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Children's Experiences of Their Parents' Marital Dissolution in
the Chinese Context

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Abstract

This research study aims to explore how the children themselves, in the Chinese context, perceive, understand and also experience their parents' marital dissolution. General landscape about their lived experiences in this regard will be illustrated. And particular focus will be given to the children's understanding of post-divorced family and family networks. In addition, it also highlights children's dynamic construction of caring and support relationship with other family members, especially their mothers and non-resident fathers. In the process of going in depth into these research focus, children's agency as competent, constructive and responsible actors within the context of family change are obviously identified. All these in the end refresh my mind with renewed recognition of their unique ideas and experiences in the process of family transformation, such as the occurrence of marital dissolution.

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1.0 Introduction

“Fifty years ago, divorce in the world was a topic people talked about in whispers. Today, things, of course, are quite different. You would be hard-pressed to find an eight-year-old who does not know what the word divorce means or who has not witnessed the end of a marriage, either that of his or her parents or of someone close. Divorce throughout the world has become a part of everyday life” (Newman & O'Brien 2008, pp.205).

Divorce has penetrated into every corner of the world and demonstrated a dramatic rise in the divorce rates over the last decades (Amato & James 2010; Clark-Stewart & Brentano 2006). Although the high rates in divorce has since witnessed ups and downs, a high proportion of marriages still end in divorce. The frequent occurrence of divorce is generally viewed as the predictor for the family collapse and social insecurity. A multitude of factors contribute to the high rise of divorce rates throughout the world. The causes are too complex to discuss in details within the space of this research study. In this study, some important factors leading to the divorce will be highlighted from a global perspective. First, changes in women's roles as wage earners within the household are also related to the divorce (Amato & James 2010; Clark-Stewart & Brentano 2006). It is suggested by these researchers that women today are more increasingly involved in the workforce and money-making, and thus making them more financial independently. As a result the wife's economic dependence on husbands is fading away. Either side of the couples has great possibility to reverting to divorce to end their marriage if they find it difficult to cope with or feel dissatisfied with their relationship. Second, women's increased engagement in work and deduced availability for family and family activities might one of the reasons to contribute to the divorce. Clark-Stewart & Brentano (2006, pp.47) point out that “women feel caught in the middle, burdened by increased demands from both work and family”.

Third, demographic features, such as age, educational attainment and ethnicity have great relation to divorce. Many studies have consistently demonstrated (Clark-Stewart & Brentano 2006, pp.49) getting married younger than eighteen (in most of the European countries, such as UK and Germany, and parts of the Asian countries, such as Iran and Iraq, the legal marriage age for women is less than eighteen) are “twice risk of a failed marriage as women who are twenty-five years or older when they marry”. A similar view is expressed by Heaton (1991) that marriage at later age decreases the risk of marital dissolution. Nevertheless, Bitter (1986) points out that late marriage may work out for some couples to some degree and not for others with tough characters and who are unable to reconcile their differences.

Besides, educational background has been found to have positive relation to marital security and stability. Higher education is related to lower likelihood of marital dissolution compared to those with primary school education (Hymowitz 2006). In addition to the above-mentioned, Clark-Stewart & Brentano (2006, pp.52-53) state that marital dissolution has also association with ethnicity. For example, “African American women are more likely to reverting to marital dissolution than women in other ethnic groups. This is because their long-standing cultural patterns, such as a greater reliance on extended kin during worsening economic conditions”.

1.1 Aim and Significance of the Study

In this study, I aim to explore how the Chinese children experienced their parents’ marital dissolution. It should be noted here that, in this study, divorce, marital dissolution and marital break-up all refer to the same meaning. Giving the rising divorce rates in China over the last decade (Zeng and Wu 2000), primarily in the big cities, and also the lived cases of divorce occurred nearby me. All these arouse my

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concern over and great interest in this kind of family change and implications for the people involved in this change, particularly the children. Previous studies about divorce in relation with children are predominately derived from the Western contexts on the basis of utilization of psychological and comparative approaches, and thereby claiming representation of the world children. In recent years, there is a growing awareness that the children in the divorced families should be analyzed and researched in their own rights thanks to the booming development and increasing influence in the new sociology of the childhood field (James & Prout 1990, 1997; Mayall 2002) Accordingly, the research focus in this regard also makes a shift from the stereotypes of researching children as the passive victims of their parents' divorce (Amato 1993; Wallerstein & Kelly 1980) to seeking their actual opinions and lived experiences they went through in the process of their daily lives and activities. This sort of research focus shift in this aspect is of great significance for the children themselves, because they are seen as the subjects rather than the objects in the research process.

In the Chinese context, there are many researches about divorce over the last decades and most of them concentrate on examination of the transformations of divorce rates since 1980s, particularly the trends and regional variations of this rising divorce rates (Platte 1988; Wang 2001; Zeng and Wu 2000). In addition, there are several studies about the impacts of divorce on the children, with special focus on their post-divorce family adjustment (Dong, Wang and Ollendick, 2002). Nevertheless, this kind of research is mainly based on the psychological perspectives as the previous researches from the Western contexts. In addition, the data in such kind of research are primarily collected from the parents who experienced the divorce. Therefore, it is adults' construction of divorce impact on their children. There is scarcity of information with regards to how the children themselves experienced their parents' divorce. In this

study, I make this attempt to let the children involved in my study, listen to their genuine voices and give them their rights to make account of their views about this. I regard them as research subjects and experts who have rich experiences which I do not know and lack in. Although this study does not demonstrate a comprehensive picture of the children in the divorced families in China on the whole, it might uncover some interesting and meaningful aspects in this regard.

