by her mother.

*“...‘oh look Mum I did the house for you’ and she’d be like ‘oh you’ve done that wrong’ ...And it’s like, I’m 11 years old, I’m trying my best, like stop being such an ungrateful bitch. I used to get so angry and upset.”*

Emily’s account seemed to recruit the audience to appreciate the unjustness of her position. Her narrative negotiated her historic self through offering the context of her age, whereby she hadn’t completed the task to the right standard, which may have contradicted her current sense of self as ‘able’ and ‘independent’. Her role of caring for others was constructed as consistent across time and enabled her to make the claim that she was valued by her sister: *“[Sister] must have been like four, but she called me Mum, and I was like ‘Aw my little sister just called me Mum.’”* Her relationship to *“stepping up as Mum”* holds a tension between her preferred identity of being able and confident whilst illustrating the unjustness of her experience. The language adopted by Emily: *“I was like ‘man up’ basically, ‘grow a pair and deal with it’,”* drew upon societal discourse around the assimilation between the male identity and strength. Emily made the identity claim of being strong enough to cope with the difficulties she was required to endure.

Jo also made reference to physical strength. Her ability to self-protect was co-constructed by the use of language about her physical strength e.g., *“I can lift my own body weight.”* Jo did not express any emotion throughout the telling of her narrative. This is consistent with her

constructed past whereby her expressions of emotion did not result in any support: *"I used to like sit there with my hands over my ears, like crying or whatever, and no one else seemed to do anything (small laugh)."* Jo's laugh demonstrated to the audience that her feeling of powerlessness belongs in the past as is not relevant to her present sense of self whereby Jo's identity claim is being powerful and independent. Her ability to self-protect in the past, placing her hands over her ears, creates a consistent sense of self over time in the absence of help from others.

Jo's narrative focussed upon the physical protection that she provided for her younger brother. Taking the responsibility of being 'the strong one' was presented as an active choice: *"I wouldn't (.) stand for it, I'd take my brother's beating instead of letting him touch my brother at all."* Her narrative also included moments when the decision to take care of her little brother was out of her control: *"I [was] stuck at home, looking after my little brother. He didn't bother to get a baby sitter or anything like that"*. Thus, Jo's narrative constructed two positions in relation to acting as the 'protector': On the one hand Jo's story draws the audience in to empathise with the lack of care she received from her father, and on the other, assert her preferred identity of having agency which allows her to avoid fulfilling the role of a victim.

Similarly to Jo, Carly's narrative co-constructed an identity of being able to look after herself and her younger sister. She also constructed a sense of self as in need of support from others too rather than being self-sufficient as suggestive in the other narratives. Carly talked about being 'strong' in the emotional sense of *"holding it together"* and accepting the role to *"hide her sister from the arguments"*. Carly constructed a sense of being strong following her

parents' divorce: *"you need to, just, you know, get along with it. And erm, be strong for your sister and your Mum at the same time"*. Carly's narrative suggested remaining calm externally, yet spoke about an internal battle of worries running through her mind: *"Oh my god, what if something happens, what if things kick off, what do I need to do?"* Whilst caring for her younger sister she was internally feeling responsible to act should something occur. Carly's narrative differed from Emily who asserted that she would be able to look after herself and her younger sister should the circumstances arise: *"I would struggle but I could do it much easier than any normal 16 year old could."* Carly's story included other characters, grandparents and friends, which were available to offer her support. Carly does not position herself as the only person able to fulfil the role of being the strong one as suggestive in both Jo and Emily's narrative.

Whilst Fran did not have siblings her story also included a central character that required *"looking after"*: her mother. Similarly to the other stories Fran also spoke about having to fulfil the position of being the strong one: *"for so many years I had to be strong for my Mum"*. She positioned herself in an authoritative position:

*"...erm, I used to say to her, you know, 'come on Mum', 'lets go out, lets go do something'...I used to just try and get her out of the house as much as possible, she used to go to coffee with her friends every morning, and, that was a big thing for her. Erm, (.) so that's, I just tried to lift her spirits, get her mind off of it"*

Although Fran's story suggested that she accepted the role of taking responsibility for her mother there was a sense that it was a difficult position: *"when someone is constantly down and depressed and leaning on you all the time, it does put a strain on your relationship."* This

co-constructed sense served to recruit the audience to have an appreciation that despite Fran fulfilling the role, it wasn't easy. Yet, Fran co-constructed a sense of self as being confident in supporting her mother despite being relatively young: *"it doesn't really matter how old you are, you are always going to feel, you know, bad, for them, and you try your hardest to make them better."*

Conversely Leila was resistant to accept the role as 'the strong one' and did not position herself as responsible to meet the needs of her younger sister or mother.

*Leila: Obviously like I was like 5 or, I was like, I didn't know what...she obviously knew like I was a child and like she couldn't talk about sad things and like. But she would like start talking and I would be like (.) 'oh'(.)*

*Jenny: What is that; 'Oh'?*

*Leila: I didn't really understand <Jenny; OK> I'd ask her what's wrong and then, I don't know, I was just expecting like a simple answer, like, I don't know.*

*Jenny: How did you feel about that?*

*Leila: Confused I guess.*

In contrast to Fran's narrative, Leila constructed a sense of self as unable to fulfil the role of her mother's confidant. Unlike the other narratives, Leila understood her mother's depression as the reason for her confiding in her: *"she was so lonely...I think she was a bit desperate."* Leila presented a sense of self as progressing over time as she gathered new information: *"I dunno, I didn't clock that...there was a reason behind it, that-wasn't-good."* This sense making varied to the other young people who constructed a sense of being aware of their mothers' difficulties and in response embraced the requirement to take on greater

responsibility. A plot emerged in the narratives that the young people's experiences of being 'the strong one' resulted in consequences for them.

*Being the 'the strong one'; a double edged sword*

Emerging from the narratives were stories about the consequences of taking on greater responsibility in the absence of mothers. Fulfilling the position as 'the strong' one was constructed as both responsible for shaping the development of favourable aspects of their identity (closer familial relationships and being mature) and the experience of less favourable emotions and coping strategies (loneliness and self-harm). In the absence of a constructed sense of taking on additional responsibility Leila's narrative deviated from the collective narrative.

Emerging in the narratives was a storyline that adjusting to the emotional absence of parents and managing parental arguments, distinguished the familial relationships as stronger than had these experiences not occurred.

*Emily: "I feel so much more attached to her than I think any normal sister would feel to their sister"*

*Jo: "We're more than brother and sister. We're like really good friends as well".*

Emily, Jo and Carly made sense of their experiences, looking after their younger siblings, as resulting in stronger bonds. Similarly Fran constructed a sense that she developed an especially close relationship with her mother.

The identity work in the narratives of Fran and Emily included constructing a sense of being mature and distinguished themselves from other 16 year olds: *"I grew up really quickly"*. Fran spoke confidently about her ability to *"handle things (.) a lot differently to how any other 16 year old would"* presenting her preferred identity. Her adoption of the pronoun 'I' constructed a sense of ownership and pride upon this part of her identity. She constructed two understandings of this aspect of her identity. On the one hand her identity was understood as having developed over time: *"I think my experiences have moulded me in to, kind of, you know, like I said I had to grow up, a lot faster."* However, on the other she constructed a sense that it is a fixed quality: *"Mum's friend is a psychic and she's always told me that I'm an older person, trapped in a young person's body"*. This idea, of a fixed characteristic, is suggestive of a consistent sense of self across time also observed in Emily's story who narrated caring for her sister before her parents' separation. Emily also constructed a favourable relationship to her identity as *"mature"* and used other characters to verify her claim:

*"Like some of the dancers that I dance with, that are like 23 when they ask me how old I was they're like 'you're not 16' and I'm like, yea I am, and they're like 'no we thought you were my age'."*

Neither Fran nor Emily elaborated their emotional experiences of 'growing up quickly' yet it could be inferred that they experienced loss. Emily's narrative included an undertone of slight resentment: *"I can be really immature if I want to but I'm 16 years old, I'm allowed to, I have an obligation to be immature sometimes."* Whereas Fran differentiated herself from her peers and claimed that she had *"outgrown everyone in school"*. She asserts that her experience of *"looking after"* her mother was "hard" as she tried to juggle usual teenage activities such as friendships. It is possible that there could be an untold story about her

missed childhood. The absence of this story may be reflective of her being unsure if the audience are prepared to hear it (Frank, 2011) or in order to protect herself from feelings of sadness or loss. These possible negative consequences of 'growing up' quickly were absent in Jo's narrative, who constructed a sense of the benefits to 'growing up'.

The young people narrated stories about how they managed with difficult emotions or feelings. Common among the narratives was choosing not to talk or share difficulties with others evident in Fran's story, who narrated that *"I didn't really talk to people at school...school I guess was an escape for me."* Fran narrated that she *"felt very alone at that time"* but constructed a sense of herself as having agency in her decision *"leaving my problems at home"* in order to provide relief from Fran's role as the 'strong one.'

*"...for so many years I had to be strong for my Mum, and now that she was OK, it was like my turn, to kind of (.) grieve over the family splitting up, and the shock of everything, and the stress of everything. It was just too much, I mean, I was so young and all this was happening and going on around me, an' (.) um, I got very depressed, erm (.) I battled with self-harm during that time, erm, it was just very hard, and I felt like no one around me was really understanding"*

Fran made an identity claim of being independent which made sense of her decision not to talk to people: *"I'm more (.) independent, where I like to do things by myself."* Yet, her narrative inferred that there were negative consequences of 'managing alone.' Her identity work required her to negotiate both her claim that people had been supportive with her claim that she *"didn't really talk to people at school"*. She made sense of her *"extended*

*family*” at her mother’s work choosing not to talk to her to avoid *rubbing “salt in the wound.”*

Unlike Emily and Jo, Fran constructed learning more effective ways to cope with stress e.g., to *“talk more,”* in order to deal with stress. They narrated that they continue to adopt the strategy of ‘coping alone’. It was constructed both as effective, as it distracted them from the difficulties, yet also ineffective as it did lead to feelings of isolation. Emily narrated that she *“just pretend[s] like everything’s OK, and just be miserable to myself.”* The co-constructed adoption of a tough exterior is differentiated to her narrated past whereby she positions herself as an *“emotional wreck.”* Her story suggested that she had *“been through a lot”* and in response she has developed a coping strategy to *“never like face a problem.”* Emily’s sense making of this strategy was to avoid being *“constantly depressed all the time”* yet recognises that this leads to her problems building up. Her performed identity demonstrated to the audience that whilst she can look alright externally, reflected in her laid back storytelling, she is struggling inside. It is possible that this narrative was intended for ‘ghostly audiences’ (Minister, 1991), either to her parents with whom historically she has been unable share her feelings, or her clinician to inform them that she is in need of support.

Jo talked about withholding information from her family: *“I couldn’t do that to my family”* which resulted in her adopting self-harm to manage her feelings. Her narrative constructed a sense of ‘coping alone’ to maintain her strong familial loyalty which also supported her identity claim of being the ‘protector’. Jo presented that it is only recently that her parents have been aware that she has been self-harming with which her mother *“didn’t really understand.”*

Carly did not make sense of her mental health difficulties in relation to her experience of being the strong one. Carly suggested that *“I used to get bullied quite a lot at school, that’s one of the main reasons why I got bulimia, ‘cause erm, I was quite, quite a chubby kid.”* Carly accounted that her mother had particular expectations for how she should have coped: *“well when your Dad had an affair, I just stood up and carried on’.”* However, this appeared inconsistent with Carly’s preferred method of coping. Unlike the other narratives Carly spoke about receiving support from various people including friends at secondary school whereby divorce was more common and spoken about *“just like a normal subject.”* The way in which she told her story facilitated her performed identity of needing support from others:

*“..’oh if my Dad has done it, and my boyfriends have done it, why doesn’t [current boyfriend] do it?’(laugh) <Jenny: mmm> Which is horrible but (becomes tearful and reaches for a tissue)”.*

This open expression of emotion, like Emily, may possibly be intended to remind her ‘ghostly audience’ (Minister, 1991) that she still needs support.

Leila made no explicit connection with her experiences of her mother being unavailable and her own mental health difficulties. Absent from Leila’s story was reference to her mental health that was spontaneously offered in all the other narratives. She offered a brief insight at the end of the interview and claimed that *“things are getting better.”* Unlike the other narratives Leila did not have an elaborated idea of how or why things were getting better giving a vague explanation:

*“Mmm (4) like (3) just (2), like I don’t feel low all the time, I don’t, ok, I used to like hit things quite a lot, I don’t anymore, I am on some medication, erm, I dunno, don’t know what else.”*

She constructed sense of self of lacking agency. Despite not making connections between her past and present mental health her historic stories about being unaware of her mother’s depression are contrasted with her current sensitivity to her mother’s feelings: *“I can’t talk to her, very much, but that’s not because she’s not good to talk to, that’s because I don’t want to worry her.”*

Shared among the narratives was the adoption of methods of coping that ‘actively’ avoided confronting difficulties. These co-constructed stories carried with them the implicit message that confronting difficulties was in contradiction to fulfilling the role of the strong one. In addition to not talking to others the young people all spoke about the adoption of ‘distraction’ for example; Leila talked about listening to music and Fran about *“throwing myself into my work.”* As Carly described, these activities provided an opportunity to *“kind of like, gave me that moment where I could just like, get away from everything.”* Emily and Jo talked about using substances such as alcohol, *“to make me feel happy”* and marijuana *“just to mellow out.”* Both Emily and Jo reflected that neither were a good way of coping in the long run as led to negative consequences.

In order to maintain the sense of self as ‘the strong one’ the young people distracted themselves from difficult feelings. For some it appeared that requesting help and support seemed to contradict their preferred sense of self as independent and mature. It is possible

that there could be untold stories about a 'missed childhood' as the young people made reference to being different to their peers.

## Chapter 4: DISCUSSION

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### 4.1 OVERVIEW

This current research was designed to hear the stories of young people who have experienced their parents' divorce or separation. The aim of the research was to build on our understandings of the ways in which young people negotiate this disruptive life event into their developing sense of self. This section will provide a brief summary of the findings followed by a discussion making reference to the storylines and existing literature. The implications of the findings for clinical practice will then be discussed. The strengths and limitations of the research design will be considered, followed by suggestions for future research. The section will be concluded with personal reflections from the researcher and some closing remarks.

