



Connected Disconnections
Negotiating family separation, membership and conflict:
A discourse analysis

Paul Michael Galbally

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctorate in Applied Psychology

School of Health and Social Care

University of Essex

Year of Award (2021)

Table of Contents

Connected Disconnections Negotiating family separation, membership and conflict: A discourse analysis	
List of Tables	iii
List of Figures	iii
Declaration.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Abstract.....	vii
Thesis Introduction	1
Aim Statement	1
Background and rationale.....	2
Interdisciplinary approach	4
Tensions around understanding family	10
Thesis Structure	12
Chapter 1 - Literature Review	14
Introduction	14
What is a family?.....	14
Challenges to nuclear thinking.....	19
Why is it so hard to leave the nuclear family behind?.....	24
How do families construct membership?	27
How does language present family to the social world?	35
Defining parental conflict.....	39
Conflict post-separation.....	41
Separated parents within a context of family therapy	42
Summary	46
Chapter 2 –Methodology.....	48
Introduction	48
Philosophical approach.....	48
Research design	50
Sampling.....	53
Data collection stage 1.....	56
Data collection stage 2 - The semi-structured Interview.....	58
Data collection stage 3 - Family map	61
Data analysis stage 1.....	64

Ethical considerations	67
Reflexivity.....	68
Adherence to principles of quality in qualitative research	70
Summary	72
Chapter 3 – Findings	74
Introduction	74
Data analysis part 2.....	74
The discursive field of heteronormativity and nucleocentricity.....	82
Stage 1 - Experiences of pain	90
Stage 2 – Perceiving transgressions.....	93
Stages 3a and 3b - Counterfactuals	100
Stage 4 - Ontological insecurity	104
Stages 5 and 6 - Moving on and the re-formation of family.....	110
Family Separation Model	115
Kate’s experience – A case study of family separation.....	118
Summary	127
Chapter 4 – Discussion.....	129
Introduction	129
RQ1: How do separated parents talk about and define family?	130
An explanation of separation shifting to a chosen family structure.....	132
RQ2: Does parental conflict affect family membership?.....	136
Post-separation family configurations.....	139
RQ3: How do the portrayals of separated families within society impact the lived experience?..	143
How does nuclear family bias impact re-formed families?	145
Managing the stake of being a separated but ‘proper’ family	147
RQ4: What are the implications of this research on practice within family therapy?	150
Implementing thesis findings into practice.....	152
Proposed treatment model	154
Reflexive considerations	155
Critical evaluation of strengths and limitations.....	158
Directions for future research	161
Thesis Conclusion.....	163
Key Findings and Contributions	163
Concluding Discussion.....	164
References	173
Appendices.....	200

Appendix A – Participant demographics and short biographies	200
Appendix B – Research advert	202
Appendix C – Topic guide for interviews	203
Appendix D – Analytical process example	205
Appendix E – University of Essex ethical consent approval.....	206
Appendix F – Research diary.....	207
Appendix G – Academic journal.....	208
Appendix H – The 16 initially identified discourses	209

List of Tables

Table 1: Respondents who completed the screening survey	54
Table 2: Respondents who were interviewed	54
Table 3: Parent typologies and descriptions.....	58
Table 4: Summary of the 6 meta-discourses and their constituent discourse components.....	78
Table 5: Stages of the Family Separation Model (FSM)	80
Table 6: Mapping the meta-discourses to the FSM.....	82
Table 7: Respondent typologies identified during the screening survey phase	95
Table 8: Case study character cast list	118
Table 9: Matrix of relationship quality.....	133
Table 10: Identified co-parenting typologies and post-separation family configurations of interviewees.....	143

List of Figures

Figure 1: Family map.....	63
Figure 2: Diagram of Craig’s family map	87
Figure 3: Diagram of John’s family map.....	89
Figure 4: Diagram of Freya’s family map	99
Figure 5: Diagram of Shaun’s family map	113
Figure 6: Diagram of Jane’s family map).....	114
Figure 7: Family Separation Model	116
Figure 8: Diagram of Kate’s family map	123
Figure 9: Visual illustration of family descriptors	136
Figure 10: The three possible configurations of the post-separation family.....	140
Figure 11: Paul Galbally family map.....	156

Declaration

This thesis is a presentation of my own research. Wherever contributions of others are included, every effort has been made to acknowledge this and indicate clearly by making reference to the literature.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my fantastic supervisory team, Professor Gill Green and Professor Ewen Speed, who have guided, inspired and cheered me on through this endeavour. Ewen's promise to be my most hostile critic was always acted on, and after a few years, I even started to become somewhat fond of Ewen's creation that I lovingly termed the pantomime villain of academia. I feel incredibly privileged to have worked with two extremely experienced academics, and their sociological roots and knowledge of research shaped my work in directions that I would have never previously considered, ultimately improving my analysis and findings no end. I also want to acknowledge Gill's incredible perseverance and polite acceptance to read yet another draft of my methodology and findings.

Thank you to all my friends and colleagues who always dutifully asked me how the doctorate was going, as well as managing to feign enough interest to humour me when I bumbled through my latest theoretical musing on the matter. I also want to credit some of these so-called friends, who back in 2008 when I started my crazy journey into higher education as a technically 'mature (geriatric) student' by moving into halls and starting an undergraduate degree in psychology, they nonchalantly said: "What a stupid idea, you will be back home in a month." Well, 12 years, a first-class graduate degree, a post-graduate masters and on the brink of a doctorate later... They have no idea that this flippant banter was internalised somewhere and undoubtedly provided the grit and motivation to never give up and to achieve my ambition of not only being the first graduate but potentially the first doctor in my family.

A special thank you to Sophie, my partner whom I met during my undergraduate experience when we took the same course. As much as I value my academic qualifications, you were undeniably the best thing that I took from the university. I will always appreciate your support, belief in me and help with my research, especially in the final few months when you sacrificed your time to get me over the finishing line.

I also appreciate the companionship of my little study buddy, my gorgeous and friendly pug dog Arnie, who diligently positioned himself on my lap whilst I painstakingly transcribed interviews and wrote up my research.

I would like to offer my heartfelt appreciation to my participants, who provide their time and honesty around their lived experiences of divorce and separation. I am in debt to your candour, frankness and courage to share such personal and painful experiences.

I also want to acknowledge my old family therapy trainee Lilas Javeed, who during a post-therapy debrief meeting unintentionally gave me the enlightening inspiration for how ambiguous family membership may prevent the therapist from being able to properly 'join' families in treatment. This idea went on to form a central pillar of my proposed theory...

My final note goes to Lindsey Page, my esteemed colleague who sat alongside me in the treatment room as a co-therapist for most of my doctoral journey. We helped many struggling families understand their experiences, and our numerous conversations, interventions, frustrations and formulations are all embedded within the conceptualisation of this thesis. I sincerely hope that this work contributes to helping more families in the future.

As my supervisory team always note 'I definitely am a man of far too many words...'



Abstract

Parental separation affects family forms and creates challenges around managing co-parenting relationships. The literature has identified a change in how western families are viewed, moving away from traditional identifiers to a role-based and social practices construct which includes the growing number of non-traditional families. Despite this shift, family therapy continues to draw from a framework of family as a nuclear entity, leading to challenges in working successfully with troubled families, resulting in disengagement and unsatisfactory clinical outcomes. Therefore, this study seeks to better understand how re-formed family configurations function and co-parent to inform professional practice.

The research takes the form of a discourse analysis that uses semi-structured interviews with separated parents (3 men and 4 women) who have experienced either high or low conflict separations, to understand how this conflict influences co-parenting. However, tensions were introduced by bringing together insights from a range of academic disciplines to develop a broader understanding of family and its clinical application based on the perspective and experiences of a family therapist. Findings suggest separations are painful experiences that people make sense of by constructing moralistic narratives of what happened and who was responsible. Individuals then typically engage in a process of rebuilding their lives and incorporating co-parenting relationships into new family forms that seems compelled and constrained by conflict and a discursive field of heteronormative social norms around public understandings of family. A clinical model is put forward to represent this process.

Professional implications of the findings are discussed and it is suggested that developing an effective treatment plan with separated parents requires explicit understanding of their perspectives of family and how separation events continually constitute family troubles and their responses. It is recommended that the proposed model can be used to guide ex-partners towards a co-parenting partnership using a rebranded therapeutic intervention that addresses problematic assumptions around the clinical term of 'the family'.

Thesis Introduction

Aim Statement

This thesis aims to understand how separated families make sense of their separation and in what ways the events and relationships around this process contribute to their current family forms. This examination will provide a foundation of how separated families are influenced by societal expectations and the interactions between parents as they transition to a family form that situates the parental relationship as being principally founded upon co-parenting. The purpose of this investigation is to improve clinical practice with separated families by providing a professionally applicable psychological model that can be used to guide treatment trajectories.

This improvement is a necessary response to a clinical paradigm that is overly reliant on traditional concepts of family that are somewhat outdated and problematic for separated families. These problems manifest as separated parents showing reluctance to engage in therapeutic programmes that promote amicable co-parenting and high levels of attrition from services such as mediation and family-focussed clinical interventions. These issues also highlight a wider concern that 'the family' has become a problematic term within the domain of family therapy, as it places assumptions, values and expectations upon those that engage with treatment as an externally identified 'family'. The consequences of this is a proclivity to treat symptoms of 'troubled families' as an individual pathology, often resulting in children being diagnosed with behavioural disorders and treated without consideration of the relational 'family troubles' that they are subject to.

The above aims will be achieved by identifying four research questions and using an interdisciplinary approach that crosses boundaries between psychology, sociology and clinical practice. A discourse analysis (DA) will represent the lived experiences of respondents and then a psychological lens will be used to translate these experiences of separation into several findings that contribute to a psychological model that can be practically utilised within family therapy. This thesis

will explicitly acknowledge the ontological and disciplinary tensions created by taking this approach and will also consider how the researcher's background and own assumptions have implications for this study.

Background and rationale

Latest UK demographics estimate that 3.5 million children and 2.4 million families are now classified under the following definition of separated families:

“A separated family is defined as one resident parent, one non-resident parent and any biological or adopted children they have between them who are either under 16 or under 20 and in full-time non-tertiary education.” (DWP, 2020, p. 4)

Around 90% of these children are resident with their mothers and 48% of them have working maintenance agreements (DWP, 2020). Many of these children transition between different homes and have complex family configurations that typically require the involved adults to negotiate co-parenting and shared contact with the child (Golombok, 2015; Kumar, 2017). Some families manage these interactions well and there is a growing body of research that suggests that children can be happier when parents part and children live in functional environments that promote mutually fulfilling residency arrangements (Harold *et al.*, 2016).

However, many families cannot make the transition into functional co-parenting and these difficult relationships often become characterised by conflict that can lead to estrangement, legal battles and reduced wellbeing (Mutchler, 2017; Nielsen, 2017; Sands *et al.*, 2017; Visser *et al.*, 2017). As a result of this inter-parental conflict, children in these circumstances have been evidenced to suffer a variety of negative outcomes that affect emotional development, academic achievement, emotional growth, behaviour and how they form functional adult relationships (Harold and Sellers, 2018). It has also been shown that living in a hostile environment reduces the probability of gaining a university degree by 7% and can lead to long term socio-economic disadvantages that “persistently undermine an individual's life chances” (Bernardi and Radl, 2014, p. 1654). Furthermore, children

who witness regular domestic violence are 30% more likely to receive a behavioural diagnosis, suffer from cognitive and IQ deficiencies, have increased prevalence of trauma disorders (Rivett *et al.*, 2006) and are at greater risk of alcohol dependency (Jackson *et al.*, 2016). There is also evidence that if the conflict is carried on as the children reach adulthood, children frequently become estranged from one or both of their parents (Ahrns, 2007a). This disconnection of family networks can also affect extended family, with some grandparents reporting trauma-induced illness as a consequence of losing contact with grandchildren (Timonen *et al.*, 2009).

During my professional career as a family therapist, I have been involved in treating children from separated families who have presented with a variety of issues such as anger, behavioural disorders, selective mutism, self-harm, disordered eating and anxiety. Many of these children had previously been subject to individual counselling that had appeared to provide a short-term improvement followed by a relapse. On re-referral, the clinical plans were altered to engage the parents and offer the clients a family focussed intervention. This shift in approach allowed family histories to be explored and it was discovered that many of these separated families were experiencing some form of inter-parental conflict. This conflict covered a spectrum of relational troubles that ranged from financial hardship to high level domestic violence, with many of the cases having had police, family court or social care involvement.

It is at these points of crisis that families will often be sent to or choose to seek a therapeutic intervention to find a way of making everyday life more manageable (Hardesty *et al.*, 2016; Mutchler, 2017; Nielsen, 2017). However, like many clinicians, I found that when parents are separated and antagonistic, the task of just getting family members to attend collaborative sessions is considerable (Mutchler, 2017). Furthermore, statistics suggest that there is a 26.8% disengagement rate after the first session in family therapy, a figure that is 33.2% higher than that for individual therapy (Hamilton *et al.*, 2011; Stratton, 2016).

My experience and that of other similar professionals is that many of these separated

parents lack the motivation to engage, feel disenfranchised by state-based intervention, are experiencing external life stressors and are often still emotionally processing their unsuccessful relationships (Goldberg and Carlson, 2015; Hardesty *et al.*, 2016; Russell *et al.*, 2016; Jevne and Andenæs, 2017; Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2019). These challenges led me to be interested in how family therapy interventions can be more appealing and effective for separated parents in conflictual relationships. As it is strongly evident that if these parents cannot find a way to work together, then more children will be forced to live under continued disadvantage.

Interdisciplinary approach

The work undertaken in this doctoral thesis straddles boundaries between different research disciplines that means it occupies a space that is characterised by numerous tensions. These tensions are primarily underpinned by the desire to understand the experiences of family life through which people make sense of their relationships and identities (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013) and to create outputs that can inform therapeutic interventions. These outputs generally rely on structured psychological frameworks that minimise the natural untidiness of social interactions (Avdi and Georgaca, 2007) and are limited in sociological explanation (Edwards *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, this thesis seeks to acknowledge the messiness and harness the complexities of family lives from a sociological understanding and use this to improve clinical practice.

Although combining insights from social science and psychology may raise theoretical complications, it has previously been found to be successful and has also led to the formation of new disciplines such as cultural psychology (Repko *et al.*, 2012). The acknowledgement and acceptance of ‘messy’ research are well documented and I want to take a similar perspective to Ribbens McCarthy *et al.* (2013, p. 14) who recognises the tensions at stake but is also careful about “bringing them to any tidy resolution”. This is alongside orientating my findings to align with the favoured approach of family therapy that prefers research outputs that have enough of a systemic and relatable structure to appeal to the clinical community (McLeod, 2011; Beitin, 2017).

The literature available on family is vast and incorporates contributions from scholars that are aligned to a variety of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology and psychotherapy. However, studies that come from an interdisciplinary position are less common, meaning that collaboration between disciplines is underrepresented and important research findings could be suppressed by researchers choosing to favour working in silos that maintain established research courses (Henton, 2012).

This interdisciplinary approach is encapsulated in my data collection process where I used research interviews rather than focussing on the family interactions within therapeutic encounters, which is typical of much family therapy research (Beitin, 2017; Lebow, 2018). This direction also makes efforts to address the lack of UK based social constructionist family therapy research (Carr, 2014) and responds to the call of the 'promising potential' of DA as a methodological approach that connects research and practice by improving therapist reflexivity (Tseliou, 2013).

There have been several previous studies that have used DA to research psychotherapy, however, Avdi and Georgaca (2007) suggest that these studies tend to be inward-facing and informed and maintained by the popular discourses that are culturally and institutionally promoted within the industry. Their constructionist critique argues that this results in problems being reframed as individual and psychological issues that are expertly treated within a paradigm that minimises the social world of the client, corresponding to my concerns about children being pathologized during acrimonious separation. In response to this critique, this thesis aligns with the view of families and their troubles as being relational, part of everyday life and inextricably linked to the social world they inhabit (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013; Morgan, 2019; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2019).

Tseliou (2013) also undertook an extensive review of research on family therapy using DA and delivered several compelling criticisms. Firstly, she found that only 5 of 28 studies carried out what she identified as a legitimate DA, with the remainder tending to produce analyses that were

thematic in nature. She also highlighted that many studies focus on talk within sessions rather than family dynamics and argued that links between the examined discourse, theory and interpretation were unclear.

Taking on board the two previous evaluations, this study adheres to a traditional social psychology DA (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards *et al.*, 1992; Potter *et al.*, 1993) that organises the research questions in a way that allows respondents' subjective experiences to be represented (research questions 1 and 2) and then by shifting the ontological stance (in research questions 3 and 4), it was possible to make a psychological model that situated these representations within public discourses of separation and applied clinical practice.

My approach moves beyond the research agenda criticisms of Tseliou (2013) by foregrounding the client engagement experience by avoiding the preoccupation of talk within clinical encounters. I feel that research focussed on therapy sessions is irrelevant to many separated parents, as they never get to experience a therapeutic session due to the considerable challenges around this client group feeling comfortable in accessing treatment (Francia *et al.*, 2019). Therefore I prioritise client autonomy in this study and in doing so make an original contribution by trying to understand how already marginalised and troubled separated parents may be able to reconsider a therapeutic intervention as collaborative, helpful and encouraging, rather than shaming, forceful and traumatic (Burman, 1995). Furthermore, the diversity of literature consulted provides insights to alternative perspectives on family, responding to the problem of using limited literature and maintaining established discourses within psychotherapeutic research raised by Avdi and Georgaca (2007).

It has been recognised that interdisciplinary research can introduce an element of risk by introducing methodological tensions, compromising established research standards, overlooking the individual needs and confusing understandings of specialist language and literature (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013). However, there is also considerable enterprise to be found in drawing on

insights from several domains of knowledge. Proctor and Vu (2019) argue that broadening study horizons can positively advance the involved research programmes and create opportunity for novel discoveries. They also advise that tensions between academic disciplines can be addressed by being mindful of the difference between attaining mastery in a subject and the ability to sufficiently understand other academic perspectives.

In this thesis, my own pluralistic background brings together dual roles as an academic researcher and clinical practitioner, further supporting an approach that is integrative and not tethered to one school of thought (Henton, 2020). I also wanted to incorporate my psychology training and therapeutic experience as a way of developing research that is both authentic and reflexive (Bager-Charleson, 2014), effectively creating a hybrid approach that optimises my skillset and is sensitive to the nuances of the blended roles (Fleet *et al.*, 2016). This widening of perspective is well supported by several notable practitioner-researchers who feel that these types of partnerships enhance practice by better embedding it within the wider evidence base (Dallos and Vetere, 2005; Cooper and McLeod, 2010; McLeod, 2011; Bager-Charleson, 2014).

This thesis is situated within a professional doctorate framework that has the key aim of using a variety of academic perspectives to inform therapeutic practice. In doing so, I develop an argument that if family therapy practice continues to draw predominantly upon family therapy literature (Stratton, 2016), there is a risk that important cultural and social changes within the wider field of family research will be overlooked. The result of this is that the popular sentiment of referring 'the family' within psychotherapeutic discourses (Lebow, 2016; Carr, 2019) is increasingly outmoded and ill-fitting for some separated parents who are not happy with being categorised as 'the family'.

My concern is that if family therapy does not engage better with the sociological literature, practice may become distant and disconnected from important developing debates and discourses around family concepts, widening already acknowledged 'chasms' between researchers and

clinicians (Piercy and Sprenkle, 2005, p. 4). One example of this is where clinical agencies consider family as a widely agreed concept and will typically place 'the family' into a service, usually inviting traditional family members such as parents and children to meet with a practitioner, often without detailed explanation of the process (McPherson *et al.*, 2017). In the case of separated families, this may be challenging as these family members may have different compositions and meaning structures of how the events of separation has impacted them (Lebow, 2016; Carr, 2019). They may also be reluctant to work alongside a person they view as dangerous, threatening or obstructive (Russell *et al.*, 2016; Visser *et al.*, 2017).

Left unchecked, this divide between clinical and sociological family scholarship may become harmful and risk alienating, disenfranchising and disadvantaging service users who feel that the notion of 'the family' promotes their disengagement, leaving troubled and separated families unsupported. This concern is evidenced by the overly high levels of attrition in family therapy and the more specific difficulty in getting separated parents to engage with joint interventions (Lebow and Rekart, 2007; Mutchler, 2017; Morris *et al.*, 2018).

This ongoing reluctance for separated parents to engage in treatment together is a contributory factor (Paris, 2020) to growing concerns around the overdiagnosis of acute mental health disorders in children (Merten *et al.*, 2017). It also reinforces the position of children's mental health being enmeshed in a framework of individual pathology (Burman, 1995; Featherstone *et al.*, 2013) that removes them from being situated within their relational family troubles (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013), especially in relation to acrimonious separation (Lebow, 2019a). Interestingly, the strategy of treating the child's mental health within a family context is a recently recommended initiative from the sitting UK government (Hunt and Greening, 2017), arguably as a response to the growing mental health emergency that has seen 1 in 8 children (5-19 years of age) presenting with at least one recognised mental health disorder (NHS, 2018).

Therefore, sociological literature will be drawn upon to explore how individuals construct a

unique concept of family that is built upon their understanding of the practices and language that underpins their family form. Particular attention will be placed upon the public discourses that these families rely upon to give meaning to the practices that shape their interactions and continuously constitute and reconstitute their familial identity (Morgan, 2019). In contrast to the sociological insights that tend to prioritise subjective understandings of everyday experiences, the disciplinary imperative for psychology is one that uses analytical frameworks and models to understand social phenomena individually and interpersonally (Levitt *et al.*, 2017), often with an intention to be central and applicable to clients and professional practice (Fuertes and Nutt Williams, 2017).

Taking the above discussion into consideration, this thesis seeks to draw upon sociology and psychology by asking the following questions:

- i. How do separated parents talk about and define family?
- ii. Does parental conflict affect family membership?
- iii. How do the portrayals of separated families within society impact the lived experience?
- iv. What are the implications of this research on practice within family therapy?

The first two questions are sociological in origin and take an ontological position that privileges the respondent perspective and allows them to discuss their subjective understanding of separation and family. The third research question shifts more towards a Foucauldian analysis, seeking to understand how all discourses are imbued with power relations that prioritise and idealise particular understandings and constructions of some knowledge over others (Foucault, 1972; Foucault, 1980). This question examines respondent experiences of changes in their family configuration relative to broader social discourses and explores how language and practices can sometimes lead to events such as separation being viewed negatively (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013; Moore, 2016b; Salter, 2018).

All the research questions are making several assumptions about what family is and how

these ideas can be understood through a psychological lens that is relevant to a clinical setting that favours theories of systems embedded within practical, psychological and applicable models (Hanna, 2019). Therefore, a decision was made to operationalise several processes to better enable an analysis that privileges the clinical outcomes of the study. This has resulted in categorical choices that have led to some reification of constructions of both family membership and conflict. This again highlights the inherent messiness of the topic and the complexities of working within an interdisciplinary framework that incorporates a constructionist viewpoint of family that can be rendered into a pragmatic and psychologically situated therapeutic model.

In contrast to the previous three questions which are rooted within the methodological framework of DA, the fourth question is concerned with the practical application of the findings and draws from clinical terminology by referring to ‘family therapy’. This phrasing is unfortunate given the acknowledgement of family being a subjective construction. However, to speak to the field of family therapy research, I do use this terminology, but I also build a critique of it. This choice highlights further tensions between the fluid sociological constructions of family and the culturally available public and psychotherapy specific discourses that create complex systems of meaning that compel, maintain and constrain therapeutic practice (Avdi and Georgaca, 2007). By doing this I aim to provide a reinterpretation of family that offers an alternative to the established psychotherapeutic discourses and generate quality theory that is also politically progressive (Burman, 1995). In this case, improving comfortability for separated parents around accessing family orientated treatments will be a step in the right direction for challenging stigmatic perceptions and offering opportunities for better co-parenting.

Tensions around understanding family

The current understanding of family in the United Kingdom is an alive and highly contested debate (Boddy, 2019; Morgan, 2019; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2019) that has previously shown the differences between an idealised institution of married parents and their biological children living

together to the actual “lived experiences of family” (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2012, p. 7). Even though there have been strong arguments made for the primary determinant of a family being constituted by social practices, fluid relationships and biographical storying between generations (Morgan, 2011), certain family types are still favoured, whilst others are stigmatised and disadvantaged through institutional inequality (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013). A division that is maintained by a political structure that affords an advantage to those who identify as heterosexual, middle class and white (Edwards *et al.*, 2012), leaving single parents, the welfare-dependent and minority groups being unfairly marginalised and systemically disadvantaged.

The latest UK government definition of a family further exemplifies the problematic assumptions that Morgan (2003) warns can occur when the term is simplistically and universally defined:

“A family is a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent, with at least one child, who live at the same address. Children may be dependent or non-dependent.” (ONS, 2019, p. 2)

Morgan’s premise is based on how various agendas can be serviced by whether the term ‘family’ is deployed as a noun, an action or a description. Within this context, the UK effectively gives family a generalised quality that endorses political discourses that use fixed criteria that compels the family into being a polarised good or bad construct (Boddy, 2019), based upon how well they fit into a politically idealised representation (Edwards *et al.*, 2012). Further tensions are found by considering how contemporary demographic changes mean that only a quarter (26%) (ONS, 2019) of UK families are now categorised under the traditional ‘nuclear’ criteria of a mixed-sex marriage with biological children living in the same home.

These societal changes in family configuration are not only the result of highly welcome progressions in areas such as second-wave feminism (Thorne and Yalom, 1992) but are also driven in some part by declining marriage rates and the dissolution of traditional family structures through increases in divorce and separation (ONS, 2020b). These separations can be understood as life

events that can initiate troubles in families and result in families becoming troubling (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013), as well as being seen by the state as contributing to the growing epidemic of mental health problems in UK children, further problematising the idea of parental irresponsibility and politicised ‘troubling family’ policy (Ribbens McCarthy, 2012):

“Children and young people are more likely to have poor mental health if they experience some form of adversity, such as living in poverty, parental separation or financial crisis, where there is a problem with the way their family functions or whose parents already have poor mental health.” (CAMHS, 2020)

There is also a tendency for this type of applied research to be overly interested in problematic families that are viable for intervention and provide motivation for developing theories that endorse therapeutic interventions with ‘bad families’ (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2019). This fuels further divisions between both academic and practice-based research, as well as leading to unhelpful assumptions about “What family lives should look like” (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2019, p. 8), potentially fetishizing the problematic family as a vehicle that is exploited as a showcase for theory curious practitioner-researchers. This is an academic approach that will inevitably further divide families into those that are moral and good, and those that fall short of expectations and become categorised as ‘troubling’ (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013).

Thesis Structure

This study is constructed of four key chapters which follow the chronological process that the research took. Chapter 1 is an extensive literature review that introduces several understandings of family, as well as explaining how cultural shifts are informing these notions. The ideas of how families negotiate membership is explored, along with a consideration of how parental separation can impact both understandings and organisation of re-formed families. The final section gives an overview of how separated families are viewed within family therapy.

Chapter 2 provides an account of the methodological approach taken throughout this study

and explains my application of a DA that draws from several proponents of the method who argue that discourse is used by individuals to socially represent themselves (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter *et al.*, 1993). This chapter also highlights the design of the research, decisions around recruitment and sampling, the processes of data collection and analysis, reflexivity and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3 presents the findings of the research and uses a combination of report style writing combined with interview material to illustrate how respondents represented their separation processes. This chapter is organised around a proposed model of family separation that offers insight into navigating separation in a series of stages that are accompanied by specific discourses. The final section presents a constructive critique of the model through the use of a detailed case study.

The final chapter is a discussion that situates my findings within the existing literature, addresses the implications of professional practice, considers directions for future enquiries and highlights strengths and limitations. This section is succeeded by a conclusion that discusses tensions inherent within the thesis, offers a reflexive discussion of decision making and emphasises contributions from the research.

Chapter 1 - Literature Review

Introduction

The following chapter provides a review of the literature focusing on family and the variety of different ways in which family membership is negotiated. A comprehensive understanding of family is crucial to help answer the research questions that explore definitions of family and to understand how the parental relationship informs family membership. I will begin by considering a historical perspective of what family is and document a shift in how the family has evolved into the contemporary setting. It will be argued that this shift may be thought of as a move from a traditional genetic and legal structure to a more complex social construction. This is followed by a critical analysis of how these three perspectives change how family membership is understood, alongside discussing how the tension between these worldviews creates a muddled social landscape. This literature will be contextualised by explaining the impact of parental conflict and then situated within the professional practice of family therapy.

What is a family?

Family is arguably a simple and highly familiar social concept, as we have nearly all experienced being part of one and can easily imagine how one looks (Levin and Trost, 1992). However, this consensus breaks down when individuals explain their own family. During this task, various types of people are listed, which include the usual genetic relations like biological parents, but can also include friends, stepfamily, ex-partners, pets and neighbours (Levin, 1999). In this respect, families are organised and evolve chronologically through interpersonal relations and life transitions, which makes a concrete and time-independent definition difficult (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990). Academic characterisations range from a basic construct of two or more people bonded by emotional affection, blood or law (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008), to complex positions that understand family as a social product:

“Today, a family may be viewed more broadly as a group of people with a past history, a present reality and a future expectation of interconnected mutually influencing relationships. Members often, but not necessarily, are bound together by heredity, legal marital ties, adoption or committed voluntary ties.” (Galvin *et al.*, 2015, p. 7)

Mid-20th century definitions of family espoused a “nucleocentric bias” (Galvin, 2006, p. 5), that was arranged around marriage and legislation, simply illustrated as a mother, father and children sharing a home (Murdock, 1949). This archetypal configuration has been termed the “nuclear family” (Bengtson, 2001, p. 1), and is based on a strongly embedded social norm of a mixed-sex, heterosexual couple with children (Bumpass, 1990). This traditional ideology is referred to as heteronormality, privileging heterosexuality, alongside promoting traditional gender roles of men as providers and women as caregivers (Oswald *et al.*, 2005). Within British culture this paradigm historically viewed typically feminised tasks such as domestic duties and childcare as invisible labour, leading to gender inequalities (Walkerdine, 1989). This is elaborated on by Thorne (1982), who believes that the dominant patriarchy glamorised the nuclear family to intentionally devalue female roles, domesticate women and maintain male authority. However, these ideas are becoming outmoded through the increased activism of sexual minorities (Allen and Demo, 1995), feminist movements (Allen and Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015) and rises in the cohabitation of non-related groups (Braithwaite *et al.*, 2010), with contemporary family scholars promoting diversity, inclusivity and equality (Galvin, 2006; Nelson, 2013; Turner and West, 2014; Coontz, 2015; Golombok, 2015; Moore, 2016b).

Importantly, family constructions are culturally specific and many alternative versions exist, especially within indigenous populations (Georgas *et al.*, 2006) and communal societies where polyamory is sometimes practised (Sear, 2016). These types of family function differently from popular westernised models, yet still contain core components of groups sharing labour, caregiving responsibilities and resources (Singh, 2009). Traits of a family that align with the early research of

Malinowski (1913), who studied early 20th-century aboriginal populations and proposed that these traits can be typically identified in groups that identify as family. His research is situated both chronologically and culturally, but central themes of collaboration and care are still recognisable within recent family models (Coontz, 2015).

Any definition of family is potentially problematic (Morgan, 2003), as discussions around 'the family' will inevitably create assumptions and tensions that limit the lived experiences of family life by creating frameworks of meaning around how individuals are collectively understood as a family (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013). However, as discussed in the [introductory chapter](#), this thesis is straddling disciplinary boundaries and is producing a clinical output that is relevant and applicable to working with separated parents. Therefore, a definition of family will be presented that acknowledges the tensions generated by doing this but is also sensitive to the sociological literature that furthers understanding of family life through appreciating the power, politics and meaning structures that surround discussions of family.

This thesis will define family by considering sociological ideas that argue that family is best understood through the idea of family practices. It is these practices that allow individuals to fluidly connect by 'doing family' through providing care, offering advice and fulfilling social gestures such as cooking a meal (Morgan, 2011). Furthermore, these practices are understood to shape family configurations through processes of affirmation and reconstruction (Morgan, 2019). Alongside these practices, all family configurations will experience changes in their composition, primarily through the chronological events such as birth, death and changes in relationships that occur during the natural course of familial life (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, by considering the parental separation as an ongoing event that initiates a change process within family compositions, the phenomena can be understood as a temporal sequence of events that are crucial to family life.

Further to the event of separation being a catalyst of change, separation is widely understood to be a source of both loss and psychological readjustment (Lebow, 2019b) and it is

helpful to view these changes as having the potential to become problematic, leading to separation as potentially constituting family troubles (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013). These troubles are engaged with by both the separated parents and the wider network that is drawn in to help respond to these troubles (Lebow, 2019a; Morgan, 2019). Ongoing interactions and events are continuously responded to and these responses can constitute family troubles, which in turn are responded to and serve to constitute and reconstitute family (Morgan, 2019). For example, each parent may mobilise other family members in a way that places them in alliance with themselves when meaning around the separation is publicly disclosed (Visser *et al.*, 2017; Lebow, 2019a). These interactions can then inform how family members collectively respond to ongoing troubles through unified performances as a way of affirming functionality and legitimacy (Finch, 2007).

With the state's position still rooted within a framework that privileges cohabitation and heteronormativity, it is important to widen the perspective of a family in this thesis, so that less typical structures are legitimised, especially when parents are separated and new members such as stepfamily occupy important positions (Papernow, 1993; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003b; Ganong and Coleman, 2016). I also want to hold a multifaceted representation of family that is relatable to clinical practice, considerate of the government position, sympathetic of public understandings and appreciative of progressive sociological viewpoints. Therefore, this thesis will understand family as constructed by actors sharing social perspectives, holding roles, taking part in family practices, responding to separation as family troubles and acting collectively to display a recognisable and working version of family (Hoffman, 1990; Finch, 2007; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013; Stratton, 2016; Morgan, 2019).

This construct also acknowledges the roles held by aunts, uncles, grandparents, stepparents, cousins, godparents and friends who make families function, as these members can be vital resources or even primary caregivers, especially within separated families (Kumar, 2017). Furthermore, by focussing on roles and social practices, my representation of family avoids being

constrained by the 'nucleocentric' stance of the UK government that devalues non-blood relations and non-residency parents. This means that a family members social contribution is privileged over how they are related and where they reside (Gamache, 1997; Ganong and Coleman, 2017).

To achieve this, I want to draw upon Floyd *et al.* (2006) who view family from various viewpoints and demonstrates a tension around how to reify family into a researchable commodity. They believe academics hold value bound positions that see family as it is, a unit legitimatised through law and genetics, and as it should be, a fluid construct of moral, political and social identities. The idea of looking through lenses that represent viewpoints also aligns with the way that family therapy understands family life being a living and dynamic construction of unique vantage points, subjective narratives, cultural scripts and interrelated facets of identity (White, 2007; Dallos and Draper, 2010; Burnham, 2011; Lebow, 2016; McNamee, 2017).

To accommodate these various positions, they introduce three types of lens to socially situate family. The first lens is a sociolegal one, using the law to establish familial ties through acts such as cohabitation, marriage and being officially recognised as parents, siblings or children. The second lens is biogenetic and effectively represents blood ties between members. The final lens privileges the roles performed, emphasising relationships between associates and the social positions held. Floyd *et al.* (2006) believe that a person can be considered family if they meet the criteria of any one of these lenses and that some concepts such as marriage occupy multiple perspectives, as it can be a role and a legal entity.

This model is both versatile and inclusive, as it accounts for the traditional family components such as procreation, cohabitation and marriage. Yet, it also allows non-nuclear families to be legitimised through their relationships, practices and talk, recognising members who are not related by blood or law as "voluntary kin" (Braithwaite *et al.*, 2010, p. 390). As a family therapist, I feel that the role lens is most important, as this is where portrayals of family such as belonging (Ribbens McCarthy, 2012) and family practices (Morgan, 2011) are best represented. This compares

to the sociolegal and biogenetic lenses that are more aligned to the outdated nucleocentric ideas that have previously stigmatised less traditional families (Bittman and Pixley, 1997). Floyd's model also provides an interesting take on family membership by accounting for more complicated configurations. For example, an absent father could be a legal parent and a genetic donor to a young child. He would therefore be considered a family member according to the biogenetic and sociolegal lenses. However, if we consider him through the role lens, he may be excluded from the system as he is not active in the actual practice of being family. Accordingly, Fitzpatrick and Caughlin (2002) argue that to be considered a family member, the performed role must be mutually recognised by the actors involved. This is useful, as even though a genetic bond cannot be undone, it is this negotiable role that allows family structures to adapt to personal circumstances.

One concept which encapsulates what family is and allows all three lenses to be integrated is that family is about being a part of something, or put simply "togetherness" (Ribbens McCarthy, 2012, p. 68). This is a fairly abstract idea but decants family into a socially constructed bonding experience that starts from being held as infants into a feeling of belonging to other people and forming attachments to ensure survival (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). This sense of belonging, coupled with the notion of family as a social performance is powerfully summarised by one author:

"We offer a view of family as a socially constructed object, a product of decidedly public actions and interactions." (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990, p. 12).

Challenges to nuclear thinking

When working professionally with a variety of families, I found the majority of these do not meet the criteria to be defined as nuclear. Many were unmarried and share homes with parents, non-fictive kin or siblings, as well as having children who transition between residences due to parental separation or communal caregiving. This observation alongside increases in queer lifestyles and multiculturalism means that traditionally normative markers of family such as heterosexualism, homogeneity, one residence and biological childbearing are slowly losing relevance (Allen, 2000).

Consequently, as a response to their non-nuclear compositions, these families will adopt a socially constructed identity (Holland and Edwards, 2014). At present, families of married couples sharing a home with dependent children account for only 26% of total UK families (ONS, 2019). Therefore, nuclear families are declining and have been described as an antiquated phenomenon in a postmodern era (Coontz, 2015; Moore, 2016a).

Even though progressive academia acknowledges family as a social product (Haldeman, 2012; Nelson, 2013; Coontz, 2015; Golombok, 2015; Kumar, 2017), layperson's views, media and society regularly promote the nuclear family as normative (Weigel, 2008; Turner and West, 2014). It is this conundrum that this thesis is conceptualised upon, as trends such as fewer marriages, lone parenting and family reconstitution (Coontz, 2015) means the perceived supremacy of the nuclear family is both problematic and illusionary. I argue that if the social construction of family continues in this direction, fundamental assumptions around defining family must occur, as many people are not accurately portrayed under the traditional family worldview. Within my practice, I often see separated families whose identity is confused, as they attempt to conform to an unrepresentative nuclear philosophy. In real terms, these families often describe themselves as 'unsuccessful', 'broken' 'not normal' and 'dysfunctional' because they are failing to meet unrealistic standards.

This divergence of contemporary families from normative ideology has created a tangled mess that needs further research to clarify and broaden the concept of family, alongside alleviating the shame of family breakdown (Moore, 2016a). This could be considered akin to a paradigmatic shift in science that occurs when contradictory evidence makes current theory untenable (Kuhn, 1970). It is vital to understand how separated families are struggling with being defined as non-nuclear, yet still adhere to heteronormativity, hence the research question asking how each family uses talk to make sense of this. The following discussion considers challenges to the nuclear model and the rise of discourse as an alternative method of displaying family.

Chamberlain (1999) considered how 20th-century immigration into the UK altered family

narratives by showing that when Caribbean workers migrated to Britain, family structures and values were also imported. The introduction of novel configurations offers indigenous populations access to alternative discourses by challenging the patriarchal bread-winning and promoting multigenerational residences. For example, many families of Caribbean extraction are headed by women, with numerous generations living together and several adult earners (Safa, 1995).

Rapp (1982), contextualises this within the Western world by stating that home is about the social relationships between people or 'kinship', and is not exclusive to two generations living in a house. She believes that by making home and family interchangeable terms, the social constructionists are attempting to alleviate tension between themselves and those who champion outmoded arguments. This appears to be an effort to allow all social constructions of family to co-exist and to accommodate the transition from traditional to progressive viewpoints, as trying to disband such established concepts would likely meet stoic resistance (Gamache, 1997). It must also be noted that even though this thesis argues for role based social constructions of family, nuclear configurations are still the dominant ideal within the contemporary social context (Golombok, 2015).

Furthermore, changes within medicine, economics and lifestyle mean that families are increasingly encouraged to deviate from the traditional two generational setup (Bengtson, 2001). Within my practice I have noticed that many working parents rely on extended family to care for infants and manage school commitments. This assertion is well illustrated with many UK grandparents acting as co-parents for children who prioritise careers, parent alone or cannot cope independently (Hunt, 2018). Parents have also highlighted how this setup alleviates the economic pressures of professional childcare (Rutter and Stocker, 2014) and helps meet rising housing costs (Clapham *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, a multi-generational living environment may be a pragmatic choice that allows parents who feel economically or culturally pressured, an opportunity to work (Masterson and Hoobler, 2015). These changes also question heteronormative practices by removing the burden of primary care from mothers and actively promoting gender equality

(Goldscheider *et al.*, 2015).

To accommodate this move from previous worldviews, family self-identification is now argued as the major determinant for family validity (Huisman, 2014), with talk integrating individual perspectives into a shared, relational and discursive construct of family (Martins *et al.*, 2014). By presenting the agreed roles of members through language rather than objective criteria, extended members and the wider social community become part of a family (Trost, 1990). These extraneous members are usually recruited during times of crisis or uncertainty to alleviate tensions within the established system (Imber-Black, 2004). Although 'fictive', 'voluntary' and 'non-resident' kin (Ebaugh and Curry, 2000; Braithwaite *et al.*, 2010; Hunt, 2018) have always been present (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990), they were previously seen as a separate support network, rather than being included within family nuclei (Nelson, 2013).

Perhaps the single biggest challenge to the nuclear paradigm is the increase in relationship breakdown and the resultant blended families (Moore, 2016b). Blended units are defined as a reconstitution of separated individuals, often including children from past relationships who reside or have contact with a parent (Gonzales, 2009). UK statistics have shown that family dissolution has risen by around 8% in the last decade and 2016 saw approximately 130,000 families separate. To place this in context there are around 7,960,000 families in the UK with dependent children (ONS, 2017).

It is worth noting that compared to nuclear families, blended systems often appear visually unrelated (Galvin, 2006). A cohesive visual appearance is important, as it creates an easily recognisable image that others can quickly classify as a family (Finch, 2007). Therefore, when a family is removed from the nuclear ideal of a heterosexual couple with shared ethnic and cultural features, they compensate with discourses that bind members together by co-constructing roles, values and obligations (Huisman, 2014). These public disclosures of private information, such as the nature of intimate relationships can be viewed as bids for cultural legitimacy due to not appearing

'normal' (Vangelisti and Caughlin, 1997). Increased dependence on socially constructed types of family highlights a need to research how individuals use talk to describe and legitimise their family, especially when separation forces reorganisation of structure and identity (Amato, 2010). It also makes sense of blended families often wanting to perform as nuclear and publicly passing as 'normal' (Moore, 2012). The processes of naming, labelling and ritualising will be explored later in this chapter to demonstrate how the nuclear model exerts pressure on all types of family to conform to normativity. In some respects, whether a family attempts to look or act the same, they are attempting to be socially accepted and avoid stigmatisation that is perpetuated by established social norms. This social performance can be conceptualised as 'passing', a term that marginalised communities use when successfully undetected by the majority (Goffman, 1963).

As previously introduced, increases in queer families are repositioning gender and sexuality away from concrete constructs and onto moveable continuums (Moon, 2008), creating fluid identities and relationships that are not restricted by rigid binary labels (Lehr, 1999). This has started a positive movement away from the heteronormative hegemony that dominated the era of the nuclear family (Moore, 2016b), resulting in the legislation of civil partnerships in 2004 and encouraging alternative families to raise children (Oswald *et al.*, 2005). However, like blended units, normative stigmatisation forces many queer families to deliver more discourses about being family (Weston, 1997). This has been attributed to disapproval from religion, community, family of origin and social networks that challenges their identity as 'proper' families (Suter *et al.*, 2008). In response, many queer families join surnames to announce togetherness, or replace them with completely new ones as a protest against societal judgement or ostracisation (Suter and Oswald, 2003).

It would appear that as long as the heteronormative ideology prevails, alternative families will be pressured into adopting nuclear traits to validate their right to have children and appear socially acceptable, at a cost of sacrificing their own values (Valentine *et al.*, 2003). This is well

illustrated by same sex parents adapting names within their partnerships, recognising the genetic donor as 'mum' or 'dad', but demoting the non-genetic parent by using their forename (Suter and Oswald, 2003). When a genetic surrogate is used, the couple will often use a person who will pass on similar physical traits to prevent accusations of the child not belonging to its parents (Suter *et al.*, 2008). In gay male couples, sometimes both will contribute sperm to make equal claim to the child, but ultimately making one parent aesthetically dissimilar (Berkowitz and Marsiglio, 2007). Even with these compensatory measures, same sex families feel a need to explain their composition, especially when contraventions to Western and heteronormative biases occur, for example a child defending that they live with two mothers (Lynch, 2000). This suggests that when a family deviates from a 'normal' family template, they are positioned as substandard and forced into active legitimisation.

So far, this chapter has introduced the nuclear and socially constructed family models, as well as exploring how societal change influences these structures. An argument for social constructionism has been presented with reference to a trio of situating lenses, proposing the role lens as the most progressive and relevant perspective. Cultural migration, feminist and queer empowerment were considered regarding family formation, alongside how these movements shift the dominant heteronormative ideology towards a self-defined and discourse dependent model. The next section will address how nucleocentric philosophy persists within UK culture, despite the increase of non-nuclear families. Afterwards, a discussion will consider how family membership is organised around practices, rituals and language.

[Why is it so hard to leave the nuclear family behind?](#)

Even though the rapidly changing social landscape of modern families (Popenoe, 1993; Bengtson, 2001) indicates a movement away from the traditional two parents and children unit, the model is resiliently idealised (Gamache, 1997) and is a culturally privileged discourse (Singh, 2009). This bias even influences some non-nuclear units to masquerade with heteronormative components such as

gender role relationships, cultural homogeneity and biological children (Ganong and Coleman, 2017).