1.2 Research Questions

In this study, I intend to explore the following research questions which are particularly inspired by Haugen's works (2007):

- What are children's views and experiences about their parents' marital dissolution?
 - a) How do children conceptualize their family after parents dissolved their marriage? And does the family networks within the divorced families work as before?
 - b) How do children practice care and practical support within the post-divorced families?

In order to gain information and knowledge on these research questions, qualitative semi-structured interviews were primarily utilized with the informants based in a Peking high school. These informants ranged in age from thirteen to sixteen and experienced their parents' marital dissolution at least two years ago at the time of my interview.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This paper is intended to dividing into six chapters. The first chapter provides a brief

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introduction of this study, including the aim and significance of this study, research questions and the structure of this study. The second chapter gives more information on the background of China. First it takes a look at the economic and social transformations over the last decades, then focuses on the marriage and divorce over the past and at present, and finally reverts to the changes in family and kinship traditions. In chapter three I present the theoretical framework, providing the theory and framework I have used in this study. Chapter four focuses on methodology. It concerns how the research is designed, how the data is collected and ethical consideration is also mention here. The theories illuminated in chapter three contribute to the analysis of my data in chapter five. And the last chapter (chapter six) is about the concluding remarks.

2.0 Background on China

Due to the fact that this study site and research participants are located in the Chinese context, it is necessary to give a brief introduction of China and also important transformations and achievements she made over the last decades. First of all, I will take a look at the economic and social changes before and after 1949. Then, I will move to the presentation of marriage and divorce from the ancient times to the contemporary China. Finally, Chinese family and kinship culture will also be highlighted accordingly. These three points are highly inter-related in the better understanding of China.

2.1 Economic and Social Changes over the Last Decades

China, located in East Asia, has a long and fascinating civilization with more than five thousand years. She went through a series of radical transformations and reforms in history in terms of social and economic aspects. Before the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China has long been subjected to civil trifles and foreign invasions. China signed many unequal treaties imposed by the foreign invaders. Losing state sovereignty and political power stability in succession of different emperors and leaders contributed to its shattering and stagnant domestic economics. The 'dark' landscape came to an end until Mao Zedong took power in 1949. During the Mao era, and under the leadership of new communism, the Chinese government made a series of economic restructurings such as redistribution concentration on the heavy industry and land reform in the countryside. However in reality, a multitude of large and important economic sectors are under the State control. The economic development made no advancement and had little interaction with the outside economic players. It was even worse that China experienced a host of social and political movements during the time from 1958 to 1976, notably 'the Great

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Leap Forward' and 'the Cultural Revolution'. The social chaos and destructions made the State and its people suffer from great losses physically, mentally and economically. "The end of the Cultural Revolution brought about an acute awareness among the Chinese leadership that China's gap both with the developed countries and some of the developing countries had widened even further" (Zhang 2000, pp.28).

Therefore, in the wake of Mao's passing away in 1976, Deng Xiaoping took the power and became the new leadership of PRC. Under Deng's leadership, the Chinese government made reforms in various fields in gradual and radical manner throughout the nation. Since the initial carrying out of the opening-up policy to the outside in 1978, China made considerable benefits from this ambitious and bold policy and market-oriented economy strategy. In the last decades, China witnessed rapid economic growth and became one of the indispensable economic players in the global arena.

Along with the opening-up policy and marketing economic framework, many social transformations around the nation came about. "Many aspects of Chinese society have been far more liberalized than ever before and many institutions underpinning State control have been considerably weakened. Household registration and the personal dossier system have loosened up. People are no longer fully dependent for their livelihoods on the working unit and the rationing system marked by 'numerical existence' has disappeared" (Zhang 2000, pp.126). This made people get access to social mobility more easily and more frequently. Many privatized and state-owned enterprises set up production plants in the urban and rural areas. People can mobilize to choose their preferred job and job site. This sort of social mobility with abundant labour force greatly contributed to the Chinese economic growth over the last thirty years.

Until increasingly rampant marketing economy, China's exposure to the outside world also gave rise to the changes in ideas and values. Secularization and consumerism get prevalence in today's China. "During the Mao era, pursuing money and leisure had been condemned as decadent. People were urged to devote all their energy to the party and revolution" (Zhang 2000, pp.127). However, during the era of Deng's leadership, everything has changed and he encouraged people to pursue personal wealth and fortune based on their efforts, creativity, and intellectuals. People have their rights to pursue better life. A lot of cadres from all walks of life gave up their permanent jobs and devoted themselves to the business. With extensions of educational institutions at all levels, more and more people are able to get access to university enrollments. When many university graduates finished their studies, they often found their jobs in the prosperous cities with high remunerations and better welfare rewarding. People have more disposable money at hand and their life quality improved considerably. "The growing trend of secularization and consumerism finds its visible gap between generations. The young generation is more geared to the life and work style of earning and spending, while, the older generation prefers earning, saving and consuming in the case of need" (Zhang 2000, pp.130). In addition, these changes in social values "have a profound impact on Chinese political development. They mark, on the one side, China's break with Mao's utopianism and totalitarianism, and on the other side, the growth of pro-market culture gradually taken root among the ordinary people, especially the young generation" (Zhang 2000, pp.130).