### 4.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings will be summarised in consideration of the specific research questions: How do the narrators describe and account for their experiences of parental divorce or separation? How do the narrators position themselves relative to themselves, others, and the broader societal narratives available to them?

The young people who participated in this study co-constructed a sense that parental divorce or separation was a *process*. The narratives presented the construction of 'turning points' whereby they were required to negotiate their sense of self. Some of the narratives illustrated how the experience of parental divorce or family discord required them to develop a different understanding of themselves. This is consistent with the idea that disruptive life events require *narratives* to be revised (Kirkman, 2002). The young people also

performed identities that were consistent to their sense of self in the past. This suggested that the young people had made sense of their identity claims, not simply as adaptations following this disruptive life event, but as consistent parts of what makes them unique individuals. The young people were able to link their past with their present developing a sense of who they are in the here and now. However, it was notable that the young people did not narrate stories about their imagined futures. A 'narrative identity' is understood as making connections between their past and present to make predictions about the future (Pasupathi & McLean, 2010). Each narrative included references to the present day and their pasts yet without reference to their anticipated futures.

This study found that the narratives co-constructed a sense that parents separating or divorcing gave the participants a sense of being different to their peers, which in all narratives resulted in them keeping their experiences to themselves. It seemed that the experience of being different and needing to 'cope alone' was in response to the emotional absence of their mothers. In the majority of accounts, the young people positioned themselves in authoritative positions of taking responsibility to look after themselves, their mothers and/or younger siblings. In the majority of stories a sense was constructed that the familial bonds were stronger than other families as a result of the changes that they had endured.

Other characters in the stories included friends. Friends were not discussed in all the narratives; however, in the majority of stories where they were presented they were not aware of the young person's experiences. 'Others' were positioned as not knowing what was

going on. The meaning making of this position included not confronting the issues, an opportunity to escape the difficulties at home and fear of judgement and shame.

One young person's account deviated from this shared plot. Whilst this young person objectively had similar experiences, the way in which she made sense of the situation differed from the others. Within this group of young people who had similar 'observable' experiences, there was great diversity in the construction of a sense of self and meaning making about their parents' divorce or separation.

#### 4.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

There will now be a discussion of the findings making reference to current literature. First there will be a discussion of the structure of the narratives offered by the young people considering the storyline; Once upon a time we were a happy family, now we're not. Secondly there will be a discussion of the societal discourse around what it means to be a mother and the requirement for the young people to adopt this role in consideration of the storyline; My life is unlike other 16 year olds. In addition, within this storyline, the young people made sense of themselves as different as a result of various factors beyond divorce.

##### 4.3.1 Once upon a time we were a happy family, now we're not

It seems that the experience of this disruptive life event, parental divorce, required the young people to negotiate the experience into their meaning making and identity work. The structure of the stories told will be considered including the observation that the young people narrated a sense of self with an absent future and narrated a consistent sense of self over time.

The young people in the study created narratives which demonstrated active sense making of their experiences of parental divorce or separation and completed identity work (Bamberg, 2004). It is adolescence when a 'narrative identity' begins to be formed (Pasupathi & McLean, 2010) as it is argued to be a key transitional phase (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Although despite the observation that the young people used their past and present to inform their preferred sense of self, in the here and now, absent from the accounts were stories of an anticipated future. It is possible that the absence of these stories was a reflection of the absence of a prompt about their future in the interview guide. Taking this into consideration and with caution it is possible that the young people's experience, of changing life circumstances, limited their ability to make predictions about their future self. It could be hypothesised that the experience of this life changing event, whereby their course of life was altered, creates anxiety around the future and thus the young people are hesitant to make predictions for their future. Alternatively, it could be reflective of a difficulty to consider their futures due to becoming stuck in creating a coherent narrative to connect their past with their present. Unfortunately the design of interview means that it is not possible to make claims about this phenomenon as it is possible that stories about the future were not offered as the young people did not anticipate that it was what the researcher wanted to hear. However, it may offer an interesting direction for future research with this population.

Whilst Bamberg (2004) argues that searching for coherence in narratives should not be the primary purpose of analysis, it was common among the narratives for there to be consistency between the constructed identities of the past and present. Both Fran and Emily offered stories to support their claims that they were *mature* both before and after their

parents' separation. Despite narrating 'turning points' when there was a sudden realisation that life would be different, their current sense of self could be traced back to their past. It was found that the young people held a consistent 'internal' sense of self whilst they constructed stories about multiple changes in the external social world. Kroger (1989) argues that identities are formed through a reciprocal process between the psychological interior of individuals and her/his socio-cultural environment. It is possible that a consistent sense of internal self for the young people offers security and certainty in juxtaposition to the ever changing external social world they had experienced.

#### 4.3.2 My life is unlike other 16 year olds

There will now be a discussion about the storyline; My life is unlike other 16 year olds. Stories about the absence of a mother will be considered, followed by a discussion about how adopting this role formed both parts of the young people's preferred identity and the struggles they experienced. Finally there will be a discussion of the finding that 'divorce' was just a part of the young people's experiences.

#### *Societal Discourse; what is a mother?*

The decision was made to consider the absence of mothers as it was a dominant story line in all the narratives. There was not enough scope in the thesis to also consider the stories of fathers. Riessman (2008) argues that segments of narratives analysed are shaped by the researcher's emerging theories and interests. It seems probable that these storylines, which suggested that mothers' were not fulfilling their role, stood out for the researcher as were positioned outside of Western expectations. The societal discourse that exists about the role of a mother, such as to nurture and protect their children creates these expectations.

Hearing stories whereby this role was not successfully carried out is likely to have invited interest due to the researcher's clinical experience whereby there is a responsibility to safeguard children. Careful use of the reflective journal ensured that the storyline was data driven and not unduly influenced by the interests of the researcher. The storylines were strongly supported by the narratives.

It is possible that stories about the emotional absence of mothers dominated the narratives due to the young people having increased contact with them. Hetherington et al. (1982) claimed that the majority of children live with their mothers and as a result fathers can become absent. This remained true for this sample however the emotional absence of mothers appeared to have a more significant impact upon their constructed sense of selves in comparison to their father's physical absence. Societal discourse surrounding the roles of mothers is likely to have contributed to the meaning making of the young people and reinforced the emotional experience of the unavailability of mothers. The young people co-constructed themselves as fulfilling a 'parent' role and completing tasks that is perhaps not expected of children in Western culture. Thus these findings may not be applicable to young people who have different ethnic or cultural backgrounds as the expectations upon the roles of 'teenagers' may be different. It is important not to over emphasise the detrimental effects of this experience as the majority of the young people positioned themselves *both* as outside of the norm *and* their 'maturity' as forming part of their preferred identity.

Societal discourse can shape and restrict the co-constructed stories, for example, Leila did not offer any elaboration about why the decision was made to live with her mother and the researcher did not ask for further elaboration. This appears reflective of how societal

discourse shapes assumptions, creates 'taken for granted' knowledge and subsequently places restrictions on the possibilities for stories. This appears illustrative of the reciprocal process between what exists in societal discourse and subsequently what *can* come into existence.

### *The burden and pride in adopting more responsibility*

The findings of this research support previous studies which suggested that the unavailability of parents results in young people adopting a pseudo-parental role (Butler et al., 2002; Byng-Hall, 1995; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). The young people narrated taking an active role in helping parents cope following divorce explored in the sub-plot 'someone's got to be strong.' The adoption of additional responsibility followed, primarily, from the emotional absence of mothers. All the young people told stories of their mothers experiencing low mood or depression following the separation. This phenomena could be explained by the 'family systems' theory which argues that structural rearrangements can occur between the parental and child sub-system in order to meet the needs of the family (Minuchin, 1974). Earley and Cushway (2002) argued that children, in response to feeling their parent's vulnerabilities, *actively* contribute in order to ensure family well-being. Being sensitive to their mother's feelings was found in the stories told by these five people who performed the identities of 'caring for others,' 'protecting' and being 'the strong one.' The narratives included reference to caring for their younger more vulnerable siblings. These findings were dissimilar to the findings of Abbey and Dallos (2004) who argued that siblings provided mutually supportive relationships. Their stories also included reference to completing tasks such as cleaning and providing emotional support for their parents. All

these accounts could be understood as '*parentification*' (e.g., Byng-Hall 2002) defined by Hooper (2007);

A disturbance in generational boundaries, such that evidence indicates a functional and/or emotional role reversal in which the child sacrifices his or her own needs for attention, comfort, and guidance in order to accommodate and care for the logistical and emotional needs of a parent and/or sibling.

(Hooper, 2007, p. 323)

The adoption of these additional responsibilities has been subjected to debate. Hooper (2007) assimilates '*parentification*' to emotional neglect. Whereas, Hetherington (1989) argued that girls can benefit from gaining independence. Whilst fulfilling this role can be adaptive (Byng-Hall, 2008; DiCaccavo, 2006), it can also result in excessive burdening patterns (Byng-Hall, 2008). DiCaccavo (2006) acknowledged that internalising the need to care for parents and meet their emotional needs can result in psychological difficulties including isolation, shame and anxiety. Byng-Hall (2008) identified that children who can fulfill this role can experience a lost childhood and their self-esteem and mood is compromised as children struggle to adequately fulfill the parent role. For the five young people in this study it was found that some stories included a sense of resentment and sadness about fulfilling the role as 'the strong one'. One of the narratives included reference to her difficulties in completing the role due to her young age. It was also possible that there were untold stories about 'missing childhoods' left untold due to the upset that they may cause. Thus, it could be argued that some of the young people experienced burden as a result of taking on these responsibilities. One narrative did deviate from the shared storyline although whilst she did not co-construct a sense of being 'the strong one', the requirement for her to fulfil the

position was presented. This young person did construct an identity of being sensitive to other's needs: *"I think I was happy if everyone else was"* which may be consistent with Byng-Hall's (1995) understanding of being 'parentified'.

There is a growing body of research which considers how parental mental health influences the well-being of children (e.g., Cummings, Keller & Davies, 2005; Mordoch & Hall, 2008; Stallard, Norman, Huline-Dickens, Salter & Cribb, 2004). The findings of this study are consistent with previous research which has argued that emotional care-taking can be a predictor of anxiety and depression in adolescent children whose mothers have a history of depression (Champion et al., 2009). However, it is important to note that the narratives co-constructed a sense that this role was central to their preferred identity work which will be considered.

The development of a sense of self as 'care-giver' is argued to become a part of the child's identity (Byng-Hall, 2008). The majority of the young people in this research had made identity claims as 'responsible for others.' Their identity work which was related to their adaptations following their mother's psychological distress formed their preferred sense of self, including being 'mature' and 'grown up'. The stories included historical accounts of looking after the needs of others suggesting it was a stable and preferred sense of self. Rose & Cohen (2010) have argued that among the population of 'parentified' children, "the exploration of alternative identities is limited" (p. 484). Through fulfilling this role young people can achieve a sense of 'mattering' (Burton, 2007), thus when the role is no longer required they can 'leave the child confused, powerless, and with a poor sense of contribution' (Van Parys & Rober, 2012). Van Parys and Rober (2012) identified eight higher

order themes in studying how children experience parental depression and their own caregiving role within the family. One of particular interest was; 'finding support and ways to release tension.' The young people in this study storied accounts of not seeking support; they presented using distraction and avoidance which 'made sense' in accordance with their performed identities of being 'the strong one'.

The current findings support that young people *actively* cope following divorce and meet the needs of the family by taking on additional responsibility. This research has illustrated how five young people in a clinical population appear to have experienced burden as a result of fulfilling this role. It seems that their relationship with themselves as 'the strong one,' the provider of care and support, was in conflict with sharing their difficulties and requesting help from others which may have contributed to their involvement with CAMHS. Rose and Cohen (2010) maintain that children do not wish to be 'rescued' from fulfilling this role. This seems in keeping with the earlier claims that this role defines the young people's preferred identities. The young people in this study spoke with pride about their ability to fulfil this role; thus, to strip them of this position may be damaging and create a loss of a sense of self. Various recommendations will be considered to apply this learning to practice and suggestions made for future research.

#### *Parental divorce is just a part of it*

Flowerdew and Neale (2003) have argued that divorce should be de-centralised from research. It is suggested that the difficulties and strengths that young people develop from divorce is a result of managing 'multiple transitions'. The findings from these five young people support Flowerdew and Neale's (2003) argument in some respects. The narratives

included accounts of managing various changes, such as; meeting step parents, continuing relationships with parents and adopting greater responsibility as a result of their mother's mental health difficulties. They also included other stories; being bullied, father's alcohol problems, physical abuse and parent's sexuality. It seems important to acknowledge that these young people in CAMHS did experience various disruptive life events that required adjustment that were both related to and separate from their parents' divorce.

Consistent among the narratives was the experience of 'coping alone' and accounts of actively choosing not to speak to others. The earlier discussion wondered if this could be explained by the identity work of fulfilling the role of 'the strong one'. It is also possible that it was a response to wider societal discourse about divorce and fear of judgement from others. It is likely that 'coping alone' was a result of a multitude of reasons, however comparable to the findings of Dowling (1993), these five young people had struggled to have their voices heard in the aftermath of parental divorce. Carly even reported feeling excited about having her story heard.

Leila asserted that her parents' divorce was just one of many transitions that she was required to make. The very act of recruiting young people who have experienced their parents' divorce or separation is likely to have shaped what the young people anticipated to talk about and what they believed the researcher wanted to hear. Yet, nevertheless the adoption of an unstructured interview design facilitated the possibilities for young people to communicate what had salience for their current identity work and offered a further recognition that stories of divorce can remain unheard either/or untold.

#### 4.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

The recognition that humans use narrative structures as a way to organise the events of their lives and to provide a scheme for their own self-identity is of importance for the practice of psychotherapy and for social-change.

*(Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 178)*

As argued by Polkinghorne (1988), the study of narratives can offer important insight and knowledge to aid clinical practice. As discussed in the *Introduction*, the over representation of young people in the clinical population that have experienced parental divorce calls for further exploration. This research has further dispelled the myth of ‘taken for granted’ knowledge about the detrimental effects of divorce and placed young peoples’ sense making at the heart of the research. Recommendations for clinical practice will be discussed.