One persuasive argument for the dominance of the nuclear family is that during the previous century this model was so strongly supported by patriarchal institutions, that it was effectively embedded as a required social norm (Coontz, 2000). It also seems that even though the separated family is no longer strictly nuclear, there is a tendency to retain normative markers to maintain legitimacy (Golombok, 2015). Effectively situating the nuclear family as a fusion of utterances that when viewed together create a highly recognisable cultural entity (Polkinghorne, 1988) that becomes so well ingrained into society that it becomes linguistically unchallenged (Foucault, 1980) and perceived as lacking viable alternatives (Pease and Fook, 1999).

With such strong religious, cultural and societal roots, the nuclear legacy has transcended from just being culturally fashionable to becoming mythologically enshrined (Gillis, 1997). Mythologised concepts are described by Bittman and Pixley (1997) as being impervious to progressive thinking, evidential challenge and shrouded in romantic nostalgia. Luhmann (1979) argues this is due to the holding of normative expectations, where psychological change resists empirical interrogation. This was described earlier as the mess that occurs as the non-nuclear majority are pressured to conform to nuclear standards (Turner and West, 2014; Golombok, 2015; Moore, 2016a). Consequently, factual evidence has failed to significantly alter these longstanding discourses (Bittman and Pixley, 1997; Golombok, 2015; Moore, 2016a), causing the present to be rooted in the past and restricting the future (Gillis, 1997). The real-world implication is a reversion to traditionalist gender roles and the perseverance of dated attitudes to sexuality, separation, gender and multiculturalism (Oswald *et al.*, 2005; Hudak and Giammattei, 2010).

Another perspective claims resistance is due to the non-nuclear family being portrayed as “broken” (Moore, 2016b, p. 56) and negatively stereotyped by media and political institutions as dysfunctional, undesirable and unsuccessful (Leon and Angst, 2005; Salter, 2018). The majority of

stories about these families focus upon absent fathers, welfare dependency and social disorder (Valiquette-Tessier *et al.*, 2016), with a tendency to glamorise narratives of moral bankruptcy, destitution and trouble (Popenoe, 1993; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003a). In comparison, the nuclear model is typically portrayed as together, successful, decent and socially productive (Stacey, 1996; Weigel, 2008; Coontz, 2015).

This nostalgic fantasy can often be seen when the contemporary family is portrayed within the UK advertising industry (Ramsey, 2016; Hodge and Tollett, 2017; Shelmerdine, 2017; Hodge and Tollett, 2018). These campaigns promoted their products by eliciting feelings of home, fun and togetherness in the form of highly accessible food rituals that epitomise 'quality family time' (Wolin and Bennett, 1984; Whiteside, 1989; Gillis, 1997). Interestingly, they varied greatly in the types of family they depicted, with McCain (Hodge and Tollett, 2017; Hodge and Tollett, 2018) choosing a self-defined version that included same-sex couples, single parents and multicultural units. Similarly, Tesco (Shelmerdine, 2017) celebrated Christmas by diversifying their version of family with a non-white Muslim group. However, Oxo (Ramsey, 2016), resisted this with a cliché of the nuclear family who was white, related and heterosexual. With numerous constructions of family represented, the public demonstrated an inability to let go of the nuclear myth when record numbers of complaints were received about the more unorthodox adverts, boycotting Tesco and forcing McCain to remove their gay fathers (Belam, 2017; Srivastav, 2017).

This public outrage aligns with the previous notion that highlights the robustness of the nuclear paradigm and suggests that institutional disapproval towards alternative families could compel them to conform to normative ideals. This pressure is further compounded by the non-nuclear stigma that has been shown to lead to poverty and reduced access to public healthcare (Culliney *et al.*, 2014). By maintaining the marginalisation of alternative forms of family, societal and interpersonal tensions may exacerbate further breakdown and result in increased stereotyping, contributing to the higher rates of mental health problems recorded in queer, adoptive, blended and

lone-parent systems (Culliney *et al.*, 2014). Ironically, even though these families have greater demands for social services, the prevalence of pejorative attitudes mean they often experience unequal provision (Irvin *et al.*, 2018).

A critical perspective is that although the nuclear model is flawed, especially in restricting diversity and eliminating female agency (Coontz, 2015), it does provide an accessible template to how families should operate (Weigel, 2008). The role-based family appears to be less patriarchal and more inclusive, but it may be perceived as an ambiguous concept that is difficult to understand. It may also take time for society to assimilate the gender role changes of men taking greater responsibility for children, and women making progress towards educational and workplace equality (Oláh *et al.*, 2015). Subsequently, many families I work with voice that the consequences of leaving the historical nuclear roles of homemaking women and working men are mothers feeling guilty about leaving their children and men suffering a masculine identity crisis (Fortin, 2005).

This raises questions about whether the decline of the nuclear family is a major factor in the rising separation rates (DeRose *et al.*, 2017), a trend that could also be responsible for role confusion, vocational crisis, toxic masculinity and family dysfunction (Coontz, 2015). There is also a degree of catching up to do in relation to how non-nuclear families distribute duty and obligation, as expectations between biological kin are better understood than those of the blended family (Coleman *et al.*, 2000; Kumar, 2017). These enquiries are relevant to this thesis to ascertain how separated families make sense of being forced out of the nuclear paradigm, alongside understanding if unyielding normativity is forcing families to conform to an ill-fitting nuclear framework.

How do families construct membership?

Previous sections have argued for a version of family that is socially constructed, fluid, non-heteronormative and no longer just conceptualised through biology and home-sharing. As a result, the process of how family membership is negotiated becomes more complex than the preceding paradigm that typically conferred affiliation according to genetics and law (Levin, 1999). To explore

this and provide a foundation for family being better understood as role-based, the following section will highlight how family practices are enacted through storytelling, ritualisation, naming conventions and claiming. These practices rely heavily on talk and make a robust case for the methodological approach of this thesis, which is seeking to understand how separated parents self-define family with talk. Importantly, these practices establish roles and membership-based upon the quality of interpersonal relationships and the outcome of critical events (Levin and Trost, 1992).

The most notable events are when members are either quickly recruited or dismissed, usually triggered by episodes such as meeting new partners, birth, separation, death and criminality (Minow, 1991). The idea of events organising family life is effectively described by McGoldrick and Carter (1999) within their family life cycle. They argue that horizontal stressors of planned and unplanned transitions such as marriage, cohabitation, illness and childbirth influence how members communicate and relate. The consequences of these events and how a family restructures itself afterwards is mediated by vertical stressors such as disability, family secrets, access to employment and discrimination that uniquely situates members within their immediate family, wider community and larger society.

In terms of family literature, the family life cycle is still organised around the nuclear model, but also incorporates ideas of non-genetic members being legitimised by their role in the family. This symbolises a turning point within the literature where established thinking began to be challenged by more progressive ideas (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990; Popenoe, 1993; Stacey, 1996; Coontz, 2000). Interestingly, this shift coincides with increased numbers of blended and queer families weakening the prevalence of heteronormative relationship ideals (Oswald *et al.*, 2005; Golombok, 2015). From preceding discussions, one potential conclusion is that changes in demographics and attitudes have questioned the classical nuclear model and made inroads into developing a hybrid model that incorporates self-defined social roles within a familiar nuclear framework. However, Kumar (2017) has highlighted some of the challenges of conceptualising

family in this way by noting that families struggle to clarify roles and emphasising the complexity of negotiating harmony between non-genetic members. Enquiring further, this thesis seeks to ascertain that within separated families, does the quality of the parental relationship influence whether a singular system is retained, or are multiple systems crudely forced to interact whilst orientating themselves around a core of outmoded expectations?

For families which are defined more by role-based discourses over traditional representations, constant communication is required between associates to clarify who has membership rights (Galvin, 2006). One way that discourse is used to socially situate family is through narrating relationships with stories of getting acquainted, sharing life events and having joint experiences of characters and plots (Sternberg, 1995). This supports the position of this thesis by illustrating that as a family drifts away from traditional signifiers, role discourses and practices are increasingly employed to illustrate membership (Finch, 2007). This storying of being a family is even more important within alternative structures, an example being where children are adopted, and formal initiation compensates for the lack of automatic membership assigned by biological childbirth. Therefore, “entrance stories” (Krusiewicz and Wood, 2001, p. 786) are communicated to affirm the children as legitimate members. How tales are told can dramatically alter how the child’s membership is interpreted, and are ideally positive accounts of wanting the child, conversely, a pitiful account can isolate, other and reject the child (Baxter *et al.*, 2014).

Similarly, all families have to work at creating shared family practices (Huisman, 2014), especially in blended structures that suddenly bring together competing family cultures (Papernow, 1993; Kumar, 2017). One form of integration occurs by establishing rituals that actively enact being family (Minow, 1991), and can be organised into three typologies based on their contribution to the group identity (Wolin and Bennett, 1984). The most important of these are culturally significant celebrations such as Christmas or marriage. The next category is traditions of personal family culture, taking the form of shared activities, such as the weekend and holidays. Daily, informal and

routine rituals are known as family interactions, examples being events such as bed and mealtimes. Participation allows a uniquely shared identity to be established, and when members are included in these ceremonies, they can be described as undergoing formal initiation:

“Rituals stabilize this identity throughout family life by clarifying expected roles, delineating boundaries within and without the family, and defining rules so that all members know that this is the way our family is.” (Wolin and Bennett, 1984, p. 401)

Once rituals become embedded, they allow a regular review of membership, but also provide ample opportunity for conflict (Whiteside, 1989). This can occur when a disagreement arises around the ritual selection, with blended families often running multiple sets of competing rituals (Braithwaite *et al.*, 1998). When successful integration occurs, ritual performance will become an ongoing process where older procedures merge and new ones are collaboratively engineered. When this is not possible, for example in big celebrations such as Christmas (that may be religiously incompatible), rituals may be alternated or practised simultaneously (Braithwaite *et al.*, 1998). Regarding the research question on membership allocation, my clinical experience is that separated families often symbolically use rituals to determine current membership. For example, conflictual ex-partners may publicise that they do not see each other as family members by making children celebrate important events multiple times. This can be problematic as certain ‘onetime’ celebrations such as marriage cannot be replicated, creating hostility and forcing children to choose one family over the other (Amato *et al.*, 2011; Gürmen *et al.*, 2017).

A further purpose of weaving stories and rituals into family narratives is to allow access to certain societal groups (Langellier, 2002), providing external support and presenting family as acceptable, moral, self-sufficient and cohesive (Huisman, 2014). In some respects, this ritualisation of stories appears to be a compensatory measure to legitimise the postmodern family when the nuclear model becomes an unachievable standard, especially when parents part. It may also be an attempt to avoid the previously explored bias that can perceive the nuclear family as more functional (Hetherington, 1999).

This idea of the nuclear family being more successful has been subject to some serious debunking attempts. Seminal research by Anderson and White (1986) argued that conflict, hostile coalitions and poor communication are equally maladaptive in both nuclear and blended systems. My own clinical experience and current research propose that inter-parental conflict is always detrimental (Reynolds *et al.*, 2014; Knopp *et al.*, 2017; Harold and Sellers, 2018), and that positively functioning parents will produce more emotionally secure children (Gottman, 1993; Cummings and Davies, 2002; Ahrons, 2007a; Amato *et al.*, 2011). Similar findings have been observed within a variety of parental configurations, including intimate partners (Brock and Kochanska, 2016), parted parents (Goldberg and Carlson, 2015) and blended systems (Sands *et al.*, 2017). This idea that any parental conflict is dysfunctional helps dispel the popular myth that unhappy relationships are tolerable, en-proviso that the family stay together for the children (Hetherington, 1999). This also provides a rationale to explore how family structures are organised by parental conflict, to determine if intense conflict leads to membership rights being withdrawn.

Membership can be a difficult process for children to comprehend within blended families, as traditional nucleocentric discourses can influence how life transitions such as a parent leaving home or new siblings are experienced (Trost, 1990). Possible evidence of nuclear bias has been observed in some children when they struggle to conceptualise a childless couple as a family (Finch and Mason, 1993). An alternative and developmental explanation are that children have an egocentric view of the world, and defining a family without children is difficult for them to imagine (Royzman *et al.*, 2003). Further research suggests that if individuals experience separation discourses during childhood, they recognise blended and less typical configurations of family more easily than those who have not had exposure (Schmeeckle *et al.*, 2006). This seems to support the notion that the more discourses one witnesses, the broader the concept of family becomes (Finch, 2007).

Traditionally, one way of quickly conveying group membership is through the sharing of a surname (Finch, 2008a), a practice that actively supports the legal and genetic components of the nuclear model. Although, reconstituted units and family as a social product mean that this patriarchist practice of fathers passing on names is declining (Mason and Tipper, 2008), many families feel more complete when sharing names (Finch, 2008a). It has also been observed that when parents have different surnames, young children report confusion around family identity (Davies, 2011).

Attempting to resolve this, Finch (2008a) believes that it is the intimate terms such as 'mum' used within a family that are central, as they give individuals uniqueness, allow interpersonal connectivity and establish hierarchy. She stresses that blended families can have different surnames and are spread over households, making the assignment of endearment terms more relevant than name sharing. Therefore, this thesis is interested in how the blended family uses surnames and intimate labelling to show ownership of children and to differentiate family systems. I have often experienced separated parents legally changing surnames of family members to demonstrate closeness of blended units, or to distance themselves from acrimonious ex-partners.

My position is more in line with progressive literature (Fine *et al.*, 1998; Finch, 2008a) that advocates membership is dictated by how relational roles such as mother or daughter are socially assigned, rather than being unconditionally inherited through law or genetics. This is epitomised in Marsiglio's sentiment about how some stepfathers are actively promoted as fathers; "Men who act in a fatherly way towards other men's children" (Marsiglio, 2004, p. 22). He supports this position by suggesting the use of affectionate terms towards stepparents such as 'dad' signifies relational intimacy. However, normative expectations force some stepparents into adopting alternative labels such as 'pop' to demarcate the relationships of biological and stepchildren. This may also be due to uncertainty around how they should be identified, and the fear of being seen as an imposter within a sacred 'nuclear role' (Galvin, 2006).

To provide a tangible description of the primary family roles, it is worth briefly defining what is meant by a mother and father, as based on the presented arguments a biological contribution will not be enough. Mothers have been explained as embarking upon an instinctive process of bodily change in pregnancy, as well as innately engaging in caretaking and nurturing behaviour that can be viewed as protectively maternal. This relationship of embodiment and behaviour is a delineation that one author proposes separates becoming a mother and being maternalistic (Mercer, 2004). In contrast, a father's role has been described as more of a culturally situated position of performing a variety of context dependent characters:

“Instead, they recognize that fathers play a number of significant roles—companions, care providers, spouses, protectors, models, moral guides, teachers, breadwinners—whose relative importance varies across historical epochs and sub-cultural groups.”

(Lamb, 2010, p. 3)

Stepfamilies will often have to negotiate when they officially acknowledge each other as members, as cohabitation or a parent's latest romantic tryst does not automatically confer family bonds (Sweeney, 2010). It is also proposed that the quality of the relationship between members affirms or denies ties (Schmeeckle *et al.*, 2006). Good quality relationships are characterised by having fun, holding others interests as important, establishing availability and 'belonging' (King *et al.*, 2015b). This links into the previous ideas of practising being a family, and allows relationships to be judged upon interaction success and perceived quality of care (Schmeeckle *et al.*, 2006). It also supports the notion that if separated parents have few or poor interactions, family membership can be withdrawn as punishment (Visser *et al.*, 2017).

There is an idea that stepparents can use the role lens to claim children as their own by acting as competent parents and engaging in a successful relationship with the child's primary carer (Marsiglio, 2004). Alternatively, a traditionalist would argue that if the stepparent is cohabiting or in a relationship with the primary carer, they become legitimised through the sociolegal lens. Does this ambiguity typify the confusion generated by tensions between nuclear and alternative models of

family, as well as questioning whether new partners are automatically considered stepparents?

Taking the role-based perspective, a stepparent should actively perform a role to the existing family members, although this activity could be interpreted in many ways and could range from just sharing physical space to being a full-time parent. Interestingly, recent research on the reverse phenomena has uncovered how children can claim the stepparent through “kin construction” (Ganong *et al.*, 2017, p. 17). They do however highlight differences in claiming, such as children having loyalty to other parents, lack of motivation (they do not choose the stepparent, it is forced by their parent’s partner choice) and how western culture idealises only having two legitimate parents.

Fortunately, role-based family forms do not restrict a family to having one father, and due to increases in blended units, it is estimated that over a third of children will experience living with a stepfather (King *et al.*, 2015a). Once again, a discrepancy is seen between the traditional view which sanctifies two biological parents and progressive thinking which encourages collaborative parenting and shared fatherly roles (Ganong and Coleman, 2017). Research by Hofferth and Anderson (2003) shows a movement away from having a singular father by demonstrating that a relationship with a biological father does not minimise the stepfather’s input. Ironically, White and Gilbreth (2001) argue that two cooperative fathers can improve child wellbeing and facilitate positive contact with the non-resident father.

Heteronormative thinking could be reinforced by considering how negative media portrayals of stepparenting creates resistance within children (Claxton-Oldfield and Butler, 1998). Pervasive discourses conjure folklore of wicked stepmothers and cruel stepfathers who threaten existing relationships (Claxton-Oldfield, 2000; DeGreeff and Platt, 2016). The claiming processes do overlap and family members are accepted if they enhance psychological well-being (Nelson, 2013). As this research is looking at how an individual organises their family, it is worth noting that this will be their subjective version at that moment in time. Other members in the system may not agree with their membership allocations, and their own structure may change as relationships naturally fluctuate.

This means that constant talk and practice is vital to helping families operate as an organic system and to clarify who is currently considered family.

The discussion so far raises questions as to whether blended families see multiple parents as having exclusive or shared responsibility. Previous research has shown how when ex-partners have positive relationships, their parenting roles are fluid and negotiated by requirement, with the parenting role becoming activated when the child is in proximity (King *et al.*, 2015a). Conflictual parents may be less generous and could be territorial, with biological claims being favoured over actual roles performed (White and Gilbreth, 2001). During my clinical work, I have experienced several estranged fathers announcing that they are the child's 'real dad', which questions if parental hostility makes important positions sacred and occupiable by only one person. Therefore, how intimate naming is decided and how it is moderated by conflict will be an interesting avenue for exploration, especially for roles that are in competition.

This section described how family membership is organised and suggested how roles are dynamically allocated to allow parents, stepfamily, children and others to be considered family. These positions are not unconditional and can be changed based on relationship quality and life events. To effectively construct family, language and practices create a shared social world of rituals, stories and nuanced family culture. Problems around how idealised heteronormativity clashes with the reality of actual family composition were also emphasised. The next part of this chapter will look more closely at how language is used to assign membership rights and roles. It will also highlight that by analysing a parent's available discourses, a useful social representation of their family can be discovered, as well as how the quality of the parental relationship influences these discourses. To contextualise this, a section on parental conflict will be included.

How does language present family to the social world?

As it has been proposed that family is self-defined through language, what sort of talk is used to either affirm or deny membership of family configurations and how can a DA collect, analyse and

draw conclusions from what is said? One idea previously explored in stepfamilies is when a child or parent begins to use intimate labelling (Galvin, 2006). The use of the endearment term 'dad' or 'mum' will often be used by the child to announce affinity with a stepparent or to experiment with the effects of assigning affectionate terms (Marsiglio, 2004). Biological children will also interchange names to express their feelings towards other members. It is commonplace to see children switch to using their parent's formal names to illustrate they are upset, or as a threat to downgrade their membership rights (Baxter *et al.*, 2004). When a stepchild consistently uses these endearment labels, it is argued that the parent has been formally accepted (Ganong *et al.*, 2017).

Correspondingly, invested stepparents can refer to non-related children as their own, or make statements about how they see no difference between biological and stepchildren (Ganong and Coleman, 2017).

Conversely, when a family is exhibiting dysfunction, such as when children refuse to legitimise a stepparent, they can disown the adult through behavioural opposition and aggressive declarations such as 'You are not my dad!' (King *et al.*, 2015b). These are powerful enactments of individuals assigning or withdrawing membership, demonstrating how dynamic, multifaceted and potentially destabilising the role lens can be. Thinking back to the ideas of claiming family members, it is easy to imagine an angry child denouncing a parental figure, whilst at the same time the parent still considers the child family. This highlights the complexity of the membership process, as if the self-defined model is accepted then the child is cutting ties with the parent until they say otherwise. Whereas, considering a more systemic approach, it may be more useful to look at the relationship trajectory over a longer period and reflect on both member's positions. In this respect the parent would still see themselves as providing a role to the child and family life would still be operating, albeit with some resistance. This situation would effectively have two competing but equally valid positions.

This triggers an enquiry that relates back to the nuclear family being so persistent, as even

though an argument has been made for a role-based family structure, is the transient nature of the role contributing to the mess of what is a family? Nuclear membership criteria could be argued to be conceptually straightforward with inherent stability from genetic bonds, whereas social roles may be blurry, changeable and risk being withdrawn if relationships malfunction. This quandary could explain why people are so attached to the modest notion of mum, dad and children living in one home, as it offers simplicity and security that the role-based system lacks, and may explain that as families diverge from normative expectations they can struggle to explain themselves (Levin and Trost, 1992).

It is also common within blended families for existing children to be positioned differently from the reconstituted couple's new offspring (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003a). This can leave them marginalised and vulnerable to rejection, criticism and disowning (Ginther and Pollak, 2004), illustrating again how precarious role reliant family membership can be. One author proposes that when interactions develop a consistency that either accepts or opposes a family members legitimacy, the situation can be described as a "turning point" (Baxter *et al.*, 1999, p. 292). These pivotal moments often occur within the first four years of the blended family life-cycle and are described by Papernow (1993) in his seven stage developmental model as commonly occurring at the fourth stage of mobilisation. This phase is characterised by high levels of conflict as members negotiate difficult dynamics and allegiances, and it is at this point members must reach a consensus on who has familial membership (Papernow, 1993).

Interestingly, another author writes that the blended family begins to mimic nuclear setups with traditional rituals such as marriage contributing to the sense of "feeling like a family" (Nuru and Wang, 2014, p. 160). It has also been shown that when families feel cohesiveness, they self-identify through positive descriptions: home, togetherness, we-ness, belonging, kinship, oneness etc. (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990; Minow, 1991; Vangelisti *et al.*, 1999; Bengtson, 2001; Finch, 2007; Ribbens McCarthy, 2012; Huisman, 2014). This raises the question, as blended units establish

themselves, do normative discourses revert family to a nuclear configuration, and is language used to emulate nuclear family stability?

Importantly, Nuru and Wang (2014) also describe group discrepancy when negotiating membership of a hypothetical stepfather, who is accepted by some members before others. In this case, the mother acknowledges his membership with romantic cohabitation. However, the children embark on a lengthier process, with different criteria requiring negotiation to achieve reciprocal claiming (Marsiglio, 2004; Ganong *et al.*, 2017). Considering the earlier conundrum where parent and child were at odds, these group conversations are crucial to facilitate a co-created view of family; the central premise of many prominent proponents of the socially constructed model (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990; Finch and Mason, 1993; Stacey, 1996; Coontz, 2000; Bengtson, 2001; Braithwaite *et al.*, 2010).

The use of language can also be applied to include fictive kin as family and to exclude unwanted biological members (Braithwaite *et al.*, 2010). This dynamic mechanism encourages families to employ discourses to describe both themselves and the frameworks of relationships within (Bourdieu, 1996). Drew and Holt (1988) suggest that one way of explicitly situating an individual is by using idioms, direct and figurative statements that often enact strong emotions through stereotypes. Idioms have also been described as being based upon assumed common sense, a means of ending a conversation, vague to the point of being difficult to dispute and resistant to contradiction (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2000).

Within my family practice, one commonly used idiom is that that 'blood is thicker than water', a phrase implying loyalty is paramount amongst biological kin, and that non-genetic relations are disposable (Neyer and Lang, 2003). This particular idiom privileges the nuclear family and omits membership to fictive kin, aligning with the idea that when under stress, blood ties are favoured through a form of genetic nepotism (Neyer and Lang, 2003). A contrary idiom such as 'he is like a brother' appoints elevated status to fictive kin and can demote biological siblings (Galvin and

Braithwaite, 2014). Accepting statements such as 'part of the family' can assign equal membership rights to both fictive and non-fictive kin (Nelson, 2013). In comparison, an aggressive statement like 'they are dead to me' infers pariahdom and effectively withdraws previous membership by figuratively slaying the unwanted individual (Williams, 1997).

With language being used by family members to subjectively position each other (Butler, 1993), this thesis can apply this to understand how separated parents assign membership after relationships end. As when parents separate, they typically move away from the nuclear model of home-sharing and legal ties to a relational model that relies on communication and compromise (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003a). It is worth noting that even parents who have had no further intimacy post conception can find themselves managing a parenting relationship (Sobolewski and King, 2005). The type of talk that is generated after the separation will effectively reconfigure family membership rights (Finch, 2007) by establishing collaborative partnerships or aggressive standoffs (Amato and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). It is these types of conversations that this thesis wants harvest and relate to levels of parental conflict. The objective being to help understand if conflict intensity accesses discourses that grant or deny family membership to ex-partners, potentially fashioning one socially constructed family or creating independent systems that can choose to co-operate or conflict.

Defining parental conflict

This section will introduce how conflict occurs between couples and ex-partners. Reasons and influencing factors will be considered, alongside how disputes vary in magnitude and function. A model of conflict intensity by Weeks and Treat (2001) will be used to clarify how conflict will be operationalised within this thesis, as well as how easily arguments can continue post-separation. This section is important to this thesis as I will use a screening survey (Ahrns, 2007a) to identify people who have relationships with ex-partners that vary in conflict. This is to ensure a variety of discourses are uncovered and that associations between conflict and family membership can be

explored.

Comprehensively defining conflict is somewhat difficult, as its presentation and underlying dynamics are widely debated (Johnston, 1994; Adamsons and Pasley, 2006; Amato and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Anderson *et al.*, 2011; Hardesty *et al.*, 2016; Mutchler, 2017). There is also no definitive consensus on separating high conflict from everyday disputes, and clearly distinguishing between conflict and domestic violence (Johnston, 1994; Friedman, 2004; Anderson *et al.*, 2011; Cohen and Levite, 2012). Although both types of dispute are detrimental to a person's sense of relational safety (Anderson *et al.*, 2011), domestic violence is characterised as the systematic battering of one person by the other, with fear and coercion used to achieve dominance (Johnson, 2006).

Further debate arises when assessing the value of conflict, as it can settle differences, problem solve and improve intimacy (Anderson and Sabatelli, 2011). Conversely, uncontained conflict reduces physical and psychological safety, adversely affecting the whole family (Cummings *et al.*, 2002). Burns (1984) believes that common disagreements are finances, sexual incompatibility, infidelity, poor communication and time management, with the primary cause of relationship breakdown being extra-marital affairs (Kitson *et al.*, 1985; Amato and Rogers, 1997).

To define conflict, this thesis will draw from Weeks and Treat (2001), whose typological model specifies three levels of conflict. They characterised low conflict as disagreements about easily resolvable issues with minimal emotional content. Medium level conflict is more systemic and associates negative thoughts and emotions to people's family of origin. Emotional arousal is heightened, and issues are personalised and blame laden. High conflict introduces a detachment from rational logic, forceful aggression, intensive blame, demonization and has a highly emotional presentation. Interestingly, high conflict couples can escalate aggression to sparring, mimicking domestic abuse encounters (Johnson, 1995). This "situational couple violence" (Johnson, 2006, p. 1006) is highly risky and dysfunctional, but unlike domestic violence, it is not about subjugation

(Jouriles and McDonald, 2015). This battling can also become a way of physically ritualising disagreements, often replicating childhood conflict experiences (Hardesty *et al.*, 2016).

This thesis will define a high conflict relationship as having regular unresolved arguments, blame attribution, overt criticism, resentment, defensiveness, low cooperation, aggression or refusal to communicate. Low conflict will be defined as mainly positive experiences of trust, civility, cooperation and negotiation.

Anderson *et al.* (2011) believes that the reasons certain relationships develop a propensity for high conflict are complex, but that negative exchanges are commonly fuelled by defensive communication from entrenched positions. They also consider how a domestic environment which is unstable, hostile and tense can inflame conflict and reduce regulatory capacity. These couples will often lack the cognitive abilities to achieve reparation or compromise (Gottman, 1993), skills ideally learnt in childhood through experiencing attentive, adaptable and containing parenting, as well as witnessing positive adult relationships (Crittenden, 2016).

Conflict post-separation

A well-documented feature of many parental separations is how conflict continues after the relationship has ended (Amato, 2010). Unsurprisingly, the ongoing management of children is often at the centre of these arguments, as childless ex-partners could effectively go their separate ways (Cohen and Levite, 2012). Typically, a couple will develop an embedded pattern of conflict (Friedman, 2004), with high conflict couples establishing unhealthy and self-perpetuating fight cycles that restrict listening and empathy (Gottman, 1994). These warring parties easily transition their animosity post-separation, as confrontation can be habitual and easily reattributed by interactions underpinned by hostility and distrust (Johnston, 1994). Similar to high conflict romances, acrimonious parental relations are characterised by poor communication, minimal co-operation and chronic disagreement (Adamsons and Pasley, 2006).

Blow and Daniel (2002) suggest that hostility occurs when the couple generates a 'bad

image' of the other to rationalise the failure of the relationship. The ex-partner is blamed and personal responsibility is abdicated, placing both partners as victims of a "frozen narrative" (Blow and Daniel, 2002, p. 85) that causes negativity, impasse and miscommunication. This acrimony also functions to express hurt and loss, and make sense of the relationship ending (Amato and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Furthermore, if both partners are friendly but apart, the dissonance of why they are no longer a couple can trigger depression and anxiety, activating psychological defences that reinstate hostility (Lebow *et al.*, 2012). Interestingly, when the catalyst of relational breakdown is an affair, gender becomes salient as men typically blame the unfaithful woman. However, the opposite situation seems to be influenced by male patriarchy, as women who have been betrayed will typically blame the other woman and position their male partner as weak and seduced (Dunn and Billett, 2018).

Jevne and Andenæs (2017), suggest that polarization occurs when the child is on contact, as distrust and controlling behaviours are activated by abandonment anxiety. Blow and Daniel (2002), add that the residency parent can purposely undermine the other to protect from altering contact arrangements, setting up an accuser and victim dynamic that switches dependent on who has contact, causing antagonistic divisions that reduce cooperation (Russell *et al.*, 2016). Parenting differences and decisions on child wellbeing can also be magnified during contact (Tavassolie *et al.*, 2016). Other research highlights the legal process inflaming hostility, as even fairly amicable separations can be contaminated by judicial discourses of winning battles, demonisation and moral partisanship (Markham *et al.*, 2017; Mutchler, 2017). Furthermore, if social disapproval is high around the failure of the relationship, couples can refuse reconciliation and heighten rivalry for peer validation (Visser *et al.*, 2017).

Separated parents within a context of family therapy

An explanation for how this thesis relates to the professional field requires a brief introduction of family therapy's beginnings, which are found around the mid-20th century when schizophrenia

treatment shifted from an individualistic to an interpersonal model (Bateson *et al.*, 1956). Gregory Bateson evolved his ideas with a psychiatric collaboration that allowed him to apply biological systems theory to patient rehabilitation by incorporating active family support (Jackson, 1957). Elsewhere, the emerging 1960's anti-psychiatric movement (Nasser, 1995) gave birth to similarly relational models such as attachment (Bowlby, 1958) and treating child disorders within a family context (Ackerman, 1962). The relational perspective was then considered in conjunction with cybernetic theory, a process of systems communicating and dynamically adapting to new information (Bateson, 1972). These advancements resulted in the founding of the seminal schools of American structural family therapy (Minuchin, 1974), and the rival constructivist approach in Milan (Palazzoli, 1974). Although different in their use of intervention and technique, both view family as a living system where feedback loops mean changing one component will affect function elsewhere (Wiener, 1954). These founding schools are the foundations of systemic family therapy and are still core learning for modern training courses (Karam *et al.*, 2015; Stratton, 2016; Carr, 2019).

Modern family therapy uses a constructionist model (Dallos and Draper, 2010), where individuals hold a bespoke vantage point situated within their unique social reality (Hoffman, 1990), accessing discourses that are based upon identity components such as gender and race (Burnham, 2011). Language is used relationally to create shared meaning (Anderson, 1997), with the therapist being an active participant within the system (Hoffman, 1985), effectively 'joining the family' (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981b). Contemporary family therapy often understands family configurations within a traditional framework of biology and legal markers (Avdi, 2015), which sees separated parents characteristically being referred into services under the banner of 'the family' (Mutchler, 2017; Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2019). This means that the actual family who turn up to the session, often a combination of parents, children, stepfamily and extended members are typically assumed as mutually considering each other as family (Lebow, 2016; Stratton, 2016; Carr, 2019).

However, I believe that this can be an incorrect attribution, with clinical experience illustrating that when relationships are hostile, individuals may exclude or other those who they see as adversarial from their current family composition (Levin and Trost, 1992; Diamond and Liddle, 1996). This phenomenon is especially common when parents separate acrimoniously, mainly due to the difficult feelings of loss, betrayal and blame that many failed relationships create (Blow and Daniel, 2002; Lebow and Rekart, 2007; Wagner and Diamond, 2016; Mutchler, 2017). It has also been well recognised that prolonged inter-parental conflict and dysfunction is associated with poor wellbeing, illness, mental health issue issues (Cherlin *et al.*, 1998; Harold and Sellers, 2018), educational failings (Brand *et al.*, 2019) and family breakdown (Ahrons, 2007a; Russell *et al.*, 2016; Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2019; Francia *et al.*, 2019), justifying a real need to better understand how separated parents are seen and treated within clinical settings.

Bischoff and Sprenkle (1993) argued that drop out in family therapy has previously lacked enough investigation to reach a satisfactory explanation. Although, further research has suggested some reasons are therapist/client mismatch, therapist inexperience, inadequate training, unclear presenting problems, lack of client commitment and adverse clinical policy (Wang *et al.*, 2006). Subsequent studies focus on how children sometimes protest against interventions by actively sabotaging sessions (O'Reilly and Parker, 2013), with Blow *et al.* (2007) proposing that family engagement is reliant on practitioner fit.

My position is in accord with findings by Morris *et al.* (2018) study that evidenced acrimony as a good predictor of engagement failure. I want to expand on this idea by suggesting that if parents are highly conflictual, then the invited individuals may have disparate representations of what they consider as family. If this the case, then the clients may feel disenfranchised, misunderstood by the referring agency and perceive the intervention as unhelpful and not in their interest (Burman, 1995; Lebow, 2016; McPherson *et al.*, 2017). The consequences of clients experiencing the pre-treatment phase negatively is likely to risk engagement failure due to concerns

that sessions will endanger psychological safety (Russell *et al.*, 2016), create aggressive confrontations (Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2019) and adversely affect residency and parenting opportunities (Emery, 2011).

Therefore, this research is interested in how the conflict levels between separated parents influence how family networks reconstitute around separation and the therapeutic implications of this. A possible explanation being that the messiness of family constitution, coupled with the instability of role-based systems means that family composition is not always explicitly understood before treatment begins. This could potentially restrict the effectiveness of the practitioner in therapeutically joining and successfully treating separated families by becoming part of the familial system (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981a), leading to unplanned endings, maintaining blaming and promoting further legal disputes (Lebow, 2019a). Once a family has disengaged, additional complications may arise as family problems then become treated within the context of individual pathology, further placing the child as problematic and not addressing the troubles, disadvantages and political milieu surrounding these families (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013). This return to positioning the child as a problematic symptom of separation may also result in family troubles intensifying as problems become treated in isolation, completing the circular nature of separated families becoming situated as troubling by public bodies such as social care and the education system (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2019).

Earlier in the [chapter](#) it has been argued that contemporary constructions of family are increasingly fluid and based on practices that continually reconstitute family. This is in part due to the shift from traditional family constructions to separated family forms that privilege family practices. This raises an important question which asks if current approaches to family therapy are rooted in outmoded constructions of family, then it is crucial to update how clinicians understand and work with family separation? Therefore, the final research question is interested in understanding the tensions between contemporary understandings of family and family therapy

practice, as well as providing ways of integrating therapeutic systems theory with sociological insights.

Summary

Some academics feel that the role lens is vague and difficult to explicitly describe (Floyd *et al.*, 2006), but the fact that it focusses on relationships as social products means that it fits the philosophical position of this thesis and the worldview held within family therapy (Dallos and Draper, 2010; Goldenberg *et al.*, 2016; Nichols and Davis, 2016). It is also the most inclusive of the lenses, enabling families who do not have legal or biological characteristics to be legitimised. Even though persistent and dominant discourses maintain traditional heteronormativity (Weigel, 2008), the self-defined model is increasingly popular and necessary to accommodate the changes seen in societal trends (Holland and Edwards, 2014).

This chapter has compared the nuclear and role-based social constructions of family, showing how both have historically evolved. An argument for the latter version has been made as being far more relevant to families in the UK, which are increasingly made up of blended, queer and non-nuclear structures. The problematic perseverance of the nuclear model was explored, as well as how this powerful ideology still exerts huge influence and bias, creating a messy landscape of what family can be. The idea that family can use practices, rituals and language to define themselves was proposed, along with introducing social role membership. The journeys of separation and reconstitution were then explored, with a debate around how family can be dynamic, interpretative and fluid. To highlight how this process is negotiated through conversation, a section uncovered how talk defines family and membership rights, stressing the instability of relationships that principally depend upon social roles.

This assertion is especially relevant to the research questions that ask about how available discourses influence the quality of the parental relationship and subsequent family organisation. These discussions were then situated within parental conflict and applied to professional practice by

proposing that it may be unclear how separated families assign membership and manage acrimony, risking potential treatment failure.

Chapter 2 –Methodology

Introduction

The following chapter will discuss the conceptual framework of this thesis by firstly introducing the philosophical foundations that this research sits upon. The rationale of the research design will then be explained, and this design will be situated within the professional practice of family therapy. The subsequent sections will describe the sampling strategy, introduce the participants and be transparent about the challenges of recruitment. The section on data collection will show how participants were initially screened with an online survey and then selected for a face-to-face interview. The interview structure and schedule will then be introduced, and the unique element of co-constructing a graphically interactive family map with the participants will be fully explained.

The analytical process will be explained and justified as a valid approach, along with introducing relevant literature within the field of DA and indicating adherence to good ethical practice. The final part of this chapter will highlight attempts to improve the credibility of the research through the careful use of reflexivity; showing how a research diary and an academic journal were used to document the process and boundary my roles of practitioner and researcher. The final section summarises how the methodological design was situated within quality assurance practice, observing the principles produced by Yardley (2000).

Philosophical approach

Within this thesis, my ontological position is relativist, a stance that is from a branch of idealism that proposes that there is no external reality that can be separated from our worldview (Madill *et al.*, 2000). Relativism holds to the premise that reality is socially constructed and experienced from the viewer's perspective (Blaikie, 2007), and that this experience is shared with others using language within an interpretative and iterative process (Raskin, 2008). Relative to the research questions, I argue that the Westernised concept of family discussed in Chapter 1 is socially constructed by the

actors who hold valid membership rights at a particular time (Levin, 1999), and is a temporal, dynamic and fluid process informed by interpersonal relationships, environmental factors and social context of family (Haldeman, 2012; Nelson, 2013; Coontz, 2015).

My epistemological position is subjectivist, where I assume that the researcher and the respondent collaboratively develop meaning by engaging in adaptive social practices throughout the research process (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This approach has enabled me to guide the data collection process and maintain focus on answering my research questions, whilst simultaneously valuing and privileging the personal experience of the respondents. I felt that it was also important to incorporate my professional identity into my research philosophy, as discrepant positions can be problematic for the practitioner-researcher (Ledger, 2010). Therefore the approach complemented my professional practice as a family therapist, a role that occupies a unique vantage point within family that facilitates opportunities for constructive interactions that take account of everybody involved (Blow and Karam, 2017).

This positioning also resonates with other post-modern proponents in the field who contend that family is to be seen as a social product that exists through performance, ritual and social initiations (Bengtson, 2001; Haldeman, 2012; Ribbens McCarthy, 2012; Coontz, 2015; Golombok, 2015). In this project, these social interactions will be explored and presented as a selection of discourses that are used to organise family membership and demonstrating how language can construct family as a discursive activity (Martins *et al.*, 2014). For example, descriptions of belonging, reciprocal care, ownership and carrying out family practices such as celebrations symbolically perform being family (King *et al.*, 2015b; Noens and Ramaekers, 2015; Nordqvist, 2017). This surpasses the nuclear idea that family being simply about biology, law and genetics, situating the construct as dependent on discourse (Galvin, 2006).

Research design

The research design adopted a subjectivist philosophical approach, based upon the premise that family is a constructed phenomenon that may be experienced differently by each member. These constructions are believed to be represented by and through language and were analysed to help understand how respondents express and create a shared meaning of what constitutes their families.

Although the main phase of the study was entirely qualitative, the initial recruitment phase used a quantitative component to screen prospective participants for interview suitability. This approach of synthesising the quantitative and qualitative in a mixed-methods approach is formalised by Morgan (1998) who proposes using two complementary methods in a scaled sequence to achieve optimal results. An online survey was used as a screening tool that categorised participants by gender and the self-reported intensity of parental conflict experienced during their separation. The rationale being that the study was interested in how different levels of conflict influence family organisation and that perspectives from both biological sexes were included. On completion of the survey, participants indicated that they consented to be contacted for a potential face-to-face interview, this allowed a purposive sample to be identified and included in the qualitative data collection.

The methodological choice for the qualitative component was a DA that drew primarily from the work of Potter and Wetherell, incorporating a psychological perspective that allows social practices to be understood through language situated within certain contexts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). As multiple participants were interviewed once at a particular point in time to identify patterns and associated themes across cases, the time horizon for this study can be classified as cross-sectional (Bryman, 2008).

The analysis of the thesis drew upon several sources from the canon of DA (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards *et al.*, 1992; Potter *et al.*, 1993). 'Discourse' is a

term that Michel Foucault used to explain how language conveys knowledge, depicts events and organises the social world through interactive performances that are established upon exchanges of power, relations and subjectivity (Foucault, 1972, pp. 135-140). In my analysis, discourses were used to define family systems, understand significant events, attribute accountability, allocate membership rights, form hierarchies and subjectively orientate to others by promoting or demoting their importance within reconstituted family constellations.

The above forms of analysis focus upon how language can represent social practices and how these representations are then organised into discourses that can be used to share meaning with others. For my analysis, this approach was used because it lent itself to investigate how individuals socially construct family systems and how these systems are determined by the social identities and roles people are assigned (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), a key aim of this study. Further to this, DA seemed an appropriate approach because I wanted to understand how people discursively construct membership of post-separation family by representing social practices such as caregiving, family rituals and participation in activities that fit within Westernised views of 'family time' (Morgan, 2011).

The rationale of selecting this analytical methodology was that it resonated with the philosophical stance outlined earlier and has been used in previous studies that focussed on understanding family as socially constructed (Jorgenson, 1989; Gubrium and Holstein, 1993; Bengtson, 2001; Haldeman, 2012; Martins *et al.*, 2014). Several authors have gone so far as proposing that family is entirely defined by discourse (Galvin, 2006; Huisman, 2014; Martins *et al.*, 2014). Within the family healthcare evidence base, similar approaches have explored divorce (Smetana *et al.*, 1991; Hemrica and Heyting, 2004; Van Krieken, 2005) and leaving home (Bernier *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, DA was deemed appropriate in this case to show how separation is an event that influences how people perceive family and make meaning of their experiences.

By considering the data from the perspective of discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell,

1987; Potter *et al.*, 1993), language can be analysed to understand how specific discourses can inform social interactions and situate actors into morally or relationally appropriated subject positions. In accordance, the analysis also viewed these activities as forms of 'interpretative repertoires' (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984, p. 40), variable accounts that are understood relative to their contexts. These accounts are often employed to bolster one's position and weaken the alternative, demonstrating social hierarchy or engendering moral superiority and power within a relationship, belief or attitude (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

During the analysis, these interpretive repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) were understood as rhetorical exchanges that viewed the apportioning of blame and responsibility as being motivated by the 'management of stake' (Edwards *et al.*, 1992), a social practice used to either minimise a contribution or to reframe a speaker's account as more favourable. Potter *et al.* (1993, p. 392) formalise this conundrum by discussing how people resolve seemingly competing statements by defending their interests, in what they term a 'dilemma of stake'. Understanding how a speaker can alter their account to suit context was important in seeing how events and relationships can be reframed in a way that demonstrates an explicit intention. For example, an individual may represent distant relationships with biological children as the fault of the other parent, allowing them to minimise the effects of their actions and attitudes in the estrangement, this could be seen as an attempt to maintain their construction of being a 'good parent'.

A significant aspect of DA is that it celebrates variation rather than convergence (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), encouraging rich accounts where the differences in talk are privileged. The literature review has identified that gender (Russell *et al.*, 2016; Tavassolie *et al.*, 2016; Visser *et al.*, 2017) and intensity of conflict (Ahrns, 2007a; Amato *et al.*, 2011; Nielsen, 2017) directly influence the type of separation that people experience. Therefore, patterns of difference across these factors were a key focus during the analysis, with the intention of developing theory on how gender and conflict influence family re-formation.

Sampling

DA sample size is generally small, as data processing is labour intensive (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Previous studies have ranged from intense analysis of a single text to designs that include numerous interview transcripts (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007). Shaw and Bailey (2009) recommended that sample size must be appropriate to service the scope of the study and centred upon answering the research question; a fundamental feature of good qualitative practice (Sandelowski, 1995).