2.2 Marriage and Divorce: Past and Present

The practice of marriage in China has a long history and went through profound changes over the past years. Marriage in China is generally perceived as an important means to perpetuate and reproduce the family. In the Qing, Tang and other Dynasties,

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polygamy was the prevalent practice. A man can have many wives. Later, forced and arranged marriage became widespread and socially accepted and it prevailed for more than hundreds of years. The forced or arranged marriage means that the marriage is decided by both sides of the parents and the would-be couples have no say on this matter. And their own wills and happiness is given little attention. In defense of their parents' decisions, some couples took extreme actions or even committed suicide. The traditional marriage landscape was faded away with the founding of PRC in 1949 and arranged or forced marriage is no longer viewed as legal and socially accepted. Instead, freedom of marriage based on one's choice and willingness came to prevalence. Over the last decade, especially in the big cities, the changes related to marriage demonstrate the following characteristics: first, the age to get married on the part of female is above thirty years old; second, some people prefer choosing other means instead of marriage, such as keeping single and cohabitation; third, the quality of marriage is giving more focus among the couples.

Divorce is not a new phenomenon in China. Over thousands of years before, divorce had been regarded as a taboo in the Chinese society. The old Chinese saying describes how the Chinese people regard their marriages under the influence of Confucianism. Once wedlock was set, the bond was supposed to last for good. Chinese tradition highly values individual sacrifice for maintaining a marriage. An old popular saying goes 'You can pull down a temple, but you cannot pull apart a couple'. Therefore, if divorce comes about, this will bring great shame not only to the couples but also to the whole family.

However, this traditional viewpoint is challenged today. The economic miracle that followed the country's opening to the outside world after 1979 has dramatically changed social mores --- and getting divorced to certain degree no longer carries the

social stigma and brought about family shame as it once did. Over the last decades, China witnessed a growing tendency in divorce rates. For example, China's divorce rates (number of divorces per 1,000 populations) increased from 0.33 in 1979 to 1.59 in 2007, and its refined divorce rates (number of divorces per 1,000 married populations) increased from 0.85 to 2.62 over the same period (China Statistical Yearbook, 2007). Why rising divorce rates occurred over the last decade in this populous country? In the first chapter, I mentioned some causes to this happening from an international perspective. While, putting these causes in the Chinese context, they hold true to a great degree. In addition, other causes behind the divorce need to be illustrated here. First, seeking individual interest and happiness becomes possible in a more liberal social and political environment after the late 1970s. Getting divorce is less viewed as selfish and immoral. A strong emphasis is placed on relational quality and satisfaction. Second, the economic reform and growth give unprecedented mobility of travelling, living and working outside of people's birthplace. An increased number of married people live separately as one partner seeks opportunities in economically booming areas. Only in a few cases, the other side of the couple would come along with the husband or wife to the booming areas. Thus, there is great possibility that couple's relationship would change and extra-marital affairs might happen with final reverting to divorce.

Third, the access to getting divorce in the legal system is not viewed as so difficult as before. Upon the founding of PRC in 1949, the Chinese government successively implemented the Marriage Law in the 1950s and 1980s respectively. Although, within the legal framework, the arranged or forced marriage were abolished and granting woman equal rights in marriage, there still existed great difficulty in getting divorce. The divorcing couples had to go through a series of mediating processes from their working units, district and local communities before they applied for and submitted

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their divorce petitions to the commissioned courts. In addition, the staff in charge of the divorce case at the court would also intervene to see whether the would-be divorcing couple's marriage could save up and reconcile. Until 1990, Chinese revised the Marriage Law and promulgated new guidelines for the divorce cases. In addition, no-fault divorce was introduced in the Chinese Marriage Act in 1980 and reinstalled recently. All these make getting divorced less difficult and less restricted.

2.3 Family and Kinship

As mentioned earlier, the economic reforms and social transformations made since the opening-up policy in 1978, it brought about great influence on the Chinese family life, family ideology and family conduct code. The traditional Chinese families were extended and all the family members were living under the same roof. The traditional Chinese family has a hierarchical structure with the man as the head of the family tagged with the responsibility for supporting his family. While, this responsibility also endows him with complete authority and the final say in the affairs of the family. The traditional Chinese extended family is generally viewed within the 'corporate' model. According to the 'corporateness' model, the sort of traditional Chinese family is "an organization characterized by a common budget, shared property, and a household economy that relies on a strict pooling of income. Family-owned property serves as the most important mechanism to shape the actions of maximizing persons" (Yan 2003, pp.15). The feminist scholars in the study of the Chinese family position this kind of extended family into the 'political' approach. They argue that "although the socialist revolution made some changes in marriage customs and intergenerational relations, it failed to realize the party-state's promise of gender equality and family reforms because of the deep-rooted ideology and structure of the patriarchal family" (Yan 2003, pp.16).