##### 4.4.1 Give voice to the experiences

The narratives of these five young people illustrated that their stories of their parents’ divorce was either left untold or unheard. The accounts illustrated that this was often an *active* choice and probably adaptive in the home environment, however these young people did not have other avenues whereby their stories could be heard. These findings further support the argument that young people, who experience their parents’ divorce or separation, should be provided with the opportunity to have their experiences heard (Dowling & Gorell-Barnes, 1999; Butler et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2003). It seems likely that this experience will help to alleviate their distress as found in the study by Dowling and Gorell-Barnes (1999). It has been acknowledged that parent’s need support in ‘hearing’

these stories (Dowling and Gorell-Barnes, 1999; Smith et al., 2003). This clinical implication is of particular importance in the current climate. There has been a move toward prioritising symptom alleviation whereby 'symptom tracking' has been employed (CYP IAPT Bulletin, 2013) which could result in these stories remaining untold.

#### 4.4.2 Re-authoring conversations

The findings in regard to the development of a 'narrative identity' require further exploration but could offer some useful guidance for clinical practice. Evidence from this small sample suggested that the young people in a clinical population found it difficult to story accounts about an imagined future and an alternative sense of self to 'taking responsibility for others'. This is an important finding as according to Kirkman (2002) the way in which one *has been* and *will be* affects the way one *is now*. The findings suggest that young people would benefit from exploration and interventions targeted at developing a coherent story about an imagined future and elaborate the individual's possible storylines and identities. Michael Whites and David Epston's 're-authoring conversations' could be a useful intervention (Epston & White 1990; Epston 1992; White 2001). The intervention focuses upon discovering 'intentions, hopes, values and commitments' which guide people's future actions. These conversations are intended to facilitate the preferred storyline for the future rather than become stuck identifying the internal deficiencies and strengths which can limit the possibilities.

#### 4.4.3 Working systemically with separated families

Present in all the narratives were multiple references to the young people's relationships, particularly with their parents and siblings. Carly concluded her interview with a comment

reflecting on the difference between participating in the interview and her involvement in CAMHS: *"I never really spoke about my life, it was more personally me, like why I felt the way I did about, and then why did I have bulimia."* This quote recognises her value in bringing her context into the room, *"my life"*, rather than focussing upon the presenting difficulties. The context, within which these young people lived, shaped their identities and meaning making of their experiences. The narratives included accounts of the young people adopting additional responsibilities which were central to their sense of self. These findings suggest that young people and their families would benefit from receiving systemic therapy.

The family systems model (Minuchin, 1974) offers an understanding of the accounts that identified that the young people adopted additional responsibilities in order to meet the needs of the family. Byng-Hall (2008) recommended that family therapy should be used to redress or stop the process. The co-constructed narratives developed a sense that the fulfilment of the role substantiates the young people's preferred sense of self. Whilst in addition it seemed possible that they had become overburdened illustrated by the use of self-destructive coping strategies such as self-harm. This complexity suggests that the process is both hard to stop and may not be helpful to stop, in recognition that children do not wish to be 'rescued' from their positions (Rose & Cohen, 2010). Systemic work with this population could specifically work to *acknowledge* and recognise the young person's contribution to the family (Coale, 1999; Van Parys & Rober, 2011) and then work to reassign balance to the roles in the family.

This sample of young people in a clinical population demonstrated that they had adjusted to parental mental health difficulties. Van Parys and Rober (2012) recommend that work with

young people who have experienced parental depression should be helped, not to rescue them from their position of 'caring', but to address the loneliness of the position. It seems important for clinicians to centralise the *context* within which young people exist. These findings would recommend that clinicians complete a thorough assessment and remain curious about other family members and the difficulties they *previously* or *are* experiencing in the aftermath of divorce or separation.

#### 4.5 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

##### 4.5.1 Strengths

This study provided young people with an opportunity to tell their previously untold stories about parental divorce or separation. This research found that young people who have experienced parental divorce or separation have 'coped alone', sometimes to the apparent detriment of their own mental health. Whilst this research does not claim that this is a universal experience of young people who have experienced parental divorce or separation, offering an opportunity for young people to have their stories heard has created the possibilities for useful clinical recommendations.

The design of this study, the adoption of a loosely structured interview and use of narrative analysis, was also a strength. It provided the opportunity for the young people to assert their own position on divorce and to have their unique stories and positions heard.

In this research it was decided to de-centralise the mental health difficulties experienced by the population. The decision was made in order to move away from the idea of causal relationships, as suggested in the wealth of quantitative research, that suggest children of

divorce are more likely to experience mental health problems. This was to allow the young people the opportunity to talk about their mental health and make the links to their experiences of divorce if it felt relevant. In accordance with the social-constructionist epistemological position of this research, the refusal to except taken for granted knowledge, permitted new stories and understandings to be heard.

#### 4.5.2 Limitations

Various limitations will be considered. The study was specifically interested in researching a clinical sample therefore not representative of young people in a wider population who experience parental divorce. In addition the stories that were analysed were from females only thus the lack of a male voice will also be considered. Broad generalisations are not possible given the small sample size however fewer participants permitted the use of intensive analysis which facilitated making useful clinical recommendations and guidance for future research.

In reviewing the literature, in the field of parental divorce research, there were very few studies specifically interested in a clinical population. This study hoped to enrich what is known about young people's meaning making of parental divorce that also appear in a clinical population. However, it is important to note that the findings are unlikely to bare resemblance to those young people who are not engaged with mental health services.

The study did not specifically set out to study females however the recruitment process resulted in a female dominated sample. Whilst one interview with a male took place it was

later discounted<sup>36</sup>. Due to societal discourse and gender stereotypes the expectations for males and females varies in western culture thus it is likely to influence the identity work and meaning making of young people. It would be equally as important to repeat the study focusing upon a male voice listening to their stories of parental divorce.

A limitation of the study was the lack of cultural and ethnic diversity in the sample which limits our understanding of how parental divorce or separation is experienced in different social groups. The young people's meaning making of the adoption of their 'caring role' occurred within a Western culture, thus bound by the available discourse. The roles of 'mother' and 'child' are not universal therefore it would be of interest to consider the identity work and sense making that occurs in different social groups. All the young people were White British, matching the researcher's ethnicity. This seemingly homogeneous group could have led to the cultural understandings of divorce being unelaborated. However, as previously mentioned, the unstructured interview did permit the possibilities of young people to talk about factors that were important to their individual meaning construction. Therefore, it is unlikely that it had significant impact upon the findings.

The method of data collection employed by this study could be criticised. The restrictions on time meant that the design used a single interview to gather data. Cotterill (1992) suggests that richer data can be gathered over the course of multiple interviews. It is claimed that the development of trust between researcher and participant can result in the construction of more personal narratives (Cotterill, 1992). It is possible that with a multiple interview design

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<sup>36</sup> The decision to discount this interview is discussed further in section '2.3.3 Participants'.

the interview with the male participant could have been used through the adaptation of interview style and through the development of trust.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of self as 'researcher'. The dual role, 'therapist' and 'researcher,' has been argued to be in direct conflict (Johnson & Clarke, 2003). Reflecting upon the transcripts there are moments whereby the interviewer empathises with the young person's position mimicking a therapy session rather than gathering information, the primary role of researcher. However, the adoption of NA accepts those moments as points for analysis rather than criticisms. Thus the researcher adopted the use of reflective journal to consider why and when those moments occurred. It also permitted learning from each interview to facilitate adaptations to ensure useful and relevant data was collected.

#### 4.6 FUTURE RESEARCH

In consideration of the strengths and limitations of the research the findings can be used to make recommendations for future research. The research findings offer useful insights into the meaning making and identity work of young people who have experienced parental divorce or separation in a CAMHS setting. Therefore, it would be useful for the study to be repeated with a larger sample. Future research could specifically ensure the inclusion of males and young people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

This research adopted the use of interviews with the young person alone. Yet, the findings suggested that the majority of young people adopted additional responsibility in light of their parents' own mental health difficulties. The narratives suggested that one child in the

family accepted the additional responsibility. The roles of the other family members remain unexplored. Van Parys and Rober (2012) discussed the benefits of interviewing whole families to facilitate the observation of the interactions between members. There were moments in the interviews whereby these interactions were observed such as when Fran set an alarm in order to ensure her mother was on time for work, and when Emily took a phone call from her brother. Sadly, these useful interactive moments were excluded from the analysis as they sat outside of the design. It may be useful to interview families in order to observe the relational patterns.

Due to the design and small sample size it is unclear whether the findings are unique to this population. It is possible that a difficulty in the development of an imagined future is common among adolescents in CAMHS. It is possible that this is part of the mechanism that creates symptomatology that results in a referral to mental health services. Equally, this phenomenon may be consistent with all young people who have experienced parental divorce or separation yet may not always result in causing concern and thus CAMHS involvement. This phenomenon requires further exploration to verify whether it was unique to these five young people or other people who have had similar experiences. Is a lack of a constructed imagined future typical of young people in CAMHS, late adolescence, or young those who experience parental divorce?

#### 4.7 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

I will now return to the use of first person, as adopted in the introduction to this thesis, to offer my personal reflections. Previously I explored how I as the researcher approached the

research. I now turn my attention to the process of conducting the research and how it has influenced me.

Conducting the interviews I was struck by how ready and willing the young people were to contribute to the study. Many of the young people commented on wanting to help clinicians further their understanding of working with young people who have experienced parental separation. I understood their eagerness to talk as further evidence for the phenomenon that their stories were previously untold. Now on reflection the behaviour seems to embody the identity work of these young people offering support for others. This experience, in combination with my personal connection with the topic<sup>37</sup> made me feel that this was a valuable project and I felt passionate to do the project justice. This at times felt like a huge pressure.

I believe hearing the stories has had a profound effect upon me. Hearing their ability to adapt to their changing circumstances to offer resolutions for their parents when they were deemed unable, illustrated their resourcefulness and resilience. It made me think about my clinical work whereby we as clinicians can be encouraged to focus upon the 'here and now.' In CAMHS this often includes working with presenting difficulties which risks doing a disservice to client's histories and their abilities to 'stay strong' and get through what can be very difficult times. I was struck by the young people's beliefs about emotions. The concept to *feel* seemed inconsistent with the young people's goals of 'getting on with life'. This has made me wonder about young people's relationship to therapy and what it means to be asked to confront their difficult feelings and experiences.

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<sup>37</sup> My personal experience of parental divorce is considered in the *Introduction* (section 1.3)

My decision to adopt the use of NA gave me a sense of excitement about the possibilities. Riessman (1993) stated that there is 'no set way' of employing NA which resonated with my belief that all people are unique. I was excited about employing a method of analysis that was data driven and did not endeavour to categorise people. I was also excited about using a methodology that was in accordance with a social-constructionist lens with which I have had a growing interest since beginning my clinical training. It enabled me to adopt a critical stance upon taken-for-granted knowledge and the denial of an 'objective truth' (Gergen, 1999). However, existing in a society whereby traditional 'positivist' methods of research have predominantly been employed posed me with difficulties from the outside. Explaining my research to others I felt the need to defend my research and its worth. Broader societal discourse and adopting a methodology of which I had no previous experience meant that there were periods of excessive self-doubt. In accordance with Riessman's (2008) advice we developed a NA community with myself and fellow trainees adopting NA. However, it was difficult to find comfort among my colleagues due to the vast possibilities in NA. Without the certainty of a predefined structure at times I felt I had to 'cope alone,' much like the young people interviewed. I had to lean upon myself for reassurance which was, at times, a lonely and unsettling place.

Concluding my research I now feel able to defend the worth of using a small sample and the absence of the ability to broadly generalise the findings; which I have previously been taught as a pre-requisite to quality research. I now face the struggle of applying the findings to my own clinical practice and ensuring that the recommendations for clinical practice are broadly disseminated.

## AN ENDING

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As this research is drawn to a close, I, the researcher, hope that it has ignited interest from both other researchers and clinicians. One hope is that there will be further research investigating the individual meaning making of the experience of parental divorce or separation. More research of this kind would elaborate and develop our understandings beyond previous assumptions and 'taken for granted knowledge'. My other hope is that in this age, whereby there has been a shift towards an individualised culture, clinicians will take note of this research and pay attention to the context and the relational aspects that are pivotal to young people's development. I close on the words of Mitch Albom which may have relevance for both the research topic and this thesis:

*"All endings are also beginnings. We just don't know it at the time."*

*(Mitch Albom, The Five People You Meet In Heaven)*

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## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A: LITERATURE REVIEW SEARCH STRATEGY

### **Stage 1: Initial Exploratory Search**

An initial search began with a review of relevant books within the Learning Resource Centre at the University of Hertfordshire and database searches using Web of Science and Google Scholar. The search terms used at this stage were:

'Parental Divorce' OR                    'clinical population' 'psychological well-being' 'mental health'  
'Parental Separation' OR                'lived experience'; 'meaning-making'; 'identity'; 'self-image'  
'Marital Breakdown' AND                'Adolescence' 'young people'

### **Stage 2: Following up references**

Relevant articles were identified and followed up. At this time, key authors were also identified and relevant papers obtained.

Whereby papers were not available through the University I contacted the authors to obtain copies of papers. I liaised with Clinical Psychologists working in CAMHS who were able to advise me regarding the nature of my research, the specific research question, and further references. Guidance in these areas was also provided by my supervisory team further papers were provided to facilitate the design of my research.

### **Stage 3: Detailed review of literature**

The preliminary searches helped guide the development of my proposal that was presented to peers in February 2012. Following this proposal the specific focus of the research was identified which enabled a submission for ethics. Following ethics being granted specific literature searches were possible. Extensive searches were contact during the time period February 2012 – May 2013. Papers were searched from 1985 – 2013. It was decided that searching for earlier papers would facilitate an understanding in the socio-historic context of divorce.