This study focussed on how conflict influences the language and discourses used to define family post-separation. Therefore, it was proposed that four configurations of parents would be included: male/high conflict, male/low conflict, female/high conflict and female/low conflict. An equal gender mix is especially important as gendered discourses are often salient when relationships breakdown (Blow and Daniel, 2002; Nuru and Wang, 2014; Russell *et al.*, 2016). Conflict levels were determined by the results of the screening survey, a process that is further explained in the [next section](#). Variation is vital for DA (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), and it was hoped that this diversity would generate rich findings that make any inferences both credible and justifiable (Hammersley, 2013). This criterion led selection is a purposive sampling technique that allows a phenomenon to be comprehensively investigated by equally representing specific characteristics (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014a).

The priority of the analysis was to collect rich and comprehensive data, and by drawing from four comparative studies that had used DA in family research (Shaw and Bailey, 2009), a decision was made to interview 8 participants, allowing an in-depth analysis incorporating high and low conflict levels and the male and female gender balance. Therefore, the intention was to interview two people from each of the above subgroups.

The screening survey was completed by 33 people (9 men and 24 women) and was closed when men and women of both conflict levels were sufficiently represented, participant demographics and a short biography are detailed in [Appendix A](#). This level was set at 3 people as a

minimum for each category, allowing for a reasonably estimated 33% dropout rate in the interview phase (Adler and Adler, 2002; Irvine *et al.*, 2013). Table 1 shows the distribution of survey respondents. From this table, it can be seen that low conflict men accessed the survey in fewer numbers and were more difficult to recruit, hence, the low number in this section of the table.

Table 1: Respondents who completed the screening survey

		Gender	
		Men	Women
Conflict Level	Low	3	9
	High	6	15

The interview stage was attended by seven participants and attempts were made to sufficiently represent each grouping. Although initial responses were promising, two of the ‘low conflict’ men did not reply to further contact, meaning only one person in this subgroup was interviewed. The other groups were selected by choosing individuals who provided some variance; for example, some of the sample were chosen as they provided diversity in religion, nationality and multiculturalism, identity factors that have been shown to interrelate and exert influence on how a family operates and the strength of interpersonal bonds (Rees, 2017). For example, one participant was Jewish, another was a Scandinavian national and one had children with a Muslim partner. One woman, Kate, was also selected to be included in the sample as she had experience managing two very distinctive separated parenting relationships. None of the women who were contacted for the interview declined. In contrast, fewer men accessed the study (around 25% of the sample) and several failed to respond to interview requests. Therefore, men were primarily selected on availability, the interviewed participants are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Respondents who were interviewed

		Gender	
		Men	Women
Conflict Level	Low	1	2
	High	2	2

The only inclusion criteria for this study was that respondents had to have children with at least one partner that they had separated from. The final interviewees comprised of 3 men and 4 women, with a mean age of 47 that ranged between 32 to 55 years. The sample all identified as heterosexual, resided in South East England and had children aged between 5 to 31 years old. None had formally adopted children and there was a mixture of parents, stepparents and grandparents within the group. All the interviewees were previously married or in cohabiting relationships with their ex-partners and had been separated for four years or more.

There were some challenges with the sampling strategy, as men were more difficult to recruit and accessed the survey in smaller quantities than women. This is a dilemma that is reflected in the literature when attempting to recruit participants with mail or internet survey strategies (Curtin *et al.*, 2000; Singer *et al.*, 2000; Groves *et al.*, 2002). This may have been further compounded by the sensitive nature of the study that requested access to intimate 'back regions' of people's lives (De Laine, 2000). There may also have been a prevailing sense of shame preventing participation, a feeling often experienced following social discord (Scheff, 2000) and divorce (Cohen and Levite, 2012). Although shame has been shown to manifest more easily in women (Tangney, 1990), Westernised feminine culture has meant that some women look for opportunities for an intimate discussion, whereas macho masculine culture around problem sharing can lead to more men internalising their feelings (Fischer and Manstead, 2000); this may explain some reluctance in male participation.

Recruitment was initially attempted from an agency with access to several parenting groups in a large county in the South East of England, allowing recruitment of respondents from various locations across the locality. This agency focuses on helping parents acclimatise to new children, learn parenting skills and facilitates parent/child socialisation. It was decided that their work would not significantly bias this study, as their remit was not about intervening with acrimonious separations.

The organisation distributed research advert leaflets ([Appendix B](#)) that introduced the project and gave instructions on accessing the screening survey. All participating organisations were provided with a research summary that detailed the study rationale, researcher background, methodology and relevance to their business. To broaden the recruitment drive, local libraries, community centres and children's centres were also approached.

Data collection stage 1

The research initially screened prospective participants with a quantitative survey administered before the qualitative phase, using a tool developed by Ahrons (2007a) assess the quality of separated parental relationships. Questions focussed on communication between parents, how decisions on childrearing are made and feelings towards the ex-partner. Her US-based research determined the functionality of post-divorce parenting relationships by assigning couples to one of five parenting configurations that ranged from "Perfect Pals" to "Fiery Foes" (Ahrons, 2007a, p. 58). Table 3 details these categories and provides a summary of how the adult relationship may look and how the children may understand this relationship.

On completion, respondents scored between 64 and 323 points, with the five parenting typologies being assigned at equidistant points along this continuum, higher scores were linked to poorer quality co-parenting relationships. This process was compiled using the statistical software package SPSS 26. This scoring allowed me to organise my respondents into either high or low conflict categories based upon the communication style used and the level of parental cooperation (technical operationalisation of high and low conflict was discussed in [Chapter 1](#)). A decision was made to have three typologies (Fiery Foes, Angry Associates and Dissolved Duos) classed as 'high conflict', with two typologies (Perfect Pals and Co-operative Colleagues) classed as 'low conflict'. Dissolved duos were considered as high conflict due to parents in this category typically avoiding communication as an adversarial strategy that often results in a child losing contact with a parent (Ahrons, 2007a). Table 7 in Chapter 3 illustrates how each respondent has been categorised based

upon their screening survey results.

For this research, the tool was adapted to be available online, and required completion of a consent and demographics section before accessing; the digital survey can be accessed using this [hyperlink](#). To offer a secure and user-friendly interface (Sue and Ritter, 2012), online hosting was provided by the University of Essex Qualtrics software. The survey was accessible on any device (smartphone, laptop, tablet etc.) through a variety of web browsing interfaces.

To avoid confusion, some terminology was substituted for more inclusive language, for example, spouse and divorce were changed to partner and separation. A paper version of the survey was also available to avoid discriminating against individuals without adequate IT access (Granello and Wheaton, 2004), although, nobody requested this. Online surveys have been criticised as having limitations around reaching some populations, encouraging automatic responding and suffering from drop out mid-completion (Wright, 2005). Best efforts were made to reduce these limitations by maximising user-friendliness, optimising completion time, providing hard copy alternatives and being available for personal assistance. During this stage, participants also provided contact details and consent for the secondary interview phase.

The survey took around 10 minutes to complete and used questions matrixes with a 5-6 point Likert scale constructed of a simple continuum of predetermined answers: for example 'never' to 'always' (Jamieson, 2004). The scales were reversed for some of the questions in an attempt to avoid response bias and minimise the tendency to scroll and automatically tick, as well as encouraging thorough consideration of the question (Sue and Ritter, 2012). The online survey was designed in conjunction with the latest guidelines on making digital surveys accessible, helping to minimise participant fatigue and attrition (Vannette, 2019). The tool complied with good practice recommendations on mobile device accessibility, length to complete, grammar, complexity and question construction.

Table 3: Parent typologies and descriptions (Ahrns, 1983, Ahrns, 2007a)

Typology	Children's Perspective	Summary
Dissolved Duos	Is Daddy Dead?	Dad disappears (and it is normally Daddy) and the children lose the relationship with their father. This is the only category resulting in a true single-parent family.
Perfect Pals	Mummy and Daddy are divorced?	The 'Perfect Pals' continue to carry out their parenting duties together, still claim each other as their best friends and often do not remarry. Other people (not least psychologists) find their relationship mysterious.
Co-operative Colleagues	Mummy and Daddy work together	Less mysterious than the 'Perfect Pals', 'Cooperative Colleagues' work together but wouldn't describe each other as their best friend. This is code for: have remarried/got a new partner. This type of parenting style has often been reached only after a long, concerted effort.
Angry Associates	Mummy and Daddy shout at each other.	Divorce didn't stop the fighting. There's plenty of anger and resentment to go around here. The children often lose out although 'Angry Associates' occasionally manage to be friendly.
Fiery Foes	Mummy and Daddy are spending my college fund on lawyers	All out warfare between parents. There's little escape from the rage for anyone in the family. Children often become pawns in the fight and parents frequently end up in court fighting over custody.

Data collection stage 2 - The semi-structured Interview

Data was collected via semi-structured interviews that allowed topics to vary, be participant-led and encouraged elaboration (Bevan, 2014). I felt that this allowed enough flexibility for respondents to develop their conversations and have some choice on what they spoke about, without compromising the focus on the research questions. This also allowed my interviewing to be adaptive by giving opportunities to clarify uncertainty, probe interesting material and help the respondent

feel at ease by using similar language to them (Benner, 1994). Interviews were digitally recorded and manually transcribed using NVivo 12 software.

An interview framework was used that had defined sections addressing important aspects of the study such as who is included in their current family and what happened when the couple separated. This enabled consistency in the data collection and ensured that the research questions remained central to the conversation (Kvale, 1994; Sandelowski, 1997). This format was also useful in helping respondents to recount their separation journeys in a way that had a logical structure and created a timeline of when events occurred and how they influenced definitions of family over time (Flick, 2009). During the process, interviewees were also encouraged to make their own interpretations of the questions, especially around how they perceived what family is and who can be included, retaining an appreciation for family as a personally unique and socially constructed concept (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990; Levin and Trost, 1992).

I was mindful that due to the sensitive nature of the research, the in-person approach felt more intimate and respectful of asking people to share personal and potentially upsetting material (Oltmann, 2016). I also found that my training as a therapist helped me to feel confident in engaging with my participants on what was potentially a very sensitive topic. The face-to-face experience also provided the opportunity to ask questions around topics that people had visible responses to, including behaviours such as crying, eye-rolling, deliberate pauses and laughter. Opdenakker (2006) argues that these non-verbal cues are a rich source of information that can completely alter the understanding of verbal exchange. I used the cues to guide probing questions, for example, if an interviewee rolled their eyes when discussing their ex-partner, I would ask them what this gesture meant and if they were aware of any thoughts and feelings around this person or situation. This encouraged collaborative meaning-making and avoided the 'reading' of externalised behaviour, a process that can easily be misinterpreted (Irvine *et al.*, 2013).

I developed a topic guide for interviews ([Appendix C](#)), with the design drawing heavily from

Ritchie *et al.* (2014b, p. 150) who suggest four useful structuring principles. I began all interviews by briefly covering introductions and providing a background to me and the research. I then asked descriptive questions that asked about defining family units and provided a history of the separated relationship. These questions contextualised family configurations by gathering information about the number of children, how the couple met and the duration of the relationship. These two phases were helpful in building rapport with the interviewees.

The third stage moved from circumstantial narratives to enquiring about beliefs and attitudes. These questions were more involved and focussed upon reasons for the relationship breakdown, attitudes towards ex-partners and how family members responded, moving conversations from definitional to explanatory (Kvale, 1994). This began to generate a sense of the views held around how gender and normative values are expressed within the interviewee's family culture. Within this third stage, a practical 'family mapping' activity was introduced (Levin and Trost, 1992), allowing the interviewee to visually represent their family structure (Finch, 2007); this activity is explained in detail in the [next section](#). These maps were then photographed and made into analysable diagrams.

The final stage of the interview is succinctly referred to as 'winding down' (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014b, p. 154). This process not only formalises the end of the interview but also checks that the interviewee feels heard and adequately represented. Interviews were ended with a general discussion around how society and media view separated families, and the interviews ended by respondents being asked to provide several adjectives to describe what family means to them. This provided a useful summary of the aspects of family that were most salient to interviewee, examples of words given included 'stress, togetherness, hurt, children, connection and belonging'.

Participants were interviewed in their homes, as this felt like a way of sustaining engagement by providing a comfortable environment and flexibility. Although this created some additional challenges around safety, interruption and privacy (Knox and Burkard, 2009; Hämäläinen

and Rautio, 2013; Oltmann, 2016), efforts were made to establish boundaries that avoided the appointment becoming an unintentional social call (Jordan, 2006). This was achieved by discussing how interruptions would be managed, having a scheduled time-frame, making sure other family members were not interfering and being respectful of the interviewees home as their 'safe space' (Hämäläinen and Rautio, 2013). Personal welfare advice from Jacobs (2006) was followed by having a documented interview schedule, verifying interviewee addresses and organising a third party who would contact relevant authorities if contact was not made after the interview. Other precautions included taking a mobile phone, wearing university identification and validating the identity of the interviewee.

Data collection stage 3 - Family map

The family mapping task was used to promote my professional ethos of collaborative practice which encourages the researched to become active agents in the process (Riach, 2009). This partnership has been shown to benefit how the researched can make sense of difficult events (Hiller and Diluzio, 2004), and is a way of working that integrates my practitioner-researcher identity with a consistent worldview (Arber, 2006). This type of creative interviewing is regularly employed within health research (Rempel *et al.*, 2007) and was pioneered by Hartman (1978) to simulate family complexity in social work. This interactive research style has been useful in understanding community hierarchies (Ray and Street, 2005) and connecting objective ideas such as family structure with the subjective meaning that individuals layer upon it (Huss and Cwikel, 2008). This component also qualifies under the qualitative tradition of 'triangulation', an idea that Denzin (1978) describes as adding credibility to research by collecting data from multiples sources, using multiple researchers or technical integration.

This activity was designed to encourage the visualisation of family configurations and open new avenues for discussion. I found that 'doing something' helped to put people at ease and gave them something to focus on whilst thinking about their family (Rempel *et al.*, 2007). Some

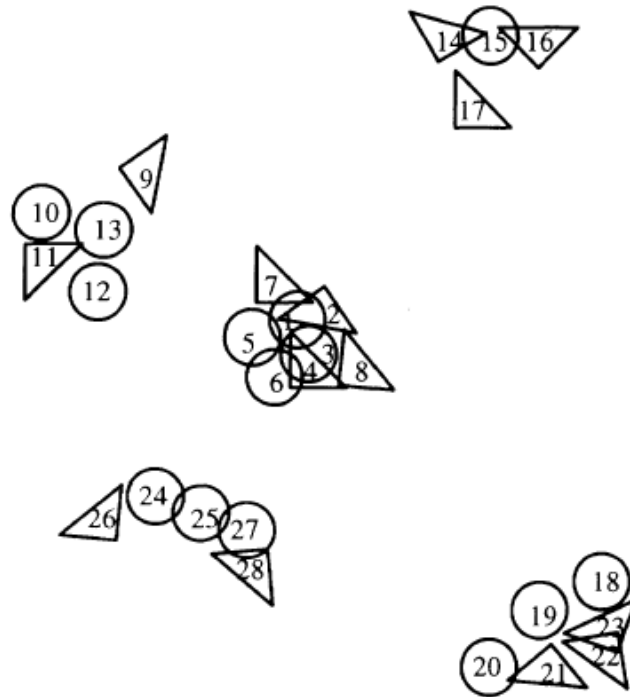
respondents also commented on how this process helped them 'picture' their family dynamics when they lacked the words to explain the situation, an application of how externalising mental imagery stimulates understanding (Thomas, 2015). These techniques also encourage representativeness, effectively functioning as a member checking device that the interviewee can verify (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

This mapping process was based upon the work of Levin and Trost (1992) who asked their participants to represent family members using paper shapes placed relative to each other. Shape orientations are explored and typically provide information on social relationships or geographical distance between people. This map is then graphically transposed and annotated with information on the positions and the roles of included members. Figure 1 provides an example of a mapping diagram where the interviewee has represented their separated family as several small groups of people who are all understood as a singular family. The spacing here represents relational distance and allows the interviewer to gain some understanding of the organisation of this family, as well as determining how a separated family incorporates the original family by creating clusters of reconstituted units that exist within a larger constellation of family.

The family map allowed interviewees to physically characterise their family and choose who is included; topographically organising family and importantly accounting for people who are not associated by blood (consanguinity) or legal ties (conjugalities). These features are vital in providing an insight into how the conceptual lenses of biogenetics, sociolegality and social roles identified in the literature review intersect (Floyd *et al.*, 2006). This notion encouraged interviewees to populate their family structure with people or pets (living or deceased), as well as revealing any previously undisclosed relations. Some of the maps also contained a blue boundary line, a component that respondents added to demonstrate distinctions between family members that people felt duty bound to include, usually based upon genetic links. However, some of these relationships were

socially dysfunctional and sometimes the boundary was used to demarcate individuals considered as supportive from those who were not.

Figure 1: Family map (Levin and Trost, 1992, p. 349)



1. Woman/wife
2. Husband
3. Daughter from earlier marriage
4. Son
5. Stepdaughter
- 6 and 7. Parents
8. Brother
9. Ex-husband
10. Ex-husband's new partner
- 11 and 12. Ex-parents-in-law
13. Husband's ex-wife
- 14, 15, and 16. Husband's siblings and wife
17. Husband's father
- 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23. Uncles and aunts
- 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28. Uncles, aunts, and cousins

Data analysis stage 1

This section will introduce the process and thinking that informed the data analysis. The chronological event stages and the accompanying discourses and meta-discourses are comprehensively explained in the next chapter ([Data analysis stage 2](#)) and illustrated using a diagrammatic model.

Preliminary coding began during the interview stage when initial reactions to the conversation were noted and used as a reminder to revisit thought-provoking aspects of the interview. For example, during one interview, I noted that the respondent frequently mentioned that trust, reliability and consistency were valuable qualities in family members. The interviews were personally transcribed after being listened to twice and were annotated with references to existing literature, allowing the formulation of early working hypotheses. This process was inductive, organic and iterative, respecting the chosen methodological stance and promoting immersion into the data (Green *et al.*, 2007).

Formal data analysis started by extracting excerpts from the transcripts that depicted relevant conversations around family definition, parenting, separation, current family setup and how family relationships have altered. These abstractions were conceptually broad and contained talk around conflict, associations, power and accounts of family membership. These topics were then organised into collections that highlighted more detailed examples of attitudes, psychological phenomena and social interactions. For example, when discussing parental conflict, several respondents mentioned how they felt aggrieved by how relationships ended, viewed new partners with suspicion, described competition for social roles and relived historical grievances. [Appendix D](#) shows a sample of the analytical process about parental conflict and its consequences that have been extracted from NVivo. This example shows how interview notes developed into collections of similar talk that were organised into topics. These topics were rarefied into discourses that were grouped into the meta-discourses that were ultimately mapped onto the stages of the model of

separation.

Discourse is a linguistic device that is highly dependent upon context (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984), I applied this definition in the [second phase of my analysis](#) that focussed on discourses around family membership, definition, separation and re-formation. This was achieved by identifying the various ways language was used to construct aspects of family and separation, including talk around who was included in historic and re-formed family configurations. This analysis identified 16 discourses that respondents used to represent their reality, which would manifest differently depending on the context, for example, when discussing high or low conflict parenting environments. By way of illustration, numerous respondents in the high conflict category spoke about how they felt they were victims of their ex-partners' actions, whereas several individuals who identified as low conflict chose discourses that expressed personal responsibility in the relationship.

When the respondents described how their relationship history and their notion of family had changed over time, the narrative naturally created a separation 'journey' that was determined by a temporal sequence of events. To represent this in my data analysis, I grouped these 16 discourses into 6 meta-discourses that portrayed this chronological unfolding of family and relationships. Each of the 6 meta-discourses represents one stage in the process and these discourses can be thought of as 'meta' because they encapsulate each of the discourses relating to that stage. For example, one meta-discourse 'breaking up' represents the first stage of the historical period around the separation and includes the discourses of 'victimhood', 'worst experience ever' and 'men should leave'. Whereas, 'the new family' meta-discourse is the final stage of the respondent's narrative that is situated in the present and represents a current construction of family. This meta-discourse is made up of the discourses of 'members only', 'absent fathers', 'you can choose your friends' and 'the new me'.

These meta-discourses were also represented visually by participants when they completed their family maps, with family membership being demonstrated through the concepts of inclusion,

exclusion and omission that Levin and Trost (1992) used to explain who appears on the map. Inclusion simply refers to people who are currently recognised as family, with exclusion and omission providing a distinctive insight into the relationships with people who are not present. The difference is essentially the intention behind absence; with omission denoting an apathetic lack of contact, whereas exclusion suggesting hostility or intentional absenteeism. This is especially pertinent to acrimonious separated parents, who will often deny the existence of their counterparts or militantly ostracise them as a punishment (Blow and Daniel, 2002).

The final stage of the analysis introduces Kate as a case study, to illustrate the complexities of separation by contextualising it within the lived experience (Stake, 2006). The rationale for including this case study was that it enables the whole journey of separation to be seen from a respondent perspective by presenting both the chronology of the separation stages and the accompanying discourses. Kate was chosen as she had an interesting parenting setup that involved the management of two separated parenting relationships that varied in their functionality and hostility. The case study also lends a pragmatism to psychotherapeutic research by introducing both richness and depth of understanding to a theoretical concept (Dallos and Smith, 2008), as well as creating a professional forum that illustrates how research, theory and practice naturally build on each other's contributions (Stiles, 2007).

The use of this case study is an opportunity to further public understandings of psychotherapy (McLeod, 2010) and to illustrate how my stage based psychological model (FSM) could support practitioners in demystifying separation processes with their clients. It also provides an example of how an 'orderly' clinical model can generate fractious differences by illustrating the binary divide between ordinary family lives and 'the problematic' areas of these lives that attract the attention of agencies and experts that are inclined to intervene (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2019).

Holding these concerns in mind, it must be acknowledged that this case study both exemplifies and problematises the use of my model, an inadvertent tension born of prioritising the

key research aim of generating a professionally applicable psychological theory that is informed by the lived experiences teased out from the DA. However, by being explicit about these issues, the case study can also enhance the reflexivity of the research by welcoming a critical perspective of generated theory that allows space for further developments and retains curiosity around the tensions of theoretical propositions to real life casework (McLeod, 2010).

This case study demonstrates how on one hand, that the model portrays some aspects of separation well, but on the other, it highlights how family troubles (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013) cannot be simplistically compartmentalised into cause and effect interactions and must be understood as relational experiences of meaning-making (Morgan, 2019). This also provides a classic example of the challenges of using sociological literature and analysis to aid the development of a pragmatic clinical intervention (Avdi and Georgaca, 2007), as well as illustrating how the crossing of disciplinary boundaries can yield a useful psychological roadmap to real-world problems (Proctor and Vu, 2019) that places client involvement and benefit as central to the research (Fuertes and Nutt Williams, 2017).

The case study is written in line with the philosophical approach of the analysis by drawing from the work of Stake (1995) who views case studies as an interpretive exercise that discovers contextual meaning with a researcher led constructivist process. This case study was analysed and presented by bounding it firmly within the context of the research questions and honouring the social biography of the respondent by giving representing Kate's voice using unedited interview transcripts (Harrison *et al.*, 2017).

Ethical considerations

The research was conducted on adults who were fully consenting, informed and able to withdraw at any time (Kluge, 2012). Consent was taken at two stages, the first instance being during the screening survey when participants had seen the recruitment leaflet, been given basic information about the research and voluntarily accessed the survey. Secondary signed consent was given by

individuals who were successfully screened and had agreed to the interview. These people were given further information, the opportunity to ask questions and advised that they stop at any time or retrospectively withdraw their data (Haverkamp, 2005).

Ethical approval was granted by The University of Essex ([Appendix E](#)) and because the subject material had the potential to be highly emotive (Amato, 2000), participant wellbeing was paramount (Kvale, 1994). Participants were protected from potential psychological harm, disruption of current or future court procedures and conflict escalation by not including the other parent or any children in the study. With this in mind, a gentle interview style, attuned responses, empathy and routine checking of well-being was adhered to (Brannen, 1988). This was especially pertinent when several participants became emotionally distressed during their interview. Regarding good practice (Liamputtong, 2006), interviewees were offered breaks, agency to stop and had the choice to avoid further enquiry around difficult topics. Written information was also provided that detailed useful support groups and instructions on how to access further help with mental health, parenting and separation (Orb *et al.*, 2001). No participants prematurely ended the interview or asked to retrospectively withdraw their data.

Family research has a highly personalised nature, which means precautions were made to make sure confidentiality was paramount (Jordan, 2006; Hämäläinen and Rautio, 2013). Although, it can be difficult to present valuable and illuminating data without compromising the identity of the people involved (Haverkamp, 2005; Flick, 2009). Getting the balance right in this thesis was slightly problematic; as child details, ex-partners and current family setup could potentially identify the respondent. Therefore, decisions were taken to omit highly identifiable material and change the names, ages, and gender of some of the adults and children.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in this thesis was a complex process that was threaded throughout as a way of explicitly acknowledging the presence of the investigator (Arber, 2006), recognising the agency of the

participants and understanding the role of practitioner-researcher (Etherington, 2004). My experience of holding dual roles was confusing, as it was easy to start to adopt a therapeutic style during interviewing. For example, interviews would often invoke emotional reactions and my professional instinct was to try and help the interviewee psychotherapeutically to understand and accept their experience. In these moments I needed to make a conscious effort to be empathetic without trying to intervene as a therapist. I also gave the interviewee the option to not discuss the emotive issues further and encouraged one participant to take a break outside in their garden, giving them time to process their feelings.

This is a well-documented conundrum within the healthcare sector (Bulpitt and Martin, 2010), as it is commonplace for practitioners to investigate phenomena identified during professional practice (Ragland, 2006; Tasker *et al.*, 2011). This position has also been described as problematic, as the blurring of roles can result in a clumsy merging of professional identities that can potentially contaminate the research (Ledger, 2010). An example of this within the therapeutic community is highlighted by Haverkamp (2005) who warns that practitioners can often find themselves counselling during a research interview, distancing themselves from the phenomena and creating an enmeshed relationship with the respondent. In technical terms, qualitative research that does not consider reflexivity can be at risk of reducing integrity and trustworthiness, limiting the truthfulness of any findings and potentially violating good ethical practice (Finlay, 2002). One way in which I tried to minimise this blurring of roles was by purposefully wearing casual clothing when conducting the interviews. This outfit choice enabled me to occupy a different role when I am in my professional workplace, where I typically wear more formal clothing.

By introducing a reflexive component to the research, I was able to foreground my role as a researcher (Humphrey, 2007) and understand how my own assumptions and experiences affected the data collection and analysis (Walker *et al.*, 2013). This approach also avoided having to actively bracket personal experience (Tufford and Newman, 2012), or research within a positivist paradigm

that mitigates investigative bias (Saks and Allsop, 2007). Reflexivity has been addressed through several mechanisms in this study, the first of these being the research diary ([Appendix F](#)), a physical record of emerging thoughts and beliefs (Nadin and Cassell, 2006), and a way of providing a voice to an internal narrative that makes sense of the researcher's relationship to people, objects and the political/cultural landscape (Primeau, 2003).

The use of reflexivity also feels relevant to the domain of family therapy, where it builds the therapeutic alliance and separates the therapist's material (Wolfe, 2003). It also complements the paradigmatic shift within practice that occurred when the profession moved away from the ideas of an objective reality to the current socially constructed approach (McNamee, 2017), positively responding to the proposition that reflexivity should fit the researcher's philosophical beliefs (Johnson and Duberley, 2003). Hence, a research diary was an appropriate way of promoting transparency, explicitly illustrating ideas, challenges, procrastinations and personal reactions (Nadin and Cassell, 2006). Alongside this personal account, an academic journal ([Appendix G](#)) documented academic developments, pre-planned supervision sessions, reported on supervisory encounters, reflected on the supervisory relationship and tracked how data developed into theory (Etherington, 2004).

[Adherence to principles of quality in qualitative research](#)

Yardley (2000) presents qualitative research as being caught in a well-documented dilemma (Krantz, 1995; Patton, 1999; Spencer *et al.*, 2003; Koch, 2006) that has tried to unravel how qualitative investigators can be deemed valuable, and how their findings can be earnestly received by the scientific community. This quandary is generally felt to be maintained by the historical dominance of positivist approaches that are regarded as having a greater empirical weight that grants superior status through implementation of 'empirical' procedures such as large samples, statistical analyses, bias elimination and generalisability (Krantz, 1995).

Yardley debates the inherent problems of trying to simply transpose quantitative quality

assurances to more interpretative paradigms, highlighting issues such as variation in philosophical ethos and diversity of methods as barriers that make universal standardisation nigh on impossible. She does however feel that a set of flexible and adaptable principles can be integrated into a well-designed qualitative study that I have interwoven into this enquiry.

The first principle of sensitivity to context has been met by carrying out a thorough literature review, demonstrating how the approach honours the philosophical foundations of postmodern social construction by examining how respondents chose specific discourses to represent social practices, relationships and family definitions. The analysis was data-driven, using a process that was iterative, inductive and inclusive of all the data and not just the elements that conform with analytical direction (Seale and Silverman, 1997). An example of this was how a model of separation emerged organically from the data and was a product of the discourses identified from the analysis. The unexpected prevalence of heteronormativity was a notion that jarred with the initial position taken during the literature review but was included in the findings and incorporated into the generated theory, rather than glossed over to provide a tidier analysis. As previously explained, the data collection stage was carefully planned to help the respondents feel comfortable by interviewing in the home and avoided unintentional counselling. Inadvertent power imbalances were also addressed, with reflexivity and self-disclosure being used to help normalise respondent context and avoid taking up an expert position.

The second principle of commitment is a simple construct that suggests that the researcher engages with their topic, methods and choice of analysis. A doctoral thesis is generally the product of a novice researcher, although measures were taken to train within appropriate research methods and to be guided by experienced researchers. Rigour refers to how suitable the sample is for the analytical choice, achieved by having an adequately sized sample for DA that has been thoroughly interrogated with an iterative analysis that went through several cycles of abstraction and attended to deviant cases. An example being Jane, as she occupied a novel position of having a

religious/cultural aspect to her parenting relationship and was a woman who left the family home without taking the children. This case was interesting and provided variation to the analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) as it bucked the normative view of women always keeping residency of the children (Barlow *et al.*, 2017) and incorporated a non-westernised view of how Muslim theocracy influences separated families (Daneshpour, 1998; Welzel, 2011). Further rigour was added to the study by triangulating the data collection (Denzin, 1978), achieved through quantitatively categorising the sample and then interviewing them whilst they participated in an activity.

The next principle encourages transparency about what was done and how a principle was fulfilled by documenting procedures and explicitly defining rationale and analysis. Theoretical assumptions were held in alignment with the data collection, ensuring that the 'fit' of the thesis was coherent and logical. A decision was also made to introduce a reflexive component that highlighted the researcher's biases and intentions.

The final guiding principle promotes how research should be impactful, applicable to social life and underpinned with political deployment. This thesis is professionally situated in an esoteric niche that is attempting to improve family therapy with high conflict separated parents. It has also highlighted a 'messy' situation where real families are sometimes marginalised and disempowered by regressive thinking and hidden biases around alternative family composition. This research will hopefully be a supportive body of evidence that offers some empirical support that can be politically mobilised to help broaden contemporary familial concepts.

Summary

This chapter has addressed the development of the methodological approach that was taken during this research. The chapter began with a discussion of how philosophical beliefs were incorporated into a compatible research design that used a pragmatic model to effectively build conceptual layers into the thesis. The study was built upon an ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed and contingent on participatory actors and how their interactions are understood

through language that encourages shared meaning-making. This idea is compatible with both the post-modern application of contemporary family therapy and the fundamental assumption of this thesis that believes that family definitions also depends upon social roles and is not solely reliant upon the traditional criteria of law and genetics.

Chapter 3 – Findings

Introduction

This DA draws from the ideas of Potter and Wetherell (1987), (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984) and Potter *et al.* (1993) who propose that an individual constructs a social account from the discourses available to them. This approach considers that talk is actively produced and deliberately chosen language contributes to a reality that is acted out through social practices. The following chapter will present my findings from the analysis, using the approach explained in [Chapter 2](#).

This chapter seeks to address the first three research questions of 1) wanting to uncover how separated parents talk about family, 2) how the quality of the parental relationship affects membership and 3) whether heteronormativity impacts separated family reorganisation? The chapter will begin by explaining the meta-discourses that emerged from the analysis. Next, it will explain how these meta-discourses relate to a conceptual that model that was produced to represent how interviewees described a journey of separation, which moved from relationship breakdown to the formation of new family systems. Following this, the model will be explained in depth using empirical examples. Finally, a case study will be presented which uses the experiences of one interviewee to provide an illustrative example of how meta-discourses are drawn from during various stages of the model which represents the process of family breakdown and re-formation.

Data analysis part 2

As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), the analysis focussed on identifying how respondents socially represented family, separation and re-formation using linguistic resources to explain their experiences. The analysis initially identified 16 discourses, as detailed in [Appendix H](#). Following this, these 16 discourses were clustered into 6 meta-discourses largely based on their chronological position in the narration from a breakup to family re-formation and the negotiation of subsequent co-parenting. Each of the 6 meta-discourses represents one stage in this process and these discourses can be

thought of as 'meta' because they are constructed from the discourses relating to that stage. For example, one meta-discourse 'breaking up' represents the first stage of the historical period around the separation and includes the discourses of 'victimhood', 'worst experience ever' and 'men should leave'.

The 6 meta-discourses are summarised in Table 4 below, I have also included the constituent discourses that form each of the meta-discourses. Some of the initial 16 discourses are part of more than one meta-discourse, one example of this can be seen with the 'victimhood' discourse, which is a component of the meta-discourses of 'breaking up' and 'emotional baggage'. In this case, some respondents reported feeling like a victim of their separation and spoke about how this victimhood still affected them by hindering subsequent relationships.

The meta-discourse of 'breaking up' was concerned with how individuals described the process of parting with an ex-partner. This typically included stories around incidents that culminated in the relationship ending, as well as how people ascribed blame and understood interactions during the process. The 'making sense' meta-discourse encapsulates the period of examination following a break-up. Respondents characteristically spoke about this time by explaining how they coped with the situation and would typically embark on a period of reflection and revaluation of their values and life trajectory. This would often happen with the accompanying meta-discourse of 'keep calm and carry on', a mechanism that respondents used to describe how they attempted to maintain a sense of normality and carried on with their lives, whilst having to come to terms with the perception of family life having undertaken a significant change. The 'new family' meta-discourse represents how respondents chose to talk about how these changes have been assimilated into their current family setups. This regularly included having to negotiate new relationships and blending families.

Two of the meta-discourses identified were not associated with the chronology of events but instead were woven through the respondent's linguistic accounts. The first of these was

'heteronormative nucleocentricity', a discursive device that acted as an overarching scaffold to the process of how family and separation is negotiated, and the feelings that are instilled throughout the experience, for example, the sense of failure around family fracture and the desire to create replacement structures that have socially acceptable, nucleocentric characteristics.

The other non-chronological meta-discourse running through the separation journey is the idea of 'emotional baggage', referred to here as the emotional scarring that people accumulate as they experienced traumatic or challenging life events. Even though I suggested that this is not temporally situated, it was however chronologically informed, as the impact of emotional baggage seemed to fluctuate at different stages of the process. For example, when family re-forms, the emotional baggage could manifest as inter-parental conflict when negotiating contact with the children. Furthermore, emotional baggage was self-perpetuating and alive, as not only was it generated by historical interactions, it is simultaneously being created by current events, informs future actions and is never complete; as future events can activate and contribute to further emotional baggage accumulation.

Emotional baggage was a problematic idea to include because it permeates all stages, but it is also difficult to completely describe and comfortably situate in my model. However, not including this concept would have minimised the emotional impact of separation and its sustained effect on how family re-formed, as it was a vital concept that my respondents used to explain traumatic aspects of their lives. Previously, the idea of emotional, baggage has been understood to be the accumulation of negative experiences in social life that can hamper progress and lead to feelings of being burdened (Følling *et al.*, 2015). In this excerpt, Freya illustrates the impact of the 'emotional baggage' that her current partner has collected following his separation:

"They have physically left each other, let's put it like that... But emotionally they haven't. They are still caught up in who will the children choose, even though the children are now adults."

As outlined below, the meta-discourses were used to represent a process of moving from relationship separation to family re-formation within the discursive field of heteronormativity and nucleocentricity. The meta-discourses that the respondents chose to draw from provided a framework of linguistic devices that individuals used to represent their social experience of family and separation. They were used in such a way that they characterised a specific sequence of events, enabling me to create a more objective model that represents the timeline of significant chapters that can be experienced/constructed differently depending on the meta-discourses that people were able to and chose to employ.

Table 4: Summary of the 6 meta-discourses and their constituent discourse components

Meta-discourse	Description	Constituent Discourses
Breaking Up	This meta-discourse is used to express how separation is experienced. It is useful in demonstrating the emotional pain that separation brings, as well as apportioning blame, highlighting personal sacrifices and promoting how events were out of individual control. The meta-discourse can be applied to create victim/perpetrator positions and can inform perceptions of moral action	Victimhood Worst Experience Ever Men Should Leave
Making Sense	A meta-discourse that assists people in understanding and explaining to others what has happened to them, it can also help comprehend the changes in circumstances that separation brings. People are typically motivated to create accounts of events that promote their own behaviour as favourable and logical, with other actors being situated as aggressive or unreasonable. These descriptions are dynamic and can quickly change on context or appear contradictory	Save Yourself Drifting Apart It's Not Fair
Keep Calm and Carry On	A process that encourages people to reassess, reevaluate and reorganise their lives post separation. Typically involving new relationships, reinvention, single parenthood, co-parenting and moving home	Maintaining Normality Deciding the Future Self-Help
The New Family	The natural progression of 'moving on' after the demise of the original family unit. This meta-discourse incorporates ideas of new membership criteria and how the new family looks and is organised. It can also promote either reparation or further hostility within parental relationships that were may have been damaged during the separation. People may reevaluate how the importance of old markers of family such as blood ties are perceived, as the reformatory process can prioritise the social relationships in reconstituted, blended or stepfamily configurations	Member's Only Absent Fathers You Can Choose Your Friends The New Me

Heteronormative Nucleocentricity	The familiar social practices, rituals and activities of being a family that is situated in the context of heterosexual parents and biological children sharing a home. Can be used to help stabilise the family unit after the disruption of separation. The adherence to traditional ideals also locates heteronormative families as preferable and aspirational. Normative and stereotypical gender notions such as men leaving the family, paternal absence and women having child residency can also be conveyed within this meta-discourse	2.4 Children Maintaining Normality Repairing the Damage
Emotional Baggage	How psychological distress and physical constraints such as negotiating step relations, managing child custody and resolving financial obligations are accumulated as people experience separation	Accumulating Trauma Worst Experience Ever Victimhood

Table 5 below describes the typical order of these events, along with some examples of possible ways that individuals portrayed their experiences at that stage. It was found that all the interviewees used the meta-discourses to narrate their journey of separation in a way that produced a discernible plot that was characterised by a distinctive series of stages. This started with a ‘breaking up’ event that was typically accompanied by a period of uncertainty, disorientation and adjustment. People spent time making sense of what had happened and appeared to reach a point where they decided to move on with their lives. However, the challenges of negotiating a family breakdown tended to leave them with residual emotions and experiences that coloured their view of themselves, family and relationships. It was these perceptions that then seemed to inform how and when people redefine their family system and potentially reinitiate romances that would often lead to the construction of a new and blended family unit.

Table 5: Stages of the Family Separation Model (FSM)

Model Stage	Possible Representation
1. Experiences of Pain	Going through separation and the nature of the separation can cause varying levels of emotional pain that influence how people perceive ex-partners and reconstruct family systems
2. Perceiving Transgressions	Value judgements about how the relationship ended and who was to blame. Talk can position people as victims or aggressors by telling stories in a certain way
3. Counterfactuals	Discursive accounts that construct a version of reality that helps people to understand what has happened to them and to apportion moral accountability. This can be a psychologically defensive manoeuvre to protect the self from difficult changes
4. Ontological Insecurity	How a person maintains stability and functioning by keeping a sense of consistency and order. Threats to this continuity can affect the sense of self, especially when familiar reality is compromised by critical events such as relationship breakdown
5. Moving On	A process that encourages people to reassess, reevaluate and reorganise their lives post separation. This can typically involve entering new romantic relationships, single parenthood, becoming co-parents and moving home
6. Reformation of the Family	'Moving On' is subject to interference from social norms, patriarchy and heteronormative discourses. Some reconstituted family units were characterised by a reliance on social relationships and a rejection of the traditional narrative that privileges genetic bonds and legal contracts

The stages in the model do not correspond to a definitive period, as some respondents stayed in particular stages for longer periods than others, but it does accurately portray the process that emerged from the findings of this study. It is also worth acknowledging that the model was constructed due to the similar trajectories that were taken by the 7 people involved in this study. Therefore, it does not seek to be generalisable, however, it does provide a useful representation of the empirical findings of this analysis and the experiences of the respondents. As mentioned

previously, respondents would draw on meta-discourses to represent social practices that were characterised by the model stages.

Table 6 summarises how the meta-discourses and model stages typically interfaced by mapping onto each other. It is also worth noting that these meta-discourses can manifest at more than one stage, and stages can overlap, which makes sense given how people understand and convey the complexities of separation.

So far this chapter has introduced and explained the 6 meta-discourses and how these discourses informed and correspond to a theoretical model that can be used to plot a typical journey of family separation and re-formation. This illustrated model will be presented towards the end of this chapter and accompanied by a case study that will demonstrate how this model can be directly applied to a separation experience. The following sections will address each stage of the model, providing illustrative interview extracts. Before doing so, as the model has been constructed from discourses that are situated in the discursive field of heteronormativity and nucleocentricity, this notion will be explored next.

Table 6: Mapping the meta-discourses to the FSM

Model Stage	Identified Meta-Discourses Typically Associated and Mapped to Model Stage(s)
1. Experiences of Pain	Breaking Up Emotional Baggage
2. Perceiving Transgressions	Breaking Up Making Sense Emotional Baggage
3. Counterfactuals	Making Sense Emotional Baggage
4. Ontological Insecurity	Making Sense Keep Calm and Carry On Emotional Baggage
5. Moving On	Keep Calm and Carry On Emotional Baggage
6. Reformation of the Family	The New Family Emotional Baggage
A discursive field within which the separation unfolds and the family reforms	Heteronormative Nucleocentricity

The discursive field of heteronormativity and nucleocentricity

During this analysis, it emerged that traditional social norms around family composition are both being challenged, but also persevere. This was especially apparent when respondents discussed

how beliefs held by their parents were often in opposition to their own. These differences in attitudes were regularly described by respondents in a way that seemed to construct a normative anchor that they used to evaluate their family situation. For example, individuals would tend to refer to unseparated families as 'normal'. This section will cite several examples of differing viewpoints between generations and will also show that a perceived favouring of traditional family ideals influenced how people represented their journeys of separation. In doing so, this section will aim to show how heteronormativity and nucleocentricity act as a 'discursive field', creating a contextual force on family breakdown and any subsequent reformatory processes.

A discursive field (Foucault, 1972, p. 25) is a concept that encompasses broad and overlapping discourses that reflect how institutions and structures in the social world inform a narrative that is often perceived as a "truth". In this case, the discursive field of heteronormative nucleocentricity frames the constructs of family practices and 'what is family?' within the idealised standards of heterosexual and married couples having biological children. This creates an environment where family is situated within a discursive field that privileges discourses that adhere to traditional social norms that perceived the nuclear family as an institutional aspiration. However, as per Weedon (1987, p. 35), the discursive field is also constituted of competing discourses that offer alternative manifestations. In the case of family life, these are discourses that portray family as socially constructed configurations that are blended, founded on roles performed, alternative or queer. The meta-discourse of heteronormative nucleocentricity that forms a discursive field is explored in detail in the following section

The following excerpts illustrate how some older generations tended to privilege nuclear families as being the most acceptable or 'normal' configuration, here, John describes growing up in an era that discouraged divorce and advocated the trope of parents staying together for the good of the children:

"People didn't get divorced or leave their children, if they divorced it was when they were sixty and the kids were grown up and gone. Kids held the family together."

Jane explored this idea of 'normality' when she explains how she saw the event of parental divorce seemingly downgrading her domestic status and positioned this childhood incident as responsible for labelling her family as abnormal:

“A normal family... Well, my mum and dad split up when I was doing my O' levels, so we didn't have a normal family for a long time.”

Similarly, Shaun identifies himself as a damaged product of a 'broken home' by explaining how this led him to experience society viewing uncoupled mothers as promiscuous and immoral, also highlighting the nuclear family discourse as hegemonic:

“As I was a product of a broken home in the 70's. My parents split up when I was 5 or 6. There really was a... Single-parent families were the big... What they meant by single-parent families were unwed mothers. There was an idea of loose women with no morals.”

These perceived views of the older generation contrast sharply with the more progressive attitudes held by the interviewees, who are all in non-nuclear families and typically talked about family separation with a greater level of acceptance. When respondents discussed attempts to convince older generations to reflect upon more liberal familial perceptions, the two competing views tended to cause tension between the generations. In this extract, Freya expresses this sense of discomfort when she recalls how her ex-husband's parents would regularly belittle separated families:

“I remember years ago before me and Dominic split up, we went out for a walk with his parents, and his mum and dad would make comments about separated families, or what they would classify as 'dysfunctional' families.”

The disapproval of separation being associated with dysfunction appeared to influence respondents to try and avoid having their own families branded in this way. Sherab represented this idea during her account which expressed concerns around her divorce being a personal failure and

how this fear led to her amending her definition of what constitutes a nuclear family. She attempted to do this by highlighting the importance of her separated family being connected through shared parenting, bringing attention to how the children are a joint 'product' of the divorced couple. At the same time, she minimises the value of maintaining marital harmony and refers to how this strong connectivity allows her to see her family as nuclear, albeit lacking a marital component:

"I still think of it as a nuclear family. Not a married nuclear family, but we are still the parents of the children. Obviously, there is not a married connection, but there is a connection with being those two children's parents."