With rapid urbanization and mushrooming housing market, more and more people choose to live separately between generations. The current prevalent norm of family structure is nuclear family with a husband, wife and child. In spite of the changes in family structure and family values, the traditional virtue of placing great emphasis on collective interests, extended kinship ties and intergenerational support of the family bears on change. For example, grandparents are involved in children's raising. It is a common practice that grandparents consider it their responsibility to help bring up their grandchildren. And the entire family relatives constitute an extended support network for family members. Although at present fewer grandparents, uncles, aunts, or other family members live under the same roof, they continue to provide all kinds of support. Whenever any members within the family go through the difficult situations, for instance, parent's divorce, the family support network plays an essential part in helping the children cope well with this. Here it should be noted that the family network in China includes both parents, uncles, aunts and other members on both sides of the family.

The research focus in the study of the Chinese family also makes a shift and the dynamics of private individual life within the family get precedence. Yan (2003, pp.6) point out that "the moral experiences of individuals whose concerns about privacy, intimacy, emotionality and individual rights are as important as economic gains". On the part of the Chinese children, Orna Naftali (2010) concentrates on the urban Chinese children's private life, particularly the privacy issue. All these show that Chinese individual family life is really coming to the platform in the research field.

Another unique feature of the modern Chinese family is that the existence of one child. The Chinese government initiated the one-child policy in 1979 in order to limit its burgeoning population growth. The policy basically allows one child per couple and it

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is implemented by enforced administrative systems. To those who do not follow the rules will receive punishment and heavy fines. When Chinese children go through their parent's divorce, no 'siblings' stand by to provide assistance and support. However, the siblings within the extended family can be resorted to.

3.0 Theoretical Conceptualization

Drawing on ideas and theories, within the so-called ‘new’ sociology of childhood, which I find might be helpful in this study and inform my later analysis of my data of exploring these children’s experiences from their perspectives of their parent’s marital dissolution. In this theoretical section, I will make a general review of these important theoretical contributions within the domain of childhood, including traditional childhood theories; interpretative reproduction perspectives; the ‘new’ paradigm of studying children and childhood; children’s rights as well as the changes in the sociology of family.

3.1 Traditional Points of Views in Childhood

In contemporary childhood research realm, Philippe Ariès (1962, in Cunningham 2005) was one of the first social historian researchers to observe that children are present in all the world cultures. He came up with in a historical manner many ideas about childhood that inform the present research in significant ways. He depicted chronologically children and childhood during the Middle Ages and pointed out the idea of childhood did not exist at that time. But this did not imply that children were abandoned or neglected. Ariès acknowledged that children were kind of recognized by the society, however, were only perceived as just miniature adults. Until from the fifteenth century onwards, children began gradually to be seen as children. With the advent of compulsory schooling and childrearing practices within the family in the nineteenth century, childhood as a specific and separate category, in parallel to the one of adult or other social group, were produced, approached and analyzed. Ariès’ significant contributions in his prestigious book “Centuries of Childhood” aroused greatly critical comments from a lot of scholars at that time, such as DeMause, Linda Pollock and Stone and so on. Although Ariès might have been somewhat flawed in

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his assumptions and might also make general conclusions which rely on limited sources, this provided a useful way of restarting the conclusions that could be derived from his work and also laid a foundation for the subsequent studies in this respect.

Moving forward to the early twentieth century in the childhood research field, it has been generally dominated by the paradigm of developmental psychology and socialization. The former places focus on the children as individuals progressing into adulthood that can be achieved through specific stages in relation to cognitive subjectivity, physical development and ages. The latter finds its path in parallel to the developmental psychology. James et al. (1998: pp.24) point out:

“The central concept in the sociology approach to childhood is socialization. A synonym for this process may well be acculturation because this term implies that children acquire the culture of the human groupings in which they find themselves. Children are not to be viewed as individuals fully equipped to participate in a complex adult world but as beings who have the potentials for being slowly brought into contact with human beings”.

This alternative in the sociological understanding of childhood and children still finds its influence in contemporary times. In the process of socialization, children is often guided and shaped by the external forces so as to abide by the social mandates and internalize their social values, thus being able to integrate into the whole society. With this approach, childhood has only been viewed as a period of preparation and adaptation into the society and children are positioned as becoming rather than being. Based on the context, Corsaro (1997) proposed two models to refer to socialization: deterministic and constructivist. The deterministic just regards children primarily play a passive role and have great potentials to contribute to the society and at the same

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time must be controlled and tamed by societal endeavors. Within this model, another two approaches were further recognized by functionalist and reproductive. Corsaro (1997: pp.8) employed the “appropriation to mean child is taken over by society and trained to become eventually a competent and contributing member”. Corsaro also pointed out the functionalist approach, on the one hand, saw order and balance in society and stressed the importance of training and preparing children to fit into and contribute to that order. The reproductive model, on the other hand, focused on conflicts and inequalities in society and argued that some children have differential access to certain types of training and other societal resources.