#### *Search Engines;*

The following search engines were used;

- Web of Science
- Google Scholar
- Psyc Info
- Pubmed

### *Search terms*

The following search terms were employed;

- Divorce - Parent Divorce, Marital breakdown, Parental Separation, Stressful life event
- Adolescences - Adolescent, Teenager, Young person, Children, Growing-Up
- Mental Health - Clinical Sample, CAMHS
- Identity – Self –image, Narrative Identity
- Narrative - Sense of self, Biographic disruption, Story
- Qualitative Research - Narrative Analysis, Social Constructionism, Qualitative Reviews, Case Study, Meaning Making, IPA, Grounded Theory, Thematic Analysis, Phenomenology

### *General Web Searches*

More generic sources were needed to inform certain aspects of the study. These were obtained through World Wide Web searches to locate the following:

- NICE guidance
- Department of Health guidance
- National Research Ethics Service
- The Centre for Narrative Research
- Child and Young Person, Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (CYP IAPT )

In order to gather further relevant papers and ensure that the literature had been thoroughly reviewed, all those papers that were deemed closest to the research design i.e. parental divorce with one or more of the following key words; qualitative methodology, young people, clinical population, narrative, using Google Scholar all papers that had cited the relevant papers were reviewed.

### *Specific Journal Searches*

The following journals were continually reviewed during the study to ensure that the most up-to-date research was referenced;

- Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry
- Journal of Clinical Child Psychology
- Family Process
- Childhood

**Health Research Authority**  
**NRES Committee East of England - Cambridge East**

Telephone: 01223 597653  
Facsimile: 01223 597645

05 October 2012

Miss Jennifer L Sole  
Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust  
1B Poets Road  
Newington Green  
Islington N5 2SL

Dear Miss Sole

**Study title:** **An exploration of young people's narratives and meaning construction of their parents' separation and/or divorce who are currently open to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.**

**REC reference:** **12/EE/0397**

Thank you for your letter of 24 September 2012, responding to the Committee's request for further information on the above research and submitting revised documentation.

The further information has been considered on behalf of the Committee by the Chair.

**Confirmation of ethical opinion**

On behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation as revised, subject to the conditions specified below.

**Ethical review of research sites**

**NHS sites**

The favourable opinion applies to all NHS sites taking part in the study, subject to management permission being obtained from the NHS/HSC R&D office prior to the start of the study (see "Conditions of the favourable opinion" below).

**Non-NHS sites**

**Conditions of the favourable opinion**

The favourable opinion is subject to the following conditions being met prior to the start of the study.

Management permission or approval must be obtained from each host organisation prior to the start of the study at the site concerned.

*Management permission ("R&D approval") should be sought from all NHS organisations involved in the study in accordance with NHS research governance arrangements.*

Guidance on applying for NHS permission for research is available in the Integrated Research Application System or at <http://www.rdforum.nhs.uk>.

*Where a NHS organisation's role in the study is limited to identifying and referring potential participants to research sites ("participant identification centre"), guidance should be sought from the R&D office on the information it requires to give permission for this activity.*

*For non-NHS sites, site management permission should be obtained in accordance with the procedures of the relevant host organisation.*

*Sponsors are not required to notify the Committee of approvals from host organisations*

**It is the responsibility of the sponsor to ensure that all the conditions are complied with before the start of the study or its initiation at a particular site (as applicable).**

### Approved documents

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Advertisement - St Albans	Version 2	24 September 2012
Advertisement - Hemel Hempstead	Version 2	24 September 2012
Covering Letter from Jennifer Sole, Trainee Clinical Psychologist		07 August 2012
Evidence of insurance or indemnity - Gallagher Heath		06 August 2012
Interview Schedules/Topic Guides	Version 1	07 August 2012
Investigator CV - Miss Jennifer Sole		06 August 2012
Letter from Sponsor - University of Hertfordshire		07 August 2012
Other: CV for Pieter Willem Nel (Academic Supervisor)		
Other: Letter to Care Co-ordinator	Version 1	06 August 2012
Other: Procedure for disclosure	Version 1	24 September 2012
Participant Consent Form	Version 2	24 September 2012
Participant Information Sheet: - St Albans	Version 2	24 September 2012
Participant Information Sheet: - Hemel Hempstead	Version 2	24 September 2012
Protocol	Version 1	January 2012
REC application	Submission code: 104809/351345/1/483	13 August 2012
Referees or other scientific critique report		
Referees or other scientific critique report		
Response to Request for Further Information from Jennifer Sole		24 September 2012
Summary/Synopsis – Flowchart	Version 1	06 August 2012

### Statement of compliance

The Committee is constituted in accordance with the Governance Arrangements for

Research Ethics Committees and complies fully with the Standard Operating Procedures for Research Ethics Committees in the UK.

### **After ethical review**

#### Reporting requirements

The attached document “*After ethical review – guidance for researchers*” gives detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion, including:

- Notifying substantial amendments
- Adding new sites and investigators
- Notification of serious breaches of the protocol
- Progress and safety reports
- Notifying the end of the study

The NRES website also provides guidance on these topics, which is updated in the light of changes in reporting requirements or procedures.

#### Feedback

You are invited to give your view of the service that you have received from the National Research Ethics Service and the application procedure. If you wish to make your views known please use the feedback form available on the website.

Further information is available at National Research Ethics Service website > After Review

**12/EE/0397  
correspondence**

**Please quote this number on all**

With the Committee’s best wishes for the success of this project

Yours sincerely



**Dr Daryl Rees  
Chair**

Email: [susan.davies@eoe.nhs.uk](mailto:susan.davies@eoe.nhs.uk)

Enclosures: “After ethical review – guidance for researchers” [SL-AR2]

Emailed to: Miss Jennifer L Sole [jenny.sole85@gmail.com](mailto:jenny.sole85@gmail.com)  
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Tim Gale [t.gale@herts.ac.uk](mailto:t.gale@herts.ac.uk)

**Are you 16 – 18  
years old?**



**Have your parents  
divorced or separated?**

**Are you currently seeing a  
clinician in this clinic?**

- If you have answered YES to all of the above questions we would be interested in meeting with you for the purposes of research.
- It is estimated that 1 in 4 people experience their parents' divorce or separate, we would like to know more about what it is like.
- If you are interested in getting involved in this research please speak with your care coordinator or Dr Pieter Nel, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, for more information.

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET: ST ALBANS**

**Young People's stories of their parents' separation and/or divorce**

**Introduction**

You are being invited to take part in a research study listening to the stories people tell of their experience of parental divorce or separation. Before you decide whether you would like to give consent to take part, please take the time to read the following information which has been written to help you understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Feel free to talk to others about participation in the study if you wish.

**Who am I?**

My name is Jenny Sole and I will be carrying out the research. I am a trainee clinical psychologist and the research forms part of the requirements for my Clinical Psychology training. The study is supervised by Dr Pieter Nel who is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Dr Sarah Leighter who is a Clinical Psychologist.

**What is the study about?**

This research is interested in hearing the voices of young people who have experienced their parents' divorce or separation. This study aims to gain further understanding of how young people in a clinical population come to make sense of their experience.

**Why have I been invited?**

You are being approached to take part in this study because you are currently receiving a therapeutic intervention within the Hemel Hempstead Child and Family Service. In addition we understand that you have experienced your parents' divorce. Around 6 – 8 young people (aged 16 – 18 years old) will be interviewed for the purpose of this study.

**Do I have to take part?**

Participation in this study is **completely voluntary**. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you give consent to take part you still have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study having taken part, all information collected as part of the study will be withdrawn and will not be used in the study results. A decision

not to take part or withdraw from the study at any time **will not** affect the standard of care you receive.

### **What is involved?**

If you agree to take part the mental health professional who informed you about this study will, with your permission, pass your name and contact details to myself, Jenny Sole. I will then arrange to meet with you and go through this information sheet again answering any questions you have, and if you wish to continue with the study ask you to sign a consent form to take part. I will then complete one interview with you, which should take no longer than one and a half hours and will be recorded using a digital recorder.

The interview will involve questions about what you remember about your parents' divorce or separation. The interview will take place in a place of your choice. We will have the opportunity to use a clinical room at the St Albans Child and Family Service main base; 15 Forest Lane, Kingsley Green, Harper Lane, Radlett, Hertfordshire, WD7 9HQ. The satellite clinic: The Bungalow, Church Crescent, St. Albans, Hertfordshire, AL3 5JB. Alternatively we can arrange a time for me to visit you at your home.

### **Will taking part be confidential?**

All information about your participation in this study will be kept confidential and any information that leaves the St Albans Child and Family Clinic with your name on it will be removed and you will be given a participant number, so that you can be recognised from it. The information will be stored in a safe locked down location which will only be accessible by the researchers.

Prior to the interview you will be reminded that information shared in the interview will be anonymised, however, if during participation in the study you disclose any information that suggests that you may be risk to either yourself or others, confidentiality will need to be broken and relevant professionals informed. At the time of disclosure I will remind you that I will be required to pass the information on to your care co-ordinator. Following the interview I will inform your care co-ordinator of my concern and they will be in contact with you directly. Thus full anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

### **What are the benefits of taking part?**

The voices of young people who have experienced divorce are not always heard and this research is providing a platform to have your story heard. Contributing to our knowledge of what the experience is like can inform clinicians about the experience and subsequently guide their understanding and work. Clinical research has been shown that talking about and reflecting on life experiences such as significant life events can be helpful.

In addition in recognition of your time committed to this research we will provide you with a gift voucher to the value of £10 to thank you for your contribution.

### **What are the potential difficulties that taking part may cause?**

It is possible that because the interview will ask you to think about the experience of your parents' divorce or separation it may be distressing for you. If you do become distressed at any time appropriate support will be offered to you from myself Jenny Sole and your care-coordinator will be informed. For this reason you will be asked to consent to your care-coordinator being contacted if you do become distressed during the interview.

### **What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of the study, you can speak to me, Jenny Sole, and I will do my best to answer your questions (tel: 07857226330). If you remain unhappy about the research and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the NHS complaints procedure. The contact is the Patient Advice and Liaison Service and their number is 01727 804629, and their email address is; PALS.Herts@hertspartsft.nhs.uk.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

Once the study is complete, the findings will be written up. If you would like a summary copy of the findings please let me know and I will send these to you. It is hoped that the study results will be published in a psychological journal. However, no participants will be identifiable in written or published material as all information will be made anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. If anonymous quotes are used as part of the results I will ask your permission to use these in the study write up and published journal.

Thank you for your time and consideration in taking part. All travel expenses for taking part in this research will be reimbursed.

### ***Who has reviewed the study?***

The project has been approved by the NRES Committee East of England – Cambridge East (REC reference: 12/EE/0397).

### **Contact Details of the researcher for further information**

Jennifer Sole, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, University of Hertfordshire  
College Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 9AB.

Email address: [jenny.sole85@gmail.com](mailto:jenny.sole85@gmail.com)

Telephone number; 07857226330



**CONSENT FORM**

**Project Title: Young People's stories of their parents' separation and/or divorce**

**Researcher;** Jennifer Sole

**Statement by Participant (please initial all boxes)**

**Participation in the study;**

- I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study.
- I understand what my involvement will entail and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.
- I understand that I can decline to answer any questions that I am not comfortable with.
- I understand that my involvement in the research will have no impact on the care that I receive.
- I understand that if I were to disclose any information that would suggest I was at risk of harm to myself or other people, the researcher would pass this information to my care co-ordinator
- Contact information has been provided should I wish to seek further information from the investigator at any time for purposes of clarification.
- I agree to take part in the study

**Participant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Recording the interviews;**

I agree to this interview being recorded on audio tape and understand that these recordings will be securely stored and only used for the purposes of the research.

I agree that it is possible these recordings will be transcribed (written up) using an organisation who will have signed a confidentiality agreement.

**Participant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Storage and publication of the study;**

I understand that all information obtained will be confidential and exceptions to this have been discussed with me.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published and I am aware that all possible precautions will be taken to protect my identity.

I agree that direct quotes from the research interview may be used in the publication of the study.

I am aware that the recordings of the interviews will be destroyed immediately on the completion of the researcher's degree.

I agree that the transcription (written words) of the interview will be stored in a secure location at the University of Hertfordshire for 5 years following the research.

**Participant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement by Investigator**

- I agree e that the project and the implications of participation in it, has been appropriately explained to this participant.
  
- I believe that the consent to participate is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

**Investigator's Name:** Jennifer Sole

**Investigator's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date;** \_\_\_\_\_

University of  
Hertfordshire



University of Hertfordshire  
Doctorate of Clinical Psychology  
1F414 Health Research Building  
College Lane Campus  
Hatfield, AL10 9AB

Tel: 07587 222630  
Email: Jenny.sole85@gmail.com

Dear XXX,

**Re; Research Interview**

Many thanks for your participation in my research study: '*Young people's narratives of their parents' separation or divorce*'. If there is anything that was raised in the interview that has caused you distress and you would like to discuss it further please speak with your clinician, care co-ordinator or you are welcome to call me, the researcher.

As a thank you for your time, please find enclosed a £10 voucher. I hope you enjoy your purchases and I wish you the best of luck with your involvement with CAMHS.

Yours Sincerely

Jennifer Sole

**Trainee Clinical Psychologist**



### Interview Prompt Sheet

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. I expect that the interview should last up to one hour. If you would like a break at any time, please ask. If throughout the interview you become upset or would like to terminate the interview please ask. Participation in the study does not affect your care as usual and it is entirely voluntary. I am going to ask you open questions, there is no right or wrong way of answering the questions, as everyone will tell their story very differently? Do you have any questions?*

**QUESTION; I am interested in hearing about the experiences of young people whose parents have divorced or separated. I would like you to tell me the story of/about your experience?**

Can you tell me about yourself, what do you like to do with your time etc

#### **Experience of divorce**

Can you tell me about the time before Mum and Dad divorced/separated?

Can you tell me when you first came to realise that Mum and Dad may not remain married/living together?

How did you come to know about the divorce?

#### **Coping**

What helped you get through this experience?

What do you think helped your family get through the experience?

#### **After Interview**

How did you find the interview?

Was there anything that you thought you might be asked, that you weren't?