This form of social masking seems to be an attempt to avoid the expected environment of hostility that surrounds separated families, an issue also highlighted by Freya when she recounts her outrage following an uncomfortable conversation with a judgemental parent shortly after her amicable split:

"There was this father stood next to me and he goes to me "Oh, he has done really well considering what he has been through", I was completely flabbergasted [...] That's the stigma I think, right there. That somehow if you are separated or divorced, it must mean something really bad for the children."

For Freya, there is a societal discourse that alleges that children are inevitably damaged by family breakdown. Interestingly, she then provided an alternative view that her 'good-natured' divorce did not harm her children and illustrated her point by stressing her son's academic successes of attending a notable grammar school and graduating from a top university.

This undertone of separation being seen as a failure was also often accompanied by a concern that blended families may be viewed as inferior. Craig explores this idea when he reflects upon his daughter Anna's experiences of her parent's separation by contrasting it to his childhood of growing up in what he feels was a 'proper' and traditional family. Craig highlights these different experiences of family and explains his perspective of Anna having a substandard version of family relative to the nuclear prototype he grew up in:

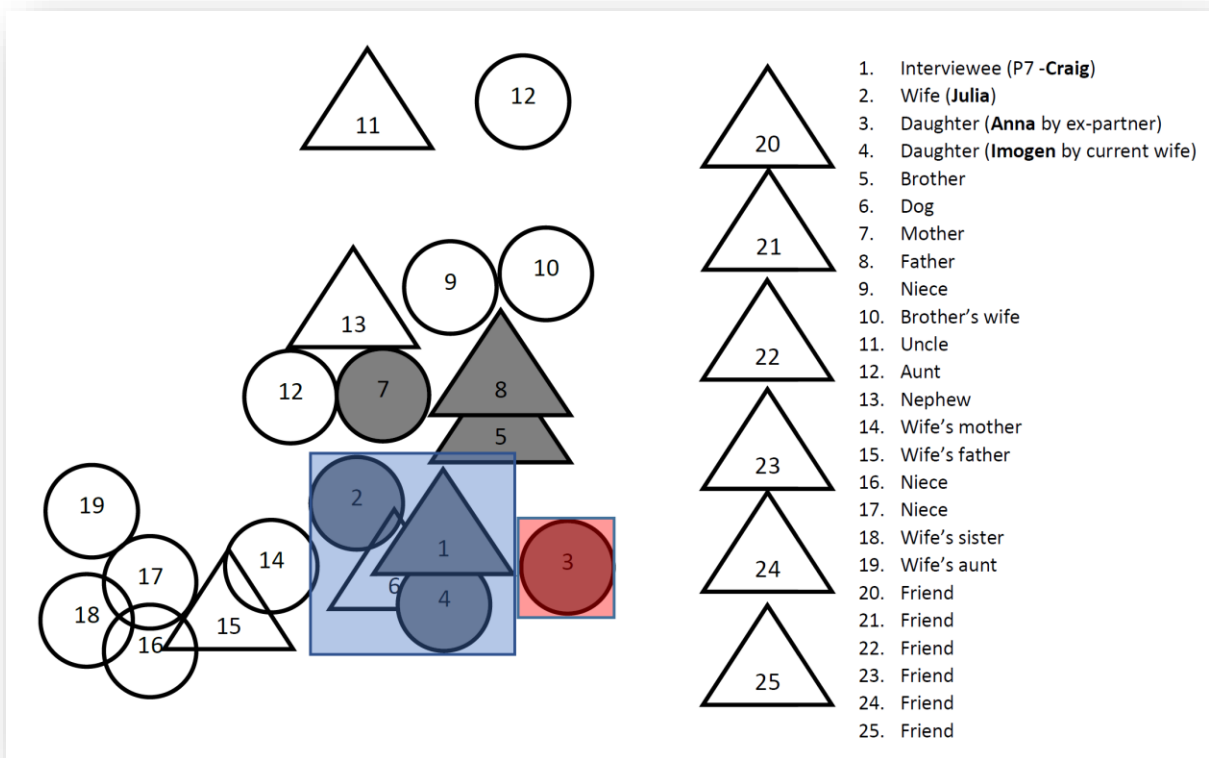
“I just liken it to my family, when I grew up it was mum and dad and Ronnie, it was the four of us together all the time, Anna hasn't got that. In my mind, what family is, she doesn't have that. For her, her upbringing means that she has a different version of family.”

To illustrate how Craig views his family organisation, the family map he created during the interview is shown below in Figure 2 (the greyed-out members are shaded to indicate that they are discussed in this section). This map is a useful and revealing visual guide to how Craig constructs his family around his nuclear ideals, especially around how he incorporates his daughter Anna from a previous relationship into his current setup. I have used a blue square to mark what Craig defines as his current immediate family, which includes his wife Julie, their daughter Imogen and the family dog.

Notably, he has placed these individuals right next to himself in an overlapping group, and he describes this cluster with the nucleocentric descriptors of a ‘classical family’ and ‘2.4 children’ (a historical reference to the average number of children in a UK nuclear family). He goes on to explain how Anna, who is marked by a red square is not part of his family due to her holding a nomadic role and transitioning between his and her mother’s family system. This distancing of his daughter Anna is further represented in his family map by positioning her as not touching the rest of his immediate family group:

“Yeah... It's weird as with Julie and Imogen, we have got the 2.4 kids or whatever you want to call it; the classic mould of the family. Anna is part of the family, but she is not part of the family because she is not here all the time.”

Figure 2: Diagram of Craig's family map (Greyed out members are discussed)



Some respondents had opinions about how this nuclear ideology is perpetuated. For instance, Shaun feels that the mass disapproval of alternative families is reinforced by political discourses within mainstream media:

“There is a code about separated families. They are not hard-working, hard-working is Mum, Dad and two kids living in Esher. The nuclear family is what the Daily Mail mean and Theresa May means when she says we want to support hard-working families.”

Under the influence of the nucleocentric ideology, several respondents disclosed that they delayed breaking up due to the perception that children would become tainted by the stigma of divorce. Here Sherab explains how she waited for over a decade before initiating her divorce. In this case, she sees this as protecting her children from the harm of family separation:

“I lived like that for about 12 years, I thought it was better to keep the family together and

the children grow up in the home, with both their parents as what was happening was not their fault.”

The discursive field of heteronormativity and nucleocentricity also seemed to ‘other’ alternative forms of family. Several of the respondents described a tangible fear of how vulnerable they felt in blended and re-formed families that were primarily established upon social relationships, rather than genetic bonds found more commonly in nuclear units. In this respect blended families were experienced as more precarious and riskier, as John summarised:

“Building bonds with people is difficult. They are not full-time bonds, they are part-time, they can end at any time.”

When John constructed his family map in (Figure 3), the only genetic relation he included was his daughter (highlighted with a blue square) and the rest of the individuals on the map are family members inherited (large red area) through marriage to his wife Lisa (that is to say they are related genetically to his wife, but not him). He previously explained that even though he has officially joined his wife’s family, he feels like a temporary member who lacks the safety that she has provided by her blood ties. On his map, he illustrates this idea when he created a circular boundary that contains all the current legitimate family members, he goes on to say that if his social relationships become strained, he may find himself outside this boundary and left vulnerable:

“Yeah, I show my wife this... I draw a circle and if I am outside that circle then I am not happy. I have to be inside the circle.”

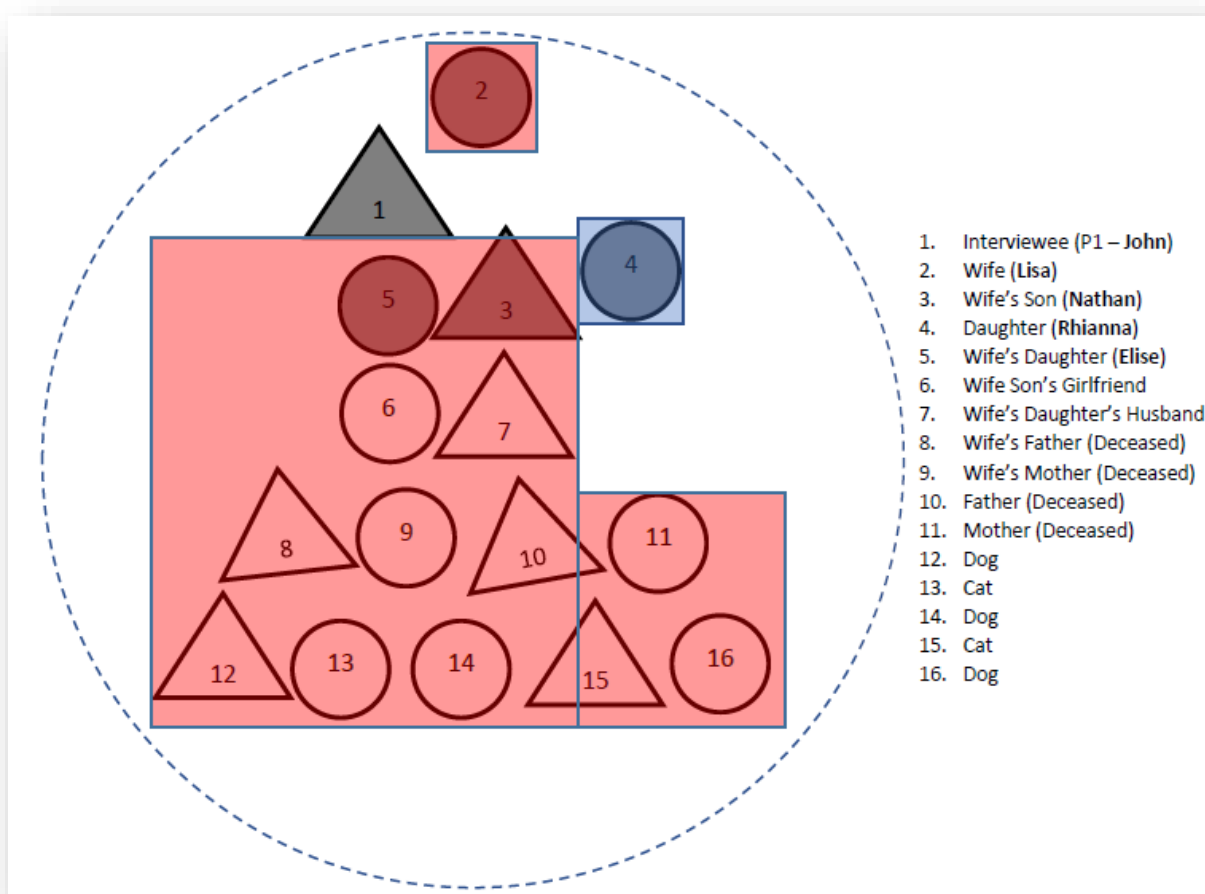
Shaun expresses similar concerns when he speaks about his awareness of a single negative experience being able to irrevocably damage a family unit that is not held together by blood ties:

“Something you think of that is strong can be broken very quickly. You can lose so much more by a stray chance event.”

Like John, he worries that if this does happen, he could also lose access to much of his family that are genetically allied to his wife:

“Other than Jill, there is no close, close people to me. What would happen if Jill wasn't there? I would lose contact with all these people and that would hurt. Although they are not blood, they are family and I would be sad to lose them.”

Figure 3: Diagram of John’s family map (Greyed out members are discussed)



Some respondents compensated for this perceived sense of being a risk by working harder to assert their position in the blended family by valuing the social roles that they perform. John firstly describes how he does not need to invest much socially into his relationship with his biological daughter Rhianna, as he feels that her needs are met by her mother. Interestingly, this allows him to have greater resources to invest in his stepchildren, Nathan and Elise:

“I know that Rhianna has everything she needs with her mum, but Nathan and Elise didn't have it, I came in and our bond grew stronger.”

In this respect, John works to develop the social bonds within his family to offset his lack of genetic relationship with them. For example, he nurtures a close bond with his stepdaughter Elise and gains a sense of approval from her when she chooses him over her biological father to walk her down the aisle at her wedding:

“Now I know I'm important, Elise will ring me... That has never happened to me before, she is not my daughter. The wedding... she said that she wants me to, as I have been more of a dad to her in the past 5 years than he has in 20.”

By comparison, John explains that he does not have to work so hard with people who are biological relations. For example, he describes his bond with his biological daughter Rhianna as unconditional, emphasising that she is always part of him and his family, despite him having very little to no contact with her:

“Whenever I am inside or outside my circle, Rhianna is always here [points to chest], she is in here and bits of me are in her.”

This section has explained some of the ways through which family experiences are compelled and constrained by the discursive field of heteronormativity and nucleocentricity. It also reveals how some people who lack genetic links to family members may work hard at maintaining the social relationships that they have with family members, arguably as a way of offsetting the precarity of their positions. The focus will now turn to explore each stage of the FSM and will provide empirical examples of the meta-discourses that respondents drew from at each stage.

Stage 1 - Experiences of pain

The first stage of the model is experiencing pain and corresponds to respondent accounts that describe and make sense of events and interactions that left them with varying degrees of emotional pain. This stage was typically initiated around the time of the actual separation and it was found

that people tended to draw from the meta-discourses of 'breaking up' and 'making sense' to relay their experience. Everybody interviewed described their relationship breakdown(s) with a sense of grief and emotional pain, and even though relationship separations were expected to be associated with loss, the intensity and insidiousness of this pain were surprising. Craig encapsulates this idea when he describes how his separation was the most difficult experience of his life and that the consequences of the event still affects him 'It was awful. That was the most traumatic thing that I ever had to go through. It still has implications now...'

Within the literature, emotional pain is conceptualised by Bolger (1999, p. 342) as "the broken self", a state associated with events such as violence, unmet needs, trauma and loss. She proposes how these events are typically accompanied by several crucial characteristics; her first property of 'wounding' is the mental personification of being physically hurt, usually triggered by another person's actions and resulting in the second property of feeling alone and disconnected. These two processes are experienced alongside an internalised discomfort that part of them is missing and a shifting of self-awareness that attempts to make sense of the experience. When contextualised within this concept, this connection between pain and separation becomes obvious and explains why individuals are so committed to voicing this notion.

It also appeared that people's pain was connected to the levels of hostility, rejection, unfairness, abuse and aggression that they felt were present during both the relationship and separation. Several respondents described how levels of pain experienced fluctuated over time and that the damage caused would often leave emotional wounds. In this excerpt Shaun used metaphor to represent pain both as physically scarring and emotionally as an unwanted tenant living in his brain:

"It still hurts, you build scar tissue, you think I'll be stronger than this. Someone once said to me...You need to get over Nadia and not let her live rent-free in your head."

Painful episodes that were shared by respondents were highly variable in their presentations and were also regularly accompanied by a myriad of emotions. In this example Sherab explains how her pain was not around the demise of her relationship but was focused on the impact of divorce on family and children:

“Yeah, it's such a shame [starts crying]. I don't miss him at all, but I am upset that the marriage broke down, as that is not what I wanted for a family and my children.”

She cried during this part of the interview and explained how she felt that her Jewish ancestry had culturally informed her views on divorce and had left her with uncomfortable feelings of shame and disappointment. To help me understand this idea she drew my attention to an old Jewish adage that claims that ‘Even god weeps when couples divorce’. This sentiment made sense of her emotional distress and contextualises her previous statement about trying her utmost to avoid divorce.

All the respondents made an indication that the pain of separation had affected their mental health in various ways, with Shaun sharing his notion of wounding and Craig describing how the event still impinges upon his day to day life. Here, Jane makes a more explicit link to the adverse effects of pain when she talks about how her discovering her husband’s infidelity triggered a long battle with depression that required professional assistance and medication:

“It was horrible times; I went slightly off the... I think he decided to leave me for her [...], I think I just stood in the middle of the living room, Kevin was at nursery and I just screamed for about 5 minutes. It seemed like forever, I had to go to the doctors and get anti-depressants, something to calm me down.”

Even when separations are less explosive and are more aligned to the recognisable trope of ‘falling out of love’, pain is still present. Here, Freya expresses herself with a gentler tone when she recounts how her marriage ended due to marital monotony:

“We didn't really argue, and I didn't know how to manage that. It was not how I knew how to be, and it was difficult. At the time I thought that this is pants...”

Her sentiment viewing a lack of marital tension as tediousness could be interpreted as a misconception that sees conflict as an essential part of marriage, an understandable belief that could be situated within a childhood that normalised parental animosity “My parents divorced when I was 7 years old. I was always stuck in the middle”. Unlike the earlier discussed experiences of pain, Freya’s account seems to be less about the injustice and appeared to emphasise painful notions of loss, regret and misunderstanding.

These eclectic manifestations of pain demonstrate both the influence and scope of the phenomenon, with the impact of pain being influenced by how people made sense of and represented their experiences. These meaning-making mechanisms led to the analysis revealing the next stage of making sense; an idea that respondents used to understand what happened during the separation and how they can story moral positions of victims and perpetrators. These value judgements can be useful indicators of how people go on to define family and conduct future co-parenting relationships, especially when understanding why significant people are included or excluded from a family system.

Stage 2 – Perceiving transgressions

The next stage of the model is concerned with how people make sense of the pain that they have experienced by conveying accounts that tended to focus on explaining how and why their relationships ended, particularly when events or people were perceived as psychologically threatening. These events were often storied as ‘transgressions’ against the relationship that contributed to the demise of the couple and seemed to influence how family is redefined post-separation. Examples of transgressions that emerged from the findings were seeking intimacy outside the marriage, domestic violence and antagonistic differences in religious, parenting, political, cultural or social views.

To explain this concept, I made a distinction between low and high transgressions in the

model as follows: low transgressions are characterised by minimal emotional arousal, shared responsibility and a balanced narrative. In comparison, high transgressions are generally seen to be emotionally charged, blaming and polarised accounts of proceedings (Anderson *et al.*, 2011). These transgressions were typically informed by respondents drawing from a 'making sense' meta-discourse that can be used to assign relative moral positions within the breakup process, often with an intent to highlight perceived offences by their ex-partners and demonstrate how they have been wronged. The following excerpt by Kate epitomises this idea through a statement that accuses her ex-husband of destroying her family with his unreasonable behaviour 'It wasn't my decision to break the family apart as such'.

This section will also refer to the results of the screening survey that respondents completed before the interview. This survey was used to identify the type of co-parenting relationship that each interviewee has with their ex-partner and makes a reference to whether or not they currently have any contact with their children, as people identified as 'fiery foes', 'dissolved duos' and 'angry associates' are more likely to be estranged from their children (Ahrons, 2007a). It also shows the level of transgressions (Table 7) that I have determined were experienced during the relationship breakdown (individuals with multiple entries have children with more than one person). This was done by analysing the transcripts relative to the criteria for high and low transgressions described previously.

Table 7: Respondent typologies identified during the screening survey phase

Respondent	Co-Parenting Typology (Ahrns, 2007)	Contact with Children	Transgression Level
John	Dissolved Duos	No	High
Freya	Perfect Pals	Yes	Low
Kate	Co-operative Colleagues and Angry Associates	Yes/Yes	Low/High
Sherab	Co-operative Colleagues	Yes	Low
Jane	Dissolved Duos and Angry Associates	Yes/Yes	High/High
Shaun	Fiery Foes	No	High
Craig	Co-operative Colleagues	Yes	Low

During the interviews, several respondents disclosed that their relationships had ended when they discovered that their partners were being unfaithful, a high transgression. Interestingly, these cases of infidelity seemed to be understood and shared differently by the men and women in the sample, with the two men appearing to view affairs as direct assaults upon their manhood that were communicated with stereotypically masculine expressions of anger, emasculation and humiliation. For example, John described how he slowly became infuriated as he processed the revelation of his wife’s adultery after returning from military service. He initially describes being confused by his emotions and reflects on whether his time away from home had contributed to the infidelity, following several days of reflection he then changed tact and shifted the blame to his ex-wife:

“It took 3 or 4 days for it to sink in, then rage took over. I don't get angry much but when I go, I go. I got angry with myself as I thought was it my fault for putting her in that situation.

Then I got angry at her for doing it.”

Shaun had a similar response when he found out that his wife had been having a longstanding relationship with another man, he describes his reaction as a ‘cliched performance’ that resulted in him becoming highly aggressive and throwing both her and her possessions out of their family home:

“Are you having an affair?” She said “Yes”, and I said, “Get the fuck out of my house then.” I did the cliché of getting all the stuff out of the wardrobe and throwing it out the window and grabbing her mobile phone and throwing that out the window.”

In John and Shaun’s narratives, the two men go to great lengths to describe how their female partners had committed an offence that legitimised their subsequent retaliation; in both cases, this punishment included intense aggression and exiling the unfaithful partners. By comparison, when Jane found out about her husband’s affair, he became violent towards her (despite him being the one having the affair). Jane gives a vivid account of being physically attacked after arriving home to find her ex-partner and his mistress at her house. During her recollection, she recounts how the violent episode not only left her hospitalised but also left her with a sense of injustice, as despite the assault being directly witnessed by her young son Kevin, he continued to idolise his father.

“Yeah, and Kevin had him on a pedestal. Despite the fact he witnessed his dad head-butting me and smashing a glass screen on the door because I came home and stopped him being in my house with her.”

These gender differences in reactions also showed that neither John nor Shaun made any reference to the men that their respective partners were involved with, preferring to focus their attention and anger on the actions of the women. It was also apparent that when discussing these

events, the accounts felt inherently patriarchal and seemed to portray women as deceptive and untrustworthy. In this excerpt, Shaun refers to his ex-wife as defective and mentally unwell, potentially allowing him to privilege his behaviour over hers “I joke about it and I shouldn't do. But she had some serious and proper mental problems.” One interpretation of this statement is that it allows Shaun to represent his wife’s actions as coming from a place of limited agency and incompetence. This type of ‘framing’ (Gumperz, 1982) can be used to linguistically view events through specific biological and cultural filters and could be a way of him discursively situating the affair as an irrational action, rather than the product of a failing relationship.

Curiously, this focus on the woman’s role in the infidelity is further perpetuated by Jane when she describes a betrayal from her female perspective, as she also depicts the ‘other woman’ as liable for the affair. In the following excerpt, Jane describes her irritation at seeing her ex-partner ‘parading’ around the town with his then pregnant girlfriend. Again, she focuses on demeaning the adulteress, rather than addressing the culpability of her unfaithful male partner. It is also worth acknowledging how Jane does not use this woman’s name throughout her interview, preferring to leave her anonymous and deindividualized:

“Oh, I think he bought his pregnant person with him once and they were knocking about town. That really annoyed me as well. I was up there, and he was acting the injured party, walking about town with her and her fucking (excuse my language) big swollen belly acting like bloody lady muck...”

Craig offers a more balanced understanding of his experience of infidelity, a view that may be crucial in enabling the maintenance of his functional co-parenting typology identified during the screening survey (Table 7) of ‘Co-operative Colleagues’. Even though his ex-partner’s affair has been classified as a high transgression, Craig portrays their separation as being due to incompatible upbringings and immaturity, avoiding the temptation to assign personal wrongdoing and fostering a

more shared sense of accountability for the relationship ending:

“She was my first girlfriend when I got my house. I had a sheltered upbringing and was wet behind the ears; I couldn't live or function on my own. So, I met her, and we moved in. It was a torrid relationship, arguments and doomed to fail, we were completely different people.”

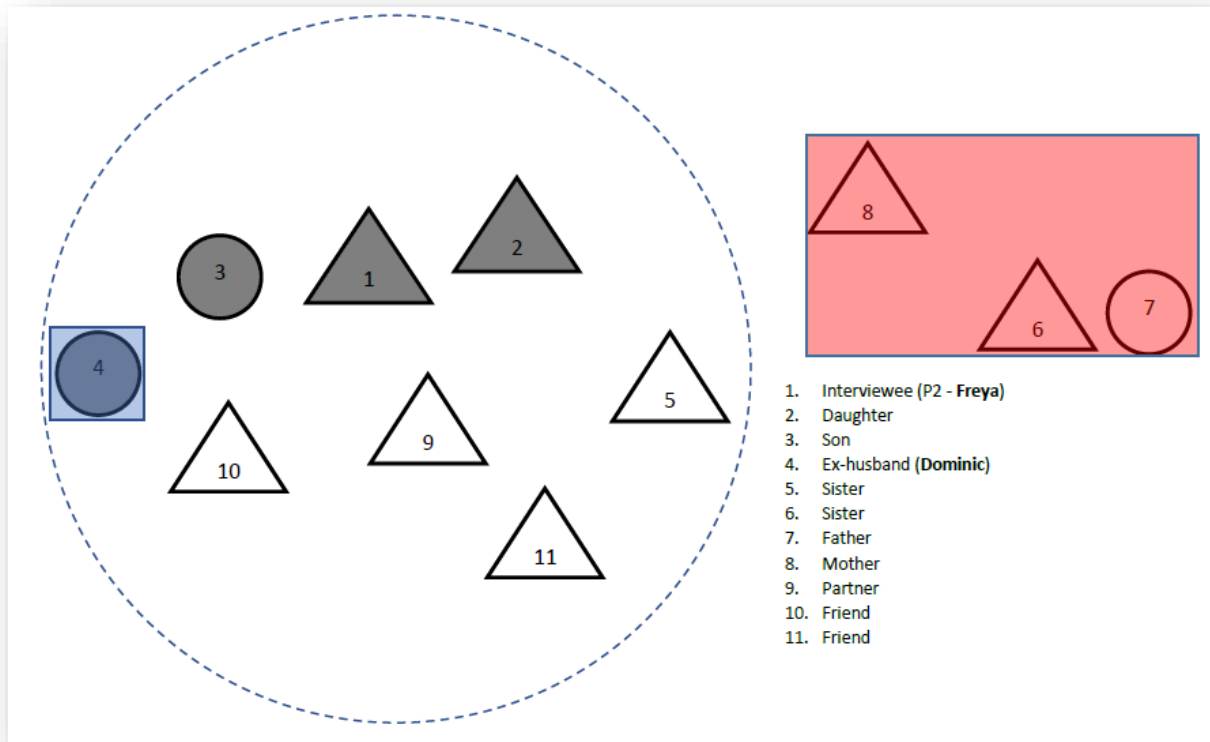
Although the transgression is still recognised by Craig when he chooses to exclude his ex-partner from his current family system (Figure 2), he explained that even though he views the ex-couple as occupying separate family systems, he feels that they can work together and that this cooperation facilitates his regular contact with his teenage daughter Anna.

In comparison, relationships ending under the classification of low transgressions tended to ‘fizzle out’ due to boredom, disagreements over life decisions or by couples simply growing apart. Freya’s situation has been mentioned previously when she represented her marriage to Dominic as uninspiring, she further explains how she eventually left the relationship when this lack of excitement became unsustainable “I had been unhappy for a while, I thought that I was unhappy with Dominic. That he was boring, and it was like living with a friend”. She then spoke about how even though Dominic was distressed by her departure, they left on good terms and remained friends, a sentiment that was also seen in her family map, as she was the only respondent who chose to include her ex-partner in their current setup (Figure 4).

In this diagram, Freya illustrates her separated family as one unitary system, with her ex-husband Dominic occupying a prominent position (shaded blue square). Remarkably, she was the only respondent whose parenting relationship was categorised in the screening survey as ‘Perfect Pals’. Freya also explained she makes a distinction of the biological family that she has poor quality social associations with by placing them outside of her dotted blue boundary (shaded red rectangle). She also advised that even though Dominic is within this supportive zone, he is placed on the

perimeter; acknowledging his role as a helpful parent, but also indicating how she views the couple as having transitioned from intimate partners to professional co-parents.

Figure 4: Diagram of Freya’s family map (Greyed out members are discussed



Sherab also talks about her amicable ‘Co-operative Colleagues’ relationship with her ex-husband, making an effort in the following excerpt to highlight that even though the marriage did not last, her ex-husband is represented positively “It’s such a shame that we couldn’t work as the way I look at it, we both had qualities that could have benefited the other.” Similarly, Freya separates her romantic disappointment from how she sees her ex-husband as an appreciated father “Absolutely, he’s a great Dad, he’s a great Dad... I know I can always say to him... What do you think?”

This type of talk is in stark contrast to the previous high transgression accounts that discussed marital contraventions with a sense of resentment, blame and contempt. All these accounts were explicitly critical of the other parent and tended to portray the co-parenting

relationship as distant and hostile, often resulting in membership withdrawal and disconnected family systems. The respondents typically framed their talk about the pain of these transgressions as being detrimental to their self-worth and a danger to their past and future emotional well-being. This sense of threat seemed to create an environment that encouraged people to try and reassert their ailing sense of self by using a discursive device that made sense of challenging situations using declarations designed to insulate painful narratives. These statements constitute the next stage of the model and are discussed next.

Stages 3a and 3b - Counterfactuals

Throughout the analysis, the interviewees often relied upon presenting a version of reality that downplayed or altered aspects of their painful experiences. This interpretative device appeared to be a way of exploring a process that all the respondents articulated with an identified meta-discourse of 'keep calm and carry on', a linguistic representation of the recognisable trope of people having to get on with their life. This stage was typically characterised by people adapting to new lifestyles, managing transgressional pain and rationalising difficult choices such as leaving the children. Essentially these were actions typically considered as life-changing decisions that are hard to comprehend without a persuasive sense-making mechanism. Counterfactuals were predominantly found when using the 'breaking up' meta-discourse and when people reflected upon their separation journeys, especially when they were reworking their family definitions and moving onto new family structures.

I have termed these 'counterfactual' accounts as attempts to convince the audience that decisions were necessary, beneficial and in some cases unavoidable. These reports can also be considered as representing 'stakes of interest' (Potter *et al.*, 1993), linguistic resources that can help provide people with psychological stability during the vulnerable period of experiencing family transition. Counterfactual thinking is a widely understood process that people may use to imagine alternative realities produced by different choices. These realities can correspond to better

alternatives (e.g. If England's goalkeeper was not injured, then they would have won), or as downward and less attractive possibilities (e.g. We are lucky England got through, imagine if we had been eliminated in the group stage).

The main purpose of counterfactuals is to manage, regulate and assimilate behaviour into the social world (Epstude and Roese, 2008), with a distinctive function of processing difficult emotions, especially regret and loss (Mandel, 2003). This is especially pertinent to this analysis, as counterfactual accounts were typically identified when people were trying to manage the numerous challenges of family breakdown. Accounts from both men and women demonstrated widespread use of counterfactuals when describing how relationships ended. These accounts usually appeared to position the storyteller as a victim of the other parent by presenting vague narratives that can be hard to undermine (Edwards and Potter, 1993). This format of storytelling seemed to help rationalise peoples' behaviour and offered a sense of incongruence that denied any loss and insisted that the separation benefitted all the actors involved. However, these counterfactual accounts were often inconsistent and were typically constructed with confusing, contradictory and counterintuitive statements.

The previous section referenced John's painful experience of family separation which resulted in him leaving his young daughter, Rhianna is now an adult and she and John's relationship is characterised by sustained periods of non-contact. John's explanation of this was interesting, as he offered an account of being both incredibly attached to her "My love for Rhianna is untold, I wouldn't swap her for the world" and simultaneously claimed that that she is unaffected by his absence and fully provided for by other family members. He went on to portray how these circumstances have created a positive situation that has allowed him time to concentrate on being a valued stepparent in his current family.

This discrepancy could be thought of as an example of a counterfactual, as John misses his daughter, yet he has decided to move on with his life and not see her. Crucially, he also positively

connotes this situation when he says she is fulfilled and that she gets everything she needs from her mother. However, counterfactuals are often contradictory and confusing. For example, when John emphasises the importance of his stepfather role to two children who lacked a stable father figure, he is promoting a belief that having a paternal figure in your life is important. This would contradict his earlier statement that his daughter whom he does not see gets everything from her mother and does not need her father in her life.

Both John and Shaun use a similar discursive technique that claims that their children are flourishing, despite their lack of contact. This counterfactual device could function to inoculate (Potter, 1997) them from the pain of being removed from their children's lives, allowing a perceived reality where their continued absence is not painful. The accounts may also be fictitious, due to a lack of contact with ex-partners and the children; therefore, knowledge of the children's well-being may be limited.

The analysis also discovered that gender was an important component, with female interviewees typically framing separation as a process that was less about self-preservation and tended to focus upon the survival of the original family unit; characteristically represented by using the meta-discourse of 'keep calm and carry on' within the discursive field of 'heteronormativity and nucleocentricity' to keep things as normal as possible. Sherab does this when she explains how she felt the need to justify leaving her marriage by emphasising how family life remained unchanged by prioritising the children's access to their extended family:

"Something about divorce doesn't sit comfortably with me when you have children, I hate the impact it has on other people and I think that their lives should carry on as much as possible, with the same people in it."

Similarly, Kate explains how she maintained normality after her separation by making sure that all the children in her blended family shared one surname. Interestingly, she then contemplates an imaginary future where her family all end up with different last names, effectively removing their

communal belongingness “Well you could all live-in different homes and have different names but still all be family, I would still be mum”. This excerpt could be seen as Kate adapting her thinking with a counterfactual style ‘interpretive repertoire’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) that retains the normality provided by ‘belongingness’ by promoting her motherly role and simultaneously demoting the previously significant idea of name-sharing.

An important aspect of DA is to discover anomalies within the data (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This was the case within Jane’s interview when she provided a variation on the idea that men should leave after a separation, as her children stayed with their father. She included a counterfactual that was expressed with a ‘making sense’ meta-discourse that claimed how her leaving was best for all involved. However, she also declared how she suffered by making an immensely painful sacrifice:

“As he was never gonna move out and I was just gonna get more and more stressed about that. The minute I moved out, the minute I relaxed. I had made a huge sacrifice; I was really gutted about that.”

This counterfactual may be a useful way for Jane to understand and legitimise her departure, which may be trapped within the discursive field of heteronormativity that favours the idea that it is only culturally acceptable for men to leave their children (Kalmijn, 2007). This notion is explained by Sherab as a taken for granted proposition that during separation men’s greater access to financial resources mean that they should leave the family home “It’s not so much that I think the male should leave, but they have the means to do that”. Interestingly, Jane’s exit refuted this social norm and she described how a sense of shame forced her to defend her actions, even though she felt her decision was made for the good of her family:

“But the girls, it was upsetting for them as I was always shouting at their dad. He was always there, and he would never usher them away, so they would just see me being angry at him all the time.”

Jane further justifies her circumstances when she describes how her ex-husband's Muslim family forced her to leave and then replaced her with a more suitable woman from their own culture:

“They eventually got his new wife over and they all moved in, and the girls were happy, and they had a female figure in the house. She was obviously from their culture and they already knew her.”

This account could be drawing from the ‘making sense’ meta-discourse to offset the pain of being without her children by promoting how the arrangement was made under duress and profited everybody involved. She had already referred to how she was sacrificing herself to stop the conflict in the home and claimed that the replacement wife was a more culturally appropriate role model for her children. Jane goes on to emphasise that the situation also benefitted her and her new husband by allowing them to spend quality time together “I was perfectly happy as well. It also meant that we could have weekends to ourselves.”

However, Jane also suggests that she misses her children and that it is important to have daily contact with them “Although I am still close with my daughters, they are only 45 minutes away and we Skype every day”. I want to propose that these discursive and counterfactual acrobatics allow Jane to reauthor her ‘keep calm and carry on’ meta-discourse to portray her difficult situation as a product of effectively handled circumstances, rather than be perceived as a woman who abandoned her children.

The previous examples have shown how counterfactuals serve a vital role in helping people to recover from historical hurt, alleviate shame and facilitate moving on from separation. The next section explores the existential insecurity and subsequent stabilisation process that occurs when family structures breakdown and are thrown into disarray.

Stage 4 - Ontological insecurity

The process of family separation is commonly associated with economic insecurity, fractured relationships and it typically forces individuals to reconfigure assumptions, expectations and needs

(Ahrns and Rodgers, 1987; Lebow, 2003; Amato, 2010; Moore, 2016a). All the interviewees reported on these types of challenges and expressed the experience as unsettling and threatening to their sense of self. It is this threat to self that is represented by this stage in the model, which I have termed 'ontological insecurity'. In this example, Jane summarises how her breakup caused turmoil in her life when she describes how she suddenly had to move home, quit her job and uproot her son:

“My son had a really good nursery place there and I had a really nice job, everything was fine, I would drop him off and go to work. Then pick him up and go home. All this got ruined and I ended up back at my Mum's with all my stuff.”

I have situated this destabilising experience within the sociological concept of 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991), an idea that routine and certainty is used to maintain safety, positivity and optimism. When a context endangers this by introducing disorganisation, reduced agency and increased uncertainty, a person can suffer anxiety and existential dread that alters their intrinsic structures of meaning. It was found that separation tended to initiate threat responses by activating a survival instinct that interviewees used to stabilise their sense of self by reconstructing lived events with counterfactuals that helped soften the painful episodes of separation.

In this excerpt Shaun describes how his ex-wife's affair endangered his ontological security by initiating a period of depression, ending his marriage and causing him to lose contact with his children. The threat to self is encapsulated in the following quote where he explains a lack of purpose in his life and having to rely on his pet dog to get him through “If it hadn't been for Bruno then I would have had no reasons to get up, no reason to leave the house”. In the interview he then follows up with a positive counterfactual that explains how the affair saved him from a dysfunctional domestic life:

“I look back on it now and it was the best thing she could have done. The relationship was toxic, we hated each other at a molecular level. But there was no way that either of us was going to leave the other one, except for if one of us had had an affair.”

This type of narrative also fits within the framework of Potter *et al.* (1993) by considering the

preservation of ontological security as a staked investment that protects the self, with counterfactuals being mobilised as rhetoric devices that help manage decisions that have led to negative outcomes; such as family estrangement reported by Shaun.

The interviewees also tended to report a drive to reassert their ontological security following the initial period of adjustment that accompanied their separation. For example, Sherab draws upon the meta-discourse of 'keep calm and carry on' when she explains how she lost access to all her in-law family members after she decided to end her marriage. She then presents this loss of family as inconsequential by framing them as not her type of people:

"Not all his family have stayed in touch with me and that is fine as I don't think I would have wanted them to. They were not my kind of people..."

However, she had previously spoken about how she valued their relationship "His family were very loving, and family orientated. They were very inclusive, it felt nice to be part of that." and expressed the importance of them remaining present in her children's lives. In this case, Sherab seems to be responding to losing her ontological security by underplaying the value of the relationships with her husband's family that she has suddenly lost access to.

This type of discordant reporting seemed to be a common theme that emerged from the analysis and was often accompanied by a sense of disorientation and a motivation to get back to a recognisable family setup. For instance, John represented his separation as highly destabilising, a feeling only resolved by meeting his current wife and being accepted and supported within a new family unit:

"God I struggled. I moved in with Lisa and got married the next year. Now I feel like I have been here all my life, it's like everything is fixed..."

This example also highlights the influence of the discursive field of heteronormativity and nucleocentricity, as John felt the only way to regain a sense of order was to find himself an

established family with an appropriate vacancy.

Once the initial turmoil of separation subsides, several of the interviewees spoke about how they attempted to bolster their ontological security by emphasising positive aspects of themselves. Freya does this by drawing from the 'keep calm and carry on' meta-discourse and presenting herself as a decent parent by taking responsibility for the marriage ending, as well as supporting her ex-husband's new relationship and making amends about her decision to end the marriage:

"That he wasn't boring and it wasn't him, it was me, I didn't want him to take that into another marriage and I think that somehow he had... Course he had his part to play, but I thought it was fair to tell him as I didn't want him to think that it was all down to him."

John draws from a slightly different version of the 'keep calm and carry on' meta-discourse by presenting his identity as a father who has become a victim of an enforced estrangement between himself and his daughter. John also uses a 'making sense' meta-discourse that portrays this situation as being perpetuated by his resentful and fearful ex-wife who does not like that he has remarried and taken on a second family:

"I don't know, it's a difficult one because I know since I got married to Lisa, her mum was basically you are not taking my daughter away from me type thing."

He goes on to explain how he has tried to reconnect with his daughter and likens their relationship to building a wall, with the inference that it is his daughter and not him who is resistant to making the relationship work:

"I lay a brick, then she does, hers may be a bit smaller than mine though. Then she might take one out and I will put one in the hole. Between us, we are getting there."

There was also an inclination for people to try and regain ontological security by representing their failed relationship as poor quality, badly judged and pointless. This echoes Potter *et al.* (1993) notion of protecting staked interests by making explanations vague, difficult to undermine and polarised. Here, interviewees constructed their previous family as a downward

contrast to their current, allowing them to perceive their separation as an evolutionary event. For example, Sherab uses the 'making sense' meta-discourse to describe how she was in a marriage that was patriarchal and unequal "In my marriage, I felt that my voice wasn't actually heard..." Similarly, Jane explains how she felt oppressed by her husband when he prohibited her from enjoying social opportunities "It was all right for me to go to work, but I had to come home. I couldn't go off and do stuff, have fun..."

These critiques of the failed relationship tended to be accompanied by accounts that portrayed the new family unit very differently. In the following example, John presents his separation with a narrative of fortunate timing that depicts his breakup as an opportunity for him to be available to meet his current wife, which was mutually beneficial:

"Although if I came out sooner, I might not have the family I have now. It all happened for the right reason. The timing was spot on with my wife as she was available as I left. At that time, I needed her, and she needed me..."

Shaun also expresses how unfulfilling his failed marriage was by using a political metaphor that illustrates how he had no power and was subjected to an unpredictable regime from his ex-wife:

"You know the situation is that households are not democracies, they are benign dictatorships at best. If you have an unstable and not always benign dictator, you probably want to keep that dictator happy."

Interestingly, Shaun then contradicts this image of living under tyranny when he describes his dictatorial ex-wife as unwell and in need of saving "She wasn't a well person... And there was a desire on my part to be the white knight, I think, to rescue her." In some ways, this seemingly incongruent description of the same person being a poorly patient and oppressive overlord feels nonsensical. However, when considered as a discursive switching of 'footing' (Goffman, 1981), this contradictory account demonstrates the confusion experienced during periods of ontological insecurity.

A thought-provoking aspect of how transgressions affect ontological security can be observed when there are 'alleged' violations of subjective social justice. In most of the accounts, there is a moral dilemma that places somebody as the offender; for example, when infidelity is punished by exile from the family home. In contrast, both John and Shaun drew from a 'making sense' meta-discourse that emphasises how they were unfairly treated by unfaithful women who forced them to leave their homes and prevented contact with their children. In this example, John explains how his poor relationship with his daughter is maintained by her resentful mother's manipulations "I think she is thinking that she doesn't want her mum to know we are talking. Rita is like that; she is domineering and jealous." Similarly, Shaun expresses how he feels that his estrangement is sustained by unfair social norms that persecute separated men and favour women. In this excerpt, he draws attention to how some men garner a sense of self by taking extreme political action when attempting to gain access to their children:

"Angry, I have never been a fan of fathers for justice people as they just embarrass their kids. But... I can see how someone can be driven to that kind of action. The thing about the breakup is that it has made me very understanding of people doing desperate things."

The drive to re-establish ontological security following the pain of separation has been evidenced as a strong psychological motivator that uses damage limiting counterfactuals as an emotional life-raft that permits the rebuilding of familial identity. This is typically achieved through the 'keep calm and carry on' meta-discourse that privileges narratives of survival, sacrifice, redefinition, reparation and re-formation; there is also a tendency to denigrate the failed relationship and idolise the current setup. Although there are many contributing contextual factors, differences in how men and women behave were observed, with men sometimes adopting a self-interested position and women focussing on preserving family units. Men were also seen to subscribe to the idea that divorce is institutionally biased against them, an attitude that can promote hostility and denouncement of traditional blood ties.

Stages 5 and 6 - Moving on and the re-formation of family

This section refers to the final two stages of the model, which are moving on and re-formation of family. Moving on is the process of rebuilding identity, evaluating relationships and managing logistics of change such as moving home. This is inherently linked to the re-formation of family, which refers to the new family unit(s) that are formed post-separation, often involving new partners and stepfamilies. All respondents referred to 'moving on' from the separation and spoke about their new family formations, this appeared to be an inevitable process for all. It was usually characterised by the loss of a familiar social circle which encouraged them to recruit replacement members, such as new partners and to recreate their family setup.

Alongside a recasting of characters, the standards placed upon family membership was also adjusted, typically through placing greater value upon the quality of relationships. This revision can also be couched within Potter *et al.* (1993) framework by considering how the ambition to protect a staked investment of functional ontological security means that family members are vetted to ascertain if they are supportive, rather than being automatically included based on genetics or legality.

When people talked about moving on, one key aspect of the process was learning to co-parent, this happened with varying degrees of success and was linked to levels of conflict between parents and how transgressions were perceived during the breakup. For example, Freya frequently referred to the ease of co-parenting with her ex-husband Dominic, crediting this to good communication and their amicable breakup:

“We have always tried, him and I to get on and always been on the same page and have high levels of dependability, I know that I will always be able to rely on him.”

This was also noticed by her children, who were shocked to find out that this level of cooperation is not universal to all separated families. This was highlighted when Freya talked about her son's

girlfriend coming over for dinner and being surprised by the attendance of both his parents and their friendly interactions:

“His girlfriend has been here for dinner; she has clearly grown up with a different experience. We always have a laugh and a chat and take the piss out of each other and whatever else you do. Apparently, she went and said afterwards "That is the best family meal I have ever had" and my son was like...What?!?"

This is not always so amicable, particularly when the conflict was high during the breakup. For example, Kate spoke about how her co-parenting interactions with one of her children’s fathers can be unpredictable and antagonistic:

“It's like Jekyll and Hyde. It depends really if he has a hangover, if he has been drinking the night before I know I am going to get it in the neck.”

The second key aspect of moving on from a previous relationship was the formation of new romances and subsequent families. In this example Craig describes the impact of this process on his daughter Anna using the ‘new family’ meta-discourse by seeing her as having two families that she moves between, as both he and her mother are in new family systems:

“That is part of the guilt. I have my idea of what a family is, but Anna just bounces between the two. She is not completely part of this family and she is not completely part of her mum's family, because she is here.”