The constructivist model identifies the child as an active agent in the socialization process. Two dominant developmental psychologists Jean Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky et al (1978) might be the best representative of this model. Jean Piaget is widely known for his construction of children’s cognitive development by means of a series of transformation in intellectualities. And his theory of children’s continued stage development is viewed as “the most powerful elaboration of Rousseau’s basic idea that children’s distinctive ways of thinking and behaving reflect their progression through nature phases of development” (Montgomery & Woodhead 2003: pp.108). Corsaro (1997, pp.10) also voiced that “Piaget’s notion of stages is important for the sociology of children because it reminds us that children perceive, interpret and organize their worlds in ways qualitatively different from adults”. Directing our eyes to the other side, Vygotsky et al. (1978) placed his attention on the child’s active and constructive role in human development. He argued that children’s social development and ways of thinking was a direct result of their collective actions in the particular society they lived rather than a universal and natural progression. It can be explained that Piaget primarily focused on the natural and cognitive processes, whereas, Vygotsky concentrated on the interactive social and cultural events and

activities that gave rise to internalization and reproduction of that society in which children were dwelling.

3.2 Interpretative Reproduction Approach

In the mid-1980s, Corsaro & Miller (1992) put forward the interpretative reproduction approach and argued this approach captures children's active and constructive participation in peer and adult cultures. The notion of interpretative reproduction came about with constructivist failure to "seriously consider the complexity of social structures and children collective activities" (Corsaro 1997, pp.27). This implies, on the one hand, children do not passively internalize and reproduce culture and society. On the contrary, they actively contribute to their cultural reproduction and transformation. On the other hand, their active participation and reproduction are constrained and controlled by the existing cultural, social and economic structures. On this view, William Corsaro holds similar position with Jens Qvortrup, although the latter employs different approach of studying children and childhood (mainly structural macro-oriented approach). Corsaro (1997) assumes that children's daily routines are essential for their interpretative reproduction and their participation in social interactions and negotiations started very soon almost from the moment the child is born. During the process of interactions between adults and babies, they are governed by 'as if' assumptions which Corsaro defined as follows:

".....assumption or attitude in person-to-person interaction where something that is potentially true or possible is treated 'as if' it is really true or possible. For example, infants are often treated by adult caretaker as though they are socially competent. Because of this, children eventually progress from limited to full participation in cultural routines" (Corsaro 2005, pp.340).

Language is underpinned in Corsaro's interpretation approach to represent its central role in children's participation in the social and cultural events both as "a symbolic system that specially encodes local, social and cultural structure and as a useful tool for executing, maintaining and creating social and psychological realities" (Corsaro 1997: pp.19). Blum-Kulka & Snow (2002) and Goodwin (1990) also point out children's language importance in active participation in dynamic interaction with their peers and adults in their social and cultural activities. Therefore, it can be deduced that Corsaro's interpretative reproduction perspective helps us crack in dimensions to fully understand the complexity in the (re)negotiation and realization of social dynamics between children and the outside sources.

3. 3 The Paradigm of 'New' Sociology of Childhood

Around the 1980s and 1990s, many researchers contributed to the emergence of the 'new' sociology of childhood which is well established as a field of study, such as (Burman 1994; Cunningham 1995; Hendrick 2003; James & Prout 1990, 1997; Mayall 2002; Morss 1995). Their joint efforts in doing so showed their critiques about the developmental psychology and the socialization theories previously presented as a means to studying children and childhood. Within this new paradigm, four ways of theorizing childhood and understanding children, and linked these to the ways in which children are conceptualized in research are identified, that is: the socially constructed child; the social structural child; the tribal child and the minority group child.

3.3.1 The Socially Constructed Child

The socially constructed child approach views childhood as socially, culturally and historically constructed rather than as a natural and universal state existed in fixed

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ways. This implies that the diversity embodied in childhoods and denies the perception of childhood developed as biologically determined. Childhood within one particular social context ascribed its particular meanings and values, possibly quite different from others. As James, Jenks and Prout argue (1998, pp.196) that “childhood has to be recognized and understood through routine and emergent collective perceptions that are grounded in changing politics, philosophy, economics, social policy or whatever”. There is a powerful body of researchers (Jenks 1982; Mayall 1996) from different research realms that apply this approach and illustrate that children do childhood so differently over different times and in different societies. Children have their unique rights that should be ratified and implemented (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). They as constructive agents need to be recognized and no longer are seen as ‘becoming’, rather than ‘being’. This approach leads to the criticism of the ways in which childhood is commonly assumed as we mentioned in the previous parts, for example, the developmental psychology and the socialization approaches. I find this approach fit well with my exploration of children’s experiences in connection to their parents’ divorces. Children’s experiences and perceptions in this aspect might differ from individual from individual, that is to say, socially and culturally constructed.

3.3.2 The Social Structural Child

Childhood under the tenet of the social structural child is conceived as a structural category, an enduring state that exists all the time in the social structure of any societies. This approach emphasizes childhood in itself to be regarded as a universal state in spite of its continued changes over time and across places. Jens Qvortrup (1993) might be one of the noted researchers who widely apply this approach. He argues that childhood is generally exposed to the same social, cultural, economic and

political forces although in a particular way. He further argues that children within this approach is often seen as endowment with conceptual autonomy and asserts:

“To liberate children conceptually and give voice to their specific life conditions may in the long run challenge the current thinking about children and in this way it can challenge our existing social order” (Qvortrup 1997, in James and Prout 1990, 1997; pp.87).