APPENDIX I: FRAN'S TRANSCRIPT AND PROCESS OF ANALYSIS

Stages 1 & 2; Reading for structure, performance, content and broader storylines

Original Transcript	Structural	Performative and Dialogic/Researcher Reflections	Themes Plots and Storylines
<p>Jenny; Erm, I think you are aware of what the research is interested in, so I'm interested in hearing the stories of young people, whose parents have divorced or separated and who are currently being seen in a CAMHS setting. So I am interested in hearing your story. You can start where you like, though most people start by telling me a bit about themselves.</p> <p>Francesca; <b>Ok, well my name's Fran, my Mum is an ice skating coach, so I was brought up ice skating, I've been doing that since I was 18 months, that has played a big part in my life, and especially the people kind of involved in that as well. (.) Erm, (2) I think my illness, my chronic fatigue, has affected me in a big way, I used to be quite sporty, quite active, I used to go out a lot, and since I've been ill I've kind of been a little bit more reserved and taking everything in a bit more, so. That's just a little bit about me I guess (laugh).</b></p> <p>Jenny; Yea, wow interesting so ice skating has played a big part, you say your Mum is an ice skating coach. &lt;Fran; Yea&gt; So, you said your illness has meant you've been more reserved, and can you tell me a bit more about that?</p> <p>Fran; <b>The thing with chronic fatigue is, you spend a lot of time in bed, and you don't really go out as much, I lost a lot of time at school, so kind of friendships there breakdown, because you don't see those people as much, and you do kind of, um, hide</b></p>	<p>Fran spoke in a confident tone – unlike the more hesitant narratives.</p> <p>Fran hesitates before sharing with the audience that she has experienced some less positive experiences</p> <p>Laughing seems to suggest to the audience that she is comfortable with this change, and she is not sad or concerned about it. Is this in order not to burden the audience or prevent herself from connecting to her concern.</p>	<p>The audience are immediately aware of the relationships between Fran and her Mum indicated the importance of this relationship</p> <p>The narrative turn here is introduced as her illness which has led to a change in her character – she is more reserved.</p> <p>The thing with chronic fatigue offers a general experience rather than her specific experience which possibly</p>	<p>Mum is introduced immediately in her self-description and Dad is absent.</p> <p>her illness occurred at the same time as what she describes as a mini break down-She explains her illness as an explanation rather than the struggles she has competed since her parents' divorce.</p> <p><i>I lost a lot of time at school, so kind of friendships there breakdown</i></p>