Family re-formation involves a significant shift to what constitutes family and how family connections are understood. The interviewees all described how the pain of separation had led them to reevaluate what are the important criteria of family. Consequently, supportive and trustworthy relationships were prioritised, in some cases this was over the traditional family markers of blood and legal connections, as Freya summarises:

“Family is not just about blood relations, it's about someone you can rely on, and I know I can rely on these people.”

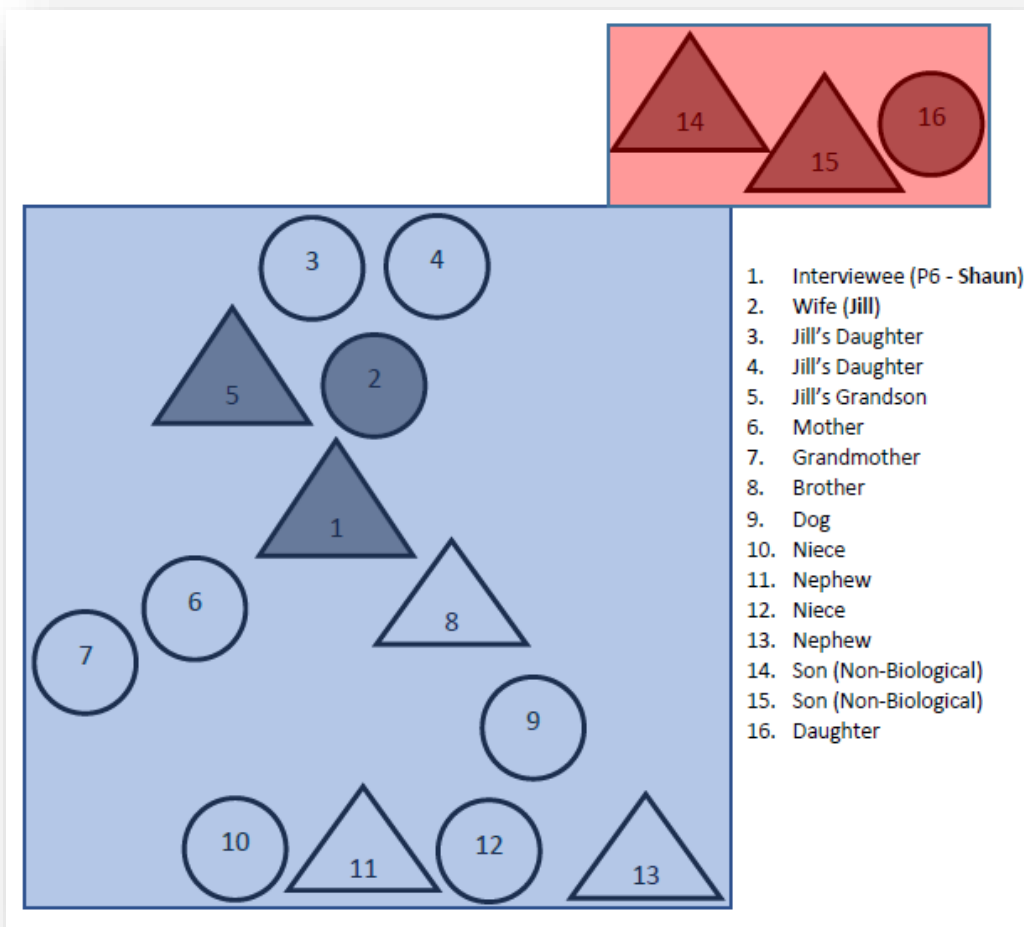
This change was also seen in Sherab's narrative when she explained her family is like a community and included many non-traditional members such as colleagues, friends and clergy; a choice that she explained was determined upon an abstract notion of 'closeness':

"We meet on that basis and even if you don't know someone, you can feel an immediate closeness to someone... That's it, closeness is really important."

Separation seemed to leave people with versions of family that were no longer technically nuclear, but was often tied to the nuclear ideal, as several respondents struggled to explain how family members with whom they had no social connection were included in re-formed configurations. Shaun firstly rejects the blood narrative by privileging those with whom he has regular contact and beneficial relationships with "My father is not on there because I don't consider I have, well I have got one, but he is not family... He's genetics."

Interestingly, although he has not seen his children for many years, he includes them on his family map (Figure 5, red rectangle), but positions them away from his main family group (blue square), highlighting the difficulty of severing nuclear obligations, regardless of lack of social contact. This demonstrates the tension that people have when trying to re-form family that can often be based on social connections within the discursive field of heteronormativity and nucleocentricity. In this case, Shaun is quite selective with elements of nucleocentricity that he rejects and those which he tries to sustain.

Figure 5: Diagram of Shaun's family map (Greyed out members are discussed)



Jane negotiates this tension differently by acknowledging the distance that has developed between family members following separation, by describing relationships as either connected or disconnected. This allows her to have a fluid version of family that can fluctuate and evolve:

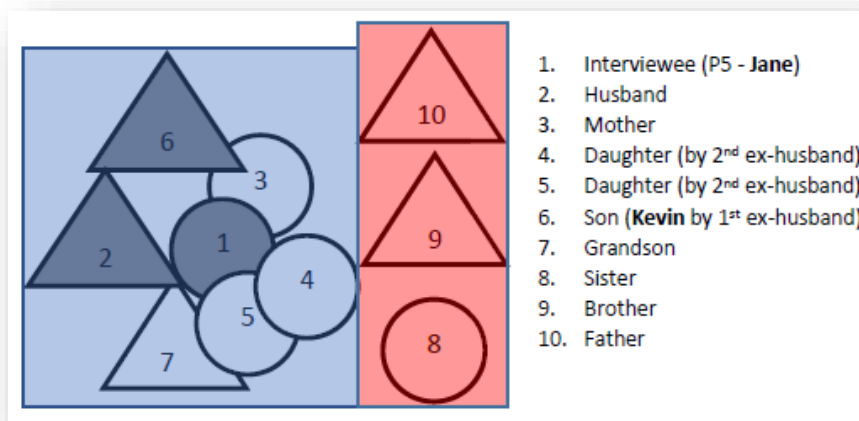
“This is a series of disconnections that have connected. They are all sort of apart, but then they are actually together. The girls are part of a disconnected relationship and my son was part of a disconnected relationship.”

This can be seen in her family map (Figure 6) that has different elements that are physically overlapping and connected (blue square), as well as including people deemed as socially unhelpful, but genetic family (red rectangle), identified by Jane as ‘disconnected’. While this appears to

construct an adaptable version of family, it also exposes a vulnerability around relationships that lack any blood ties becoming disconnected permanently. In this example, Jane expresses concern about when she and her current husband Tony have a prolonged period of no quality social interactions:

“All these people here are connected disconnections. Sometimes I say that to Tony. I say, "I am feeling really disconnected". Like when he is really busy with work and when I have been busy.”

Figure 6: Diagram of Jane’s family map (Greyed out members are discussed)



Family membership is a highly complex and changeable concept, with the analysis suggesting that genetics and relational quality are combined to create a fluctuating hierarchy that adapts to the current context and allocates membership rights accordingly. Respondents formed intricate family systems that could be singular and harmonious, singular with boundaries that emphasised social status and explained absenteeism, or ambivalent sovereignties. This idea is illustrated in detail next in Kate’s case study that revealed how stepparents can become redundant when biological parents reengage.

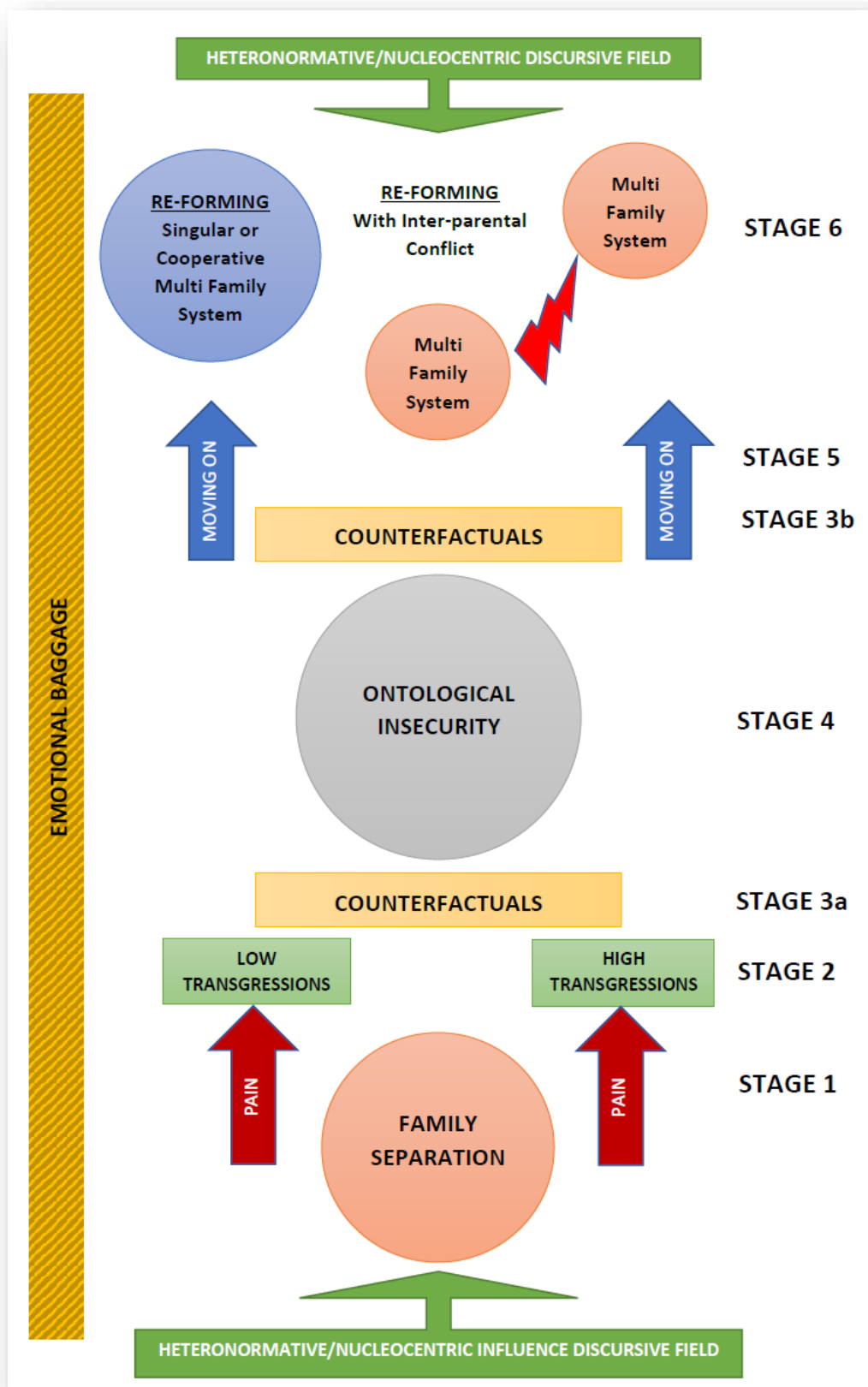
Family Separation Model

The below diagram (

Figure 7) is a complete diagram of the model outlined in this chapter. This model gives an illustrative overview of the chronological trajectory of the separations that my respondents experienced. This has been organised into six stages that typically occur in sequence. The stages are influenced by an overarching discursive field of heteronormative nucleocentricity and contain episodes of psychological distress (emotional baggage) that permeate throughout all the stages of separation.

It can be seen in the model that the separated parent starts the journey at the point of separation (Stage 1), making sense of the relationship breakdown and forming judgements about significant incidents and events that are then ascribed high or low transgressional value (Stage 2). This leads to a processing period (Stage 3a) that involves the creation of narratives around the relationship and how it has impacted the self. This self-reflection typically results in a time of psychological instability (Stage 4) as meaning structures change and assumptions about family and life choices are challenged and reevaluated (Stage 3b). At this point, people begin to move forward with their lives (Stage 5) and will begin to create a new idea of family that is influenced by any new relationships and ongoing co-parenting arrangements. This journey is further affected by how a person manages psychological trauma from negative relational experiences (emotional baggage) and influenced by the socio-cultural ideas of separation and traditional family (heteronormative/nucleocentric discursive field).

Figure 7: Family Separation Model (Galbally, 2020)



Kate's experience – A case study of family separation

Below is Kate's story which has been chosen as a case study because her situation was unique within my sample. She currently manages two separated parenting relationships (both her children have different fathers, both of which are ex-partners of Kate) and has experiences of being a stepparent and having other people act as stepparents to her children. During her interview, Kate explained how she distinguishes the quality of these two very different co-parenting relationships; the first identified during the screening survey as 'Co-operative Colleagues' and the second shifting between 'Angry Associates' and 'Fiery Foes' (Ahrons, 2007a). This case study is complicated and therefore a cast of characters are included in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Case study character cast list

Name	Description
Dylan	Jasmine's biological father and Kate's ex-partner
Jasmine	Kate's daughter with ex-partner Dylan
Simon	An ex-partner that took the role of stepfather to Jasmine from her birth until the point at which he split up with Kate
Luke	Joe's biological father and Kate's ex-husband
Joe	Kate's son with ex-husband Luke

This case study will also show how Kate draws upon discourses that represent her separations and family re-formation that can be linked to the conceptual stages of the FSM. Kate offers several interesting experiences that allow an exemplification of the stages but also throws up complexities that are not fully explained within this theoretical model. The most thought-provoking part of Kate's experience is how she holds and manages two contrasting parenting relationships into her family configuration and how ongoing practices continually constitute family life. Although both ex-partners are included and defined by her as family, she has a very different interpretation of their

function and position within her family concept. Here and throughout, identifying features of family members have been changed to respect confidentiality.

To situate Kate's present understanding of family within its historical context, a chronological account of Kate's separation experience will be described. A story that began when she fell unexpectedly pregnant with her daughter Jasmine and was quizzed by her casual boyfriend (Dylan – who was the biological father) about the paternity. Kate draws from discourses that represent her break up and describe the emotional pain caused by Dylan not wanting to be officially involved with his daughter, her response to this was to allow him to occasionally visit Jasmine under the guise of a family friend.

“He wasn't very trusting in me whatsoever, to the point where he said that he would come and visit every now and then and be classed as a friend/uncle or whatever...”

During this period, Kate reported being supported by her parents but also felt that coming from a family that had not experienced separation created tension between her situation and the traditional ideology that her parents symbolised. This reflects the heteronormative discursive field within the FSM that separated parents often measure their success or failure against. Interestingly, the FSM explains the presence of this normative pressure, but people may negotiate this in a variety of different ways that are not necessarily discussed. In this example Kate is aware of how her single-parenting could be negatively viewed and responds to this trouble in a way that reconstitutes her family by quickly establishing a relationship with Simon and engaging in heteronormative practices that affirm their new family configuration:

“We had just met and really fell for each other. I found out I was pregnant with Jasmine and Simon was like “It's okay, I'll bring up the baby and we can do this together and say I am the father.”

The FSM is useful for interpreting how Kate and Simon sought to create this nuclear style set up as a way of being socially accepted and to help Kate manage the emotional insecurity that accompanies lone parenting:

“Because you are the two parents in the household, whether you are biological or not, that is the way I see it. If someone has children, you treat them as if they are your own.”

Kate’s case is also useful in identifying some of the limits of the FSM. For example, the decision to replicate a nuclear configuration had implications for Simon’s existing social network, demonstrating that responses to troubles will often draw in other individuals (Morgan, 2019). In this situation, even though Simon was happy to engage in caregiving and fatherly duties, effectively treating Kate’s daughter as his own, his parents vocalised their uncomfortableness with the idea of performing as grandparents:

“When Jasmine was a baby and I was with Simon, his mum really rejected her because they were not biological, and she knew that. She was like "I am not gonna be nanny because it is not Simon's child."

This highlights how Simon’s parents had a subjective understanding of family that conflicted with Simon and Kates’s version, generating a tension between those who choose to ‘buy in’ to how family life is organised by others and those who do not.

Kate eventually got confirmation that Dylan was the father of Jasmine and he began to feature in her life, this quickly led to Simon and Kate’s relationship ending and Simon becoming redundant as a parent to Jasmine. This was a concern that Simon had previously raised when he objected to Dylan being publicly recognised as Jasmine’s father:

“He felt it would change things between him and Jasmine. Maybe not between us as a couple at the time, but it would burst the family bubble slightly.”

Kate’s interpretation of this was that Simon felt that he was surplus to requirements as she had reconstituted a family form with her daughter being actively parented by her birth parents. After she had separated from Simon, Kate started building a working co-parenting relationship with Dylan and his recently married wife.

The next step of Kate’s journey was the meeting of her now ex-husband Luke, who already had a child from a previous relationship. Kate again highlights how her ideas around family

construction are heavily influenced by heteronormative and nucleocentric ideals when she highlights how the couple decided to present their similarly aged children as related after they were incorrectly assumed to be twins by a member of the public on a family day out:

“It was funny because we would go out as a family and people would think the children were siblings.”

This section of Kate’s biography is a good demonstration of how the FSM interprets how the process of parents ‘moving on’ from previous relationships is inevitably accompanied by complications in the form of ‘emotional baggage’. In this case, Kate’s complexities are negotiating family reconstitution, assimilating stepfamily, managing multiple parenting relationships and processing her pain from failed romances. Kate and Luke went on to get married and had their son Joe before Kate describes how she literally and figuratively ‘left the family’ when her marriage become defined by aggressive and conflictual interactions:

“I did the brave thing... he liked a drink and a row... I used to plain sail it... After one awful row, he went to work, and I locked the door... That is how I left that family.”

This case study was also selected as it provides a critical perspective when applying the FSM to complex family life, with the main point of contention being the management of this dual relationship that her children have with their two different fathers. When seen within the context of the FSM, there is a theoretically idealistic idea that Kate has two family configurations that effectively constitute a wider family concept, but the reality of this is not as clearly defined. If this notion is accepted, it is improbable that these two configurations are exclusive of the other and do not exert some form of relational influence. To unpack this effectively, I will draw on literature around family troubles and troubling families (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013; Morgan, 2019; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2019) that would suggest that Kate’s situation is one where all family members are negotiating a variety of duties, obligations and constructions of meaning-making when involved in everyday family practices. It is also apparent that Kate’s setup can be explained through Morgan’s

view on the relational nature of troubles, with Kate and her children all being affected by the relationships between herself and the two fathers of her children:

“Frequently there is interaction between what is found to be troubling, whatever their source, and the interrelated sets of individuals who are touched by them.”
(Morgan, 2019, p. 2226)

Whilst creating her family map (figure 8), Kate regularly referred to a blue dotted boundary that demarcates between her trusted chosen family or ‘family bubble’ (blue square), and people like her children’s fathers, whom she feels obligated to include:

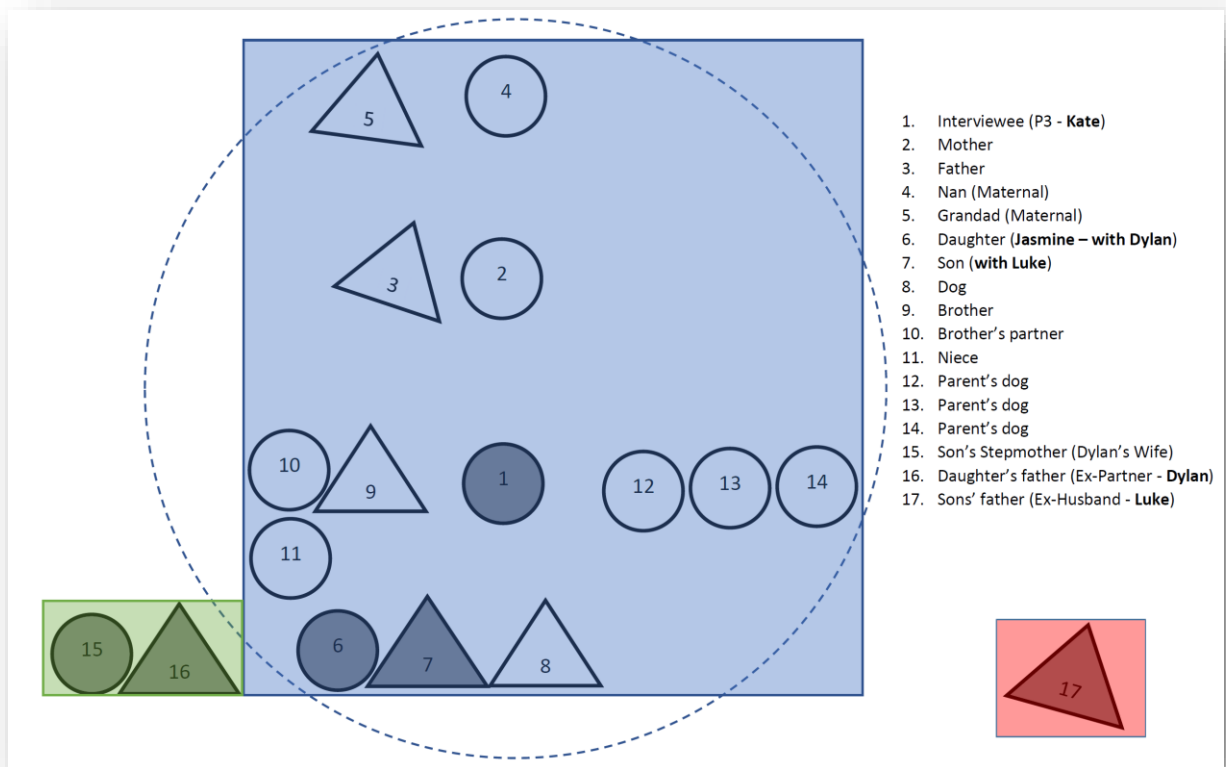
“I don't class them as my family, but they are part of our family, in terms of our household family.”

When she goes on to explain how she includes people who do not have parental obligations, decisions were predominantly made upon their involvement with helpful family practices such as assistance with childcare (Morgan, 2011). Directed by this principle, she omits her ex-husband Luke’s parents and his extended family:

“They do not overlap into my little bubble as they are not helpful with the bringing up of my children.”

Even though this caveat provides Kate with a useful condition to separate those that she deems as her supportive family and those who get included through the privileging of child/parent dependency, the social reality of this is not as simplistically binarized. The main issue being that by distancing certain extended family, Kate limits potential sources of support and her children are unable to access people who could provide important aspects of cultural identity and ancestral heritage. These problems may be further exacerbated into established troubles by the fact that Jasmine can access a rich family biography through extended family, but her brother Joe cannot.

Figure 8: Diagram of Kate's family map (Greyed out members are discussed)



This situation is further complicated by Kate feeling compelled to include her ex-husband Luke on her family map (red square) due to his regular child contact, although, their acrimonious relationship means that he is placed into an isolated location:

“I feel like I have to include him as he is directly involved with the people I am directly involved with.”

Exploring this tension within the FSM, Kate creates a counterfactual account that minimises the importance of Luke's extended family and then emphasises that their exclusion is because of the historical and ongoing transgressions that she experiences with her ex-husband. This can be viewed as a mechanism that promotes an emotionally safe distance between the parents as a way of managing the ongoing threat to her ontological security that the events surrounding her separation and subsequent co-parenting create:

“He has days where he will turn up on the doorstep and he is an arsehole and will say the most horrible of things.”

Thinking about how Kate describes and manages these ongoing troubles, Luke’s continued involvement assists Kate in providing parenting consistency after their difficult separation, effectively servicing ‘a need for a degree of continuity in the events and meanings given to them, in a person’s life’ (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013, p. 5). The preservation of wider family life may also motivate Kate in holding the discomfort she feels at being compelled to include Luke due to her son’s dependency on his father and to satisfy Luke’s sense of obligation to be an involved parent (Morgan, 2019). Furthermore, this choice could also be pivotal in maintaining a mutuality within the sibling relationship of her children, as leaving her son without access to his father could escalate into troubles that are constituted by feelings of unfairness between Joe and his sister Jasmine.

Even though the FSM accounts for these differences in how the two involved fathers are seen within Kate’s family configuration, there are some limitations on understanding the interplay and other contextual influences that accompany this network of relationships. An example of this is how Kate’s gender and working-class background means that her single parenting with multiple ex-partners would likely be viewed negatively by society (Edwards *et al.*, 2012). These are concerns voiced by Kate when she explains feelings of gendered accountability around her situation:

“I find the whole single mum, I am the only adult to depend on in the household... Providing, organising Blah Blah Blah... Quite demanding and hard.”

Therefore, any family troubles that emerged from parenting differences could become indicative of a troubling family rather than everyday trouble, potentially bringing her to the attention of external agencies that may be inclined to offer an expert intervention (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2019). This treatment of troubles appears a stark comparison to families that occupy higher status having their troubles framed as individualised difficulties that do not generally result in them becoming viewed as troubling and requiring external help (Morgan, 2019). This unequal societal division appears to be an institutional discourse that not only hold parents

responsible for troubling families (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013) but also positions mothers like Kate as both the reason for the troubles and the person who must manage the trouble (Morgan, 2019).

With this in mind, Kate explains how she blended her and her ex-husbands family in a way that constituted the new configuration as one that resembled a traditional setup of a happy heterosexual couple with children in one home (Both Kate and Luke had children from previous relationships when they met). This shows a distinct awareness of wanting affirmation that would help avoid being viewed as troubled and Kate works hard to display (Finch, 2007) how well this reconstituted family form looks and works when both parts are placed together:

"There was a mum, there was a dad and there were 2 children...It was quite sweet actually because we were a bit of a 'ready-made family'. There were two halves that come together you know."

This statement suggests that Kate employs a pragmatism around deciding to continue including Luke within her post-separation family configuration and is a concerted effort at maintaining normality and minimising external scrutiny by presenting her family as one that remains acceptable, even though they are constituted in part through negative public opinion around lone parenting (Morgan, 2019). Even though Kate is vocal in her dislike of her ex-husband, she feels compelled to respond to this trouble and affirm her family as one with active fathers to circumnavigate the troubling family identity that absent fathers could create.

In comparison to the difficult relationship Kate has with Luke, her daughter's father Dylan and his partner are situated on her family bubble perimeter (green rectangle) and described using an inclusive narrative that emphasises the value that Kate places on family practices that support her parenting: "Dylan's mum is very supportive, and I see them as extended family really." These types of statements are an interesting aspect of Kate's case and highlight the importance of the distinction between higher and lower transgression relationships within the FSM. In Kate's case, the

transgression level makes substantial differences to the quality of the co-parenting relationships that she has with her children's respective fathers.

“Supportive would be one... Enjoy each other's company...?!? But not all family you get on with. I suppose supportive, working together type people that you are somehow related to.”

Kate's case study brings together several findings by showing that as separation unfolds, ongoing pain and transgressions contribute to the quality of future interactions. Kate is a good example of how an individual can have two very different parenting experiences that are tethered to traditional family values, underpinned by self-preserving counterfactuals and influenced by the emotional baggage that impinges upon family reconstitution. In this case, Kate has identified her family membership criteria as 'quality of relationships' and 'perceived support'; building a complex system that omits a departed stepparent (Simon), includes one amicable ex-partner (Dylan) and has a dissident partner (Luke) who gains indirect genetic membership.

This real-life example helps show the practical application for the FSM, as Kate's experience can be seen as one that is informed by the nature and history of the relationships, she has with her ex-partners and how established social norm are highly influential in how she understands her family life. There is an argument that the FSM is principally a psychologically framed clinical tool that can help separated parents to understand the quality of their co-parenting exchanges and plan any intervention by understanding the journey taken by the clients before treatment starts. However, there is also an acknowledgement of how the model is unable to encapsulate all the tensions and messiness that human relationships undoubtedly create. These are explored within a context of separation being family trouble that is relational and informed by responses to these troubles, everyday practices, meaning-making and identity characteristics.

Summary

This chapter has presented these findings in a fashion that demonstrates how the DA naturally developed using an iterative coding strategy. By the end of this process, these findings were summarised into a dynamic set of stages that were socially performed by respondents using a variety of mapped meta-discourses and discursive techniques. The agenda of this chapter was to address the first three research questions that ask how separated parents redefine family, the impact of conflict and if heteronormativity affects this? It was found that family breakdown causes emotional pain that is amplified by how transgressions are perceived, leading to levels of hurt that can diminish how socially safe a person feels. The desire to stabilise and the natural human instinct to survive encourages people to reframe their experiences and influences how they articulate their lived experience. To do this, people will often construct counterfactual accounts that attempt to make sense of and buffer the turmoil that typically accompanies the fracture and reconfiguration of family.

People are then encouraged to move forward with their life by embarking on new romantic ventures, reconstituting family units and transitioning the parental relationship from intimate partners into co-parents. The quality of this relationship is highly dependent on the levels of conflict that are experienced and how grievances are managed over time. An interesting aspect of this phenomena was that even though demographics and explicit attitudes to family have broadened with the arrival of modernism, the families in this study all experienced pressures to operate within acceptable heteronormative boundaries. There was also a role of gender within the process of 'moving on' that determined how quickly and easily people were able to transform nuclear style families to more alternative structures. The analysis also uncovered a tension between the stability provided by shared genetics and nuclear ideals; with the progressive and socially dependent family structures being characterised by rapid formation and sudden disarray if relationships deteriorate.

Family membership was shown to be complex, contradictory, inconsistent and highly

nuanced. The process is dynamic and facilitated by events and external circumstances, as well as being mediated by factors such as gender, conflict, genetic obligations, stigma and traditional family values. To illustrate this a diagrammatic model was proposed and applied to a case study that illustrated the separation journey. The takeaway message of the findings was that families tended to reorient themselves based on conflict intensity and the real-time quality of social relationships.

The following chapter will now contextualise these findings within the literature review, critically discussing this contribution as new knowledge and connecting to existing academia. The final research question of evaluating how these findings can be applied within professional practice will also be considered.

Chapter 4 – Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will concentrate on discussing the findings of the thesis, focusing specifically on answering the four research questions:

- i. How do separated parents talk about and define family?
- ii. Does parental conflict affect family membership?
- iii. How do the portrayals of separated families within society impact the lived experience?
- iv. What are the implications of this research on practice within family therapy?

Each question will be considered separately, and the results of the analysis will be linked back to the literature. Justification will also be provided for the thesis contributing to the field of family research, bringing attention to several interesting discoveries. The questions are ordered to demonstrate how each successive question builds upon the discussion of the previous; culminating in a theoretical approach to work therapeutically with acrimonious ex-partners that incorporates reformed family definitions, the role of parental conflict and the influence of social norms. I will also propose how this research will be used in further work to formalise a clinical treatment model for separated parents using my family-focussed method; an approach to mental health rapidly gaining traction within contemporary government policy (Hunt and Greening, 2017).

Following this, a reflexive account will document personal aspects of the research process and consider how the chosen methodology actively acknowledged the influence of the researcher, as it was pertinent that my parents divorced during the undertaking of the research. This event provided an invaluable insight into separated families and also allowed me to keep a reflexive research diary as a measure to manage any potential biases.

The final section of this chapter will consider the strengths and limitations of the research,

and consider how conceptualisations of family were influenced by long-established and dominant definitions of family. A case will be made that these findings can be used as a base to tentatively explore alternative style families; as the socially constructed family is not exclusively reserved for heteronormativity (Patterson and Farr, 2017).

Research Question 1: How do separated parents talk about and define family?

A key aim of the study was to better understand how to work with separated families within therapeutic practice. To do so, it was important to explore how separation affected definitions of family. My analysis highlighted that when families part, they often change intrinsic meaning structures that they previously relied on to define their newly reconstituted systems. Importantly, this meant that separated families tended to privilege social relationships and include members based upon conditional criteria, differing from the original family unit that was chiefly founded on legal and genetic links (Floyd *et al.*, 2006). This challenge to the traditional family model was strongly evidenced within the reviewed literature by various authors who argued for a more inclusive and contemporary vision of family (Coontz, 2015; Galvin *et al.*, 2015; Moore, 2016a; Sear, 2016), with family members who have no blood or marriage ties often being categorised using terms such as fictive and voluntary kin (Nelson, 2013).

This thesis drew heavily from the work of (Floyd *et al.*, 2006) who conceptualised family membership through three possible lenses that were organised as sociolegal, biogenetic and role. In Chapter 1, an argument was made that the role lens was the predominant lens for selection criteria, a position that questioned the official state definition of family that privileges 'nuclear' measures of marriage and shared genes (ONS, 2019). Again, many authors have previously taken this stance and demonstrated that family is a social construction that is discursively portrayed by roles, relationships and participation in social family practices (Braithwaite *et al.*, 2010; Coontz, 2015; Noens and Ramaekers, 2015)

My findings were consistent with other research focussing on family definition post-

separation (Fine *et al.*, 1998; Ganong and Coleman, 2017), finding a propensity for 'doing family' using social displays that demonstrate identity and legitimise non-genetic relations such as stepparents. These intimate exhibitions were typically verbalised using abstract descriptors such as togetherness, belonging and connectivity, similar practices to those noted by other scholars (Martins *et al.*, 2014; Golombok, 2015; Noens and Ramaekers, 2015). These ideas culminate in a notion that corresponds with the view of family being an interpretive and ever-changing social form, differentiating the inflexible modernist 'family' from a fluid and post-modern 'the family' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990).

Additionally, my analysis found that these expressions of language were often accompanied by a reformatory discourse that rejected the blood narrative by minimising the importance of the traditional sharing of genetics. This mechanism encourages the consolidation of the new family structure by privileging more alternative style family components in the absence of previously relied upon nuclear signifiers. There was also a strong tendency to draw from discourses that prioritised offering membership to supportive allies, rather than mandatory inclusion based on blood ties.

These conditional and social affiliations were generally articulated by describing members as possessing personality assets that facilitated mutually beneficial exchanges; represented as qualities such as loyalty, support, trust and respect. When contextualised under the auspice of separated parents having previously endured painful relational experiences, keeping dependable people around you is logical and unremarkable. However, my findings suggest that these perceived qualities form the basis of the conditional criteria that afford entry to and maintain family membership. This provides an insight into how the proposition of separated parents attending family therapy together could be risky, as it both places individuals into a potentially threatening situation by orchestrating an intimate encounter with an ex-partner who may violate the various conditions of family membership outlined above.

An explanation of separation shifting to a chosen family structure

My findings strongly suggested that separated parents showed preference towards a family concept that has transitioned from 'given' family to 'chosen' family, a selective mechanism that allows the amalgamation of prescribed members such as biological children with new arrivals like stepfamily, a process identified by Nelson (2013) as the conscious selection of beneficial 'fictive kin'. Elsewhere within the literature, this was presented as family claiming (Marsiglio, 2004; Ganong *et al.*, 2017), recruiting cooperative groups (Minow, 1991) and evolutionary caring for non-dependent offspring (Sear, 2016). It has also been framed as a developmental process where the reconstituted family have to navigate stages of conflict, negotiation, rivalry and compromise (Papernow, 1993; Martins *et al.*, 2014; Ganong and Coleman, 2017). My analysis showed a shift to choosing family members is a defensive device that minimises the chances of further painful family breakdown by selecting members who pose minimal relational risk.

This social preferencing was further highlighted in my analysis by showing that although high conflict parents had often distanced themselves from their previous hostile family structures, the transition through estrangement, conflict and disconnection had resulted in the accumulation of 'emotional baggage', a trajectory facilitated by selecting discourses that devalue genetic or legal connections and favours positive social relationships, effectively maintaining functionality through the inoculation of a staked interest (Edwards *et al.*, 1992; Potter, 1997) that can discursively adjust to individual circumstances. I have formalised this idea as a self-regulating system that preserves the legitimacy of relationships using a compensatory process that can adjust or offset the social capital of blood or social membership in response to the current situation. It is proposed that this uses real-time feedback to distribute value to either construct; simply summarised as when one decreases, the other increases.

The four possible configurations of relationship are illustrated in Table 9, highlighting that when a relationship is deficient of or lacking one component, the weighting is transferred to

maintain functionality. This notion logically leads to the formation of a scale of relational quality, where the ‘gold standard’ is when there is a good social relationship with a blood relation, and the opposing extreme is a socially obsolete connection without any genetic kinship. For example, a stepfather may invest heavily in the social relationship with a stepchild to compensate for having no blood claim. In the reverse situation, an estranged parent and child may emphasise the importance of their heritage, as they have no way of validating the relationship with social criteria.

Table 9: Matrix of relationship quality

		Blood Relation	
		Yes	No
Social Relationship	Positive	✓ ✓	✓ ✗
	Negative	✗ ✓	✗ ✗

My analysis considered this type of discursive strategy as an interpretive repertoire (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), a linguistic dilemma where accountability can be apportioned as a way of upholding the stake that an actor has an investment in (Edwards *et al.*, 1992). This notion was exemplified in my analysis when John demonstrated his love for his estranged daughter by minimising the interpersonal and highlighting a shared legacy. At the same time, he dismissed the genetic heritage of his stepchildren by admonishing their distant father and privileging his social involvement. This discursive protection of self-interest and the desire to buffer oneself from impending threats has been medicalised within the literature as a ‘stake inoculation’ (Potter, 1997), potentially avoiding criticism around being an absent biological father by highlighting the importance of his social and ‘fatherly’ role in a re-formed family. The use of this form of repertoire also helps to maintain the socially constructed and re-formed family, as his family’s stability lacks a shared ‘blood narrative’ that can compensate for any tension in the social ties. Similarly, Kate privileged shared ancestry to terminate a romantic relationship with the man who had been acting as a father to her daughter. Crucially, she simultaneously devalues his paternal role by drawing from an evolutionary

narrative of children deserving to know their lineage.

Both findings are consistent with Marsiglio (2004), who argued that that successful stepparenting relies on the maintenance of an intimate relationship with the biological parent, and also aligns with other research that highlights how easily stepparents and children can disconnect when the adult relationships falter (King *et al.*, 2015a; Ganong *et al.*, 2017). These findings are also couched in the idea that it takes several years for families to fully initiate stepparents (Papernow, 1993), a process typically decided upon with an identifiable turning point that can leave a stepparent being discarded (Baxter *et al.*, 1999). This was observed in my analysis when ambiguous paternity combined with the myth of the 'evil' stepfather metaphorically 'getting in the way' (DeGreeff and Platt, 2016) resulted in a stepparent being rejected in favour of the biological father.

Descriptions of separated family

As discussed in Chapter 1 when families experience conflictual separations, how people retrospectively portray their old family can become contaminated by negative experiences of pain, disappointment, betrayal and shame (Amato, 2010; Russell *et al.*, 2016). In contrast, the majority of literature on family definition (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990; Minow, 1991; Levin and Trost, 1992; Morgan, 1996; Stacey, 1996; Levin, 1999; Coontz, 2000; Finch, 2007) tended to depict family favourably and rarely introduced these types of negative constructions. This may be due in part to their research focussing on family units that were not necessarily separated or living in conflict.

The negative descriptors associated with separation could be caused by the cultural shift of rising divorce rates and the decline of the nuclear prototype (Coontz, 2015), resulting in more complex and ambiguous family concepts uncovered in my analysis. Interestingly, it was those who had experienced high conflict who frequently reiterated how difficult separations have irrevocably tainted their family concept, an unsurprising revelation that several people reported as their 'worst experience ever'.

In these instances, family was often talked about within a pluralistic context, where the first and fractured family was negatively construed as failing, disappointing and unfulfilling. This is then contrasted with the current family, portrayed as improved, functional and a 'good decision'. The preceding chapter highlighted that people who had endured traumatic relationship breakdowns may be using this counterfactual tactic to make sense of painful experiences. This schism of current and historical family life may also be a way of trying to reassert agency and to alleviate uncomfortable feelings that accompany difficult choices such as leaving the children (Nuru and Wang, 2014).

There may also be a purpose to consciously maintaining antagonism between old and new family systems, as the positive evaluation of the new family relies on the old family being situated as a hostile and uninhabitable psychological anchor, effectively allowing people to inoculate their stake (Potter, 1997) of choosing to leave. If this narrative is not followed, then difficult questions such as 'Why did you not make the marriage work?' or 'How could you abandon your children?' may arise; enquiries that Lebow *et al.* (2012) propose are responsible for the feelings of regret and loss that are synonymous with family disintegration. Therefore, when families have parted with high-level transgressions, the old and new family must be kept rivalrous to avoid rumination and to keep the 'moving on' process viable, a common phenomenon in acrimonious child contact disputes (Blow and Daniel, 2002).

Figure 9 below is an illustrated word cloud created by collecting descriptors of family identified during my analysis. This illustration depicts the disparity between the perceived good and the bad family that some respondents had internalised. This type of division can be considered relative to psychoanalytic object relations theory as an enactment of psychic splitting (Klein, 1929), a defensive psychological process where 'bad' and anxiety provoking components are detached from more positively viewed components. Put into context, this illustrates how the 'good' family concept is maintained by being mindful of how uninhabitable the fractured unit was.

used emotional language and typically portrayed the relationship as consisting of incidents of violence, abuse and infidelity. These high conflict interactions typically developed into conflictual co-parenting relationships that could become pathologically dysfunctional and often resulted in parents and children becoming estranged, patterns of relating that commonly mirrored how the couple communicated before their separation (Friedman, 2004).

My analysis replicated this patterning, with the four high conflict respondents all recollecting historical narratives of aggression and conflict that regularly incorporated discourses that situated them as victims, an interpersonal positioning that contributes to couples establishing repetitive cycles of negative interactions (Gottman, 1993) and reinforced by drawing attention to negative aspects of ex-partners. Blow and Daniel (2002) explained these types of discursive actions as attempts to generate bad images, an idea that Mutchler (2017) expands upon by suggesting that these types of accounts are also ways of attaining moral superiority. This form of ethical ascendancy was also seen within my data by talk that represented questionable actions as self-sacrificial and necessary.

Individuals may also use these discursive mechanisms to justify absence or to manage the dissonance of exposing families to hostile environments that are detrimental to both the children's wellbeing (Harold and Murch, 2005; Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2014) and their welfare (Cherlin *et al.*, 1998). This was evidenced in my findings when alternative versions of reality were used retrospectively (counterfactuals) to insulate the sense of self and rationalise self-destructive or irrational behaviour, another example of self-preservation by the management of stake (Potter *et al.*, 1993). These alternative narratives were often organised as devices that made actions logical attempts to avoid psychological or physical threats, as well as facilitating the moving on process by perceiving the old family as unappealing and romanticising the re-formed structure.

In contrast, relationships characterised as ending due to low level transgressions like being bored or growing apart resulted in co-parenting that was more amicable with potential for

negotiation. These respondents described more amicable separations that were underpinned by feelings of falling out of love, unfulfillment and discontent, with two of these lower conflict parents (Freya and Sherab) establishing collaborative post-separation families that promote both parents being involved with the children.

However, Craig offered an alternate perspective around infidelity by processing the transgression in a different way, seemingly motivated to achieve a working parental relationship that facilitates regular and positive contact with his daughter. This maintenance of contact was highlighted as a strong factor for constructing this functional co-parenting alliance, effectively enacting the 'good divorce' (Amato *et al.*, 2011) that puts aside personal grievances in favour of child well-being (Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2014) and avoids 'weaponising' the children (Cohen and Levite, 2012). This 'good behaviour' may also be subtly motivated by the fear that if tensions resulted in court proceedings, there is a societal perception of a biased judiciary that disadvantages men (Russell *et al.*, 2016).

It is worth addressing that the other men in the high conflict category reacted very differently to their ex-partners' infidelity, developing distant and toxic post-separation relationships. Consequently, they both have limited or no contact with their children, even though they strongly expressed the importance of fatherhood. My interpretation of this disparity is that Craig came from a strongly bonded and traditional family of origin that has informed a worldview on the importance of family staying together. This was evidenced in feelings of guilt around his daughter coming from a broken relationship and how he protected the failed parental relationship by describing it as a mismatch of class, maturity and values, rather than assigning personal culpability.

Comparatively, the other two men took a well-documented position of ascribing gendered blame (Dunn and Billett, 2018) following interpreted feelings of emasculation about being betrayed. This took the form of hostility towards the female perpetrator and the salvaging of pride through acts of fierceness, distancing and drama; effectively promoting continued hostilities (Amato, 2010)

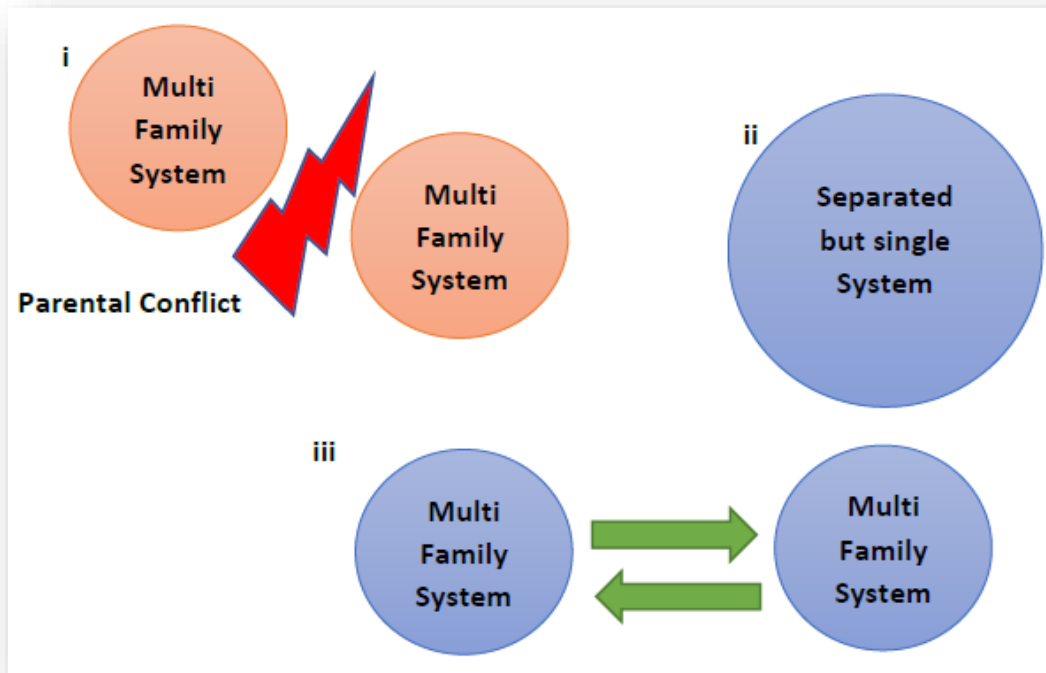
and formally announcing their emotional hurt (Blow and Daniel, 2002). Unlike Craig, they were unable to resolve this through compassionate reflection, possibly because they both originated from conflictual families, potentially replicating challenging childhoods (Hardesty *et al.*, 2016) that did not intergenerationally transmit attitudes of reparation and empathy (Gottman, 1993).