However, Prout (2005, pp.64) raises the existence of problematic nature of studying childhood as a social structure to be primarily concerned with macro-oriented patterns of the childhoods in a specific society and paying scant concentration to the “changing character of the boundaries between nationally defined societies and the flows across these boundaries and it tends to homogenize the forms of childhood found within the boundaries”. Prout further argues that this approach is “more focused on the pattern how it is produced and constructed and it glosses over how stability and scale are achieved” (Prout 2005, pp.64).

Qvortrup defends with arguments that placing unilateral concentration on the unique character of children and childhood prevents our understanding and insights into what is common. He points out locating children and childhood within such approach enables intergenerational comparisons to be made across different cultures and societies. Alanen (2001) also pointed out the importance of the idea of generation and gender as a major way of studying and understanding children and childhood.

3.3.3 The Tribal Child

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The tribal child is often depicted as the politicized version of the socially constructed child (Kjørholt 2004). This model sees children as inhabiting an autonomous world, separate from adults, in which children are competent actors, existing in a conceptually different world from that of adults, with its own rules and agendas. This can be explained that children exist “out from a commitment to childhood’s social worlds as real places and provinces of meaning in their own right, not as inadequate precursors of the adult state of being” (Kjørholt 2004, pp.28). She further argues that it is, at the same time, of great importance to examine the relationships between children and adults and not simply putting them as separate groups.

3.3.4 The Minority Group Child

The minority group child approach is widely viewed as the politicized version of the socially constructed child. Children described within this approach belong to an exploited minority group in a given society. The victimized and exploited children in such approach have also great relevance with other social factors which contribute to, such as gender, class, race and power and so on. All these categorize children into an exploited and discriminated group by adults and by each society. Undoubtedly, there exist other minority groups that are also marginalized just like the disadvantaged, the ethnic and refugees. Kjørholt (2004, pp.33) argue within this approach “children are first and foremost presented as right claimers, with the same rights as the adults in their society, only if children are seen as structurally differentiated within societies”.

Nevertheless, James et al., (1998, pp.42) argue that “although the minority group approach advocates for the rights of the children but at the same time this model ignores such fact that childhood experiences are heterogeneous”. Placing applicability of this approach in my study, I find it is not quite the right path. Although parents’

divorce is generally regarded as bringing about irreversibly negative impact on their children involved, in my study, I will not presumably fix my eyes on their victim roles in the process of their parents' divorce.

To summarize these four approaches in the so-called 'new' paradigm of studying children and childhood, James et al. (1998, pp.199) might give the specific statement as follows:

“The ‘socially constructed’ child and the ‘tribal’ child often stand in close relation, collude or experience elision in the approaches adopted in childhood studies. And identical fluidity and potential for creativity exists between the ‘social structural’ child and the ‘minority group’ child. Movements in the other direction are, however, relatively rare. Thus, the ‘social structural’ child and the ‘socially constructed’ child are locked in different and even antagonistic formulations, as are the ‘minority group’ child and the ‘tribal’ child”.

To put it in other ways, James et al (1998, pp.199) explain that these four approaches can be viewed as being located “within a set of dualism: structure and agency, voluntarism and determinism, identity and difference, continuity and change, global and local, change and continuity, universal and particular”. Nevertheless, “James and her colleagues do not purpose to generate a separatist typology, but rather invite colleagues to call for ‘movements across and between these approaches” (Haugen 2007, pp.36).

3.4 Children's Rights

When we start to talk about children's rights, it has been with us for a century or more

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in some shape or form. However, none of the treaties or declarations in this regard have such international influence as the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter: UNCRC). It was adopted that year by the UN General Assembly and put it into force one year later. Most Member States in the world have ratified the UNCRC except the United States and Somalia although the latter two States have signed the UNCRC. The Chinese government signed the UNCRC in 1990 and ratified it to enter into force in 1992.

The UNCRC is aimed to represent a global commitment to children's rights. However, at the same time, it finds out there exists some difficulty in developing international standards while respecting local traditions and taking local circumstances into consideration. Especially when talking about the grouped three 'Ps' by substantive rights, it finds that there are much more barriers to the acceptance of children's participation rights compared to the other two rights of provision and protection. Participation rights are generally thought to be inherently problematic and clinch great tensions with protection rights in a radical manner. Montgomery & Woodhead (2003) also pointed out that UNCRC itself is of little meaning for many societies where their specific social values, local customs and practices are completely above individual rights.

Putting these 'Ps' into the context of divorce, most researches mainly focus on the provision and protection points and pay insufficient attention to the participation aspect. The provision and protection services given to the children in relation with their parent's divorce are primarily based on the taken-for-granted assumptions of 'doing harm' and 'being left victims' in the research and policy-making realms. In addition, these provision and protection programs and services are the results from the perspectives of adults, such as parents, grandparents, communities and the special

organizations as well as the governments. Children's true voices and genuine ideas in this regard are seldom heard and referred to. In this study, the theoretical and methodological approach I adopt informs the nature and contents of my empirical evidence gathered, thus, children's perspectives and voices are consulted within their divorced families. Children's rights to be expressed in the matters concerning them and also their rights to be heard within the post-divorced families are given primary consideration accordingly.