<p>a little bit from everybody because you're in so much pain, you don't wanna do anything, always tired, so you just naturally just come quite more reserved in the fact that you don't (.) go out and talk to people as much. Yea, you don't socialise as much, with people.</p> <p>Jenny; And is that different to you, not to be socialising as much?</p> <p>Fran; Yer, I think so, as I say, I grew up ice skating and erm, there's a lot of different people coming and going, my Mum's pupils and stuff, so I've always been around people, older people, and I think that's had a huge influence on me, because, erm, I see myself as a much older person I guess. So yea, it is quite different, it is quite weird to, not be as (2), I guess, er, as friendly with people,</p> <p>'cause I don't know them anymore, sort of thing.</p> <p>Jenny; You don't know them anymore?</p> <p>Fran; Mmm. Erm, when I was kind of going through my parents divorce and separation that's kind of the time when I became ill, and so a lot of my friends didn't really understand, and, erm (.) a lot of my friends come from backgrounds where their families are still together, so it was very hard for them to understand what I was going through. Erm, which I understand because, you know, you can't really go to someone for advice, if they don't really know what they're talking about. So, that was quite hard.</p> <p>So erm (2). Yea, I guess when you stop going to school everyday, you stop seeing the same people everyday, erm, you do just kind of, you just don't talk to them as much anymore, because you don't see them. I guess facebook and things like that</p>	<p>'People coming and going' – the language her has parallels to Dad to-ing and fro-ing</p> <p>The word hard is repeated by Fran about 30 times throughout her narrative emphasising this experience.</p>	<p>offers distance to her own story 'you do kind of 'hide' from everybody', she suggests this is a result of her pain and an element of the illness rather than personal choice. Is it the pain, or her that is stopping her contact with people. Fran chooses not to use the word 'I' here, removing agency – the generalised term 'you'; it clusters all those with chronic fatigue together which almost makes this turning point, determined and fixed as a result of her illness.</p> <p>Fran shifts between positions here, as when referring to her own maturity she uses the term 'I', possibility indicative of an identity that she is confident in presenting.</p> <p>Other people couldn't understand as had not had the same experiences. She presents a preferred identity of being understanding of others inability</p> <p>'I am more independent' seems to shape a positive identity from</p>	<p>Fran includes a plot of coping alone. Fran connects the story of her illness to her experience of divorce, possible in providing further context to understand the breakdown of relationships. Others not having similar experiences deemed them external, similarly to a belief presented earlier about pregnancy and offering advice 'can you only be supportive if you have the same experience?'</p> <p>The idea of facebook is introduced yet not elaborated – possibly as it is not in accordance with the idea that she is losing contact with people as may be contradictory to her preferred</p>
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<p>helps, but (laughs) I'm kind of, er, I'm more (.) independent, where I like to do things by myself, than be in a large group of people.</p> <p>Jenny; So you said that your illness came at the same time as your parents were going through their divorce.</p> <p>Fran; Yea. Erm I think I should explain the separation and the divorce thing. Er, when I was 7, erm, my Dad sat me down, it was Christmas, and he told me he was leaving and he wasn't coming back. Erm, and that was also the age that my Mum found out he was having an affair. So, erm, they officially kind of separated, erm, but because there was a lot of, erm, financial problems and things like that, they didn't get divorced until later on. Erm, and also, kind of my Dad, was messing around with me and my Mum a little bit saying that he was going to come back and he, you know, he was to-ing and fro-ing and we were all living together in a house, so erm, that was a really hard time for me, but yea, I was 13 when they actually got divorced, my Mum moved out so.</p> <p>Jenny; So there was this whole period with you being told when you were 7, and then &lt;Fran; Yep&gt; when Dad actually moved out?</p> <p>Fran; mmm hmm yea. Well, no what happened erm, err (.) when I was about (.) 9 or 10, he got a cottage in XXX erm because we couldn't physically stand living together, but separately as it were, erm, so yea, he got his own cottage in XXX and someone told him to move me, because we were living in XXX, and someone told him to move me to XXX school, because it was a better school than XXX. So we used his address in XXX 'cause it was in the</p>	<p>There was uncertainty surrounding the divorce/separation with Dad possible coming back.</p> <p>Fran developed clear narratives offering clear abstracts (explaining point of story) followed by orientation (when I was 7) then complicating action (what happened) – this gave the sense of coherence in her narrative</p> <p>The term messy signifies the disorganised experience and possibly illustrates feelings of being out of control.</p>	<p>not speaking to people – is this alluding to no longer trusting people? This is not checked out by the interviewer. The meaning of the experience is attempted to be explored. The interviewer wonders about the relationship between the illness and the divorce, however, Fran changes the subject and presents what she feels important - explaining the process of separation and then divorce. This changes the direction of the interview.</p> <p>'we' couldn't possibly stand living together positions Fran and her family having a shared experience of being unable to live together.</p>	<p>identity of not talking to people anymore.</p> <p>Fran choses to tell the story of the separation and divorce – it is deemed important for the audience to have a sense of what she has experienced</p> <p>Fran tells the story of a Dad's actions whereby he would live his life in a single person's way, whilst Mum and Fran had a joined life and existence where they would do things together.</p>
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<p>catchment area to get me into XXX school. Erm, so when my Mum decided she was gonna leave that house, we moved to XXX and my Dad moved back into the house. &lt;Jenny; OK&gt; Yea, so kind of a really big messy period, a lot going on, and a lot happening.</p> <p>Jenny; So you lived a couple of years living together but separately, and a period when you were actually living separately and then you lived back together. And then, what, so, maybe, can you take one of those periods and tell me more about it? Which one comes to mind?</p> <p>Fran; I think the first one. When he first told us he was leaving, erm, he'd do weird things like he'd get up, he'd go to work, and then he would get back until about 6 which was the norm, and then he'd go out, he'd say he was going out down the pub, and then, he'd come in about 8, have dinner, go back out down the pub with his friends, and then come home at 3 O'clock in the morning. And, it was like that for a while, 9.) erm, I remember one day in particular, I'd come home from school, I'd done my homework, and he literally came in, went to the toilet and went straight back out again. So it was very much, separate lives, and you know my Mum was distraught but still having to get on with her normal routine, you know, getting me to school and stuff and going to work herself, and so (.) yea it was very much separate, but we all lived together, so. It was hard.</p> <p>Jenny; It was hard? &lt;Fran; Yea&gt; So what was it, in what ways was it hard?</p> <p>Fran; I think because, when you're that age, you are</p>	<p>Happy equates to normal, then all of sudden it changes.</p> <p>Whilst elaborating on the bomb Fran uses the term 'me' possibly to emphasise the impact of the news that Dad was leaving.</p>	<p>'Us' positions Mum and Fran together this gives an identity of unity not a single identity, that the leaving was being done to the family not Fran alone</p> <p>Her age here is not a strength as she is unable to understand</p>	<p>Elaborate story offering a specific example to offer the audience a vivid image to illustrate how Dad was not really there.</p>
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<p>old enough to know that something isn't right, but you're not old enough to really understand what's gone wrong. Erm, (.) and I think it's hard, for you know, any child when they see their parent coming and going, and you don't know where they are, and you don't know what they are doing, and they don't really have an interest in you an, that's quite hard, to deal with, and also, you know I would go around my friends house and their parents are together, an (.) you kind of know that it's not normal, you know your situation isn't normal, but you're not old enough to understand why it's not normal. So, that's what's hard about it.</p> <p>Jenny; And it felt not normal at the time?</p> <p>Fran; Mmm, no because, you know, for, for the first 7 years of my life I'd grown up with a really happy family, and er, a really happy home, and then all of a sudden (2) we get this like bomb dropped on us, and we're left to deal with it, sort of thing. So, yea, it was really hard, it wasn't easy.</p> <p>Jenny; What was the bomb that was dropped?</p> <p>Fran; Him, sitting us down at Christmas and telling me he was leaving. And erm, he wanted my Mum to tell me, but she said, no you are going to tell her yourself. So he did. And especially, you know, it being near Christmas, that's not a great time to remember your Dad leaving, so er, yea that was the bomb.</p> <p>Jenny; It was just before Christmas? &lt;Fran; Yea it was a couple of days before Christmas&gt; What was that Christmas like?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, my Mum tried to make it kind of as normal as possible, erm, that's year I think we did</p>		<p>fully what is happening.</p> <p>'any child' rather than I/'they' rather than he is another way of removing/distancing herself from her feelings – 'don't really have an interest in you', it removes her ownership.</p> <p>She compares herself to an external sense of what is 'normal' and the societal expectations that parents are together.</p> <p>Mum has agency and provides a structure telling Dad how to manage the situation.</p> <p>Mum is defined as trying to help Fran and make the circumstances as 'normal' as possible.</p> <p>,</p>	<p><i>parent coming and going, and you don't know where they are</i></p> <p>Trying to keep things 'normal' appears to be pertinent as is repeated. Idea that togetherness equates to normality Dad neither being here nor there for a few years was awkward, possibly due to the uncertainty. The deep breath may be indicative of feeling space and time to breath, perhaps the unknowing had been an anxious time?</p>
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<p>Fran; mmm, yea. Because I think, you know, when you see your parent that upset, it doesn't really matter how old you are, you are always going to feel, you know, bad, for them, and you try your hardest to make them better, feel better, and erm, (.) yea (laugh) but it was hard &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; because I had you know, school an friends, and I was trying to keep a normal life, and, so yea.</p> <p>Jenny; What did you to, you said 'try and make them better', what did you do to try and make her better?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, I used to say to her, you know, 'come on Mum', 'lets go out, lets go do something', over that time we used to (.) go up to London a lot, we used to go to the movies, I used to skate with her a lot, I think that was a big one. Erm, I used to just try and get her out of the house as much as possible, she used to go to coffee with her friends every morning, and, that was a big thing for her. Erm, (.) so that's, I just tried to lift her spirits, get her mind off of it, and, yea.</p> <p>Jenny; So this was all during the period where Dad was still living at home? &lt;Fran; mmm&gt; But you to were going skating and doing these things &lt;Fran; Yea&gt; So where did he fit in to all of that?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, he didn't really. If I'm honest. But, the way I see it, he was too busy doing what he wanted to do, at that time my Dad lived, a very much single life style. He'd go out with his friends whenever he liked, erm (.), the big excuse he used was, I mean he's been doing it for years but, Thursday night he goes out cycling with his friends and that's his like exercise, and then they go down the pub after, and that's kind of how it started, he'd go out, more and</p>		<p>these stories are untold.</p> <p>The continued use of a general pronoun 'your' rather than 'my', 'you' rather than 'I', this storytelling of using the general seems to state the experience in a matter of fact way, a more determine way. One whereby everyone would react in the same way as she.</p> <p>Fran brings to life her actions her, through the linguistic devise of reported speech. It allows to audience to create an image of what it was like between Fran and Mum.</p> <p>Dad quite absent from the story I asked how he fit in to it? She was able to offer a narrative to explain how he fitted in, providing examples to illustrate her opinion that Dad was absent.</p>	<p>Dad made a choice not to be there, he had agency, now he has the consequences of feeling sad about it.</p> <p>The audience can infer that there was more than one occasion when he would say he would come back</p> <p>Fran makes sense of her father's actions <i>very much living the single life</i>' as reflecting His reasons for coming back were to do with not wanting what he had, not wanting to come back to Fran and her Mum.</p>
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<p>more and more. (.) So he was out all the time, he didn't really play a part in my life for (2) for that time, and he says to me now, you know I've missed a lot of your childhood, you know, he knows, and he admits that it does upset him now, but, that's that, that was his choice, so. Yea, he didn't really play a part in my life. So.</p> <p>Jenny; And have there been points where he has played a part in your life?</p> <p>Fran; (Sigh) Yea, I mean the first time he told my Mum that he was gonna come back, erm (.) he'd gone away for the weekend with his girlfriend, and he text my Mum saying 'oh you can tell Fran that she's gonna get her Daddy back soon'. And, erm, I think he got a bit scared, um, of thinking, he realised that his girlfriend wanted children and marriage and that wasn't really what he had planned, so, he came back for a while, and my Mum and Dad tried to make it work but it just didn't. It didn't work, and (.) erm, we used to do things together, we used to go out, erm (.) I used to go down the pub with him (.) er, he tried to kind of do what my Mum and I did, but it didn't really work. So.</p> <p>Jenny; It didn't work? &lt;Fran; No (laughs)&gt; How did you make sense of it not working?</p> <p>Fran; Um, I just felt very awkward around him, so you know, he, even now sometimes I do, he'll try to make conversation, or we'll try to suggest that we do things, and it's like 'I don't really want to' so that's what I mean, it didn't work in the terms, like he was kind of trying to hard to make up for, you know, the months that he'd lost out on. So, you know, it just didn't flow right with me (laughs).</p>		<p>Both Mum and Dad positioned as trying</p> <p><i>he tried to kind of do what my Mum and I did, but it didn't really work</i> – removes a sense of her own agency – she does not accept as her responsibility to create a relationship together. positions Dad as being the responsible one, the one who is required to make it work.</p>	<p>Dad lived the single life – contrasted with Mum and Fran trying to recover from the damage he made</p> <p>Fran has felt awkward since he first said he was leaving – despite his efforts Fran does not want to continue a relationship with him</p>
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<p>Jenny; And what's it like now?  Fran; Erm, it's OK. We have, we have an OK relationships, there are times when it gets a bit rocky (.) erm, <b>he tries very hard</b>, erm, but sometimes he'll put his girlfriend before me, and sometimes he'll put me before his girlfriend to try to keep a balance, and (.) erm, you know, I don't, I don't mind his girlfriend, now. So you know when I go around there it's not just me and him, and, so erm, <b>I have a better relationship with him now, (.) but it's, you know it has its ups and downs.</b></p> <p>Jenny; And when it's rocky what does that look like?  Fran; Err (laughs) I went through a stage, I think, (.) mmm, (.) it was just after my parents got divorce, so I would have been about 13, I didn't talk to him for 9 months. That's what it looks like (laugh). &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; Erm, (.) we just, we don't communicate, we don't see each other, um, there's a lot of anger there, I think, on both sides. Er, <b>he doesn't like the fact that I've kind of grown up, I've got my own views on things, I think he, he sees me as his little girl, and he doesn't like to accept the fact that he's missed such a chunk of my life</b> an, me growing up, so erm, yea, so when it's rocking we just don't talk, we just don't talk.</p> <p>Jenny; So you had a whole 9 months of not talking, can you tell me about that time.  Fran; I can't even remember what we were talking about, but I was on the phone to him, and, (.) he just kept trying to push me, (.) erm, and it <b>angered me, I got very angry</b>, and in the end I just put the phone down on him. And, I know that's probably not the best thing to do, to your parent, but I was, I was</p>		<p><i>He tried very hard</i></p> <p>I've grown up – independent identity with own and opinions</p> <p>Angry and upset towards Dad</p>	<p>Relationship is OK with Dad though not consistent</p> <p>Dad made a choice to miss out on Fran's life and now he can't accept that she's grown up. Fran makes no apology for this, and positions this as Dad's problem that needs to be overcome.</p>
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<p>really angry. I can't even remember what it's about, how silly is that. But, erm, he called me back, and I didn't answer, and he left me a voicemail saying that I wasn't his daughter anymore, he never wanted to see me again, erm, you know, I should change my last name 'cause I wasn't, he didn't want anything to do with me, erm, and I was just so angry at the time, I just remember being really really angry with him. And I just said to my Mum, do you know what, I don't want anything more to do with him, he's ruined my life, he broke up my family, I don't want anything to do with this man anymore, he's not my father, and he's told me he's not, and he wants nothing to do with me, and I want nothing to do with him. And a week later, he came around with a box of stuff that I'd given him, all his birthday cards that I'd given him, (.) erm just a load of stuff that he'd kept over the years with me and him, and he gave it all back to me. And, I wasn't really fazed by it, and then, (sigh) er, it was an OK 9 months I think it gave me and my Mum time to get closer and kind of rebuild that relationship. Erm, yea, and I just forgot about my Dad, I didn't wanna know him, that 9 months, so I just got on with my (laughs) life, without him in it. So.</p> <p>Jenny; So why did it come to an end, the 9 months?  Fran; Erm, my Nanny died, his Mum died before I was born (3) and I, had such a restless night and I woke up and I swear I saw her at the end of the bed (2) and I got my Mum up, and I was 'I've seen Nanny, I've seen Nanny' (in a panicked tone) I was in hysterics, I was crying, I didn't know what to do with myself, and so my Mum as a result of that had to</p>	<p><i>You know</i> – draws in the audience in agreement with her which serves to construct her father as responsible for the breakdown.</p> <p><i>"My family"</i>, unites her with her mother, which happens throughout the interview, suggesting she is not alone, rather than 'left me' etc he actively broke up the unit.</p> <p>Togetherness with Mum</p>	<p>Constructs an image of a relationship breakdown – Dad taking responsibility removing agency. The audience feels like their relationship is breaking up too, as well as Mum's.</p> <p>Let's the audience know, not to feel sorry for her as she wasn't 'fazed by it'.</p> <p>Life just goes on without Dad.</p>	<p>Dad responsible for the breakdown of the family</p> <p>Lost contact with Dad for a</p>
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<p>call my Dad, and that's how we got talking. I think it was her, showing me that she was upset that we weren't talking. Erm, so yea, that's kind of what put it back together, I think he realised that as well, so (.) erm, (.) yea it was just that kind of emotional bond over, his Mum, so &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; Yea.</p> <p>Jenny; OK, and you said that during that period you rebuilt your relationship with your Mum?</p> <p>Fran; Yea, I think, when someone's constantly, down and depressed, and leaning on you, it does put a strain on your relationship &lt;Jenny; Mmm&gt; (.) So you know, by that time, you know, my Mum had kind of come to terms with what had happened, and you know we were moving out, erm, her uncle had died, (2) erm, and left her a bit of money, so kind of we'd gone on holiday, and we'd totally kind of restarted our lives in a sense, you know moving into the new house and me starting a new school, it was like a fresh start. Erm, and so we, we kind of put what had happened behind us, and we're still extremely close now, my Mum and I, we do everything together. Everyone says we're a bit of a double act (both laugh)so (.) erm yea so we just took that time to forget, and start again. That's what I mean when I say we've rebuilt that relationship. &lt;Jenny; Yea&gt; Yea.</p> <p>Jenny; An, so (.) you said that during the period where you were living together but separately then then there was this period where you were living separately. So what was that period like?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, that was OK, I think because, you know, it, it was so hurtful to see him coming and going, and the fact that he was just gone, and he couldn't</p>		<p>The period of not speaking to dad for 9 months was a turning point – whereby Mum and Fran's relationship was rebuilt after the period where Fran looked after her.</p> <p>Mum and Fran are a team; <i>re-started our lives</i></p> <p>Strong relationships between self and mother – use of other characters to qualify her claim</p>	<p>period of 9 months</p> <p>Dad is the cause of the divorce 'he broke up'</p> <p>Dad's presence made things worse, so whilst he wasn't around both Fran and Mum could recover.</p> <p>Following the difficult time, when they were permanently separated it meant Fran could have a relationship with both parents.</p>
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<p>come in whenever he liked you know that gave my Mum a lot of time to recover, and me a lot of time to recover. Erm, so that was actually a good time, and I saw him at the weekends, erm, and er, with his girlfriend at the time, erm, and I kind of liked it that way, and I have ever since, because, I feel like I've got my relationship with my Mum, and we, we do stuff together, and I have a very strong relationship with her, and then I have my relationship with my Dad and we do other things together, an, and we have a pretty good relationship together, so I kind of, I get one on one time with both, and I kinda, I liked it like that and I was very settled like that, erm, so I think that was, that was a good time, erm, for my Mum and I. My Dad (.) he, he was OK, I think, he erm, (.) he was kind of hoping my Mum would take him back, at that time, but she tried, and it hadn't worked for her, an, it was still very raw when they tried, so it wasn't, it wasn't great. But, erm, (.) we, we, (sigh) in that time, we were all, sort of trying to (.) get over it and recover, and, try and get stronger &lt;Jenny; Mmm&gt; but that was a better time &lt;Jenny; That was a better time?&gt; Yea.</p> <p>Jenny; And what followed that time?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, after that I was leaving school, I was leaving XXX, I left a year early, and I was going to XXX and for the first (.) I think 6 months of school, in year 7, in XXX, (.) erm I had to get up, earlier 'cause we were still living in XXX, to get to school. And I remember that being quite tough, because, you know I was up at half 6 everyday, just the strain of what had happened, and, you know, during this time you know I hadn't told any of my friends, I</p>	<p><i>'Oh yea I had all of that'</i> – punctuates the story and makes the point of the story that she was under pressure to continue, which she did, yet this resulted in her collapsing.</p> <p>It is repeated twice that Mum took her to the doctors, demonstrated the importance of the statement that Mum acts in order to support her and seek help.</p>	<p>It had been a difficult period that would require the support of others. Not telling others leaving self to deal with it alone. This feels incongruent with the image of having lots of support at hand – which is how the interview is closed. The idea of a period of stillness whereby settled, followed by instability whereby adjustments are needed.</p> <p>,</p> <p>Mum believed that Fran was reacting to the stress, which</p>	<p>Interesting how the bond was reunited through the vision of an after-life figure – removed the agency from Fran herself or Dad. It took a vision to join them. I wonder how either Fran or her Dad feel and whether they too are sad that they are not speaking.</p>
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<p>hadn't told anyone at school (.), erm so I very much dealt with that situation on my own. Erm (.), so I think that realistically is when I fell ill, that time, 'cause I was back and forth, erm, from Mum to Dad, and school and back. So that was a pretty tough time, and then, when Mum finally moved in to XXX, I settled down completely it was great. Erm, (.) and then school became quite hard, because I used to (.), get up in the morning, and I would just say to Mum, 'I'm too tired, I can't do this, I'm aching all over.' And she thought it was kind of the stress of everything that happened, &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; and I think a lot of it was (.), um, and I fell ill with glandular fever (.), (a clicking noise made with her mouth) which was the start of my chronic fatigue &lt;Jenny; Mmm&gt; (Sigh) but (sigh), I didn't rest, I had to work through it, I had to get through it, and I carried on my normal day (2) erm, and then it got worse, it didn't get better, so I had a lot of time off school (.).</p> <p>Jenny; When you say I had to work through it, where did that come from 'I had to get through it'?</p> <p>Fran; Erm (2) I lot of the pressure at that time was from my Dad (.) and the school (.), erm, my Mum took me to the doctors, 'cause I was literally complaining every day, that you know 'I feel like crap' you know. (Deep breath) And my Mum would say just 'well, well, just go in, just try' (mimicking Mum's gentle voice), and then my Dad would be on the phone saying 'you've got to go, you don't understand how important these years are' and 'we've worked so hard to get you in to this school an' (said in a sterner more annunciate voice). Oh,</p>	<p>This experience additionally demonstrates how things were out of her control she does not hold the agency,</p> <p>He said / she said – giving direct speech</p>	<p>Fran possibly accepts and punctuates this narrative turn with a clicking sound.</p> <p>She positions herself here as being abiding to others wishes, she gives up agency and positions herself as doing what others expect of her; her Dad and the school.</p> <p>This is possible regret here, as the consequences of not resting were developing chronic fatigue.</p> <p>Contrasting the behaviour of Dad to Mum constructed dichotomous understandings of the characters</p>	<p><i>"it was so hurtful to see him coming and going, and the fact that he was just gone"</i></p> <p><i>'I very much dealt with the situation alone'</i> – this is a powerful statement as throughout the story Fran uses the pronoun 'we' 'they' often giving the idea of togetherness, yet here the audience gets a sense of her being alone Illness begun following the stress of going back and forth – balanced - with the medical cause of the illness glangila fever.</p>