Post-separation family configurations

Situating these ideas within my 'Family Separation Model' and answering this research question requires a definitive position on how conflict affects family re-formation. The analytical phase resulted in the production of a dynamic theory that illustrated how respondents transitioned from one family by negotiating a 'moving on' process. By utilising the 'family map' (Levin and Trost, 1992) during interviews, it emerged that high transgression relationships often resulted in ex-partners being excluded from current family systems; effectively creating separate systems. Figure 10 illustrates how my model organises family separation into one of three possible configurations.

This notion of three arrangements is an evolution of Ahrons' formation of the bi-nuclear family, a division of the traditional family unit that occurs when parents part (Ahrons, 1979; Ahrons, 2007a). My model expands this theory and suggests three formations that rely upon levels of conflict between parents, allowing the creation of social constructions of family that are unified, can work together or deny the existence of the other. It also incorporates the argument that families often exclude members that they have difficult relationships with (Levin and Trost, 1992), a concept rooted in the established postmodernist position of a contemporary family being fluid and defined through social practices (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990; Stacey, 1990; Minow, 1991). More recently, US-based research has focussed upon the communicative relationship styles between co-parents (Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2019), while my model covers similar themes such as the ways co-parents communicate, it builds on this work by incorporating the concept of family membership being granted on the quality of current social relationships.

Figure 10: The three possible configurations of the post-separation family (FSM - Galbally, 2020)



- i. **Antagonistic Multi-Family System** - Multiple systems that are hostile and characterised by parental conflict (Hardesty *et al.*, 2016). Children are often estranged from one or both parents, inter-parental communication is poor or conflictual, there is often a history of court procedures and members of the 'other' family can be excluded or omitted (Visser *et al.*, 2017). When talking about ex-partners, descriptions are blaming, resentful, accusatory, denigrating and critical (Blow and Daniel, 2002). Conflict or 'stonewalling' is commonplace (Gottman, 1993), and children typically report being caught in the middle of disputes (Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2014).
- ii. **Single System** - A singular system that is organisationally unchanged from the original family and typically includes ex-partners and their extended/stepfamily. These families operate in much the same way as the pre-separation family and will typically be friendly, compromising and collaborative (Kumar, 2017). Children will transition between homes, having

relationships with both parents, seeing extended family and contact is often informal and flexible (Emery, 2011). Parenting is co-operative and arguments are usually low level and resolvable (Gürmen *et al.*, 2017). Family members will sometimes spend 'friendly' time together at important events such as birthdays with minimal tension (Ahrns, 2007a).

- iii. **Collaborative Multi-Family System** - Multiple systems that exclude the ex-partner by establishing separate and interactive configurations of family. These systems can work together and children usually have contact with both parents and their families (Gürmen *et al.*, 2017). There can be differences around parenting, although, these are usually resolvable with some compromise and low levels of conflict (Tavassolie *et al.*, 2016). Court has sometimes been used to formalise residence arrangements and anxiety can be high during contact (Jevne and Andenæs, 2017). Important family events can cause disagreements, new partners can be threatening, and joint encounters can be awkward. Ex-partners will typically be civil and talk about the other with formal apathy (Russell *et al.*, 2016). These systems can be fragile as they are vulnerable to stressors such as changing residency orders, new romantic relationships, financial disputes, new births and parenting differences (Mutchler, 2017).

Building upon Ahrns' initial research has enabled me to create a model that results in one of three socially constructed configurations of separated families that are shaped by parental conflict. This draws from the literature on the socially fluid family and integrates the current thinking on the manifestation and maintenance of post-separation conflict (Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2014; Goldberg and Carlson, 2015; Nielsen, 2017). It is this amalgamation of family membership and conflict within the context of family as a discursive and social entity that provides my novel scientific contribution and answers this research question by incorporating the social criteria of family membership identified in the first research question.

This interplay between the socially constructed family and conflict is encapsulated in the model that explains how events perceived as violating can create threatening emotional pain, motivating the avoidance of future hazards by constructing re-formed family configurations that privilege supportive and low-risk members. This means that if relationships with ex-partners are conflictual and damaging, people may minimise risk by removing them from their family concept.

Table 10 shows the link between my interviewees' co-parenting typologies (Ahrons, 2007a) identified from the screening survey and my categorisation of their post-separated family systems within my model. High conflict parents (which includes people who have no contact) formed separate systems that are oppositional, exclusive and uncooperative. Those who reported low/med conflict formed separate but interactional systems that co-parent using effective communication and collaboration. The singular system family that includes both parents within the same social concept was characterised by a parental relationship that has minimal conflict and high levels of trust.

Table 10: Identified co-parenting typologies and post-separation family configurations of interviewees

Interviewee	Co-Parenting Typology (Ahrons, 2007)	Post-separation Family Configuration (Galbally, 2020)
John	Dissolved Duos	Antagonistic Multi Family System
Freya	Perfect Pals	Single System
Kate	Co-operative Colleagues/Angry Associates	Collaborative Multi Family System/Antagonistic Multi System
Sherab	Co-operative Colleagues	Collaborative Multi Family System
Jane	Angry Associates	Antagonistic Multi System
Shaun	Fiery Foes	Antagonistic Multi System
Craig	Co-operative Colleagues	Collaborative Multi Family System

Research Question 3: How do the portrayals of separated families within society impact the lived experience?

This research question was concerned with understanding how my interviewees felt separation was socially perceived within society, as in Chapter 1 I noted a potential mismatch between statistical changes in family composition and cultural attitudes. I also consider that these public perceptions will influence the management of separation, self-definition of family, membership criteria and family re-formation. Even though I expected some negativity to be experienced around separation, I was surprised that all my interviewees described feeling shame around their experiences. Although this phenomenon has been previously considered (Leon and Angst, 2005; Moore, 2016b; Salter, 2018), the prevalence and strength of this sentiment were strong. Interestingly, the latest government demographics show that traditional nuclear setups account for around a quarter of UK families (ONS, 2019), meaning that alternative arrangements are now the mainstream. However, my separated parents reported feeling pressured to use complex social performances (Vangelisti and

Caughlin, 1997) to perform as nuclear.

My findings were consistent with previous research that identified how families promote a successful image and improve their legitimacy using positive storytelling (Huisman, 2014), shared names (Finch, 2008a; Davies, 2011) and legal statutes such as marriage (Golombok, 2015). There was also a tendency for families to engage in recognisable practices such as fun days out that are characteristic of how they are expected to operate. As much as it was anticipated that all types of families take part in rituals and celebrations (Wolin and Bennett, 1984); these actions appeared vital for reconstituted families to authenticate themselves (Minow, 1991), achieve belongingness (King *et al.*, 2015a) and be publicly validated (Finch, 2007). These concepts were captured in my analysis as a 'heteronormative and nucleocentric' discursive field that was used to show that even though the physical family structure may have altered, the social construct of acting as a 'proper' family was left intact, a pervasive phenomenon previously identified by several contemporary family scholars (Huisman, 2014; Martins *et al.*, 2014; Coontz, 2015; Noens and Ramaekers, 2015; Ganong and Coleman, 2017).

The literature review also highlighted that alongside the social performance of family, visual similarity permits individuals to be seen as a singular entity, with many alternative families being concerned that if they look and act unrelated, they may not be seen as a group (Finch, 2007). Kate captured this dilemma perfectly when she impersonated a nuclear family after her similarly looking daughter and stepson were mistaken for siblings. Rather than correct the mistake, Kate began to regularly present the children as related; explaining how this allowed her to feel like a family and feel accepted by other actors within her social context (Gergen, 1994).

Much of the literature argues that even though the nuclear family is an outmoded ideal, the increasing numbers of separated families often aspire to this benchmark (Gamache, 1997; Coontz, 2000; Bengtson, 2001; Coontz, 2015; Moore, 2016b). I identified these ideas within my interviewees who generally held more progressive viewpoints to that of their parents, but they also held the

traditional family as more desirable. Although this attitudinal shift has been framed as a cultural revolution (Schmeeckle *et al.*, 2006), one critic considers that pejorative attitudes around separation are so entrenched that the event is always seen as unfavourable (Salter, 2018). Therefore, even though separation is becoming increasingly normalised (Ganong and Coleman, 2017), my analysis suggested a disconnect between this normalisation and the reported experiences of shame and marginalisation.

How does nuclear family bias impact re-formed families?

Although nuclear family favouritism is overtly promoted within mainstream media (Salter, 2018) and regularly championed by conservative 'baby boomers' (Valiquette-Tessier *et al.*, 2016), these factors may be insufficient answers to such a complicated problem. My interpretation is that this situation may be a result of people being compelled to draw from certain discourses that are established through social, cultural and political mores, a finding that has previously been identified in mental health service users (Speed, 2006). My analysis suggested that these established discourses favour the nuclear and traditional family, constraining alternative structures by restricting agency and encouraging the adoption of a heteronormative guise. A feminist critique by Pease and Fook (1999) argued that people become oppressed when they are unable to access reasonable alternatives to culturally established standards, an idea born from a proposition that when discourse becomes so well embedded, it becomes a dominant cultural narrative that can discursively eclipse other options (Foucault, 1980).

Therefore, even though separation has shifted family from a modernist to a postmodernist structure (Gergen and Davis, 1997), people are somewhat disempowered by lack of choice and cannot source additional ways of legitimately 'doing family'. Consequently, they become constrained by a patriarchal and unchallengeable structure of traditional family situated within a heteronormative framework (Pease and Fook, 1999). This idea was explained within my analysis by considering heteronormativity and nucleocentricity as a discursive field that produces an

uncomfortable environment that the modern family is forced to exist within (Foucault, 1972; Weedon, 1987).

Furthermore, it was also apparent that classically nucleocentric family concepts such as marriage, shared names, genetic similarity and visual appearance was highly valued and used by separated parents as an anchor that tethered them to an easily accessible image of family (Turner and West, 2006), a notion that further privileges the nuclear ideal and leaves people questioning how else can you socially construct recognisable reconstituted units? If families do not recognisably act as family and remove their traditional sociolegal and biogenetic markers, they may not be socially understood (Finch, 2007); principally due to not qualifying under any of the three lenses of family proposed by Floyd *et al.* (2006).

As previously discussed, contemporary society appears to be showing greater superficial acceptance to re-formed families, but the condemnation of previous generations may have imbued a transgenerational sense of failure around family fracture. This manifested through respondents disclosing experiences of shame, as well as reporting vulnerable feelings around living within predominantly role-based structures (Floyd *et al.*, 2006). These family types have previously been shown to be overly susceptible to life stressors (Kumar, 2017), prone to replicate previously dysfunctional patterns that initiated the initial family breakdown (Zelevnikow and Zelevnikow, 2015) and are a major factor in unsuccessful family blending (Baxter *et al.*, 1999; Braithwaite *et al.*, 2001).

The literature review highlighted how this depiction of separation is discursively propagated through defamatory constructs such as being 'broken' (Moore, 2016b) and the promotion of negative stories of absent fathers, single mothers and welfare dependency (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003a; Leon and Angst, 2005), commonplace sentiments expressed in my analysis by older generations and non-separated peers who employed a recognised stereotype of divorce inevitably creating disturbed children (Amato and Keith, 1991). In Chapter 1, there was a suggestion that these viewpoints can be a result of people having limited personal experiences of family breakdown (Levin

and Trost, 1992) and being exposed to biased narratives (Moore, 2016b; Salter, 2018). However, my position aligns with emerging evidence that it is the level of inter-parental conflict that harms children, rather than the event of divorce (Harold and Sellers, 2018). Next, I will explain how this pejorative construction of all separation being harmful is a way of preserving a social hierarchy that upholds the dominance of the nuclear family.

Managing the stake of being a separated but 'proper' family

My findings suggest that the moralistic campaign that vilifies separation both sustains and protects the dominance of nuclear family and is further problematised by a dominant public discourse that destabilises familial reconstitution by only portraying traditional families as successful, wholesome and moral (Hetherington, 1999; Weigel, 2008; Coontz, 2015). My analysis indicated that the lack of agency that separated families experience around being able to be separated and successful has created a disconnect between their reality and the social context that they exist within. This disjuncture between statistical increases of non-nuclear style families and the social favouring of traditional families has created a metaphoric 'mess' where separated parents feel compelled to manage their stake (Potter, 1997) of being considered 'good and proper' by displaying nuclear attributes for social validation. This can be considered as a mutually constitutive process, as people draw from the dominant discourses around family, simultaneously perpetuating their dominance and constraining the possible discourses that could positively portray separated families.

Craig spoke about this problem when he tried to unify the discord of a traditional family concept that needed to incorporate a teenage daughter from a previous relationship. He was clearly wrestling with being a dutiful father and responding to contextual pressure from his own family's traditional ideals. This led to him presenting his current family as a nuclear-style configuration of married parents and a child in one home, with his other daughter being loaned temporary visitor membership rights. This mechanism allowed Craig to accommodate his own family culture and avoid any potential disapproval from a family mythology that has limited access to alternative family

discourses (Schmeeckle *et al.*, 2006). However, this parody caused him discomfort as he described an unease about modifying his well-established definition of family (Finch, 2007) to incorporate a daughter who is the product of separation.

My analysis suggests that experiencing separation broadens family concepts and elevates the importance of relationship quality when assigning future family membership. This can be viewed as people shifting their notion of family from a 'given' to a 'chosen' family (Nelson, 2013), a transition driven by cultural changes within domestic life that separation brings (King *et al.*, 2015b; Ganong and Coleman, 2017; Kumar, 2017). Although the 'chosen' paradigm has both academic and demographically evidential support, the nuclear model is still the powerful minority; a phenomenon identified when divorce started to gain acceptability during the late 20th century (Gamache, 1997).

This perseverance of the nuclear model is fuelled by a variety of factors that means the paradigm is both robust and resilient. The influence of stigma and longstanding generational attitudes has already been addressed, as well as how familiar practices are present in some form within all family forms (Wolin and Bennett, 1984; Whiteside, 1989; Braithwaite *et al.*, 1998; Suter *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, my analysis indicated that families that were entirely chosen could be fragile and overly vulnerable to domestic stressors such as divorce, bereavement and relocation (McGoldrick and Carter, 1999; Haldeman, 2012). Therefore, socially constructed family units may introduce nuclear traits to both stabilise themselves and be socially legitimised; simultaneously trying to 'pass' (Goffman, 1963) as a 'proper' family and avoid being perceived as separated and failing (Moore, 2016b).

The strategy to successfully pass as nuclear is a mechanism used by some to avoid being labelled under the defective 'broken family' trope and was evidenced in my analysis by re-formed families recruiting substitute members to fill vacant positions (Zelevnikow and Zelevnikow, 2015). A situation exemplified by John and Shaun who quickly inserted themselves into available father roles in new family structures following their separations, a process previously described as authenticating

family bonds through 'claiming' (Marsiglio, 2004; Ganong *et al.*, 2017), effectively situating family as a company of characters that are auditioned and recast in response to the social environment (McNamee and Gergen, 1992; Gergen, 1994). This familial auditioning also provides separated parents with the opportunity to further preserve their staked interest in keeping their family unit socially reputable (Potter *et al.*, 1993).

Furthermore, this view of alternative families being undesirable (Leon and Angst, 2005; Salter, 2018) is reflected in media outputs of traditional and aspirational family life. This favourable public perception of nuclear families also corresponds to their increased social mobility, with studies showing a marked resistance to poverty (Culliney *et al.*, 2014) and better access to healthcare (Irvin *et al.*, 2018). These parallel processes are strong motivators for alternative configurations trying to remain as nuclear as possible, further explaining the mimicking of the nucleocentric ideal of '2.4 children'. Other influences for this perseverance could be that even though separation has become more commonplace (Beaujouan and Bhrolcháin, 2014), there is a lack of viable alternatives to the recognisable family - for example, would a group of non-related and single adult men living communally, or a divorced and childless woman living alone be considered family? This dilemma tends to result in separated individuals re-forming allowable and familiar versions of family.

This has led me to conclude that people are driven to remain part of a unit that is constructed in a comparable way to families they have left. The way this is done is inextricably associated with the levels of conflict between parents. When partners part on reasonable terms and still see the ex-partner as a valid family member, the original system is left intact and can be expanded with new additions such as romantic partners and stepfamily. However, when tensions are high and ex-partners actively omit or exclude each other (Levin and Trost, 1992), family configurations are rebooted and people enlist substitutes to create a familiar version of the prototypical nuclear unit. This was illustrated within the analysis by several respondents who

formed legally reinforced structures through marriage, cohabitation and taking on parental roles with stepchildren.

Research Question 4: What are the implications of this research on practice within family therapy?

As this is a professional doctoral thesis, the final research question is interested in how the findings can be situated within therapeutic practice. In some respects, this section presents my most important discovery, as not only is this finding directly applicable to practice, but it also constructed from the previous three research questions. These findings were contextualised by my family research model by examining how separation affects family definitions, the impact of inter-parental conflict and the socially constructed tensions from normative family values.

During Chapter 1, a notion was introduced that suggested how family therapy may make assumptions about the composition of the family in treatment. In my practice, referrals will often arrive with concerns about a child's behaviour, disposition or educational progress. A typical approach starts with a comprehensive assessment of the client that maps the problem and takes a detailed family history (Wagner and Diamond, 2016) enabling a clinician to formulate a treatment plan and identify required attendees (Lebow, 2003). This second point is important, as many families will come into a service with an idea that a single individual is the locus of the problem (Feinberg *et al.*, 2007; Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2014) and will often need educating on how families operate as a homeostatic system that shares both change potential and accountability (Anderson and Goolishian, 1988). This situation is usually exacerbated in hostile family systems that are characterised by historical pain and high transgressions, as both parents are likely to be invested in blaming the other (Mutchler, 2017).

Working as a system, where family and therapist create a collaborative entity that can be influenced by all the attendees is now the dominant working paradigm within family therapy (Dallos

and Draper, 2010; Stratton, 2016; Carr, 2019), technically conceptualised by the idea of second-order cybernetics (Hoffman, 1985). In many cases, the treatment is organised around the referred child and their family are seen as being both part of the problem and instrumental in improving the situation, a notion that is expressed by Anderson and Goolishian (1988) as a 'problem determined system'. This collaborative setup is effectively working from a position that places the referred patient at the centre of treatment and can be categorised as a '**child focussed**' approach to alleviating symptoms and improving well-being (Lebow and Rekart, 2007; Stratton, 2016; Carr, 2019).

It has been well established that children are affected by any type of family breakdown (Roberts *et al.*, 2009), with ongoing parental conflict exaggerating the detrimental effects upon children's mental health, behaviour and schooling (Bernardi and Radl, 2014; Harold and Sellers, 2018). I process numerous referrals that are centred around children who are exhibiting symptoms and are also caught in conflictual interactions between their separated parents. Many parents expect that the child will somehow be treated in isolation, often struggling to comprehend how the acrimonious parental relationship contributes to the dysfunction; highlighting a tension between the biological ownership of a child and how the social relationship between the parents is negotiated (Markham *et al.*, 2017).

Recent government policy attempts to avoid pathologizing children in this way by highlighting the importance of including family when treating child mental health (Hunt and Greening, 2017). However, my data shows that who is seen as part of family is subjective, ambiguous and interchangeable based on context. Therefore, I have a concern that assumptions may be made about whether family members in treatment agree on who is part of the system, and that a '**family-focused model**' could be compromised by prescribed or 'given' family members not recognising each other's status due to poor quality relationships. Even though this approach has been a long supported position from the pioneering days of family therapy (Bateson *et al.*, 1956;

Jackson, 1957), if perceptions of family membership are not directly addressed then it can be unclear whether the 'family' in the treatment room are a legitimate family when viewed through a social lens (Floyd *et al.*, 2006). This was well represented within the findings, as most of my respondents excluded or omitted their child's other biological parent from their family configurations. This was even the case for separated parents who were classified as having functional relationships with their ex-partners.

Implementing thesis findings into practice

As mentioned previously, a common part of an assessment process is an exploration of both parent's families of origin, often facilitated by graphically illustrating family configurations with a genogram (McGoldrick *et al.*, 2008). This task typically creates 'literal' family trees where separation is acknowledged, but separated members are usually included due to their biological or legal status. However, if the same family is illustrated using family maps (Levin and Trost, 1992), individuals who were previously included in the genogram may not appear, especially when social relationships are tense or estranged. Therefore, I feel that by using just a genogram alone, incorrect assumptions about family being a single system may be left unchallenged and potentially reinforced. This is a stark contradiction to comprehensive evidence that has shown that separation will often create multiple family systems (Levin and Trost, 1992; Amato, 2000; Ahrons, 2007a; King *et al.*, 2015a).

I want to propose that the re-formed family is principally dependent on the quality of the relationship between the parents and that if this relationship is rivalrous or toxic, the families are less able to categorise themselves as a working family system. The role of conflict causing disharmony and dysfunction is well evidenced in the literature (Amato and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Hardesty *et al.*, 2016; Mutchler, 2017; Visser *et al.*, 2017), and more importantly is demonstrated in my analysis with my FSM ([Chapter 3](#)) that depicted three possible configurations created when families part (Figure 10).

Family therapy with conflictual and separated parents already implements specific

interventions such as court-ordered treatment, separate sessions and conflict resolution (Blow and Daniel, 2002; Cohen and Levite, 2012; Reynolds *et al.*, 2014; Hardesty *et al.*, 2016; Mutchler, 2017). I suggest that in addition to these interventions it would be useful to address the role of conflict on family membership, effectively taking a family-focused approach and explicitly clarifying how the family in the room actually envisions family and if the other parent is included in this; either in the same system or as a separate arrangement that can be negotiated with, much akin to a trading alliance between countries.

If this is not directly addressed, then the impact of pain from historical and current grievances could derail any attempts to work with families (Morris *et al.*, 2018). Even though this idea feels deceptively obvious, I have argued that assumptions are often rooted in the traditional and heteronormative idea of family, most notably, that a child and their parents are categorised using outdated conceptual markers of blood ties and legalities (Singh, 2009). This idea has also not been overtly addressed within the literature and so will provide a valuable contribution.

To situate this idea into a clinical scenario, I had previously highlighted an important and fundamental process of 'joining' ([Chapter 1](#)), a term coined by Minuchin and Fishman (1981a) that states that for a therapist to treat a family, they must first become a legitimate, albeit temporary family member. I want to extrapolate this notion and suggest that if the family in the room are incorrectly presumed to be one unit, then it is highly unlikely that the therapist will be successfully accepted, as no consensual version of family has been established. I want to further argue that if the therapist cannot 'join the family', the therapeutic alliance may not be created and it is likely that the client will leave treatment (Rait, 2000; Kindsvatter and Lara, 2012), a common phenomenon in family therapy (Lebow and Rekart, 2007; Wagner and Diamond, 2016; Mutchler, 2017) that is especially prevalent in separated parent work (Wang *et al.*, 2006; Blow *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, I want to propose that when working with these families, efforts are made to clarify how the family is configured and if it is viable to attempt the joining process, or if the therapist must first reconcile any

adversarial versions of family.

One key aspect of this thesis is the production of a treatment model that is designed to work with high conflict separated parents. As I have been working as a practitioner during my thesis, I have already been incorporating some of my findings into clinical work; informally testing various prototypal interventions that reconcile the fractured family concept. Initial ideas would be to have separate sessions for each parent that explicitly define and map the family, address membership patterns and help partners to process their separation. Ex-partners would then be more likely to be receptive to joint sessions that would promote collaborative parenting and privilege the well-being of the children, effectively transferring the couple from an emotionally unstable intimate ex-partnership to a more reasoned co-parenting team.

Proposed treatment model

My approach would be to implement a fixed programme of 24 sessions that allow 8 sessions for both ex-partners to understand the impact of their split, any anxieties, risk assessment and planning for treatment trajectory (Patterson *et al.*, 2018), with the final 8 sessions being attended together. The treatment will integrate systemic family therapy, attachment, psychodynamic theory and psychoeducation. Each partner will explore their unhelpful behaviour and communication to help understand that this can be disguised distress or arousal that is not being processed or correctly responded to (Clulow, 2012). Attachment theory, especially the dynamic maturational model (Crittenden, 2016) will be used to contextualise these behaviours as functional for the situation and find other ways of making requests and responding. The family will be introduced to mentalising skills (Bateman and Fonagy, 2006), facilitating empathy with other people and promoting alternative understandings of provocative behaviours.

Relational work will involve a psychodynamic exploration of the respective families of origin to understand how parents may be replicating or correcting (Byng-Hall, 1985) childhood experiences and unconsciously transferring their difficult feelings onto other members (Gerson, 2010). This

family history will inform a systemic approach that borrows from traditional approaches (Minuchin, 1974; Palazzoli, 1978) and more recent constructivist (Sexton and Lebow, 2016) and narrative ideas (White, 2007) that address cultural family practices to appreciate differences and oppression created by dominant identity discourses (Burnham, 2011).

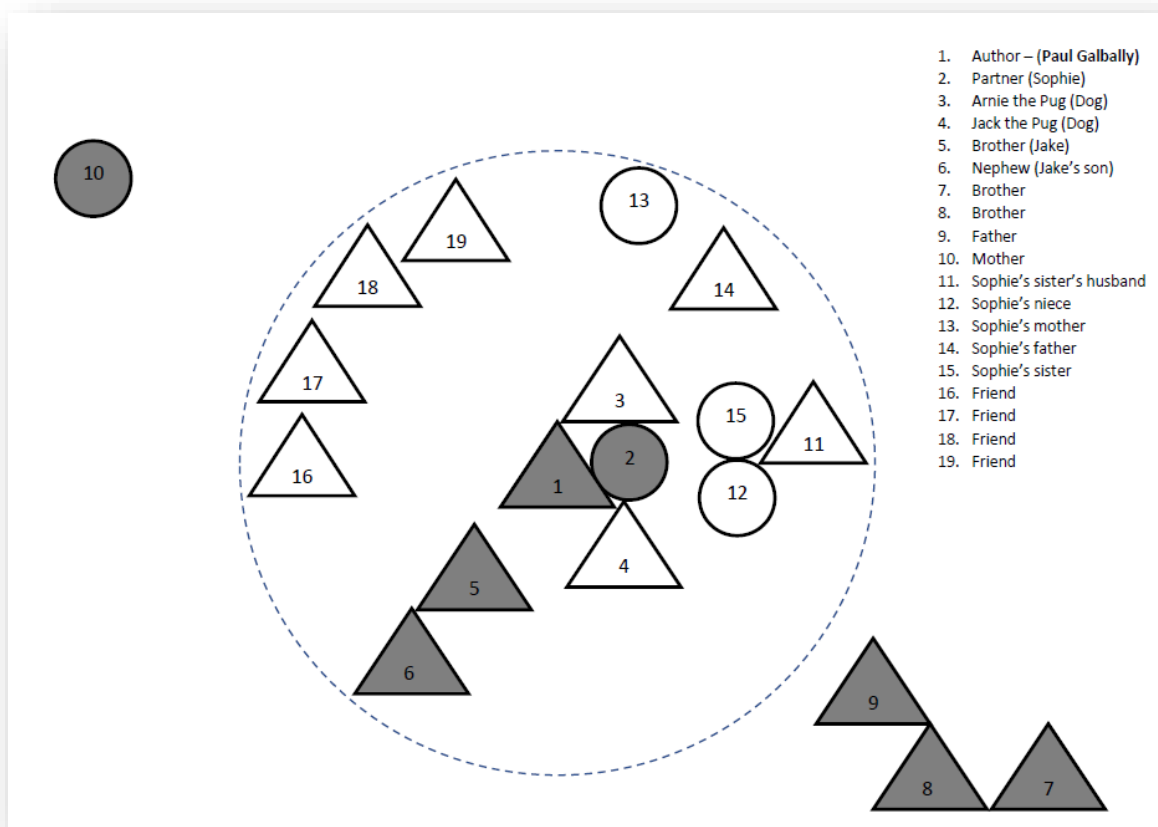
Reflexive considerations

The use of reflexivity was addressed in [Chapter 2](#) and involved an explicit attempt to understand the personal experience, log the academic journey and manage the practitioner-researcher dilemma. Throughout the research process, I found that much of the material was sensitive, emotive and judgement provoking. At times it was difficult to hear stories of mental health issues, abandonment, violence and self-preservation, especially when people spoke about how children had become inadvertent casualties of parental splits. It was during these moments that I felt that my researcher-practitioner identity was challenged, triggering the therapeutic aspects of my professional self and highlighting the importance of processing personal reactions (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

Furthermore, to avoid contamination of unchecked private experiences (Koch and Harrington, 1998) and to acknowledge my intersubjective experiences of family in social life (Finlay, 2002), I wanted to introduce my own family who has recently experienced acrimonious parental divorce. It needs to be acknowledged that my family history is one of the reasons that I chose to research this topic, as I have personally experienced how conflict and dysfunction can force the 'nuclear family' to fracture and reorganise; a process that was initiated by parental divorce proceeding that coincided with the start of my doctoral journey. However, my family has been in decline since my adolescence, so the divorce could be considered the end of an incredibly laborious process. This has led to the parental relationship re-forming two independent entities, that aside from various legal disputes no longer communicate and regularly accuse, blame and denigrate the other. Both parents have new relationships, have moved out from the family home and their current relationship typology would be categorised as 'Fiery Foes' (Ahrons, 2007a).

My family map (Figure 11) illustrates how I envision my current family setup. At present, I have a very limited relationship with my mother, I have seen her once in the past four years and we occasionally share impersonal electronic contact. Our relationship is tempestuous and unstable; I feel this is due in part to her various and chronic mental health challenges. I also believe that a violent marriage and subsequent divorce has impacted the opportunity for a more functional relationship. I rarely have contact with my father, and we are presently estranged, a familiar situation that is a product of a relationship that is characterised by unpredictability, unfulfillment and distance. Technically, I have two stepparents and various stepsiblings that I have never met; however, I would not consider any of these people as my family.

Figure 11: Paul Galbally family map (Greyed out members are discussed)



I have three full siblings whom all have complicated and fractured relationships, I currently only see one of my brothers and have no contact with the others. All the brothers have varying levels of contact with my father and none of them is currently seeing my mother; this type of fractured family is a common consequence of acrimonious divorce (White, 1994; Ahrons, 2007a; Lansford, 2009; Amato, 2010; Reynolds *et al.*, 2014). All of us have been party to various presentations of domestic violence in the family home and have experienced a variety of mental health challenges in adulthood; typical results of a hostile family breakdown (Cherlin *et al.*, 1998; Kelly and Emery, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Hardesty *et al.*, 2016). We have also been regularly expected to take sides and listen to numerous allegations from both parents (Blow and Daniel, 2002; Nuru and Wang, 2014; Mutchler, 2017; Visser *et al.*, 2017).

Another interesting consequence of my family re-formation is that I have three nieces and two nephews with whom I have no contact. I feel that this highlights the inadvertent impact of family breakdown on extended family relations (McGoldrick and Carter, 1999; Kumar, 2017), as estrangement and resentment can be endemic and contagious (Sands *et al.*, 2017). Examining my family configuration, I found that I took a well-documented position in the literature by compensating for my lack of prescribed family by recruiting replacements that include pets, friends and my partner's family (Levin and Trost, 1992; Finch, 2007; Nelson, 2013). It is worth admitting that I am considerably influenced by traditional family values, as I still include biological relations that I would consider socially estranged. However, the privileging of the 'blood narrative' only seems to extend to direct relations that I have had historical social interactions with and becomes moot when a generational gap is introduced, hence the exclusion of nieces and nephews.

Due to the complicated nature of my own family, I feel this disclosure is important and I have regularly referred to the family and the divorce of my parents in my reflexive journal. I believe that this transparency is crucial to help contain my experiences and is vital in tempering my personal biases. An example that illustrates this was the uncomfortable feelings and desire to challenge

interviewees who had become estranged from their children and represented themselves as victims, rather than exponents of this situation. I am also insightful enough to realise that these measures are not perfect and that it would be impossible to be completely objective. However, following critiques of qualitative approaches (Morse, 1994; Seale, 1999), this is something that is present within the research paradigm and has been addressed using the good reflexive practices outlined previously.

Critical evaluation of strengths and limitations

The following section will summarise the strengths and limitations of the study. The strengths will be presented first, followed by the limitations and reflections on how these limitations might be improved.

The design of this study had been well considered and the methods were situated within established ontological and epistemological research positions that complemented my worldview and professional practice (Grix, 2018). This promoted confidence in the authenticity of the methodological framework and helped to create relaxing interview environments. This strategy also adhered to good counselling and psychotherapy research practices, allowing personal beliefs and the philosophy of family therapy to be unified within a complementary methodology that privileges language and social practices (McLeod, 2011); endorsing a congruent and robust approach that was familiar, easy to apply and academically consistent (Seale, 2004).

The data collection stage was flexible to respondent schedules, allowing them to access the survey at their convenience and through a variety of means. Interview times accommodated the respondents and were held in their homes, encouraging participation by respecting work and childcare duties (Hammersley, 1992). The data collection adopted a 'triangulation' strategy (Denzin, 1978) to improve the credibility of the data by integrating complementary and converging methods in the form of an interview and visual mapping activity (Rempel *et al.*, 2007). Asking participants to take part in a task also helped to build rapport and encourage collaboration (Oltmann, 2016).

Several people reported enjoying this task and felt that it helped the discussion to be frank, natural and flowing.

These decisions were also helpful in planning for the impact of the research, by ensuring that the methodology was professionally relevant. It has also been encouraging to see the recent publication of comparable research (Beckmeyer *et al.*, 2019) and government green papers (Hunt and Greening, 2017) that are advocating family approaches to social issues. The final strength was that reflexivity was woven through the study and bias was considered using a design that was inherently transparent of both the researcher and his process. This was achieved using an academic journal that recorded supervisory conversations and my responses to the data, as well as a reflexive diary that accounted for personal experience.

As with all 'good' research, a design was conceived that attempted to minimise potential limitations (Jootun *et al.*, 2009). However, qualitative research by its nature is interpretative, iterative and nuanced, and immersing the researcher into a highly complex social environment will always be challenging (Morse, 1994). Firstly, as the sample consisted of a difficult to reach population and relied on self-selection, geographical demographics and limited resources, the sample was relatively homogenous (Robinson, 2014). However, the screening survey allowed differences such as religion or nationality to be uncovered; meaning that individuals with different backgrounds could be approached for interview to encourage some variation within the sample.

The subject of the study was a sensitive topic, an issue known to affect the quality of disclosure (De Laine, 2000) and may result in respondents offering 'thin' or vague accounts (Oltmann, 2016). In response, interviews were held in the home to facilitate comfortability and the topic of family separation was normalised to help reduce feelings of shame or judgement. For example, I briefly introduced my own experience of being from a separated family and spoke about my clinical practice with these types of issues. Alternative venues were also offered, as home interviewing can be susceptible to distraction and intimate conversations could trigger

uncomfortable memories (Hämäläinen and Rautio, 2013).

Unfortunately, there was a distinct lack of male respondents in the initial sign up. This may have been due to much of the advertising material being disseminated through establishments such as children centres that typically see a higher female footfall and have weekday opening times, potentially restricting the opportunity to recruit working parents. The gender differences that were highlighted in Chapter 2 may also have contributed, as men have been described as being emotionally guarded and less likely to volunteer (Curtin *et al.*, 2000; Singer *et al.*, 2000; Groves *et al.*, 2002). If the study was to be repeated, it may be useful to identify and utilise locations where separated fathers frequent, for example, single parenting groups for men.

A similar issue was found when trying to recruit good co-parenting relationships. Reasons for this may be that relations post-divorce are volatile and populist societal discourse encourages hostility towards ex-partners (Visser *et al.*, 2017), meaning that people with negative experiences may be more motivated to tell their story as a way of expressing their felt injustice (Newington and Metcalfe, 2014). The propagation of the 'negative narrative' could also be exacerbated by the proliferation of 'gendered' and salacious media platforms that provide opportunities to voice stories of 'feckless fathers', 'embittered mothers' and unjust court processes (Russell *et al.*, 2016).

Although all types of family were welcome to be part of this study, the sample would have benefitted from increased diversity around sexuality, ethnicity and culture; as all the respondents were from white European ethnic groups and none of them identified as queer or had adopted children. Accessing these harder to reach populations would have expanded the notion of family, and the examination of less common configurations would have improved inclusivity, potentially enabling any conclusions to be further explored to ascertain significance to families with alternative identities; as all the respondents were already situated within the heteronormative paradigm. Therefore, it could be said that the thesis is somewhat ensconced in a safe vantage point that inadvertently aligns with the dominance of the nuclear family.

However, with looked after children only accounting for 0.62% of the UK child population (ONS, 2020a), explicitly accessing separated parents in an already small demographic would have been beyond the scope of this project. Similarly, it was unfortunate that the LGBTQ+ community was not represented in my sample, as it is likely that these types of families would have not conformed to the heteronormative norm and provided an insight into how separation is managed within alternative family forms. Although, according to the latest government statistics, these families are very difficult to access as they account for only 0.1% of total UK families (ONS, 2019).

Directions for future research

As identified in the previous section, this study was completed using a small sample and findings could increase in credibility if outcomes were adequately recreated within a larger and more diverse population (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017), potentially supporting an argument that develops these idiosyncratic conclusions into a wider setting (Johnson, 1997). If achieved, findings could be presented to local social service providers as a therapeutic alternative to the currently favoured approaches of court-ordered contact and mediation (Smithson *et al.*, 2015). A recent report by Barlow *et al.* (2017) found that only 43% of mediatory processes were effective, with 70% of the unsuccessful clients having to then have decisions made by the court. The consequences of this are that parents can be left hostile, uncommunicative and discordant, which places children into potentially inhospitable domestic landscapes (Emery *et al.*, 2005). Reasons for failings include lack of finances, gender differences, poor mediators, perceptions of bias and irreconcilable differences on issues such as religion (Barlow *et al.*, 2017), with one author stating that therapeutic approaches may be preferable to legal battles when working with volatile ex-partners (Dingwall, 2010). Therefore, to improve the professional application of this study, it would be best implemented in conjunction with the formalised treatment plan proposed in the previous section.

A second area for further study is based around addressing what was earlier termed the 'mess' of tensions between real-world and aspirational family composition. I previously identified

that there was an implicit and dichotomous view of 'good' (nuclear) and 'bad' (separated) families that still feels prevalent and exerts influence on how respondents constructed family identity. With all of them making some efforts to retain nuclear characteristics to garner greater social acceptance; this position felt ingrained within an unspoken public discourse that left questions around how this discrepancy will resolve itself.

Although there has been a cultural shift that superficially accepts that separation has moved away from the preceding generations view of shaming of divorce and single parenting (Salter, 2018), families in my study still gravitated towards the nuclear archetype. Part of me feels that this attitude may naturally subside as more and more people grow up in alternative family configurations, leaving the traditional family to naturally become something of a curious minority. While this is an assumption, it might be worth investigating if this 'mess' can be resolved and how this could happen, given the death of the nuclear family has been incorrectly heralded for some time now (Popenoe, 1993; Bittman and Pixley, 1997; Bengtson, 2001). The most pertinent issue is that if it is resolvable, will it require changing social policy, a process that will be inevitably accompanied by some form of political activism (Finch, 2008b). However, this scenario brings concerns of resistance and could lead to unintended difficulties around families that have the right to actively pursue nuclear status to gain the social advantages that they feel come from the inherent stability of parental consistency (DeRose *et al.*, 2017).

Thesis Conclusion

Key Findings and Contributions

From my analysis, four key findings emerged. The first was that separated families tend to de-emphasise the prioritising of blood and legal ties and place increased importance on the quality of social relationships. Second, it was found that levels of conflict were instrumental in constituting family forms post-separation that may or may not cooperate. This was typically informed by the functionality of the relationship between ex-partners, how the intimate relationship ended and the biography of the relationship. The third finding determined that families were influenced by established discourses that valued traditional social norms and heteronormativity, creating tension between families that have separated and those that have not. The final finding was a clinical recommendation that suggests that separated families should be encouraged to share how they make meaning around the separation and how family is understood. An argument was made for clinicians to facilitate this using the FSM with clients to help them understand the end of the relationship and how family forms have altered after the separation. It is suggested that if a more robust therapeutic alliance is created then this could facilitate engagement and improve clinical outcomes.

The study has made four key contributions. Firstly, in a period where separation and family blending are increasing, it has contributed an in-depth analysis of the lived experience of several separated parents. Secondly, insight has been provided into the discourses that people draw from when making sense of separation and the conflict that often accompanies this event. An argument has been put forward that roles become increasingly important criteria for when traditional blood ties and previous legal connections are disrupted. Thirdly, a psychological model (FSM) has been developed to represent the potential stages of separation and to highlight some of the available discourses that influence how separation, co-parenting and family re-formation is understood. The final contribution is a recommendation to family therapy practice that advises clinicians to explicitly

explore how ex-partners coming into treatment understand and construct meaning around their current family form. This was couched within practice by taking a family-focused approach that explored the complexities of how roles, relationship, historical events, and accessible discourses affect this process. If these understandings conflict, the therapist will need to work with ex-partners to help them focus on co-parenting and not get trapped in replicating historical patterns of conflict that may derail successful treatment.

Concluding Discussion

This thesis has travelled across academic borders to draw together insights from family literature in the areas of sociology, psychology and psychotherapy. This decision was made to account for the tendency of psychotherapeutic literature to favour a familiar literary canon (Avdi and Georgaca, 2007) and prioritise the therapist's experience of treatment room dynamics (Tseliou, 2013). My approach responds to this critique by venturing into a sociological field that understands family as dynamic and underpinned by practices that constitute and reconstitute family forms in response to the contextual troubles that they face as they move through their ordinary and everyday family lives (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013; Morgan, 2019).

Importantly, this literature has been interpreted through a psychological lens that allows multiple academic perspectives to be integrated to inform a clinical output with separated families. In doing this, some sociological theory was understood from a psychotherapeutic viewpoint that naturally introduced a level of epistemic tension as differing assumptions and meaning-making frameworks generated friction around considering and expressing notions of family. However, this decision was taken cautiously to allow a respectful journey out of the usual literature base and into unfamiliar sociological terrain as a way of encouraging others in the therapeutic community to expand their academic sources (Avdi and Georgaca, 2007; Henton, 2012).

This approach has provided new understandings that allow theoretical development from broader literature and not just the evidence from a certain perspective (Cooper and McLeod, 2010).

It was also argued that mental health research agendas are best answered by the bringing together of disciplines such as psychology, social science, psychiatry and medicine (Holmes *et al.*, 2020). My findings are not pretending to solve the existing conundrum of tidying up complex and multifaceted family issues (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013), but instead, they are offering epistemological messiness as an enterprising opportunity to present empirically viable alternatives to the usual discourses on family and separation within family therapy (Beitin, 2017). I also wanted to answer a recent call for increasing evidence-based practice in family therapy as a way of remedying how the profession has inadvertently de-emphasised the vital link between research and practice by popularising postmodernism and rejecting more objective science (Lebow, 2018). This has left the field reliant on dated knowledge and scientifically distanced from modalities such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) that consistently develops practice from new evidence (Gaudiano, 2008; David *et al.*, 2018; Lebow, 2018).

Furthermore, I want to highlight how urgent Lebow's call is to my research by stressing how this reluctance to include other bodies of literature directly contributes to family therapy being tethered to cultural discourses that idealise, privilege, and endorse the nuclear family (Avdi, 2015). This results in separated families struggling to successfully integrate new members when blending and promotes acrimonious co-parenting relationships that leave the children marginalised and voiceless (Lebow, 2019a). My clinical experiences and thesis have directly addressed both the request to widen the literature base within the profession, as well as producing evidence-informed clinical outputs that challenge the dominant nucleocentric narrative by promoting all types of family forms through introducing the sociological ideas of family being constituted by the practice of families doing everyday things (Morgan, 2011).

This interdisciplinary approach was not without risk, as bridging these disciplines introduced several tensions. One particular tension was around simply defining 'the family' within clinical practice, as psychotherapy assumes that 'the family' is reduced to an overly simplistic product

(Morgan, 2003) that can be categorised, measured and invited into treatment. This is problematic when considered under the sociological family practices framework, as it reifies family and introduces politicised ideas that inevitably disadvantage families that sit outside the normative (Edwards *et al.*, 2012).

However, for the FSM to be integrated successfully into the theoretical framework of family therapy, the conceptualisation of family had to be familiar and identifiable to those who are still tangled within heteronormative and nucleocentric discourses (Avdi, 2015). This was explicitly addressed in my findings through the notion of post-separation families being represented as one configuration or multiple systems that are constituted by the quality of relationships between members. My decision to conceptualise families in the FSM as systems means that family is understood, constituted and discursively maintained through a psychotherapeutic lens that tends to view these clients as a systemically organised group being treated around a typically individually attributed problem (Carr, 2019).