3.5 The Changes in Perspectives about the Sociology of Family

Family is generally perceived as the fundamental cornerstone to bolster each society in the world. However, this basic institution within the society has undergone great transformations in terms of family structures, functions, roles and family ties. The traditional extended family structure based on patriarchy and power status were fading and gradually replaced by nuclear family in response to meeting the needs of modernized industrialization society. The impact of industrialization made family members within the nuclear family system have to adapt to the roles and obligation redistributions ascribed primarily by economic forces and labour division. Talcott Parsons & Bales (1956) put forward the structural functionalist idea and pointed out that males, primarily fathers and husbands, should take on the roles of providing for the material needs and making decisions on behalf of the whole family; whilst, females, primarily mothers and wives, should meet the roles and obligations of giving birth to and attending to their children, doing the household work and other necessary things within the family. In addition, the children within such functionalist framework are generally assumed to be controlled, tamed and socialized through the psychological progression into the adult life.

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Functionalist perspective about the nuclear family roles and functions did not get much favor and support from the other researchers, especially the feminists. They criticized the nuclear family as a major social site in the reproduction of patriarchic system, capitalism and giving rise to the women's subordinated positions rather than as a harmonious or even idealized institution for the equal benefits of all its family members. Benston (1972, in Glazer & Waehrer 1977) employed the Marxist approach in the analysis of the fact of women's exploitation by inequality of gender division of labour within the family context. Similar views are also expressed by Engels (1972) and Oakley (1972) who point out women are completely confined to such family climate with a series of embedded responsibilities to meet the needs of the family members. In addition, the occurrence of many home incidents such as domestic violence and child abuse also greatly challenge the previously mentioned functionalist perspective.

All these critical analysis of family in terms of function and structure received a shift in the context of increasing rates of separation, divorce and remarriage, cohabitation. And the research focus moved towards the preoccupation with personal interactions within the family. Giddens (1992) and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) illuminate a similar picture in their articulation of 'pure relationship' and 'individualization theses', placing personal interactions at the heart of de-traditionalized family life. They claimed that the interactions among the family members are no longer based on gender roles and perceived obligations. Each individual within the family have greater opportunity and choices to create and enjoy equal interaction in relation to others. And this sort of ideal post-modern family life, away from the traditional patterns of family life, places children into a more visible position. Children's voices, under such context, are viewed as counted even though their parents maintain kind of power and authority over them.

Nevertheless, this positive individuals as equals in the concept find its difficulties for the complete realization. And many researchers in this regard also expressed their concerns about the impact of individualization on people's morality and society as a whole. Fevre (2000) shows concerns on the rise in the conflicts of self satisfaction and lacking in specific sense of values to guide their actions in their daily lives. He also pointed out that "unhappy marriages are increasingly replaced with divorces as people go off to try their luck a second, third, fourth, or fifth time in the hope of finding someone who thinks in the same way"(2000, pp.101). Peoples' interactions, under the tenet of such kind of 'pure relationship' and 'individualization thesis', are often illuminated as an insecure state. Therefore, people are trying to establish more and more reliable interactions with children. Love and Care of children is seen as providing 'a tie which is more elemental, profound and stable than any other in this society' (Beck-Gernsheim 1995, pp.74).

Smart et al (2001) also pointed out separation and divorce made parents reassess their interactions with children and found out the bonds clinched with children are much more durable and satisfying. Children, often viewed as so-called 'victim' of their parents' marital dissolution, may find great opportunities to reestablish and redistribute their interactions with their parents. And this also enables children, as constructive agent, become more engaged in their family arrangement negotiations and decision-making. In effect, children are more concerned with the extent to which they can really be in the process of the matters that affect them. I find Smart's argument has great relevance with my study in the aim to explore children's lived experience of their parental marital dissolution and this also informed my research questions to trace back on children's memories as reflective agents in this aspect. It is interesting to ask children's perceptions about their parents' marital dissolution and how they conceptualize their families. My efforts in doing so might be meaningful in

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the understanding of children's perspectives in this regard in the quite different contexts seldom documented.

4.0 Methodology

In this chapter, application of qualitative research methods is explained and justified. The main focus of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of children's lived experiences of their parents' marital dissolution. To this end, the study primarily employs the approach of semi-structured interview. In addition, methodological issues are taken into considerations, including the ethical issues and limitations of this study.

4.1 Qualitative Methodology

This research study is situated within the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research, in recent years, witnessed resurgence and gained wider growth in a variety of research settings. As to the defending of qualitative research, there are many attempts in doing so in a multitude of disciplines. Nevertheless, there is no single and authorized consensus with regard to this. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, pp.3) employ the word 'generic' to define qualitative research and argue that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". The qualitative researchers may revert to various inter-related interpretative approaches (e.g. ethnography; participant observation; interviewing; narrative accounts and deconstructionism) in the aim to make an in-depth understanding of the subjects they focus on as well as gain insight and knowledge from that. Flick holds the same view that qualitative is "inherently multimethod in focus that adds rigour, breath, complexity, richness and depth to inquiry" (2002, in Denzin and Lincoln pp.5). Denzin and Flick's efforts in their definitions of the main characteristics and primacy of nature in the qualitative research are also echoed by other researchers. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), Mason (2002) and Patton (2002) all demonstrate the striking agreement that the qualitative research is both an interpretative and a naturalistic

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methodology applied to aid an understanding of the original meanings that people attach to in their specific social settings.