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<p>yea, I had all of that, so, (laugh) I kind of felt like I had to go, and then after 3 weeks of going in everyday and just battling through it, (.) erm (.) I kind of collapsed and my Mum said 'right I am going to take you to the doctors', and he said 'she's got glangila fever she's got to rest'. So I had 2 weeks off, school, but by that time the damage was already done, erm, I had a number of blood tests I had all of my organs checked, because I just, I wasn't getting any better after the 2 weeks rest, erm, and what they reckoned had happened was I, I'd actually worked through the glangila fever, and then that was when, when I rested that was when the chronic fatigue kind of hit me, erm, (sigh) so yea, I had, I've had a good year off school &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; And it's been tough, and erm, I was in year 7, and, this was just before I fell ill, erm this girl was talking about (.) people having an affair, and, erm, getting (.) divorced and things like that and I just like had a mini break down in the middle of the classroom (laugh), that's when it all came out and all the teachers found out, and all my friends found out that my parents got divorced. So, that was a big thing for me, then I had counselling at school, and then because I fell ill, erm, I missed all my counselling sessions at school, so they stopped giving me those, and that's kind of how I started to get counselling outside of school and kind of into CAMHS really. Erm &lt;Jenny; So this, what you describe as a mini break down, can you tell me more about that?&gt; Um, I think it was like, for so many years I had to be strong for my Mum, and now that she was OK, it was like my turn, to kind of (.) grieve</p>	<p>Introducing her point – when Dad moved out. Followed by elaborating her story and</p>	<p>The doctor is given direct speech – illustrating how he takes the authority on her decision to rest. Her speech is only present when sharing her pain with others she does not take agency in the decision process.</p> <p>The understanding of the experience of 'mini break down' and illness is not clear. It is possible that it was result of stress, yet the experiences are presented side by side, not linked together.</p> <p>Out of control, or without agency</p>	<p>Mum looked out for her, yet Dad and School expected her to carry on. This difference is demonstrated by the contrasting tone of the speech chosen for Mum and Dad.</p> <p>The ongoing struggle with maintaining normality seems to have been at a big cost.</p> <p>Carrying on hadn't been helpful and had resulted in her becoming ill, it was tough to have time from school and the sigh seems to demonstrate her regret or sadness about missing school. This story is quickly followed by recalling hearing the terms divorce and affair being used leading to a mini break down, what she describes as a 'volcano'.</p>
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<p>over the family splitting up, and the shock of everything, and the stress of everything. It was just too much, I mean, I was so young and all this was happening and going on around me, an' (.) um, I got very depressed, erm (.) I battled with self-harm during that time, erm, it was just very hard, and I felt like no one around me was really understanding, erm, my counselling did help though, but I felt like she could only help to an extent, (deep breath) um, so yea, (laugh) so I did kind of have a mini break down &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; Um.</p> <p>Jenny; You said someone was talking about an affair at school?</p> <p>Fran; Yea, it was the weirdest thing, I was just sat in the class and we were given a topic to talk about, I think it was in life skills or something, and suddenly the conversation switched on to marriage and affairs and (.) it was the first time that anyone has really said those words to me, and then I suddenly realised I think, what had happened, what was going on, and it just (.) can't of built up like a volcano, I'd kept everything in then all of a sudden it just all just came out. (.) Erm, my teacher was very good at the time, she took me down to the head of year, and said you know, this has happened. But they were understanding for the first week, but then they kind of stopped being understanding and said, you, you've gotta come to school. But at the time I didn't really know how ill I was so.</p> <p>Jenny; So was this at the same time as having glangila fever &lt;Fran; mmm, yea&gt; you had this sort of realisation about marriage and affairs at that point as well, so it all happened at the same time?</p>	<p>offering an example.</p> <p>She introduces Dad reminiscing about good times</p>	<p>'I' has been strong, here she takes agency for her actions, stating that she had looked after Mum and resulted in an individual struggle 'I battled with self-harm' and feeling alone.</p> <p>Putting the words to the experience meant there was a 'sudden' reaction, a surprise that was explosive.</p> <p>This demonstrates the interviewers assumption that this would be a turning point – and with this prompt Fran elaborates her story however this was not offered</p>	<p>Stress caused by the separation led to getting glandular which eventually caused the</p> <p>there was an explosion of emotion. She never told people intentionally. The turn of events with her illness got in the way of her receiving support.</p> <p>Everybody found out – this removes a sense of agency In disclosing her parents divorce <i>“when it all came out and all the teachers found out, and all my friends found out that my parents got divorced”</i></p>
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<p>Fran; (laughs) mmm hmm, yea. That seems to be my life, it's OK, and then it all comes at once, an', yea, &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; it was hard, it was hard.</p> <p>Jenny; So when was the point that you realised Mum and Dad weren't going to be together?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, I think I was about 9 or 10 when Dad moved out, (.) I think, you know (.) (sigh), I'd kind of sort of guessed for a while, when he came back the first time and then had to leave again, it (.) I don't think I have ever sat down and thought 'oh my god Mum and Dad aren't going to together' it was just, I was stuck in that situation there was nothing I could do about it, but I think looking back, yea, when he first moved out, yea, that was when it kind of hit me that, erm, we weren't going to be a family anymore. And erm, (.) it's weird because my Dad will sit and talk about you know, when we did this together, and we were a happy family, he'll talk about it now, and he'll, he'll reminisce to himself, and, I'm just like pfft, you know he, he remembers all our happy times, and that's quite hard to hear &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; so er, yea, when he moved out.</p> <p>Jenny; Why was it hard to hear Dad talk about happy times?</p> <p>Fran; Erm (2), because I think, (.) when you throw away, erm (.) a marriage and a relationship (2) you, kind of I guess, well for me, I would kind of forget everything, you wouldn't wanna remember that, because it's hard, erm and also you know, he has a new girlfriend and I think, why are you talking about you ex-wife and your family in front of your girlfriend, and I just I feel like he doesn't deserve to, kind of remember those times because he was the</p>	<p>Clear exit speak is characteristic of her story telling. It gives the idea of coherence. Yet interestingly the content does not position her as being in control as the way in which she tells her story suggests.</p>	<p>independently.</p> <p>Fran positions herself in a helpless position being unable to do anything about it, with life going ahead without her being able to take any control. <i>was stuck in that situation there was nothing I could do about it</i></p> <p>The unifying terms – 'we' 'family' positions herself as involved in the experience and affected by the experience so she wasn't completely separate yet she positions herself as not having agency.</p> <p>She moves the position of Dad from the specific to the general using the term 'when you' as she did earlier when speaking about chronic fatigue, this de-intensifies Dad's position, possible to dilute his decision to 'throw away his marriage'. Yet when talking about 'deserving' she uses the term 'he' giving ownership to her Dad.</p>	<p>The existence of happy memories is confusing to Fran who believes that it would be painful to recall happy memories</p> <p>Fran states that Dad does not deserve to have happy</p>
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<p>one who destroyed all that. So I think that's why it's hard for me because I don't really understand why he talks about them.</p> <p>Jenny; There's something about him not deserving to have those memories? &lt;Fran; yea&gt; Do you have those memories?</p> <p>Fran; Er, (.) not really (coughs), I think er (.) for a long time I, I er, even now I don't really remember a lot of my childhood. I just kind of block it out, mentally I don't want to think about it, because that brings a lot of pain, and a lot of hurt, erm (.) so I think that's another reason why it's hard for me to hear it, because you know it's (.) I think I was a bit young to kind of remember when we were really happy. &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; Erm, (.) there's a time he talks about a lot, and I was 4 and we went off to Disney land for his birthday (laugh) even though it was somewhere I wanted to go, (laughs) we all went. And erm, he talks about that all the time and I guess we were a really happy family then, but I was 4 I don't remember anything, and the times that I do remember I block out, so.</p> <p>Jenny; You block out, the times that you, what, bit of a difficult question but the times that you block out, what are those times? (both laugh)</p> <p>Fran; Erm, (sigh) just kind of the times when he would come and go, erm, times seeing my Mum unhappy all of the time, erm, him introducing me to his girlfriend as a friend (.) you know I can look back now and think, phrr, I wasn't an idiot. Erm (.) yea.</p> <p>Jenny; So difficult memories &lt;Fran; mmm&gt; are the ones that you block out?</p> <p>Fran; Yea one of them was, when he kind of said he</p>	<p>She presents that she is confused here, why does he hold on to the happy memories – you might infer that she has questions she would like answers to.</p>	<p>I do not follow this up – possible due to a connection to my own story I chose not to probe further – what does she not understand?</p> <p>Here she invites the audience to share the idea that parents put her first – on Dad's birthday they went somewhere to please her.</p>	<p>memories as he chose to throw them all away.</p> <p>Hesitation about her memories and she wonders about her memories – I wonder if happy memories maybe incongruent with her image of life before divorce. Fran says that it is also difficult that Dad has happy memories because she doesn't.</p> <p>Happy memories have been shared with her yet not part of her her own lived experience</p>
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<p>was coming back, we went on a holiday, family holiday to XXX and, erm, my godmother, her daughter was my Mum's top pupil and to me, she's my big sister (claps hands) and she came with us, and she caught him texting his girlfriend (.) erm (.) and I remember that being quite hard, the fact that we were all together, and he's texting someone else, you know, that was quite hard, and I think that was a (.) but he still, you know his mind was in a different place and that's that's quite hard.</p> <p>Jenny; And do you remember how she told you, your big sister?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, she told my Mum, (.) erm and then she kind of said, you know, (2) then she kind of said, you know (.) er 'you Dads texting a lot' she didn't really erm tell me too much, I think, 'cause I was still quite young at the time, so she, she'd make little comments like 'your Dad's texting why don't you go and talk to him', she'd try and send me off to put him off as it were, erm, she was very protective of my Mum and me especially so (.) erm, she'd just make little comments, and you know, I guess at the time, you there, and you don't really think about it, and then now I look back and think oh yea that's what she was on about. &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; yea.</p> <p>Jenny; So what about other people then, 'cause you mentioned erm, your Mum being an ice skating teacher and there was lots of people around &lt;Fran; (laughs) Yes&gt; and that you consider yourself as quite a social person, but then when you were talking about school you said that you didn't tell any friends, you dealt with it on your own &lt;Fran; yea&gt; can you talk me through that? So did you not speak</p>		<p>Other people are positioned as looking after her.</p>	<p>The understanding of the experience has changed as with age she has a clearer understanding of what was going on</p> <p>Mum's needs overshadowed Fran's, her tears encouraged</p>
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<p>to anybody?          Fran; Not really because my Mum used to go to work in tears, most days, so everybody at the ice rink knew (.) erm so I didn't really have to talk about it there, and that was the place where I felt most at home and most comfortable and because no one talked, er, I guess they did in a way, but they were more kind of dealing with my Mum, erm, they used to ask me if I was OK and how was I doing, but they never really sat me down and talked to me about it, so because in my head, everyone, that, that, everyone at the ice rink is kind of like a massive extended family, erm, so because everyone knew what was happening, understood it, didn't really I guess want to rub salt into the wound they didn't talk about it with me, so I kind of felt that I didn't really need to talk about it in school. &lt;Jenny; Because people elsewhere knew about it?&gt; Yea. Erm, (.) and I think, you know, my friendships with the kids at school at the time, you know, I'd grown up with them, I'd been to primary school with them, and, (sigh) I dunno, I just erm (.) I guess I felt very alone at that time, in school, because (2) by that time, I knew I was going to XXX and (3) I just, I felt like I was going to leave anyway an' phrr, at that time I was coping with it, in my own way, erm, yea so I didn't really talk to people at school about it, and also, school I guess was an escape for me, you know, I went to school and I left my problems at home, so I guess in another sense I didn't feel like I wanted to bring my problems from home to school. So when I was at school I used to throw myself into my work and forget about it, and not really mention</p>	<p>Whilst Fran talks it feels like she is shaping her understanding of the period of life where she chose not to talk.</p> <p>The structure of her story because less clear and confident as she brings to existence her understanding that she had actually found it quite difficult to cope</p>	<p>Fran corrects herself and possibly as it would sacrifice the preferred identity of her 'extended family' if it was true that they didn't speak with her about how she was dealing with it.</p> <p>She has a lot invested in the people at the ice rink and seems important to maintain the image that they are the extended family</p> <p>Sense of Fran being confused and feeling unsure how to talk about it.</p> <p>Fran hands over understanding to the people at the Mum's work, yet this is contradictory to her performed identity later whereby Fran states that she felt very alone and people did not understand</p>	<p>support from friends and Fran was left. Fran states that she didn't need to talk about it as people already knew – I wonder if that is the case? As she later advises that people talk to people.</p> <p>It begins to be framed as a more active choice – I left my problems at home, positions herself as having more agency</p> <p>Throw self into school to distract self from what was going on.</p>
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<p>it, and it was all about what I was doing at school. (.)  erm, that's probably why I didn't really talk to anyone about it, and at the time you know I didn't really understand enough to say, oh my Mum and Dad are getting divorce, or, they're gonna get divorced.</p> <p>Jenny; So you said that you were coping in your own way, so how did you cope?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, (.) well I say I did, but I guess looking back I didn't really, I just, I didn't talk about it to anyone in school, that was one of the ways I coped with it, it was that was at home, I was in school, erm, when I was at home, I'd come home I'd get on with my homework, I'd stay up in my room, and listen to music, or I'd be downstairs just watching TV, so I didn't really talk to my Dad if he was in, erm, and then if my Mum was home, we'd be out doing something (.) so, yea, when I guess I say I coped (laugh) I really didn't because I didn't really think about it, I was, so busy looking after my Mum, that coping was really getting away from it, as much as I could. &lt;Jenny; mmm&gt; Yea.</p> <p>Jenny; If you were to come across stress, or difficult situations in the future, how do you think you would you cope with it now?</p> <p>Fran; Erm (2) I've had a really stressful time with the school, so I guess I've been dealing with that. Erm, (.) I think I've learned to talk about it more, erm, I've learned to kind of open up, especially to my Mum, erm and I guess that's why I am able to be here today and talk to you about it, because I think I've had to open up to you know, doctors and things and you know psychiatrists, and I know it's for my own</p>		<p>On reflection Fran positions herself as not coping – it was really hard and she was unable to speak to people. Yet following on from having to go to counselling she has developed a new coping strategy of talking to others.</p>	<p>Learned to talk about it more – since her emotions exploded like a volcano she will change</p>
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<p>good, in a way, so yea, I think that's one way I've learnt to deal with stress and things like that, it's just, you know, <b>get it all out, get it off your mind, and then you can move on with your life.</b></p> <p>Jenny; Mmm. You say that you talk to Mum now, &lt;Fran; Yea&gt; during the period where Mum was finding it quite difficult and you say she was actually leaning on you &lt;Fran; mmm&gt; Did you talk to her then?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, yea. But I think I didn't really have a lot to say, it was more her talking, I mean <b>my Dad was the only thing that she could talk about, at that time.</b> Erm, so it was more, me offering her support in that sense. I mean, yea, I'd come home and tell her all the tittel tattle that happened at school, and you know, just normal chit chat, but I was a kid, you know (laugh) <b>there's so much more to talk about now than I guess there was, so, yea I did but at the same time, it was more, we were kind of helping her, get it all out and talk about it, and so, yea it was more my listening to her in that time</b> &lt;Jenny; yea&gt; yea.</p> <p>Jenny; An' we need to sort of think about drawing the interview to a close I don't want to make mum late for work, erm you said earlier that you see you said, I see myself as older, erm can you just tell me what you mean?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, I think, <b>growing up around a lot of older people, I mean when I was born my big sister was (. ) eer, 10, so you can see the, the age gap there (laughs) is so big,</b> so obviously when I was little they were all teenagers and erm, I was very much interested in what they were doing, so I've always</p>		<p>Mum had no choice but talk about Dad</p> <p>Excuse not talking as much when younger as had less to say, listening to mum 'we were kind of helping her' – again not owning</p> <p>Fran offers justification for helping others, she appears modest, not wishing to take to the gratitude for helping others</p>	<p>her approach.</p> <p>The interviewer probes for Fran to consider her experiences and their impact upon her maturity – yet this is not elaborated and she does not provide a narrative to explain this point.</p> <p>I am left wondering whether Fran experienced her parents in a similar way – did they talk to one another?</p>
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<p>kind of looked up to older people. &lt;Jenny; do you have one older sister?&gt; She's not actually my older sister, but erm, she's someone I consider &lt;Jenny; Is this the godmothers&gt; Yea &lt;Jenny; Yea&gt; So she kind of taught me I guess along the way, how to be, erm, but I just, I feel like I'm more mature than everyone in my school, I feel like I've outgrown that, and erm, my Mum's friend is a psychic and she's always told me that I'm an older person, trapped in a young persons body. &lt;Jenny; Really? &gt; Yea (laughs) it's really weird, but erm &lt;Jenny; So does that mean you're an older person trapped in your body, or your experiences, because earlier it sounded like because of what you've had to/&gt; yea, I think so, I think my experiences have moulded me in to, kind of, you know, like I said I had to grow up, a lot faster, erm, but yea, I handle things (.) a lot differently to how any other 16 year old would. I think about it in a more adult way.</p> <p>Jenny; Can you give me an example? It's hard to put into word but.</p> <p>Fran; (Laughs) Oh, Ok, erm, like, OK, two of my friends fell out, and they were both at logger heads, and I said to them look 'you're feeling this way, she's feeling that way, the only way you are going to resolve this is talk to each other' and I was literally bashing their heads together, like you 'can't see what's going on'. So I've always been the mature one and everyone comes to me with their problems &lt;Jenny; OK&gt; yea so I guess that would be a good example I am good at giving advice from a kind of different, older perspective in that sense.</p> <p>Jenny; And people come to you for advice?</p>	<p>Kids need to be involved and feel they have a say – this feels contrasted to Fran's experience where she was stuck not knowing what to do.</p>	<p>Self as older due to having to cope with certain experiences.</p> <p>Positioned as needed by others, a person able to help others – yet gives away agency to genetics. She puts it down to her genes rather than her choice to help her Mum. She doesn't seem to take ownership of her qualities – having an external locus of control. 'I am</p>	<p>Talk to people feels like an important message for her to</p>
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<p>Fran; Yea, I must have like ask me, written across on my forehead (laughs) my Mum's exactly the same, I guess it's a genetic thing (laugh) &lt;Jenny; Do you like being that person?&gt; I love helping people, so yea, I think the only reason I come a bit unstuck is when, if someone came to me and said like they were pregnant well I don't really know how to help you (laughs). So, (.) erm, yea, <b>I like helping people out, but then, a lot of people have helped me out in the past with what I've dealt with.</b> Erm, so yea, I do like helping people.</p> <p>Jenny; Whose helped you?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, my Mum, massively, my Dad, in ways. My Mum's friends, are brilliant, my older sister, my extended family, (laugh) my friends yea, I have a lot of people to be thankful for.</p> <p>Jenny; OK, so just one final question then, erm, (.) I am torn with how to ask this, I have two ways of asking it. One is, you can chose, if a family come to me and they are thinking about getting a divorce or they, they've chosen to get a divorce what advice would you give to parents with how to think about it. &lt;Fran; Ok&gt; Or the other question would be, erm, a child of parents who are about to get a divorce, how to help them cope with divorce. &lt;Fran; OK, I could actually answer both. &gt; Ok, go for it.</p> <p>Fran; The first one, I think it's very important that they <b>make sure the child understands what is happening.</b> I think it's harder to deal with it when you actually don't know what's happening. And a lot of <b>adults do it,</b> they think that they should shelter their child, and it's, you know, it's not their problem, actually if you explain what is happening to the child</p>	<p>Not to side with one parent or the other</p>	<p>good at giving advice'</p> <p>This is not elaborated on – the audience is left wondering in what way.</p>	<p>learn.</p> <p><i>like helping people out, but then, a lot of people have helped me out in the past with what I've dealt with.</i></p>
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<p>the child has a better way of understanding it, learning from it, you know, watching my parents divorce <b>has changed my views on marriage and having kids</b>, so I think, if, if, the child that is about to experience their parents divorce knows what's happening and in a sense has a say, you know, then <b>that's gonna help</b>. And another thing, when they do get divorced, if that child then has a relationship, they, the parents shouldn't let how their relationship has failed kind of effect their relationships. So if, erm like my Mum did it, when I broke up with my first boyfriend, she was using how, her and my Dad split up as kind of an example of me and my boyfriend so she's saying, 'well your Dad did that so that means, that's gonna happen, and that's gonna happen' so yea, I think (.) I know it's hard, (sigh) but parents to try not to influence them as much I guess &lt;Jenny; In their relationships?&gt; Yea. That's a big one. Or like my Mum, will sit there, and moan about men, you know, it's like 'stop it' (mimic slapped wrist) so yea. &lt;Jenny; What makes you want her to stop it?&gt; I think it's because, <b>everybody should have the opportunity to kind of, learn from their own mistakes</b>, &lt;Jenny; yea&gt; you know, not all men are bad, so yea. I'd say that was a big one.</p> <p>Jenny; Yea, OK, brilliant. And have you got any advice for young people whose parents would be divorcing?</p> <p>Fran; Erm, I think, <b>stay strong</b>, and, make sure you <b>talk to people</b>. That is a big one. Erm, because <b>I didn't really for a long time, and it affected me quite badly. Holding all that in, is a big thing, so yea I</b></p>		<p>Very mature understanding – quite a compassionate understanding of what has happened.</p> <p>Identity work of being forgiving and able to learn from what she perhaps did not do so well – a very mature stance</p>	<p>Fran presented the plot of learning from her past – she would ensure that she spoke to people next time rather</p>
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<p>think, talking to people about it, making sure your friends know, because you know, because if they don't they are going to be quite insensitive to your situation but it's not their fault they just don't know what is going on. So yea, I think taking, and also talking to your parents is a big thing, making sure that you don't side with one or the other, it's important to still have an equal relationship with both parents, so yea just talking about it being open, being honest, telling them how you feel about it is a big thing, and yea, just keep people around you that you love and who love you and who will support you, is a big thing.          Jenny; Thank you.          Fran; You're welcome.</p>		<p>She positions herself as not taking sides with either or parent.</p>	<p>than keep it to herself.           She has learnt from her experiences</p>
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### **Stage 3:** Post transcription and read through reflections