By doing this I acknowledge a tension between sociological theory and family therapy that views families as self-regulating systems (Kindsvatter and Lara, 2012). This regulation can manifest in the treatment room by clients drawing upon discourses to socially situate other members, effectively establishing hierarchies and networks through subjective positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990). Within therapeutic encounters that are addressing family and separation, this positioning often manifests as blaming, moral campaigning, relational distancing and the creation of in-groups and out-groups within mutual social networks (Lebow, 2019b). In this thesis I interfaced these existing ideas with the sociological constructs that consider family being constituted by practices, responses to troubles and societal discourses that understands complicated separated family situations as ‘troubled’:

“Individual problems become transmuted into family troubles through practices and meaning creation, and in these interactions, family identities and belongings are reaffirmed or established. Some family troubles, again in complex ways, become seen as instances of

troubling families. And troubling families enter into public discourses to rebound upon and to give particular meanings to family practices.” (Morgan, 2019, p. 2236)

Although my concession of embedding family systems within the FSM could be criticised as being backwards facing, the decision allows the contemporary sociological ideas of family troubles and practices to be gently introduced with a minimised risk of instant rejection on the grounds of being too discrepant to the established thinking (Cooper, 2010). This approach is helpful within the context of separation as it links to my findings that showed relationships being underpinned by a complex interaction of loyalty to the blood narrative and relational quality, simultaneously allowing changes in both legal statutes (such as house-sharing and marriage) and developments in social relationships to be accounted for. The FSM helps connect these issues by therapeutically addressing the meaning of historical transgressions in the parental relationship and how ex-partners move on, introduce new family members and co-parent. Furthermore, by including sociological understandings and positioning separation as an event that can lead to family troubles (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013), new family forms can be understood by examining the interrelatedness of ongoing practices and responses to troubles that are constituted and reconstituted by changes in dependency, mutuality and obligation (Morgan, 2019).

By applying Morgan’s framework to the context of parental separation, the dependency between parents and children may change as children move between homes, be parented by non-biological parents and have legally binding contact criteria that determine who is responsible for what, who and when (Carr, 2014). The idea of mutuality may also alter as parents’ transition from intimate to more formal relationships that are either mutually beneficial or mutually restrictive, depending on the biography of the breakup and ongoing relationship quality. Finally, experiences such as becoming a single parent and changes in living arrangements may involve activating the obligations of family support networks to help with childcare and finances.

Any talk around family life must also be sympathetic to connecting to the public

understandings of family, which are culturally situated and organised around established discourses of gender and class (Morgan, 2019). These public constructs are typically accompanied by a moralistic narrative that places increased responsibility on parents and positions them in an environment that constrains parental autonomy through state supervision and intensified scrutiny of parenting practices (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013). Separated families must be aware of these narratives, as the idea of being responsible for good and bad parenting is often played out between parents as they blame and criticise the other (Francia *et al.*, 2019). This was conceptualised in my findings by showing how historical transgressions were perceived and how family forms reconstituted and handled contact of the children. A failure to properly address this in the field of family therapy is likely to sustain high levels of client disengagement (Hamilton *et al.*, 2011; Stratton, 2016), maintain medical discourses that pathologize children (Harold and Sellers, 2018) and perpetuate the structural disadvantages that troubled and troubling families experience (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013).

Recommendations from this thesis will also need to take the previously discussed ideas of family as being constituted of meaning-making practices into a clinical paradigm that views family as a psychological and interactive system (Carr, 2019). Simultaneously, this translation will also need to convey contemporary sociological viewpoints into a public arena that is highly influenced by established and popularised understandings of family that are politicised, heteronormatively situated and rooted within the idealised and traditional. Therefore, findings from this thesis straddle these tensions and produce responses to the research questions that make sense to systems theorists and are mindful of long-standing public discourses that privilege heteronormative family forms (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2013; Avdi, 2015; Stratton, 2016). By doing this, any future publications from this research will be able to speak to the family therapy evidence base by applying the principle of understanding the relationship of people and their problems by fully comprehending theory and then connect this theory to client work (Chen *et al.*, 2017).

I also recognise my position as a practitioner-researcher looking at ‘problematic’ family separation and I want to highlight that by gathering data from respondents who experienced separation as a process, rather than using those referred for treatment, I attempted to keep ‘ordinary family lives’ central to my research. I acknowledge that even though these separations may also be a source of family troubles, I want to improve clinical practice by introducing sociological perspectives into a clinical setting, treating this tension between family therapy and authentic family lives as one that is “to be held and managed, rather than overcome” (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2019, p. 9). This use of respondents who have not been marked for intervention also helps to widen the research scope from the traditional psychotherapy data sources of families that have been already categorised as problematic and are actively involved with a professional intervention (Chen *et al.*, 2017; Becvar and Becvar, 2018)

I was also mindful that my sample and findings were limited around the diversity of respondents, with all my interviewees identifying as white and heterosexual. However, this is comparable to the local community that only has 9.2% of residents having a black or minority ethnic background (HWBB, 2019). Official statistics also highlight that around 2.2% of the UK population in the South East of England identify as LGB, and that over two thirds of these individuals are single and not involved in child rearing (ONS, 2020c). By researching a somewhat homogenous sample, I am aware that this does limit my findings and inferences to a restricted range of parental relationships.

However, my hope is that by working towards broadening the concept of family from the heteronormative model currently favoured (Avdi, 2015), families from minority communities may view family-based interventions as becoming more attuned to their personal needs, improving accessibility and helping support the movements of social justice and equality that are taking place in the industry (McGoldrick and Hardy, 2019). This widening of family concepts in clinical settings could be viewed akin to Michael White’s ground-breaking work in Australia that opened up specialist family therapy services to aboriginal communities as a way of addressing the “nuclear shadow” that

privileges treatments to non-indigenous families (Denborough, 2009, p. 93).

Furthermore, my own background has impacted a desire to get a more inclusive version of family into common parlance in the therapeutic community. I feel that this desire is partly due to experiencing the social disadvantages associated with being working class, living in a separated family, and having a mixed Irish and Roma gypsy heritage. These identity components have not only impacted my understanding of family, but have also placed me in groups that are known to have accessibility barriers as both a client and a practitioner of psychotherapy (Ballinger and Wright, 2007). I must also acknowledge that although the above experiences form the basis of my life biography, I also hold great privilege in the therapy room as being a white educated male in the position of a professional therapist (Combs, 2019). Although my personal life and professional career are now less encumbered by many of my previous markers of disadvantage, I wonder if my increased social mobility may distance me from the troubled families I see and that I need to be careful of falling into the same established and normative imbalances of power discussed above. I hope that by engaging in reflexivity and acknowledging the tensions that are inherent in my identity, I will be able to uncover and remedy some of the blind spots that are a product of straddling such a complex vantage point:

“Reflective practise involves considering the ‘lenses’ through which we perceive reality around us so that they become part of how we frame situations” (Bager-Charleson, 2010, p. XV)

Expanding on this point, Burman (1995) discusses the embedded power imbalance in therapy that already favours the therapist, and I wonder if this can be better addressed with separated parents who feel marginalised? In some way, the insistence of how the profession organises referrals around the notion of ‘the family’ places clients into expertly categorised social groups that could promote further disengagement (Avdi, 2015). In this respect, borrowing the idea of ‘connected disconnections’ from one of my interview respondents may be helpful in re-visioning working with separated parents using the FSM:

“Family is a series of disconnections that have connected. They are all sort of apart, but then they are actually together.” Jane (2018)

I interpret this statement as reconstituting family as a co-parenting form that is constantly connecting and disconnecting around encountered troubles, for example, new partners and residency alterations. To respond to these troubles collaboratively, the FSM can be explored with the ex-partners to help guide them to use their psychological resources and insider family knowledge to uncover ways of relating that avoid intimacy and risk reactivation of traumatic events that are held within the discursive representation of the painful breakup. This idea can be situated within Burman’s views of empowerment and emancipation that offer new subject positions (Davies and Harré, 1990) that could help separated parents move into more harmonious family forms by actively responding to troubles together:

“Helping the client differentiate between old patterns (feelings) and actual real demands”
(Burman, 1995, p. 487)

This will allow the discursive repositioning of the clients towards a less hostile system of meaning around the separated family concept. It also promotes a feminist perspective that encourages the patriarchal ideas of ownership and male power to be recognised and may help move the ex-partners from antagonistic to collaborative.

My research is messy and proposes a model that interprets this mess in a way that is both useful to clinicians and reflects the inherent character of separation as being untidy, changeable, uncertain and precariously reliant on the unpredictability of human experience. This interdisciplinary study has allowed an appreciation of bringing new ideas of family to my professional domain. After exploring comparable outdated assumptions within this thesis, I want to suggest that family therapy goes through a process of rebranding to remove the problematic term of ‘family’. Therefore, my final recommendation is a semantic change to the landscape of treating separated parents in therapy, as it has been argued that the term ‘family therapy’ introduces highly politicised assumptions that may be counterproductive to successful outcomes. This is a very similar

sea change to what happened when Marriage Guidance rebranded to Relate in 1988 after the organisation were concerned about religious connotations, patriarchal domestic structures and misunderstanding of the LGBTQ+ community:

“In such a context, Relate has its work cut out – not least because its philosophy is not to shore up the sacred if embattled institutions of marriage and family (as was Dr Gray's hope in 1938) but to encourage us to value all kinds of relationships.” (Jeffries, 2013)

My initial rebranding suggestion is to continue the theme of connected disconnections and refer to the application of my model under the banner of **‘Connecting Coparenting’**. This proposal acknowledges the history of the parental association and suggests that relationships have shifted and will shift again as the therapist and client recognise the traumatic experiences of separating. This then encourages ex-partners to collectively respond to the troubles that they face as they reconstitute a healthy co-parenting alliance that places the wellbeing of the children as a mutually beneficial endeavour.

If these recommendations can be achieved then this thesis will not only contribute a practical model that can be applied by practitioners but will also go some way to achieving the principal aim of this study which was to prevent parents inadvertently accepting the seductive invitation to see their children’s distress as individual dysfunction and not a manifestation of family troubles. The message from this thesis is that if clinicians can help separated parents recognise their child’s distress as a symptom of the complex parental dance of trauma, grief and resentment that accompanies separation, then their children may be able to enjoy a childhood that is a little less troubled.

References

- Ackerman, N. W. (1962) 'Adolescent Problems: A Symptom of Family Disorder', *Family Process*, 1(2), pp. 202-213.
- Adamsons, K. and Pasley, K. (2006) 'Coparenting following divorce and relationship dissolution', in Fine, M. and Harvey, J. (eds.) *Handbook of divorce and relationship dissolution*. Mahwah, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 241-261.
- Adler, P. A. and Adler, P. (2002) 'The Reluctant Respondent', in Gubrium, J. F. and Holstein, J. A. (eds.) *Handbook of Interview Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 515-536.
- Ahrons, C. R. (1979) 'The binuclear family', *Alternative Lifestyles*, 2(4), pp. 499-515.
- Ahrons, C. R. (2007a) 'Family Ties After Divorce: Long-Term Implications for Children', *Family process*, 46(1), pp. 53-65.
- Ahrons, C. R. (2007b) 'Introduction to the special issue on divorce and its aftermath', *Family Process*, 46(1), pp. 3-6.
- Ahrons, C. R. and Rodgers, R. H. (1987) *Divorced families: A multidisciplinary developmental view*. New York: WW Norton & Co.
- Allen, K. R. (2000) 'A Conscious and Inclusive Family Studies', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(1), pp. 4-17.
- Allen, K. R. and Demo, D. H. (1995) 'The Families of Lesbians and Gay Men: A New Frontier in Family Research', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 57(1), pp. 111-127.
- Allen, K. R. and Jaramillo-Sierra, A. L. (2015) 'Feminist theory and research on family relationships: Pluralism and complexity', *Sex Roles*, 73(3-4), pp. 93-99.
- Amato, P. R. (2000) 'The consequences of divorce for adults and children', *Journal of marriage and family*, 62(4), pp. 1269-1287.
- Amato, P. R. (2010) 'Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments', *Journal of marriage and family*, 72(3), pp. 650-666.
- Amato, P. R. and Hohmann-Marriott, B. (2007) 'A comparison of high-and low-distress marriages that end in divorce', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(3), pp. 621-638.
- Amato, P. R., Kane, J. B. and James, S. (2011) 'Reconsidering the "good divorce"', *Family relations*, 60(5), pp. 511-524.
- Amato, P. R. and Keith, B. (1991) 'Parental divorce and the well-being of children: A meta-analysis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 110(1), pp. 26-46.
- Amato, P. R. and Rogers, S. J. (1997) 'A longitudinal study of marital problems and subsequent divorce', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59(3), pp. 612-624.

Anderson, H. (1997) *Conversation, language, and possibilities a postmodern approach to therapy*. New York: Basic Books.

Anderson, H. and Goolishian, H. (1988) 'Human systems as linguistic systems: Preliminary and evolving ideas about the implications for clinical theory', *Family process*, 27(4), pp. 371-393.

Anderson, J. Z. and White, G. D. (1986) 'An empirical investigation of interaction and relationship patterns in functional and dysfunctional nuclear families and stepfamilies', *Family Process*, 25(3), pp. 407-422.

Anderson, S. A. and Sabatelli, R. M. (2011) *Family Interaction: A Multigenerational Developmental Perspective*. 5th edn. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Anderson, S. R., Anderson, S. A., Palmer, K. L., Mutchler, M. S. and Baker, L. K. (2011) 'Defining high conflict', *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 39(1), pp. 11-27.

Arber, A. (2006) 'Reflexivity - A challenge for the researcher as practitioner?', *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 11(2), pp. 147-157.

Avdi, E. (2015) 'Discourses of development in the consulting room: Analysing family therapy with children', *Journal of Feminism Psychology & Health*, 25(3), pp. 363-380.

Avdi, E. and Georgaca, E. (2007) 'Discourse analysis and psychotherapy: A critical review', *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, 9(2), pp. 157-176.

Bager-Charleson, S. (2010) *Reflective Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy*. Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd.

Bager-Charleson, S. (2014) *Doing practice-based research in therapy: A reflexive approach*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Ballinger, L. and Wright, J. (2007) 'Does class count?' Social class and counselling', *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 7(3), pp. 157-163.

Barlow, A., Hunter, R., Smithson, J. and Ewing, J. (2017) *Mapping Paths to Family Justice: Resolving Family Disputes in Neoliberal Times*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Bateman, A. and Fonagy, P. (2006) *Mentalization-based treatment for borderline personality disorder: A practical guide*. OUP Oxford.

Bateson, G. (1972) *Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bateson, G., Jackson, D. D., Haley, J. and Weakland, J. (1956) 'Toward a theory of schizophrenia', *Behavioral science*, 1(4), pp. 251-264.

Baumeister, R. F. and Leary, M. R. (1995) 'The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation', *Psychological bulletin*, 117(3), pp. 497-529.

Baxter, L. A. and Braithwaite, D. O. (2008) *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Baxter, L. A., Braithwaite, D. O., Bryant, L. and Wagner, A. (2004) 'Stepchildren's perceptions of the contradictions in communication with stepparents', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 21(4), pp. 447-467.
- Baxter, L. A., Braithwaite, D. O. and Nicholson, J. H. (1999) 'Turning points in the development of blended families', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 16(3), pp. 291-314.
- Baxter, L. A., Norwood, K. M., Asbury, B. and Scharp, K. M. (2014) 'Narrating adoption: Resisting adoption as "second best" in online stories of domestic adoption told by adoptive parents', *Journal of Family Communication*, 14(3), pp. 253-269.
- Beaujouan, É. and Bhrolcháin, M. N. (2014) 'Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s', in *Cohabitation and Non-Marital Births in England and Wales, 1600–2012*. New York City: Springer, pp. 192-213.
- Beckmeyer, J. J., Coleman, M. and Ganong, L. H. (2014) 'Postdivorce coparenting typologies and children's adjustment', *Family Relations*, 63(4), pp. 526-537.
- Beckmeyer, J. J., Markham, M. S. and Troilo, J. (2019) 'Postdivorce Coparenting Relationships and Parent–Youth Relationships: Are Repartnership and Parent–Youth Contact Moderators?', *Journal of Family Issues*, 40(5), pp. 613-636.
- Becvar, R. J. and Becvar, D. S. (2018) *Systems theory and family therapy: A primer*. Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books.
- Beitin, B. K. (2017) 'Qualitative Research in Couple and Family Therapy', in Lebow, J., Chambers, A. and Breunlin, D. C. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 1-6.
- Belam, M. (2017) *Threats to boycott Tesco after Muslim family features in Christmas ad*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/nov/13/threats-boycott-tesco-muslim-family-christmas-ad> (Accessed: 9th February 2018).
- Bengtson, V. L. (2001) 'Beyond the Nuclear Family: The Increasing Importance of Multigenerational Bonds', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(1), pp. 1-16.
- Benner, P. (1994) 'The tradition and skill of interpretive phenomenology in studying health, illness, and caring practices', in Benner, P. (ed.) *Interpretive phenomenology: Embodiment, caring, and ethics in health and illness*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 99-127.
- Berkowitz, D. and Marsiglio, W. (2007) 'Gay men: Negotiating procreative, father, and family identities', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(2), pp. 366-381.
- Bernardi, F. and Radl, J. (2014) 'The long-term consequences of parental divorce for children's educational attainment', *Demographic research*, 30(61), pp. 1653-1680.
- Bernier, A., Larose, S. and Whipple, N. (2005) 'Leaving home for college: A potentially stressful event for adolescents with preoccupied attachment patterns', *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(2), pp. 171-185.
- Bevan, M. T. (2014) 'A method of phenomenological interviewing', *Qualitative health research*, 24(1), pp. 136-144.

- Bischoff, R. J. and Sprenkle, D. H. (1993) 'Dropping out of marriage and family therapy: A critical review of research', *Family Process*, 32(3), pp. 353-375.
- Bittman, M. and Pixley, J. (1997) 'Chapter 1 - Is the myth of the nuclear family dead?', in Bittman, M. and Pixley, J. (eds.) *The Double Life of the Family*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, pp. 1-15. 1.
- Blaikie, N. (2007) *Approaches to Social Enquiry: Advancing Knowledge*. Cambridge, UK: Wiley.
- Blow, A. J. and Karam, E. A. (2017) 'The therapist's role in effective marriage and family therapy practice: The case for evidence based therapists', *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 44(5), pp. 716-723.
- Blow, A. J., Sprenkle, D. H. and Davis, S. D. (2007) 'Is who delivers the treatment more important than the treatment itself? The role of the therapist in common factors', *Journal of marital and family therapy*, 33(3), pp. 298-317.
- Blow, K. and Daniel, G. (2002) 'Frozen narratives? Post-divorce processes and contact disputes', *Journal of Family Therapy*, 24(1), pp. 85-103.
- Boddy, J. (2019) 'Troubling Meanings of "Family" for Young People Who Have Been in Care: From Policy to Lived Experience', *Journal of Family Issues*, 40(16), pp. 2239-2263.
- Bolger, E. (1999) 'Grounded theory analysis of emotional pain', *Journal of Psychotherapy Research*, 9(3), pp. 342-362.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996) 'On the family as a realized category', *Theory, culture & society*, 13(3), pp. 19-26.
- Bowlby, J. (1958) 'The nature of the child's tie to his mother', *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 39, pp. 350-373.
- Braithwaite, D., Olson, L., Golish, T., Soukup, C. and Turman, P. (2001) "' Becoming a family": developmental processes represented in blended family discourse', *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 29(3), pp. 221-247.
- Braithwaite, D. O., Bach, B. W., Baxter, L. A., DiVerniero, R., Hammonds, J. R., Hosek, A. M., Willer, E. K. and Wolf, B. M. (2010) 'Constructing family: A typology of voluntary kin', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27(3), pp. 388-407.
- Braithwaite, D. O., Baxter, L. A. and Harper, A. M. (1998) 'The role of rituals in the management of the dialectical tension of "old" and "new" in blended families', *Communication Studies*, 49(2), pp. 101-120.
- Brand, J. E., Moore, R., Song, X. and Xie, Y. s. (2019) 'Why does parental divorce lower children's educational attainment? A causal mediation analysis', *Sociological Science*, 6, pp. 264-292.
- Brannen, J. (1988) 'Research note the study of sensitive subjects', *The Sociological Review*, 36(3), pp. 552-563.
- Brock, R. L. and Kochanska, G. (2016) 'Interparental conflict, children's security with parents, and long-term risk of internalizing problems: A longitudinal study from ages 2 to 10', *Development and psychopathology*, 28(1), pp. 45-54.

- Bryman, A. (2008) *Social Research Methods*. 3rd edn. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bulpitt, H. and Martin, P. J. (2010) 'Who am I and what am I doing? Becoming a qualitative research interviewer: Helen Bulpitt and Peter J Martin discuss using reflexion to make research processes in studies transparent', *Nurse researcher*, 17(3), pp. 7-16.
- Bumpass, L. L. (1990) 'What's Happening to the Family? Interactions Between Demographic and Institutional Change', *Demography*, 27(4), pp. 483-498.
- Burman, E. (1995) 'Identification, subjectivity, and power in feminist psychotherapy', in Siegfried, J. (ed.) *Therapeutic and everyday discourse as behavior change: Towards a micro-analysis in psychotherapy process research*. Westport, CT, US: Ablex Publishing, pp. 469-489.
- Burnham, J. (2011) 'Developments in Social GRRRAACCEEESSS: visible-invisible and voiced-unvoiced', in Krause, I.-B. (ed.) *Culture and reflexivity in systemic psychotherapy: Mutual perspectives*. London: Karnac Books, pp. 139-160. 7.
- Burns, A. (1984) 'Perceived causes of marriage breakdown and conditions of life', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 46(3), pp. 551-562.
- Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York: Routledge.
- Byng-Hall, J. (1985) 'The family script: A useful bridge between theory and practice', *Journal of Family Therapy*, 7(3), pp. 301-305.
- CAMHS (2020) *Children and Young People's Mental Health: CAMHS – Facts and Figures*. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-camhs/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-and> (Accessed: 11th October 2020).
- Carr, A. (2014) 'The evidence base for couple therapy, family therapy and systemic interventions for adult-focused problems', *Journal of Family Therapy*, 36(2), pp. 158-194.
- Carr, A. (2019) 'Family therapy and systemic interventions for child-focused problems: the current evidence base', *Journal of Family Therapy*, 41(2), pp. 153-213.
- Chamberlain, M. (1999) 'The family as model and metaphor in Caribbean migration to Britain', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 25(2), pp. 251-266.
- Chen, R., Hughes, A. C. and Austin, J. P. (2017) 'The use of Theory in Family Therapy Research: Content Analysis and Update', *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 43(3), pp. 514-525.
- Cherlin, A. J., Chase-Lansdale, P. L. and McRae, C. (1998) 'Effects of parental divorce on mental health throughout the life course', *American Sociological Review*, 63(2), pp. 239-249.
- Clapham, D., Mackie, P., Orford, S., Thomas, I. and Buckley, K. (2014) 'The Housing Pathways of Young People in the UK', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 46(8), pp. 2016-2031.
- Claxton-Oldfield, S. (2000) 'Deconstructing the Myth of the Wicked Stepparent', *Marriage & Family Review*, 30(1-2), pp. 51-58.
- Claxton-Oldfield, S. and Butler, B. (1998) 'Portrayal of Stepparents in Movie Plot Summaries', *Psychological Reports*, 82(3), pp. 879-882.

- Clulow, C. (2012) *Adult attachment and couple psychotherapy: The 'secure base' in practice and research*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, O. and Levite, Z. (2012) 'High-conflict divorced couples: combining systemic and psychodynamic perspectives', *Journal of Family Therapy*, 34(4), pp. 387-402.
- Coleman, M., Ganong, L. and Fine, M. (2000) 'Reinvestigating remarriage: Another decade of progress', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), pp. 1288-1307.
- Combs, G. (2019) 'White privilege: What's a family therapist to do?', *Journal of Marital and Family therapy*, 45(1), pp. 61-75.
- Coontz, S. (2000) 'Historical perspectives on family studies', *Journal of marriage and family*, 62(2), pp. 283-297.
- Coontz, S. (2015) 'Revolution in intimate life and relationships', *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 7(1), pp. 5-12.
- Cooper, M. (2010) 'The challenge of counselling and psychotherapy research', *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 10(3), pp. 183-191.
- Cooper, M. and McLeod, J. (2010) *Pluralistic counselling and psychotherapy*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W. and Miller, D. L. (2000) 'Determining validity in qualitative inquiry', *Theory into practice*, 39(3), pp. 124-130.
- Crittenden, P. M. (2016) *Raising Parents: Attachment, Representation, and Treatment*. 2nd edn. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Culliney, M., Haux, T. and McKay, S. (2014) *Family structure and poverty in the UK: An evidence and policy review*. University of Lincoln.
- Cummings, E. M. and Davies, P. T. (2002) 'Effects of marital conflict on children: Recent advances and emerging themes in process-oriented research', *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, 43(1), pp. 31-63.
- Cummings, E. M., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Papp, L. M. and Dukewich, T. L. (2002) 'Children's responses to mothers' and fathers' emotionality and tactics in marital conflict in the home', *Journal of Family Psychology*, 16(4), pp. 478-492.
- Curtin, R., Presser, S. and Singer, E. (2000) 'The effects of response rate changes on the index of consumer sentiment', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64(4), pp. 413-428.
- Dallos, R. and Draper, R. (2010) *An Introduction To Family Therapy: Systemic Theory and Practice*. 3rd edn. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Dallos, R. and Smith, J. (2008) 'Practice as research and research as practice: How the qualitative case study can invigorate clinical psychology', *Clinical Psychology Forum*. The British Psychological Society, pp. 18-22.

- Dallos, R. and Vetere, A. (2005) *Researching psychotherapy and counselling*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Daneshpour, M. (1998) 'Muslim families and family therapy', *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 24(3), pp. 355-368.
- David, D., Cristea, I. and Hofmann, S. G. (2018) 'Why Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Is the Current Gold Standard of Psychotherapy', *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 9(4).
- Davies, B. and Harré, R. (1990) 'Positioning: The discursive production of selves', *Journal for the theory of social behaviour*, 20(1), pp. 43-63.
- Davies, H. (2011) 'Sharing surnames: Children, family and kinship', *Sociology*, 45(4), pp. 554-569.
- De Laine, M. (2000) *Fieldwork, participation and practice: Ethics and dilemmas in qualitative research*. London SAGE Publications Ltd.
- DeGreeff, B. L. and Platt, C. A. (2016) 'Green-Eyed (Step)Monsters: Parental Figures' Perceptions of Jealousy in the Stepfamily', *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 57(2), pp. 112-132.
- Denborough, D. (2009) 'Some Reflections on the Legacies of Michael White: An Australian Perspective', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 30(2), pp. 92-108.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978) *Sociological methods: A sourcebook*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2017) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 5th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- DeRose, L., Lyons-Amos, M., Bradford-Wilcox, W. and Huarcaya, G. (2017) *The Cohabitation Go-Round: Cohabitation and Family Instability Across the Globe* New York: Institute, S. T. [Online]. Available at: <http://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2017/files/WFM-2017-FullReport.pdf>.
- Diamond, G. and Liddle, H. A. (1996) 'Resolving a therapeutic impasse between parents and adolescents in multidimensional family therapy', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64(3), pp. 481-488.
- Dingwall, R. (2010) 'Divorce mediation: should we change our mind?', *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 32(2), pp. 107-117.
- Drew, P. and Holt, E. (1988) 'Complainable matters: The use of idiomatic expressions in making complaints', *Social problems*, 35(4), pp. 398-417.
- Dunn, M. J. and Billett, G. (2018) 'Jealousy Levels in Response to Infidelity-Revealing Facebook Messages Depend on Sex, Type of Message and Message Composer: Support for the Evolutionary Psychological Perspective', *Journal of Evolutionary Psychological Science*, 4(1), pp. 17-23.
- DWP (2020) *Estimates of the separated family population statistics: April 2014 to March 2018*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/separated-families-population-statistics-april-2014-to-march-2018/estimates-of-the-separated-family-population-statistics-april-2014-to-march-2018#about-these-statistics>.

- Ebaugh, H. R. and Curry, M. (2000) 'Fictive kin as social capital in new immigrant communities', *Sociological Perspectives*, 43(2), pp. 189-209.
- Edwards, D. and Potter, J. (1993) 'Language and causation: A discursive action model of description and attribution', *Psychological review*, 100(1), pp. 23-41.
- Edwards, D., Potter, J. and Middleton, D. (1992) 'Toward a discursive psychology of remembering', *The Psychologist*, 5(10), pp. 441-446.
- Edwards, R., Ribbens McCarthy, J. and Gillies, V. (2012) 'The politics of concepts: family and its (putative) replacements', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 63(4), pp. 730-746.
- Emery, R. E. (2011) *Renegotiating family relationships: Divorce, child custody, and mediation*. 2nd edn. New York: Guilford Press.
- Emery, R. E., Sbarra, D. and Grover, T. (2005) 'DIVORCE MEDIATION: Research and Reflections', *Family Court Review*, 43(1), pp. 22-37.
- Epstude, K. and Roese, N. (2008) 'The functional theory of counterfactual thinking', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 12(2), pp. 168-192.
- Etherington, K. (2004) *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher - Using Our Selves in Research*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Featherstone, B., Morris, K. and White, S. (2013) 'A Marriage Made in Hell: Early Intervention Meets Child Protection', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 44(7), pp. 1735-1749.
- Feinberg, M. E., Kan, M. L. and Hetherington, E. M. (2007) 'The Longitudinal Influence of Coparenting Conflict on Parental Negativity and Adolescent Maladjustment', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(3), pp. 687-702.
- Finch, J. (2007) 'Displaying families', *Sociology*, 41(1), pp. 65-81.
- Finch, J. (2008a) 'Naming names: Kinship, individuality and personal names', *Sociology*, 42(4), pp. 709-725.
- Finch, J. and Mason, J. (1993) *Negotiating Family Responsibilities*. London: Routledge.
- Finch, N. (2008b) 'Family Policies in the UK', in Ostner, I. and Schmitt, C. (eds.) *Family Policies in the Context of Family Change: The Nordic Countries in Comparative Perspective*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 129-154.
- Fine, M. A., Coleman, M. and Ganong, L. H. (1998) 'Consistency in Perceptions of the Step-Parent Role among Step-Parents, Parents and Stepchildren', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15(6), pp. 810-828.
- Finlay, L. (2002) 'Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice', *Qualitative research*, 2(2), pp. 209-230.
- Fischer, A. and Manstead, A. (2000) 'Chapter 4 - The relation between gender and emotions in different cultures', in Fischer, A. (ed.) *Gender Emotion: Social psychological perspective*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 71-94. 4.

Fitzpatrick, M. A. and Caughlin, J. P. (2002) 'Interpersonal Communication in Family Relationships', in Knapp, M. L. and Daly, J. A. (eds.) *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 726-777.

Fleet, D., Burton, A., Reeves, A. and DasGupta, M. P. (2016) 'A case for taking the dual role of counsellor-researcher in qualitative research', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 13(4), pp. 328-346.

Flick, U. (2009) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 4th edn. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Floyd, K., A.C. M. and Judd, J. (2006) 'Chapter 2 - Defining the Family Through Relationships', in Turner, L. H. and West, R. (eds.) *The Family Communication Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 21-39. 2.

Følling, I. S., Solbjør, M. and Helvik, A.-S. (2015) 'Previous experiences and emotional baggage as barriers to lifestyle change - a qualitative study of Norwegian Healthy Life Centre participants', *BMC Family Practice*, 16(1).

Fortin, N. M. (2005) 'Gender role attitudes and the labour-market outcomes of women across OECD countries', *oxford review of Economic Policy*, 21(3), pp. 416-438.

Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Edited by Gordon, C. New York: Pantheon Books.

Francia, L., Millear, P. and Sharman, R. (2019) 'Mothers and fathers' experiences of high conflict past two years post separation: A systematic review of the qualitative literature', *Journal of Child Custody*, 16(2), pp. 170-196.

Friedman, M. (2004) 'The so-called high-conflict couple: A closer look', *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 32(2), pp. 101-117.

Fuertes, J. N. and Nutt Williams, E. (2017) 'Client-focused psychotherapy research', *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(4), pp. 369-375.

Galvin, K. M. (2006) 'Chapter 1 - Diversity's impact on Defining the Family: Discourse-Dependency and Identity', in Turner, L. H. and West, R. (eds.) *The Family Communication Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 3-20. 1.

Galvin, K. M. and Braithwaite, D. O. (2014) 'Theory and research from the communication field: Discourses that constitute and reflect families', *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 6(1), pp. 97-111.

Galvin, K. M., Braithwaite, D. O. and Bylund, C. L. (2015) *Family Communication: Cohesion and Change*. 9th edn. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Gamache, S. J. (1997) 'Confronting nuclear family bias in stepfamily research', *Marriage & Family Review*, 26(1-2), pp. 41-69.

Ganong, L. and Coleman, M. (2016) *Stepfamily Relationships: Development, Dynamics, and Interventions*. Boston, MA: Springer US.

- Ganong, L. and Coleman, M. (2017) 'The Cultural Context of Stepfamilies', in *Stepfamily Relationships: Development, Dynamics, and Interventions*. Boston, MA: Springer US, pp. 21-36.
- Ganong, L., Coleman, M., Chapman, A. and Jamison, T. (2017) 'Stepchildren Claiming Stepparents', *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(15), pp. 1-25.
- Gaudiano, B. A. (2008) 'Cognitive-behavioural therapies: achievements and challenges', *Evidence-Based Mental Health*, 11(1), pp. 5-7.
- Georgas, J., Berry, J. W., Van de Vijver, F. J., Kagitçibasi, Ç. and Poortinga, Y. H. (2006) 'Chapter 1 - Families and Family Change', in Georgas, J., Berry, J. W., Van de Vijver, F. J., Kagitçibasi, Ç. and Poortinga, Y. H. (eds.) *Families across cultures: A 30-nation psychological study*. Cambridge Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-50. 1.
- Gergen, K. (1994) *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gergen, M. M. and Davis, S. N. (1997) *Toward a New Psychology of Gender: Opening Conversations*. Edited by Gergen, M. M. and Davis, S. N. New York: Routledge.
- Gerson, M. J. (2010) *The Embedded Self: An Integrative Psychodynamic and Systemic Perspective on Couples and Family Therapy*. 2nd edn. Hove, East Sussex: Routledge.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gilbert, G. N. and Mulkay, M. (1984) *Opening Pandora's box: A sociological analysis of scientists' discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gillis, J. R. (1997) *A world of their own making: Myth, ritual, and the quest for family values*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ginther, D. K. and Pollak, R. A. (2004) 'Family structure and children's educational outcomes: Blended families, stylized facts, and descriptive regressions', *Demography*, 41(4), pp. 671-696.
- Goffman, E. (1963) 'Chapter 2: Information, Control and Personal Identity', in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., pp. 41-104. 2.
- Goffman, E. (1981) *Forms Of Talk*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Goldberg, J. S. and Carlson, M. J. (2015) 'Patterns and predictors of coparenting after unmarried parents part', *Journal of Family Psychology*, 29(3), pp. 416-426.
- Goldenberg, H., Goldenberg, I. and Stanton, M. (2016) *Family therapy: An Overview*. 9th edn. Andover: Cengage Learning.
- Goldscheider, F., Bernhardt, E. and Lappegård, T. (2015) 'The gender revolution: A framework for understanding changing family and demographic behavior', *Population and Development Review*, 41(2), pp. 207-239.
- Golombok, S. (2015) *Modern families: Parents and children in new family forms*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Gonzales, J. (2009) 'Prefamily Counseling: Working with Blended Families', *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 50(2), pp. 148-157.
- Gottman, J. M. (1993) 'The roles of conflict engagement, escalation, and avoidance in marital interaction: a longitudinal view of five types of couples', *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 61(1), pp. 6-15.
- Gottman, J. M. (1994) *What Predicts Divorce?: The Relationship Between Marital Processes and Marital Outcomes*. London: Routledge.
- Granello, D. H. and Wheaton, J. E. (2004) 'Online data collection: Strategies for research', *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 82(4), pp. 387-393.
- Green, J., Willis, K., Hughes, E., Small, R., Welch, N., Gibbs, L. and Daly, J. (2007) 'Generating best evidence from qualitative research: the role of data analysis', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 31(6), pp. 545-550.
- Grix, J. (2018) *The Foundations of Research*. 3rd edn. London: Macmillan Education UK.
- Groves, R. M., Dillman, D. A., Eltinge, J. L. and Roderick, L. J. A. (2002) *Survey Nonresponse*. New York: Wiley.
- Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994) 'Chapter 6 - Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', in Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research 2*. Michigan: SAGE Publications, pp. 105-117. 6.
- Gubrium, J. F. and Holstein, J. A. (1990) *What is Family?* Houston, Texas: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Gubrium, J. F. and Holstein, J. A. (1993) 'Phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and family discourse', in *Sourcebook of family theories and methods*. Boston, MA: Springer US, pp. 651-675.
- Guillemin, M. and Gillam, L. (2004) 'Ethics, reflexivity, and "ethically important moments" in research', *Qualitative inquiry*, 10(2), pp. 261-280.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982) *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gürmen, M. S., Huff, S. C., Brown, E., Orbuch, T. L. and Birditt, K. S. (2017) 'Divorced Yet Still Together: Ongoing Personal Relationship and Coparenting Among Divorced Parents', *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 58(8), pp. 645-660.
- Haldeman, D. C. (2012) 'The Evolving Family', in Fouad, N. A., Carter, J. A., Subich, L. M., Fouad, N. A., Carter, J. A. and Subich, L. M. (eds.) *APA handbook of counseling psychology, Vol. 2: Practice, interventions, and applications*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association, pp. 105-123.
- Hämäläinen, K. and Rautio, S. (2013) 'Participants home as an interview context when studying sensitive family issues', *Journal of comparative social work*, 8(1), pp. 43-70.
- Hamilton, S., Moore, A. M., Crane, D. R. and Payne, S. H. (2011) 'Psychotherapy dropouts: Differences by modality, license, and DSM-IV diagnosis', *Journal of marital and family therapy*, 37(3), pp. 333-343.

- Hammersley, M. (1992) 'Deconstructing the qualitative-quantitative divide ', in Brannen, J. (ed.) *Mixing methods: Qualitative and quantitative research*. London: Routledge, pp. 39-55.
- Hammersley, M. (2013) *What's wrong with ethnography?* New York: Routledge.
- Hanna, S. M. (2019) *The Practice of Family Therapy: Key Elements Across Models*. 5th edn. New York: Routledge.
- Hardesty, J. L., Crossman, K. A., Khaw, L. and Raffaelli, M. (2016) 'Marital Violence and Coparenting Quality After Separation', *Journal of family psychology : JFP : journal of the Division of Family Psychology of the American Psychological Association (Division 43)*, 30(3), pp. 320-330.
- Harold, G., Acquah, D., Sellers, R., Chowdry, H. and Feinstein, L. (2016) 'What works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children', *Department of Work & Pensions*, 32.
- Harold, G. and Sellers, R. (2018) 'Annual Research Review: Interparental conflict and youth psychopathology: an evidence review and practice focused update', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 59(4), pp. 374-402.
- Harold, G. T. and Murch, M. (2005) 'Inter-parental conflict and children's adaptation to separation and divorce: theory, research and implications for family law, practice and policy', *Child & Family Law Quarterly*, 17(2), pp. 185-206.
- Harrison, H., Birks, M., Franklin, R. and Mills, J. (2017) 'Case Study Research: Foundations and Methodological Orientations', *Forum of Qualitative Social Research*, 18(1).
- Hartman, A. (1978) 'Diagrammatic assessment of family relationships', *Social Casework*, 59(8), pp. 465-476.
- Haverkamp, B. E. (2005) 'Ethical perspectives on qualitative research in applied psychology', *Journal of counseling psychology*, 52(2), pp. 146-155.
- Hemrica, J. and Heyting, F. (2004) 'Tacit Notions of Childhood An analysis of discourse about child participation in decision-making regarding arrangements in case of parental divorce', *Childhood*, 11(4), pp. 449-468.
- Henton, I. (2012) 'Practice-based research and counselling psychology: A critical review and proposal', *Counselling Psychology Review*, 27(3), pp. 11-28.
- Henton, I. (2020) 'Introduction to a special section on practice-based research and counselling psychology', *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 33(1), pp. 1-7.
- Hetherington, E. M. (1999) 'Should we stay together for the sake of the children', in Hetherington, E. M. (ed.) *Coping with divorce, single parenting, and remarriage: A risk and resiliency perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, pp. 93-116.
- Hiller, H. H. and Diluzio, L. (2004) 'The Interviewee and the Research Interview: Analysing a Neglected Dimension in Research', *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 41(1), pp. 1-26.

Hodge, M. and Tollett, B. (2017) *The Spot*. Available at: <http://creativity-online.com/work/mccain-we-are-family/52489> (Accessed: 9th February 2018).

Hodge, M. and Tollett, B. (2018) *Here's To Love*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79LtGHFAVll> (Accessed: 9th February 2018).

Hofferth, S. L. and Anderson, K. G. (2003) 'Are all dads equal? Biology versus marriage as a basis for paternal investment', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65(1), pp. 213-232.

Hoffman, L. (1985) 'Beyond power and control: Toward a "second order" family systems therapy', *Family systems medicine*, 3(4), pp. 381-396.

Hoffman, L. (1990) 'Constructing realities: An art of lenses', *Family process*, 29(1), pp. 1-12.

Holland, J. and Edwards, R. (2014) *Understanding Families Over Time: Research and Policy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Holmes, E. A., O'Connor, R. C., Perry, V. H., Tracey, I., Wessely, S., Arseneault, L., Ballard, C., Christensen, H., Cohen Silver, R., Everall, I., Ford, T., John, A., Kabir, T., King, K., Madan, I., Michie, S., Przybylski, A. K., Shafran, R., Sweeney, A., Worthman, C. M., Yardley, L., Cowan, K., Cope, C., Hotopf, M. and Bullmore, E. (2020) 'Multidisciplinary research priorities for the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science', *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(6), pp. 547-560.

Hudak, J. and Giammattei, S. V. (2010) 'Doing Family: Decentering Heteronormativity in "Marriage" and "Family" Therapy', in Ariel, J., Hernandez-Wolfe, P. and Sterns, S. (eds.) *Critical Topics in Family Therapy*. Washington DC: American Family Therapy Academy, pp. 49-58.

Huisman, D. (2014) 'Telling a family culture: storytelling, family identity, and cultural membership', *Interpersona*, 8(2), pp. 144-158.

Humphrey, C. (2007) 'Insider-outsider Activating the hyphen', *Action Research*, 5(1), pp. 11-26.

Hunt, J. (2018) 'Grandparents as substitute parents in the UK', *Contemporary Social Science*, pp. 1-12.

Hunt, J. and Greening, J. (2017) *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: A Green Paper*. London, UK: UK Government [Online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper>.

Huss, E. and Cwikel, J. (2008) "'It's hard to be the child of a fish and a butterfly": Creative genograms: Bridging objective and subjective experiences', *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 35(2), pp. 171-180.

HWBB (2019) *Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2019*. Chelmsford, Essex: Health and Wellbeing Boards - Public Health Intelligence.

Imber-Black, E. (2004) 'September 11, 2004: The third anniversary', *Family process*, 43(3), pp. 275-278.

Irvin, K., Fahim, F., Alshehri, S. and Kitsantas, P. (2018) 'Family structure and children's unmet health-care needs', *Journal of Child Health Care*, 22(1), pp. 1-11.

- Irvine, A., Drew, P. and Sainsbury, R. (2013) 'Am I not answering your questions properly?' Clarification, adequacy and responsiveness in semi-structured telephone and face-to-face interviews', *Qualitative Research*, 13(1), pp. 87-106.
- Jackson, D. D. (1957) 'The Question of Family Homeostasis', *The Psychiatric Quarterly*, 31, pp. 79-90.
- Jackson, K. M., Rogers, M. L. and Sartor, C. E. (2016) 'Parental divorce and initiation of alcohol use in early adolescence', *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 30(4), pp. 450-461.
- Jacobs, B. (2006) 'The case for dangerous fieldwork', in Hobbs, D. and Wright, R. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Fieldwork*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 158-168.
- Jamieson, S. (2004) 'Likert scales: how to (ab) use them', *Journal of Medical Education*, 38(12), pp. 1217-1218.
- Jeffries, S. (2013) 'Relate: 75 Years of Marriage Guidance', *The Guardian*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/oct/26/relate-75-years-marriage-guidance>.
- Jevne, K. S. and Andenæs, A. (2017) 'Parents in high-conflict custodial cases: negotiating shared care across households', *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(1), pp. 296-305.
- Johnson, J. L. (1997) 'Generalizability in Qualitative Research', in *Completing a Qualitative Project: Details and dialogue*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 191-208.
- Johnson, M. P. (1995) 'Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, pp. 283-294.
- Johnson, M. P. (2006) 'Conflict and control: Gender symmetry and asymmetry in domestic violence', *Violence against women*, 12(11), pp. 1003-1018.
- Johnson, P. and Duberley, J. (2003) 'Reflexivity in management research', *Journal of management studies*, 40(5), pp. 1279-1303.
- Johnston, J. R. (1994) 'High-conflict divorce', *The future of children*, 4(1), pp. 165-182.
- Jootun, D., McGhee, G. and Glenn, M. (2009) 'Reflexivity: promoting rigour in qualitative research', *Nursing Standard*, 23(23), pp. 42-46.
- Jordan, A. B. (2006) 'Make yourself at home: The social construction of research roles in family studies', *Qualitative Research*, 6(2), pp. 169-185.
- Jørgensen, M. W. and Phillips, L. J. (2002) *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Jorgenson, J. (1989) 'Where is the "family" in family communication?: Exploring families' self-definitions', *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 17(1-2), pp. 27-41.
- Jouriles, E. N. and McDonald, R. (2015) 'Intimate partner violence, coercive control, and child adjustment problems', *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 30(3), pp. 459-474.
- Kalmijn, M. (2007) 'Gender differences in the effects of divorce, widowhood and remarriage on intergenerational support: Does marriage protect fathers?', *Social Forces*, 85(3), pp. 1079-1104.

Karam, E. A., Blow, A. J., Sprenkle, D. H. and Davis, S. D. (2015) 'Strengthening the systemic ties that bind: Integrating common factors into marriage and family therapy curricula', *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 41(2), pp. 136-149.