I spent time following each read through making reflections of the main performative, structural or themes presented in the narrations.

#### ***Reflections of initial listen and read through considering the tone and focus***

She performs the identity of a mature and rational individual, who has learnt from her experiences, that if you do not talk about your difficulties they can build up and 'explode'. The story is sad, she presents a story of connectedness, being a unit and often used the term 'we', yet there was an undertone of loneliness. She did not chose to share her sadness with others, or talk to people, it was a secret from those at school. Concluding the interview I had left with a sense of a mature girl who was very 'together'. Whilst that does not cease to be true it does feel that following closer attention to her transcripts there are other parts of her story which illustrate life has been a struggle. *It was hard* and she *had* to grow up to enable her to cope. It is interesting that Fran does not take responsibility for her actions, her illness or her parents' divorce. It seems that she played an important role in taking care of her mother, yet her performed identity was of someone just doing what was required. I wonder if looking after her mother meant her needs were not met?

I wonder if her lack of agency is reflective of feeling out of control and helpless about her parents' divorce. This is very interesting as when I left the interview I assumed a responsible lady who takes responsibility for others, yet when you analysis the use of verbs and who she positions with authority it is rarely herself. She understand that being someone people turn to is due to an internal quality - *"Mum's friend is a psychic and she's always told me that I'm an older person, trapped in a young person's body"*

#### ***Reflections of reading for themes and plots of the interview***

Mum is introduced as a main character of story who has been influential in Fran's life, and with whom she has a good relationship.

Fran offers insight into moments whereby her trajectory has changed, including the onset of her chronic fatigue, which led to her being 'more reserved'.

There appear to be two main significant life events that Fran narrates, her chronic fatigue and her parents' divorce which occurred at the same time. The relationship between the two is touch upon yet not elaborated. Her parents' divorce was understood as responsible for her change in her relationship with others. Fran explains not going to others due to it being *'hard for them to understand'* as they were from families that were still together *'you can't go to people for advice, if they don't really know what they are talking about'* which is an opinion she reiterates later in the interview when she explains she would be unable to help out a friend if they were pregnant, which the audience could guess is something she has no experience of. Fran shared that she experienced this time as lonely, and she states *'that was quite hard'* however this not an elaborate experience and she offers how her identity has changed to being *'Independent, where I like to do things by myself'* whereby she appears to offer a preferred identity.

Divorce is described as occurring *'all of a sudden (2) we get like, this like bomb dropped on us'* the idea of suddenly, and shock is spoken in a later narrative when describing an incident when she was in year 7 at school, however objectively it wasn't 'sudden' as it was a lengthy process, however it is interesting that it is experienced as sudden. Throughout the narrative in many stories the divorce is presented that happen to 'them' rather than her, or to her mother, they had it done to them, by her father. This both joins Fran to her mother, so that she is not in such an isolated position and unites them and becomes something that *'we're left to deal with'*. Mum is positioned as the person to continue the normality, *'Mum tried to make it kind of as normal as possible,'*

Fran uses of the pronoun 'I' when talking about her 'mini-break down' and how she looked after her Mum. Those stories do create an image of Fran being alone. She also used a singular pro noun when describing Mum being 'distracted' following Dad requesting the separation *'she never really had any energy, she'd always you know, get headaches and things, catch every illness going, I mean, her self-esteem, her immune system, everything was just at an all-time low, for her' 'she was mess, and I had to grow up very very quickly'* Fran explains that she *had* to grow up very quickly, in order to look after Mum and make her better, whilst try to keep a normal life – you have to infer what is meant by this, as this was not explored further, yet it feels apparent that this was a struggle for Fran. , *I just tried to lift her spirits, get her mind off of it*, linguistic devise of reported speech *'Come on Mum let's go and do something 'I hadn't told any of my friends, I hadn't told anyone at school (.), erm so I very much dealt with that situation on my own.'* It had been a difficult period that would require the support of others. 'I very much dealt with the situation alone' – this is a powerful statement as throughout the story Fran uses the pronoun 'we' 'they' often giving the idea of togetherness, yet here the audience gets a sense of her being alone. Not telling others leaving self to deal with it alone. This feels incongruent with the image of having lots of support at hand – which is how the interview is closed.

### **Reflections of reading for structure; how the story is told**

Throughout the interview Fran moves from the specific to the general through various uses of particular pronouns e.g. 'you', 'they' rather than 'I' 'he' and it appears to distance herself from her story. When discussing the impact of her 'chronic fatigue' on her life she speaks about it in general terms – *'you spend a lot of time in bed, and you don't really go out as much'*. In some ways this removes her agency, and offers an explanation of her behaviour in terms of symptoms of the illness, which almost removes her responsibility and creates the idea that becoming 'more reserved' was an inevitability given her illness. *'I think it's hard, for you know, any child when they see their parent coming and going, and you don't know where they are, and you don't know what they are doing, and they don't really have an interest in you'* – I wonder if separating her experience to a general example is a strategy which is more compassionate and feels less isolated and alone that perhaps she felt. I wonder if the story of feeling alone is an untold story?

The concept of normal is mentioned a few times throughout her narrative, particularly in contrast to friends whose 'parents are together'.

### ***Reflections of the performative and dialogical process of the interview***

Fran performs an identity of being an older person a more fixed quality, however she shares that since her illness it has been unusual to not be 'as friendly with people' as she was previously.

The interviewer has an assumption that the two turning points, 'illness' and the 'divorce' maybe connected as occurred at the same time, however Fran chooses to speak about what is important to her, Fran offers a narrative to clarify her parents' divorce and separation, which she feels is important to explain. Fran often uses the terms coming and going/to-ing and fro-ing which provide a context to her story whereby she is unsure and uncertain. When asked to tell the interviewer more Fran chooses to talk about the period where Dad was 'messing around' possibly indicative of this being an important part of her story. Dad is presented as continuing his usual routine of socialising and coming in and out as he pleased, which is contrasted to Fran who was at home with Mum. Whilst this experience is not elaborated I wonder whether the fluidity of Dad's movements is a stark contrast to Fran '*I was stuck in that situation there was nothing I could do about it*'. Fran presents an image of Mum and her living very separate lives to Dad, and having to complete normal everyday tasks such as going to school, homework and work.

Fran shares that '*it was hard*' a term she repeats, however her age is used as justification as not knowing what was going on an internal state of which she has no control, similar to her illness – this is in contrast to other stories whereby the responsibility for understanding comes from parents.

Dad is positioned as the responsible party for the divorce '*he broke up my family*', and despite his more recent expression of regret '*he admits that it does upset him now, but, that's that, that was his choice, so*' Fran does not elaborate her feelings about this, yet you can infer that she feels he is responsible and therefore does not feel empathetic towards his position. '*he was kind of trying to hard to make up for, you know, the months that he'd lost out on*' yet there does appear to be little forgiveness and a lack of commitment from Fran to 'make it work'.

Fran reports that there is '*a lot of anger there, on both sides*' Dad made a choice to miss out on Fran's life and now he can't accept that she's grown up. Fran makes no apology for this, and positions this as Dad's problem that needs to be overcome. In the absence of Dad, Mum and Fran can continue to go, and it seems important for Fran to illustrate how this period allowed her relationship with Mum to strengthen, '*we kind of put what had happened behind us, and we're still extremely close now, my Mum and I, we do everything together*'.

#### **Stage 4: Writing the Global Impression**

Following these stages the Global Impression was written, available in the main text of the thesis.

#### **Stage 5: The main storylines**

- Coping alone - '*you can't go to people for advice, if they don't really know what they are talking about*'
- Dad as responsible for the marital breakdown; '*all of a sudden (2) we get like, this like bomb dropped on us*' Dad was positioned external to the team of Fran and her Mother.
- Mum's struggles following the divorce; '*Come on Mum let's go and do something*'
- '*I grew up very very quickly*. Fran's sense of self as older than her peers.

APPENDIX J: An excerpt from the reflective journal; Fran

Following each interview a reflective account was written an example is offered below;

Fran arrived to the interview 10 minutes early, and text to ensure that she was in the right place. Her text had a familiar feel; 'I'm here in the waiting room, not sure if I'm in the right place, haha 😊'. This familiarised tone was characteristic of our previous interactions. She arrived with her Mum and we had a conversation in the waiting room to agree a finish time as her Mum needed to head off to work. Fran was quiet in the conversation and didn't participate, yet when we entered the clinic room she set an alarm stating 'I don't want to make Mum late for work'. I was struck by her confident tone, and I had to keep reminding myself of her age I felt like I was talking to someone of my same age as her manner and posture felt much older than your usual 16 year old. She had a presence in the room. There were moments when I recognised similarities in how she told her story, to how I could imagine telling my own. The idea of being older than most of her peers is a shared experience to my own. I wonder if this made me respond in a less curious tone as the story felt familiar. I asked for greater elaboration of her of caring for her Mum, this was following my recognition that this had been left unexplored in previous interview. However, I wonder if it was also because I felt more able to in response to her confident and mature tone.