Kelly, J. B. and Emery, R. E. (2003) 'Children's adjustment following divorce: Risk and resilience perspectives', *Family Relations*, 52(4), pp. 352-362.

Kindsvatter, A. and Lara, T. M. (2012) 'The Facilitation and Maintenance of the Therapeutic Alliance in Family Therapy', *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 42(4), pp. 235-242.

King, V., Amato, P. R. and Lindstrom, R. (2015a) 'Stepfather–adolescent relationship quality during the first year of transitioning to a stepfamily', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(5), pp. 1179-1189.

King, V., Boyd, L. M. and Thorsen, M. L. (2015b) 'Adolescents' perceptions of family belonging in stepfamilies', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(3), pp. 761-774.

Kitson, G. C., Benson Babri, K. and Roach, M. J. (1985) 'Who Divorces and Why: A Review', *Journal of Family Issues*, 6(3), pp. 255-293.

Klein, M. (1929) 'Personification in the play of children', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 10, pp. 193-204.

Kluge, E.-H. W. (2012) 'Informed Consent in Health Research', *International Journal of Pharmaceutical Medicine*, 21(6), pp. 405-414.

Knopp, K., Rhoades, G. K., Allen, E. S., Ritchie, L. L., Markman, H. J. and Stanley, S. M. (2017) 'Within- and Between-Family Associations of Marital Functioning and Child Well-being', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 79(2), pp. 451-461.

Knox, S. and Burkard, A. W. (2009) 'Qualitative research interviews', *Psychotherapy Research*, 19(4-5), pp. 566-575.

Koch, T. (2006) 'Establishing rigour in qualitative research: the decision trail', *Journal of advanced nursing*, 53(1), pp. 91-100.

Koch, T. and Harrington, A. (1998) 'Reconceptualizing rigour: the case for reflexivity', *Journal of advanced nursing*, 28(4), pp. 882-890.

Krantz, D. L. (1995) 'Sustaining vs. resolving the quantitative-qualitative debate', *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 18(1), pp. 89-96.

Krusiewicz, E. S. and Wood, J. T. (2001) 'He was Our Child from the Moment We Walked in that Room': Entrance Stories of Adoptive Parents', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18(6), pp. 785-803.

Kuhn, T. S. (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kumar, K. (2017) 'The Blended Family Life Cycle', *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 58(2), pp. 110-125.

Kvale, S. (1994) *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Lamb, M. E. (2010) *The role of the father in child development*. 5th edn. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Langellier, K. M. (2002) 'Performing family stories, forming cultural identity: Franco American memere stories', *Communication Studies*, 53(1), pp. 56-73.
- Lansford, J. E. (2009) 'Parental divorce and children's adjustment', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4(2), pp. 140-152.
- Lebow, J. L. (2003) 'Integrative family therapy for disputes involving child custody and visitation', *Journal of Family Psychology*, 17(2), pp. 181-192.
- Lebow, J. L. (2016) 'Editorial: Empirically Supported Treatments in Couple and Family Therapy', *Family Process*, 55(3), pp. 385-389.
- Lebow, J. L. (2018) 'Editorial: Research on Rarely Researched Family Therapies', *Family Process*, 57(4), pp. 849-854.
- Lebow, J. L. (2019a) 'Current Issues in the Practice of Integrative Couple and Family Therapy', *Family Process*, 58(3), pp. 610-628.
- Lebow, J. L. (2019b) *Treating the difficult divorce: A practical guide for psychotherapists*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- Lebow, J. L., Chambers, A. L., Christensen, A. and Johnson, S. M. (2012) 'Research on the treatment of couple distress', *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38(1), pp. 145-168.
- Lebow, J. L. and Rekart, K. N. (2007) 'Integrative family therapy for high-conflict divorce with disputes over child custody and visitation', *Family Process*, 46(1), pp. 79-91.
- Ledger, A. (2010) 'Exploring multiple identities as a health care ethnographer', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 9(3), pp. 291-304.
- Lehr, V. (1999) *Queer family values: Debunking the myth of the nuclear family*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Leon, K. and Angst, E. (2005) 'Portrayals of stepfamilies in film: Using media images in remarriage education', *Family Relations*, 54(1), pp. 3-23.
- Levin, I. (1999) 'What phenomenon is family?', *Marriage & Family Review*, 28(3-4), pp. 93-104.
- Levin, I. and Trost, J. (1992) 'Understanding the Concept of Family', *Family Relations*, 41(3), pp. 348-351.
- Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L. and Ponterotto, J. G. (2017) 'Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity', *Qualitative Psychology*, 4(1), pp. 2-22.
- Liamputtong, P. (2006) *Researching the Vulnerable: A Guide to Sensitive Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Luhmann, N. (1979) *Trust and power*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

- Lynch, J. M. (2000) 'Considerations of family structure and gender composition: The lesbian and gay stepfamily', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 40(2), pp. 81-95.
- Madill, A., Jordan, A. and Shirley, C. (2000) 'Objectivity and reliability in qualitative analysis: realist, contextualist and radical constructionist epistemologies', *British Journal of Psychology* 91(1), pp. 1-20.
- Malinowski, B. (1913) *The Family Among the Australian Aborigines: A Sociological Study*. Alexandria: The Library of Alexandria.
- Mandel, D. (2003) 'Counterfactuals, emotions, and context', *Journal of Cognition and Emotion*, 17(1), pp. 139-159.
- Markham, M. S., Hartenstein, J. L., Mitchell, Y. T. and Aljayyousi-Khalil, G. (2017) 'Communication Among Parents Who Share Physical Custody After Divorce or Separation', *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(10), pp. 1414-1442.
- Marsiglio, W. (2004) 'When stepfathers claim stepchildren: A conceptual analysis', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(1), pp. 22-39.
- Martins, P. P. S., McNamee, S. and Guanaes-Lorenzi, C. (2014) 'Family as a discursive achievement: A relational account', *Marriage & Family Review*, 50(7), pp. 621-637.
- Mason, J. and Tipper, B. (2008) 'Children and the making of kinship configurations', in Widmer, E. J., Riitta (ed.) *Beyond the nuclear family: Families in a configurational perspective*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, pp. 137-156. 6.
- Masterson, C. R. and Hoobler, J. M. (2015) 'Care and career: A family identity-based typology of dual-earner couples', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(1), pp. 75-93.
- McGoldrick, M. and Carter, B. A. (1999) *The Expanding Family Life Cycle: Individual, Family, and Social Perspectives*. 3rd edn. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- McGoldrick, M., Gerson, R. and Petry, S. S. (2008) *Genograms: Assessment and intervention*. WW Norton & Company.
- McGoldrick, M. and Hardy, K. V. (2019) *Re-Visioning Family Therapy - Addressing Diversity in Clinical Practice*. Third edn. New York: Guilford Publications.
- McLeod, J. (2010) *Case Study Research: In Counselling and Psychotherapy*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- McLeod, J. (2011) *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy*. 2nd edn. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- McNamee, S. (2017) 'Social Constructionism in Couple and Family Therapy', in Breunlin, D., Chambers, A. and Lebow, J. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp. 1-4.
- McNamee, S. and Gergen, K. J. (1992) *Therapy as Social Construction*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

McPherson, K. E., Kerr, S., Casey, B. and Marshall, J. (2017) 'Barriers and Facilitators to Implementing Functional Family Therapy in a Community Setting: Client and Practitioner Perspectives', *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 43(4), pp. 717-732.

Mercer, R. T. (2004) 'Becoming a mother versus maternal role attainment', *Journal of nursing scholarship*, 36(3), pp. 226-232.

Merten, E. C., Cwik, J. C., Margraf, J. and Schneider, S. (2017) 'Overdiagnosis of mental disorders in children and adolescents (in developed countries)', *Child and adolescent psychiatry and mental health*, 11(5), pp. 1-11.

Minow, M. (1991) 'Redefining families: Who's in and who's out', *U. Colo. L. Rev.*, 62(2), pp. 269-285.

Minuchin, S. (1974) *Families and family therapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Minuchin, S. and Fishman, H. C. (1981a) 'Chapter 3: Joining', in *Family Therapy Techniques*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 28-49. 3.

Minuchin, S. and Fishman, H. C. (1981b) *Family Therapy Techniques*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Moon, L. (2008) 'Chapter 4 - Queer(y)ing the Heterosexualisation of Emotion', in Moon, L. (ed.) *Feeling queer or queer feelings?: Radical approaches to counselling sex, sexualities and genders*. Hove, Sussex: Routledge, pp. 36-53. 4.

Moore, E. (2012) 'Renegotiating Roles Postdivorce: A Decisive Break From Tradition?', *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 53(5), pp. 402-419.

Moore, E. (2016a) *Divorce, Families and Emotion Work: 'Only Death Will Make Us Part'*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Moore, E. (2016b) 'Understanding Families and Personal Relationships', in Moore, E. (ed.) *Divorce, families and emotion work: 'only death will make us part'*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 53-80. 3.

Morgan, D. (1996) *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Morgan, D. (1998) 'Practical strategies for combining qualitative and quantitative methods: Applications to health research', *Qualitative health research*, 8(3), pp. 362-376.

Morgan, D. (2003) 'Introduction', in Cheal, D. (ed.) *Family: Critical Concepts in Sociology*. London: Routledge.

Morgan, D. (2011) *Rethinking Family Practices*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Morgan, D. (2019) 'Family Troubles, Troubling Families, and Family Practices', *Journal of Family Issues*, 40(16), pp. 2225-2238.

Morris, M., Halford, W. K., Petch, J. and Hardwick, D. (2018) 'Predictors of engagement in family mediation and outcomes for families that fail to engage', *Family process*, 57(1), pp. 131-147.

- Morse, J. M. (1994) *Critical issues in qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Murdock, G. P. (1949) *Social structure*. Michigan: Macmillan Company.
- Mutchler, M. S. (2017) 'Family Counseling With High-Conflict Separated Parents: Challenges and Strategies', *The Family Journal*, 25(4), pp. 368-375.
- Nadin, S. and Cassell, C. (2006) 'The use of a research diary as a tool for reflexive practice: Some reflections from management research', *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 3(3), pp. 208-217.
- Nasser, M. (1995) 'The rise and fall of anti-psychiatry', *The Psychiatrist*, 19(12), pp. 743-746.
- Nelson, M. K. (2013) 'Fictive kin, families we choose, and voluntary kin: What does the discourse tell us?', *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 5(4), pp. 259-281.
- Newington, L. and Metcalfe, A. (2014) 'Factors influencing recruitment to research: qualitative study of the experiences and perceptions of research teams', *BMC medical research methodology*, 14(10), pp. 1-11.
- Neyer, F. J. and Lang, F. R. (2003) 'Blood is thicker than water: kinship orientation across adulthood', *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 84(2), pp. 310-321.
- NHS (2018) *Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017 [PAS]*. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2017/2017> (Accessed: 20th October 2020).
- Nichols, M. P. and Davis, S. D. (2016) *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods*. 11th edn. New York: Pearson.
- Nielsen, L. (2017) 'Re-examining the research on parental conflict, coparenting, and custody arrangements', *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 23(2), pp. 211-231.
- Noens, P. and Ramaekers, S. (2015) 'The family as a "gathering": how the life of an object "makes" a family', *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 5(4.2), pp. 722-740.
- Nordqvist, P. (2017) 'Genetic thinking and everyday living: On family practices and family imaginaries', *The Sociological Review*, 65(4), pp. 865-881.
- Nuru, A. K. and Wang, T. R. (2014) '"She Was Stomping on Everything That We Used to Think of as a Family": Communication and Turning Points in Cohabiting (Step) Families', *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 55(2), pp. 145-163.
- O'Reilly, M. and Parker, N. (2013) 'You can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink': Exploring children's engagement and resistance in family therapy', *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 35(3), pp. 491-507.
- Oláh, L. S., Richter, R. and Kotowska, I. E. (2015) 'The new roles of men and women and implications for families and societies', *Changing families in the European Union: Trends and policy implications*. New York, May 14–15. United Nations Expert Group Meeting "Family policy development: Achievements and challenges".

- Oltmann, S. M. (2016) *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*.
- ONS (2017) 'Families and Households: 2017', *Office For National Statistics* pp. 1-16.
- ONS (2019) 'Families and Households: 2019', *Office For National Statistics* pp. 1-14.
- ONS (2020a) 'Children Looked After in England: 2019', *Office For National Statistics* pp. 1-19.
- ONS (2020b) 'Divorces in England and Wales: 2019', *Office For National Statistics* pp. 1-10.
- ONS (2020c) 'Sexual orientation, UK: 2018', *Office For National Statistics* pp. 1-12.
- Opdenakker, R. (2006) *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L. and Wynaden, D. (2001) 'Ethics in Qualitative Research', *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), pp. 93-96.
- Oswald, R. F., Blume, L. B. and Marks, S. R. (2005) 'Chapter 6 - Decentering Heteronormativity: A Model for Family Studies', in Bengston, V. L., Acock, A. C., Allen, K. R., Dilworth-Anderson, P. and Klein, D. M. (eds.) *Sourcebook of family theory & research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc, pp. 143-165. 6.
- Palazzoli, M. S. (1974) *Self-starvation: From the intrapsychic to the transpersonal approach to anorexia nervosa*. (Trans A. Pomerans). Hanover, PA: Chaucer.
- Palazzoli, M. S. (1978) *Paradox and Counterparadox: A New Model in the Therapy of the Family in Schizophrenic Transaction*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Papernow, P. L. (1993) *Becoming a Stepfamily: Patterns of Development in Remarried Families*. Cambridge, MA: Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Press.
- Paris, J. (2020) *Overdiagnosis in psychiatry: how modern psychiatry lost its way while creating a diagnosis for almost all of life's misfortunes*. 2nd edn. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Patterson, C. J. and Farr, R. H. (2017) 'What Shall We Call Ourselves? Last Names Among Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Couples and Their Adopted Children', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 13(2), pp. 97-113.
- Patterson, J., Williams, L., Edwards, T., Chamow, L. and Grauf-Grounds, C. (2018) *Essential Skills in Family Therapy, Third Edition: From the First Interview to Termination*. 3rd edn. New York: Guilford Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (1999) 'Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis', *Health services research*, 34(5 Pt 2), pp. 1189-1208.
- Pease, B. and Fook, J. (1999) *Transforming social work practice: Postmodern critical perspectives*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Piercy, F. P. and Sprenkle, D. H. (2005) *Research methods in family therapy*. 2nd ed. edn. New York: Guilford Press.

- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988) *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press.
- Popenoe, D. (1993) 'American family decline, 1960-1990: A review and appraisal', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, pp. 527-542.
- Potter, J. (1997) 'Discourse Analysis as a way of analysing naturally occurring talk', in Silverman, D. (ed.) *Qualitative research. Theory, Method and Practice*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., pp. 144-160.
- Potter, J., Edwards, D. and Wetherell, M. (1993) 'A Model of Discourse in Action', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 36(3), pp. 383-401.
- Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Primeau, L. A. (2003) 'Reflections on self in qualitative research: Stories of family', *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 57(1), pp. 9-16.
- Proctor, R. W. and Vu, K.-P. L. (2019) 'How psychologists help solve real-world problems in multidisciplinary research teams: Introduction to the special issue', *American Psychologist*, 74(3), pp. 271-277.
- Ragland, B. B. (2006) 'Positioning the practitioner-researcher: Five ways of looking at practice', *Action Research*, 4(2), pp. 165-182.
- Rait, D. S. (2000) 'The therapeutic alliance in couples and family therapy', *J Clin Psychol*, 56(2), pp. 211-24.
- Ramsey, R. (2016) *The Popular Girl*. Available at: <http://creativity-online.com/work/oxo-popular-girl/49394> (Accessed: 9th February 2018).
- Rapp, R. (1982) 'Chapter 10 - Family and class in contemporary America: Notes toward an understanding of ideology', in Thorne, B. and Yalom, M. (eds.) *Rethinking the Family - Some Feminist Questions*. New York: Longman Inc, pp. 168-187.
- Raskin, J. D. (2008) 'The Evolution of Constructivism', *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 21(1), pp. 1-24.
- Ray, R. A. and Street, A. F. (2005) 'Ecomapping: an innovative research tool for nurses', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 50(5), pp. 545-552.
- Rees, G. (2017) 'Family structure and children's subjective well-being: A comparative analysis in eight European countries', 1(1), pp. 13-35.
- Rempel, G. R., Neufeld, A. and Kushner, K. E. (2007) 'Interactive use of genograms and ecomaps in family caregiving research', *Journal of Family Nursing*, 13(4), pp. 403-419.
- Repko, A. F., Newell, W. H. and Szostak, R. (2012) *Case studies in interdisciplinary research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

- Reynolds, J., Houlston, C., Coleman, L. and Harold, G. (2014) *Parental conflict: Outcomes and interventions for children and families*. University of Bristol: Policy Press.
- Riach, K. (2009) 'Exploring participant-centred reflexivity in the research interview', *Sociology*, 43(2), pp. 356-370.
- Ribbens McCarthy, J. (2012) 'The powerful relational language of 'family': togetherness, belonging and personhood', *The Sociological Review*, 60(1), pp. 68-90.
- Ribbens McCarthy, J., Doolittle, M. and Sclater, S. D. (2012) *Understanding family meanings: A reflective text*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Ribbens McCarthy, J., Edwards, R. and Gillies, V. (2003a) *Making families: Moral tales of parenting and step-parenting*. Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor & Francis.
- Ribbens McCarthy, J., Gillies, V. and Hooper, C.-A. (2019) "'Family Troubles" and "Troubling Families": Opening Up Fertile Ground', *Journal of Family Issues*, 40(16), pp. 2207-2224.
- Ribbens McCarthy, J., Hooper, C.-A. and Gillies, V. (2003b) *Making families : Moral tales of parenting and step-parenting*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Ribbens McCarthy, J., Hooper, C.-A. and Gillies, V. (2013) 'Troubling normalities and normal family troubles: diversities, experiences and tensions', in McCarthy, J. R., Hooper, C.-A. and Gillies, V. (eds.) *Family troubles?: Exploring changes and challenges in the family lives of children and young people*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 1-21. 1.
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Elam, G., Tennant, R. and Rahim, N. (2014a) 'Chapter 5: Designing and Selecting Samples', in Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. 2nd edn. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., pp. 111-146. 5.
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M. and Ormston, R. (2014b) 'Chapter 6: Designing Fieldwork', in Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. 2nd edn. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., pp. 147-176. 6.
- Rivett, M., Howarth, H. and Harold, G. T. (2006) "'Watching from the Stairs': Towards an Evidence-based Practice in Work with Child Witnesses of Domestic Violence', *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 11(1), pp. 103-125.
- Roberts, S., Stafford, B., Duffy, D., Ross, J. and Unell, J. (2009) *Literature review on the impact of family breakdown on children - Report to the European Commission*.
- Robinson, O. C. (2014) 'Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), pp. 25-41.
- Royzman, E. B., Cassidy, K. W. and Baron, J. (2003) "'I know, you know": Epistemic egocentrism in children and adults', *Review of General Psychology*, 7(1), pp. 38-65.
- Russell, L. T., Beckmeyer, J. J., Coleman, M. and Ganong, L. (2016) 'Perceived Barriers to Postdivorce Coparenting: Differences Between Men and Women and Associations with Coparenting Behaviors', *Family Relations*, 65(3), pp. 450-461.

- Rutter, J. and Stocker, K. (2014) 'Childcare Costs Survey 2014', London: Family and Childcare Trust, pp. 1-28.
- Safa, H. I. (1995) *The myth of the male breadwinner: Women and industrialization in the Caribbean*. Boulder Colorado: Westview Press.
- Saks, M. and Allsop, J. (2007) *Researching health: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods*. Sage.
- Salter, E. (2018) 'A Media Discourse Analysis of Lone Parents in the UK: Investigating the Stereotype', in Bernardi, L. and Mortelmans, D. (eds.) *Lone Parenthood in the Life Course*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 55-74.
- Sandelowski, M. (1995) 'Sample Size in Qualitative Research', *Research in Nursing & Health*, 18(2), pp. 179-183.
- Sandelowski, M. (1997) "'To be of use": Enhancing the utility of qualitative research', *Nursing outlook*, 45(3), pp. 125-132.
- Sands, A., Thompson, E. J. and Gaysina, D. (2017) 'Long-term influences of parental divorce on offspring affective disorders: A systematic review and meta-analysis', *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 218, pp. 105-114.
- Scheff, T. J. (2000) 'Shame and the social bond: A sociological theory', *Sociological theory*, 18(1), pp. 84-99.
- Schmeeckle, M., Giarrusso, R., Feng, D. and Bengtson, V. L. (2006) 'What makes someone family? Adult children's perceptions of current and former stepparents', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68(3), pp. 595-610.
- Seale, C. (1999) 'Quality in qualitative research', *Qualitative inquiry*, 5(4), pp. 465-478.
- Seale, C. (2004) 'Chapter 24 - Quality in Qualitative Research', in Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gubrium, J. F. and Silverman, D. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 379-389. 24.
- Seale, C. and Silverman, D. (1997) 'Ensuring rigour in qualitative research', *European Journal of Public Health*, 7(4), pp. 379-384.
- Sear, R. (2016) 'Beyond the nuclear family: an evolutionary perspective on parenting', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 7, pp. 98-103.
- Sexton, T. L. and Lebow, J. (2016) *Handbook of Family Therapy*. New York: Routledge.
- Shaw, S. and Bailey, J. (2009) 'Discourse analysis: what is it and why is it relevant to family practice?', *Family practice*, 26(5), pp. 413-419.
- Shelmerdine, G. (2017) *Christmas 2017* (Accessed: 9th February).
- Singer, E., Van Hoewyk, J. and Maher, M. P. (2000) 'Experiments with incentives in telephone surveys', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64(2), pp. 171-188.

- Singh, R. (2009) 'Constructing 'the family' across culture', *Journal of Family Therapy*, 31(4), pp. 359-383.
- Smetana, J. G., Yau, J., Restrepo, A. and Braeges, J. L. (1991) 'Adolescent-parent conflict in married and divorced families', *Developmental Psychology*, 27(6), pp. 1000-1010.
- Smithson, J., Barlow, A., Hunter, R. and Ewing, J. (2015) 'The 'child's best interests' as an argumentative resource in family mediation sessions', *Discourse Studies*, 17(5), pp. 609-623.
- Sobolewski, J. M. and King, V. (2005) 'The Importance of the Coparental Relationship for Nonresident Fathers' Ties to Children', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(5), pp. 1196-1212.
- Speed, E. (2006) 'Patients, consumers and survivors: A case study of mental health service user discourses', *Social Science & Medicine*, 62(1), pp. 28-38.
- Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. and Dillon, L. (2003) *Quality in qualitative evaluation: a framework for assessing research evidence*. London: Government Chief Social Researcher's Office.
- Srivastav, T. (2017) *McCain removes gay couple from 'We are Family' advert*. Available at: <http://www.thedrum.com/news/2017/09/30/mccain-removes-gay-couple-we-are-family-advert> (Accessed: 9th February 2018).
- Stacey, J. (1990) *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late-twentieth-century America*. University of California Press.
- Stacey, J. (1996) *In the name of the family: Rethinking family values in the postmodern age*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Stake, R. E. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Stake, R. E. (2006) *Multiple Case Study Analysis*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Starks, H. and Brown Trinidad, S. (2007) 'Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory', *Qualitative health research*, 17(10), pp. 1372-1380.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1995) 'Love as a Story', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 12(4), pp. 541-546.
- Stiles, W. B. (2007) 'Theory-building case studies of counselling and psychotherapy', *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 7(2), pp. 122-127.
- Stratton, P. (2016) *The Evidence Base of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice*. UK: Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice
- Sue, V. M. and Ritter, L. A. (2012) *Conducting online surveys*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Suter, E. A., Daas, K. L. and Bergen, K. M. (2008) 'Negotiating lesbian family identity via symbols and rituals', *Journal of family issues*, 29(1), pp. 26-47.
- Suter, E. A. and Oswald, R. F. (2003) 'Do lesbians change their last names in the context of a committed relationship?', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 7(2), pp. 71-83.

- Sweeney, M. M. (2010) 'Remarriage and stepfamilies: Strategic sites for family scholarship in the 21st century', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), pp. 667-684.
- Tangney, J. P. (1990) 'Assessing individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt: Development of the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(1), pp. 102-111.
- Tasker, D., McLeod-Boyle, A. and Bridges, D. (2011) 'From Practice to Research and Back Again: Living Transformations', in Bridges, D., Higgs, J., Titchen, A. and Horsfall, D. (eds.) *Creative Spaces for Qualitative Researching*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pp. 291-300.
- Tavassolie, T., Dudding, S., Madigan, A., Thorvardarson, E. and Winsler, A. (2016) 'Differences in perceived parenting style between mothers and fathers: Implications for child outcomes and marital conflict', *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25(6), pp. 2055-2068.
- Thomas, V. (2015) *Using mental imagery in counselling and psychotherapy: A guide to more inclusive theory and practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Thorne, B. (1982) 'Chapter 1 - Feminist Rethinking of the Family: An Overview ', in Thorne, B. and Yalom, M. (eds.) *Rethinking the family: Some Feminist Questions*. New York: Longman Inc, pp. 1-24. 1.
- Thorne, B. and Yalom, M. (1992) *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*. 2nd edn. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Timonen, V., Doyle, M. and O'Dwyer, C. (2009) *The role of grandparents in divorced and separated families*. Dublin: School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College.
- Trost, J. (1990) 'Do we mean the same by the concept of family', *Communication Research*, 17(4), pp. 431-443.
- Tseliou, E. (2013) 'A Critical Methodological Review of Discourse and Conversation Analysis Studies of Family Therapy', *Family Process*, 52(4), pp. 653-672.
- Tufford, L. and Newman, P. (2012) 'Bracketing in Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(1), pp. 80-96.
- Turner, L. H. and West, R. (2006) *The Family Communication Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Turner, L. H. and West, R. (2014) 'The Challenge of Defining "Family"', in Turner, L. H. and West, R. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Family Communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 10-22. 1.
- Valentine, G., Skelton, T. and Butler, R. (2003) 'Coming out and outcomes: negotiating lesbian and gay identities with, and in, the family', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21(4), pp. 479-499.
- Valiquette-Tessier, S.-C., Vandette, M.-P. and Gosselin, J. (2016) 'Is family structure a cue for stereotyping? A systematic review of stereotypes and parenthood', *Journal of Family Studies*, 22(2), pp. 162-181.

- Van Krieken, R. (2005) 'The 'best interests of the child' and parental separation: On the 'civilizing of parents'', *The Modern Law Review*, 68(1), pp. 25-48.
- Vangelisti, A. L. and Caughlin, J. P. (1997) 'Revealing family secrets: The influence of topic, function, and relationships', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 14(5), pp. 679-705.
- Vangelisti, A. L., Crumley, L. P. and Baker, J. L. (1999) 'Family Portraits: Stories As Standards for Family Relationships', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 16(3), pp. 335-368.
- Vannette, D. L. (2019) *The Qualtrics handbook of question design*. Provo, Utah: Qualtrics International Inc.
- Visser, M., Finkenauer, C., Schoemaker, K., Kluwer, E., Rijken, R. v. d., Lawick, J. v., Bom, H., de Schipper, J. C. and Lamers-Winkelmann, F. (2017) 'I'll Never Forgive You: High Conflict Divorce, Social Network, and Co-Parenting Conflicts', *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 26(11), pp. 3055-3066.
- Wagner, A. and Diamond, R. (2016) 'Divorce in Couple and Family Therapy', in Lebow, J., Chambers, A. and Breunlin, D. C. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 1-5.
- Walker, S., Read, S. and Priest, H. (2013) 'Use of reflexivity in a mixed-methods study', *Nurse Researcher*, 20(3), pp. 38-43.
- Walkerdine, V. (1989) 'Femininity as performance', *Oxford Review of Education*, 15(3), pp. 267-279.
- Wang, M.-n., Sandberg, J., Zavada, A., Mittal, M., Gosling, A., Rosenberg, T., Jeffrey, A. and McPheters, J. (2006) "'Almost There"... Why Clients Fail to Engage in Family Therapy: An Exploratory Study', *Contemporary family therapy*, 28(2), pp. 211-224.
- Weedon, C. (1987) *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Weeks, G. R. and Treat, S. (2001) *Couples in Treatment: Techniques and Approaches for Effective Practice*. 2nd edn. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Weigel, D. J. (2008) 'The concept of family: An analysis of laypeople's views of family', *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(11), pp. 1426-1447.
- Welzel, C. A., Amy C (2011) 'Islam and patriarchy: how robust is Muslim support for patriarchal values?', *International Review of Sociology*, 21(2), pp. 249-276.
- Weston, K. (1997) *Families we Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. 2nd edn. New York: Columbia University Press.
- White, L. (1994) 'Growing Up with Single Parents and Stepparents: Long-Term Effects on Family Solidarity', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 56(4), pp. 935-948.
- White, L. and Gilbreth, J. G. (2001) 'When Children Have Two Fathers: Effects of Relationships With Stepfathers and Noncustodial Fathers on Adolescent Outcomes', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(1), pp. 155-167.
- White, M. (2007) *Maps of Narrative Practice*. London: W.W. Norton & Company.

Whiteside, M. F. (1989) 'Family rituals as a key to kinship connections in remarried families', *Family Relations*, pp. 34-39.

Wiener, N. (1954) *The human use of human beings: Cybernetics and society*. Boston, MA: Da Capo Press.

Wilkinson, S. and Kitzinger, C. (2000) 'Thinking differently about thinking positive: a discursive approach to cancer patients' talk', *Social science & medicine*, 50(6), pp. 797-811.

Williams, K. D. (1997) 'Social Ostracism', in Kowalski, R. M. (ed.) *Aversive interpersonal behaviors*. New York: Plenum Press, pp. 133-170.

Wolfe, B. E. (2003) 'Knowing the self: Building a bridge from basic research to clinical practice', *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 13(1), pp. 83-95.

Wolin, S. J. and Bennett, L. A. (1984) 'Family Rituals', *Family process*, 23(3), pp. 401-420.

Wright, K. B. (2005) 'Researching Internet-Based Populations: Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Survey Research, Online Questionnaire Authoring Software Packages, and Web Survey Services', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10(3).

Yardley, L. (2000) 'Dilemmas in qualitative health research', *Psychology & Health*, 15(2), pp. 215-228.

Zelevnikow, L. and Zelevnikow, J. (2015) 'Supporting Blended Families to Remain Intact: A Case Study', *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 56(4), pp. 317-335.

Appendices

Appendix A – Participant demographics and short biographies

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Educational Qualifications	Social Class – Classified using Britain's Real Class System: Great British Class Survey". BBC Lab UK 2013
John	55-64	White	Secondary School (O'Levels, CSE, GCSE)	Traditional working class
Freya	45-54	White Scandinavian	Undergraduate Degree and post graduate qualifications	Established middle class
Kate	25-34	White	College	Technical middle class
Sherab	45-54	White	Undergraduate Degree	Established middle class
Jane	45-54	White	Secondary School (O'Levels, CSE, GCSE)	Traditional working class
Shaun	45-54	White Irish	Secondary School (O'Levels, CSE, GCSE)	Traditional working class
Craig	35-44	White	Secondary School (AS, A-Levels)	Technical middle class

Participant Biographies

John

Originally from the North of the UK, John grew up in a large, poor and traditional working-class family before embarking on a military career. He has been married and is now remarried. He is not currently working and has experience of parenting and stepparenting. He has very limited contact with both his birth and first family following a difficult divorce.

Freya

Grew up in Scandinavia in a highly conflictual and separated family before moving to the UK. Freya is an educated health professional and was previously married with two children, she has been divorced several years and is now in a long-term relationship. Freya ended her marriage as she was uninspired and felt that she needed to change certain aspects of her lifestyle.

Kate

Grew up in a large and close-knit family that valued traditional family values. Kate's has been married once, works as an administrative professional, has residency of all her children and manages several co-parenting relationships. Her marriage to her ex-husband ended due to frequent incidents of heated conflict.

Sherab

Grew up in the South of England in a traditional Jewish family. She has been married and is now divorced. Sherab is not currently in a relationship, works as a professional in the healthcare sector and has two adult children. Her marriage ended due to the couple growing apart and needing different things from the relationship.

Jane

Has been married several times, moving around the UK from her original home in Scotland. She is currently re-married and living with her husband. Her children from her previous marriage live with their father and have regular contact with Jane. She works in an office and has experiences of being a parent and a grandparent. Her first marriage ended due to high conflict and her second marriage concluded due to cultural differences.

Shaun

Is currently in his second marriage and comes from a conflictual and separated family with a mixed cultural background. He currently works within the care sector. He has experience of parenting and stepparenting but has not had contact with any of these children for several years. His relationship ended due to his ex-wife's infidelity.

Craig

Is from a traditional family that values marriage, middle class lifestyle aspirations and well-defined gender roles. He works as a financial professional and is currently married and lives in a blended family that accommodates regular visits from his daughter from a previous relationship that ended due to frequent disputes.

PARTICIPANTS WANTED

FOR A STUDY ABOUT FAMILY SYSTEMS AND
SEPERATED FAMILIES



Contact

For more information or to sign up. Please contact me by the following:

Telephone: 07977 505958

Email: pmgalb@essex.ac.uk

* All data collected is confidential and anonymised

Scan the QR code below to directly access the survey from your mobile device:



What is the research about?

Hello, my name is Paul Galbally and I am a fully qualified and DBS checked family therapist and researcher from the University of Essex. I am interested in finding out how parental separation influences how people talk about their family. I hope my findings will help support parents and children to have positive relationships by further understanding separation in local health & social care counselling services.

Who can apply?

Parents (Over 18) who have a child(ren) with a partner(s) that they are no longer in a relationship with. Ex-partners and children will not be involved.

What will I need to do?

There are 2 stages:

- i. A multiple-choice survey about your relationship with your ex-partner, this can be accessed online, by the QR code on this poster or by post.
- ii. If you are willing and selected, a face to face interview will be conveniently arranged to talk to you about your family.

Appendix C – Topic guide for interviews

Topic Guide – Connected Disconnections

Negotiating family separation, membership and conflict:

A discourse analysis

Introduction to the research

More and more families are now experiencing separation and the traditional version of the nuclear family of a mother, father and children living in one home has now changed. Blended families, same sex couples and children living between households are now much more commonplace than in the 20th century, and family now has multiple meanings and can be described in many ways. I want to learn how parental separation affects how people define their family and who they include as part of it. Understanding these things better will help us to improve how we can work with and support families who have experienced separation.

Aim

The main aim of the study is to further understand how levels of conflict between parents create different discourses around how separated parents talk about their families.

Research Questions

- i. How do separated parents talk about and define family?
- ii. Does parental conflict affect family membership?
- iii. How do the portrayals of separated families within society impact on the lived experience?
- iv. What are the implications of this research on practice within family therapy?

Introduction

- Introduction to researcher
- Introduction to study topic
- Explain aims and objectives of study
- Explain confidentiality and anonymity
- Get permission to record
- Go through consent and explain can withdraw at anytime
- Make disclaimer that they do not need to answer questions that they do not want to.
- Check any questions and happy to continue.

Background

- Build rapport with participant and contextual information.
- How long were you together?
- How old were you when you first got together?
- How old were you when you had children?
- Could you describe what the relationship used to be like?

The relationship with the other parent

- How do you describe the relationship now?
- When did you separate?
- How old were the children when you separated?
- How did you find the separation?

Probes around nature of the split and feelings or descriptions of experience and the ex-partner.

Family (Use family map to create graphical representation)

- Explain relationship of key members?
- What do the spatial gaps mean (relational distance, geography)?
- Has anyone been left off on purpose? *Why?*
- How do you get to be a member of your family?
- How do people come to be a member of your family? *Who decides?*
- Can people be removed from your family?
- Are any of these people not related by genetics or law? *How does that work?*


Future/Conclusion

- How do you describe your family? Words/descriptors
- Do you think blood ties, legal ties or roles of the members are the most important?
- What is a usual or normal family?
- Do you think there is a stigma around separated families? *Can you give examples in the media or social life? Where do you think this comes from?*
- Are there any other comments?
- Thank participant, reiterate confidentiality and say that they can contact at a later date to ask about research.

Appendix D – Analytical process example


4. His separation changed his view of family instantly and he felt he had to give up his daughter. They now have a phone relationship but she is private about her other family. He feels that he would like to meet up, but she is anxious and resistant. He feels that his ex-wife could keep her safe but is uncomfortable with being too close to him to avoid upsetting her mother. He talked about how they collaboratively build a wall with different size bricks and how they sometimes they add or remove these bricks.

Notes taken at Interview about consequences of poor parental relationship



<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Parental Relationship	0	0
<input type="radio"/>	Aggressive men	1	5
<input type="radio"/>	Children appreciating parents relationship	1	1
<input type="radio"/>	Complex relationship preventing co-parenting	1	7
<input type="radio"/>	Coping with separation	3	6


Topic collections around parental relationships



Breaking Up

- ★ Name
- Men Should Leave
- Victimhood
- Worst Experience Ever

Initial discourses that constitute the meta-discourse



Meta Discourses FINAL

- ★ Name
- Breaking Up

Meta-Discourse of 'Breaking Up'



University of Essex

04 January 2018

MR PAUL GALBALLY
AVALON
THE STREET
HATFIELD PEVEREL
ESSEX
CM3 2EG

Dear Paul,

Re: Ethical Approval Application (Ref 17012)

Further to your application for ethical approval, please find enclosed a copy of your application which has now been approved by the School Ethics Representative on behalf of the Faculty Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa McKee
Ethics Administrator
School of Health and Human Sciences

cc. Research Governance and Planning Manager, REO
Supervisor

Colchester Campus
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester CO4 3SQ
United Kingdom

School of Health and Social Care
T 01206 872854
E hsc@essex.ac.uk

www.essex.ac.uk

@Uni_of_Essex

/uniofessex

/uniofessex

Appendix F – Research diary (Indicative of Nvivo 12 entry)

Academic Journal - Appendix F Research Diary - Appendix E

Date: 10.08.18
Venue: Home Office
Present: Paul Galbally

Lots of good public debate around changing the law to stop divorces having to have one party as responsible for the marriage end. My experience is that lots of mutually ending relationships are forced into bitter legal disputes to win the settlement. This transfers to the children contact and can really be detrimental. Literature review has addressed this point
MUTCHLER, M. S. 2017. Family Counselling With High-Conflict Separated Parents: Challenges and Strategies. *The Family Journal*, 25(4), 368-375.

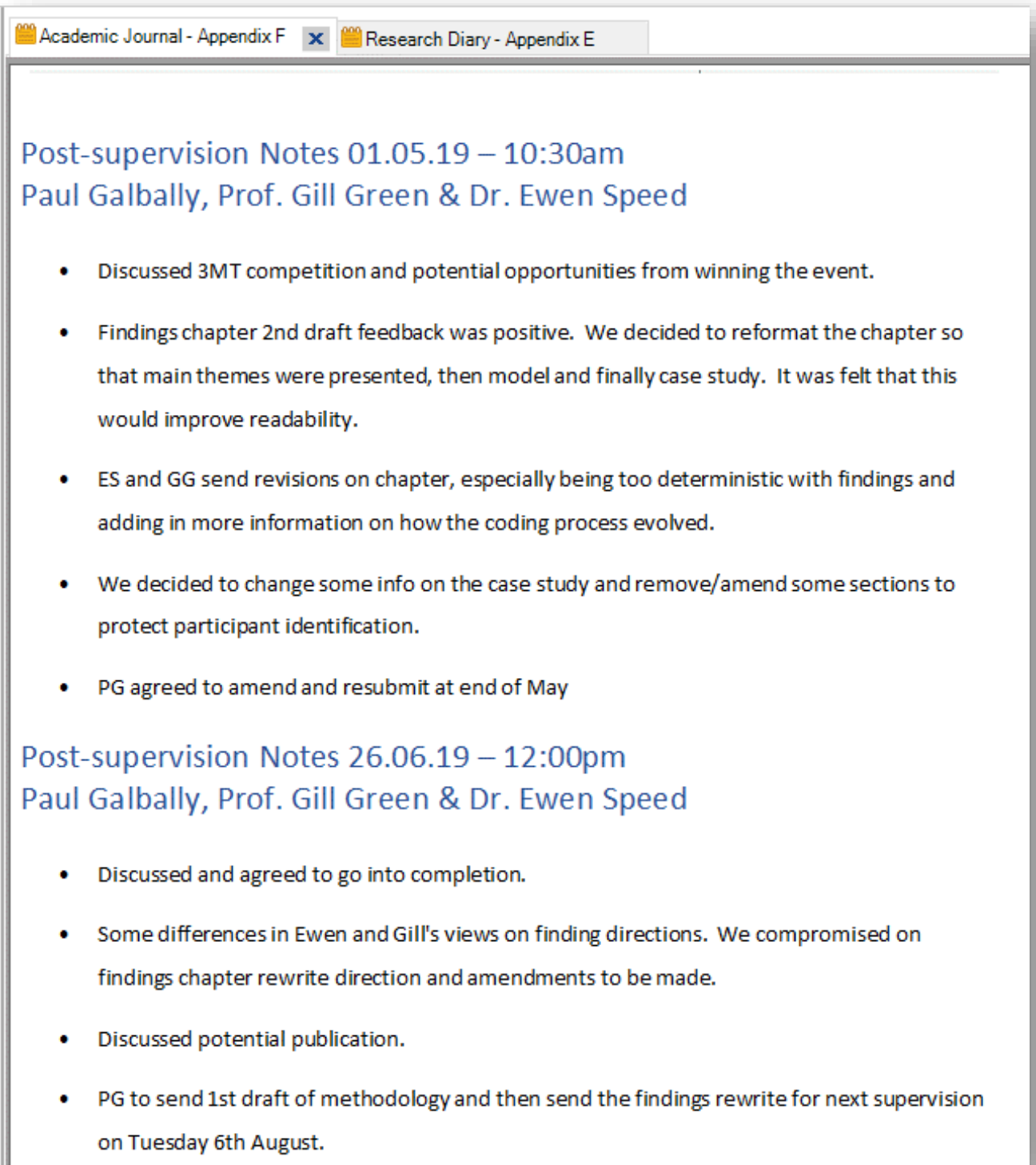
Date: 10.09.18
Venue: Home Office
Present: Paul Galbally

Finding the summer quite hard to get motivated as not much Uni contact and feeling a bit unsure on my career as job applications for academia rejected. I am wondering how all my hard work, money and time will pay back as the therapy industry is very stagnant at present. I am also finding the challenge of breaking into teaching a struggle without relevant HE experience. A bit chicken and egg. If I had more time then a GTA role would be a good idea to get the proverbial foot in the door. This is making it hard to be motivated with the thesis. I am slowly progressing, so I am pleased that I can still remain engaged, even though progress is fairly sluggish.

Date: 22.09.18
Venue: Italy, brother's wedding
Present: Paul Galbally

Interesting aspect of my own family as attended my brother's wedding. My parents were there with their respective new partners. They are still in court with their divorce. I hadn't seen my mother for around 4 years, we spoke and were civil. My parents did not speak one word over the whole event, my mother sort of denied existence of my father and he was fairly juvenile about her with unhelpful comments. He asked me if I had seen 'the enemy' at one point. I felt he was childish and I told him so, it was an awkward scenario and the comparison with the bride's nuclear family (that seemed functional) felt shaming, 2 of my other brothers were not there due to poor relationships.

It made me think that if I was a child and this was happening, it would be incredibly difficult and upsetting. As an adult I could make sense of it and I am fairly distant with both parents, so was not split. It has made me feel that this research will be valuable in reinforcing good separations as the alternative is highly detrimental to younger children.



Academic Journal - Appendix F ✕ Research Diary - Appendix E

Post-supervision Notes 01.05.19 – 10:30am

Paul Galbally, Prof. Gill Green & Dr. Ewen Speed

- Discussed 3MT competition and potential opportunities from winning the event.
- Findings chapter 2nd draft feedback was positive. We decided to reformat the chapter so that main themes were presented, then model and finally case study. It was felt that this would improve readability.
- ES and GG send revisions on chapter, especially being too deterministic with findings and adding in more information on how the coding process evolved.
- We decided to change some info on the case study and remove/amend some sections to protect participant identification.
- PG agreed to amend and resubmit at end of May

Post-supervision Notes 26.06.19 – 12:00pm

Paul Galbally, Prof. Gill Green & Dr. Ewen Speed

- Discussed and agreed to go into completion.
- Some differences in Ewen and Gill's views on finding directions. We compromised on findings chapter rewrite direction and amendments to be made.
- Discussed potential publication.
- PG to send 1st draft of methodology and then send the findings rewrite for next supervision on Tuesday 6th August.

Appendix H – The 16 initially identified discourses

Identified Discourse	Description
Victimhood	Attributing blame for the separation and describing how events were out of your control and at your detriment, reinforces a victim position that holds moral superiority
Maintaining Normality	Trying to avoid the disruption of separation by carrying on as normal
Save Yourself	Explaining how actions were often taken to avoid negative or damaging consequences
Member's Only	The notion that family membership is permitted to people who are socially supportive, rather than admission being based on legality or genetics
Deciding the Future	A process that encourages people to reassess, reevaluate and reorganise their lives post separation
Worst Experience Ever	Emotive explanations of how difficult separation was
Self-Help	Therapeutically resolving and managing painful experiences
Drifting Apart	The gradual process of losing romantic interest
Men Should Leave	An idea that women have less access to resources and that after separation men should leave the family home
Absent Fathers	The social acceptance of men not being present in children's lives
Accumulating Trauma	The build-up of emotional distress, lack of trust and physical restrictions such as children and financial obligations
You Can Choose Your Friends	A movement that rejects traditional ideas of having to privilege genetic relationships
Repairing the Damage	Making amends for relational grievances
The New Me	Recreating and reevaluation of identity after separation
2.4 Children	Adherence to normative and traditional family ideals
It's Not Fair	An idea that expresses how events and actions are perceived as not adhering to the subjective concept of social justice