Strauss and Corbin (1998, pp.10) attempt to define the term of qualitative research from a different perspective and refer to it as “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification”. They further argue that some researchers “gather data by means of employment of interviews and observations techniques normally associated with qualitative methods. However, they code the data in a manner that allows them to be statistical analyzed. They are in effect quantifying qualitative data”.

In spite of its difficulty in arriving at a singular and universal agreement on the definition of qualitative research, qualitative investigation is widely viewed as an appropriate methodology applied in diverse disciplines and realms to capture the nature and meaning of a specific experience rather than following up a set of proclaimed assumptions to express that experience. The latter case is often the objectives of the quantitative researchers. Beyond definition and recognition of wide application, qualitative research encounters a multitude of resistances and challenges from the academic and disciplinary arenas. Denzin and Lincoln (2008, pp.10-14) indicate these resistances to qualitative research as the “politics embedded in this field of discourse”. These so-called political resistances reflect “an easy awareness that the interpretative traditions of qualitative research commit the researcher to a critique of the positivist research served by the quantitative research practices methods”. In addition, the complex political landscape embedded in the traditions of the qualitative research “creates a tension that informs each of these traditions” (naturalistic and interpretive tradition; feminist paradigm; Marxist theory and queer theory and so on).

The qualitative researchers embraced all of these tensions and responded by re-examination and interrogation of these traditions. Whilst, qualitative researchers defend the resistance and maintains ongoing criticism of the politics existed in quantitative investigation.

4.2 Access and Recruitment of Informants

A junior primary school in Peking, China, was selected for this study. The school's choice was made possible by preliminary contact with on early June 2010. When first getting to the school, I reverted to the relevant staff and the school's president to introduce myself and also the purpose of why I was there. They showed curiosity and also interest in my research project. They asked me some questions and finally gave me permission to conduct the research there. They are very helpful in organizing the students to be present in my introductory presentation.

During the introductory presentation, I clearly and thoroughly explained who I was, why I conducted this research, the would-be employment of interview approach and the reason of interview as well as what the gathered information is to be used for. When I was talking about these information, I deliberately slowed down the rate of speech in order to make everyone present really understand what the research was about. Some students raised questions with regards to my presentation and got the answers from me. I pointed out that the participant's informed consent was needed for being involved in this research project. And those who would participate have their rights to withdraw from the interview at any time without giving any reasons. As to those who had no intention to participate in this study had not any kind of adverse consequences, such as criticism or even scolding. It should be noted that getting access to the participants was not easy. This is possibly because that in the Chinese

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society, the issue of marital dissolution is perceived private and has social stigma more or less to some degree. It is generally viewed as much accepted in the big cities than in other areas. Because the research was located in Peking, it seemed that people showed more open attitudes towards marital dissolution. This made access to approaching the samples relatively smooth. However, it is still time-consuming. The students were given two days to think about whether decided to participate in my study.

Due to time conflicts and limitations both on the part of school and myself, the main data collection took place in two time span: from 16 June 2010 to 30 June 2010; from 15 November 2010 to 30 November 2010. Finally ten children in the school were purposively selected in this study based on capability and willingness to relate experiences associated with their parents' marital dissolution. Purposeful sampling is a commonplace approach often employed in the qualitative investigation and it intends to select specific cases that will provide rich information for the question under study. Patton (2002, pp.230) terms such cases as the information-rich cases and points out "studying the information-rich cases yields insight and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations". As to the sample size, there is no exact criterion in the qualitative research. When determining the sample size for qualitative investigation, this is greatly dependent on the requirement of application of data collection approach; the resources and even time available to carry out the research study; the intensive nature of the study as well as the homogeneous nature of the participants (Patton, 2002).

Children who finally volunteered to participation in this study were given oral consent. Informal oral consent was also received from the school teachers. Among the would-be ten participants, six was girls versus four boys. Those informants aged

ranging from thirteen to sixteen all experienced parents' divorce several years earlier (at least two) before the time of interview. The oral informed consent was renewed when I got access to the same participants on mid- November 2010. I also asked if I could use a tape-recorder during the interview so that I could revert to these after that. Some of the informants did not like this and in these cases I went to the note-taking and kindly asked them to slow down in their talks as much as possible. I found this went well during the interview.

4.3 Interview

The term interview is viewed literally as a recent production and is endowed with the main characteristic views of interchange between two people on a theme of common interest (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Since the rapid growth of qualitative research since 1980s, interview has become a prevalent approach to be systematically applied by more and more researchers. In this study, I also refer to this approach, especially to the semi-structured interview. This sort of interview is designed to have a number of interview research questions prepared in advance, but such prepared questions are subjected to openness so that the subsequent questions can not be planned before hand but must be improvised in a theorized way (Wengraf, 2001). A similar view is also expressed by Kvale (1996) who indicates this semi-structured interview as an approach which has a sequence of themes to be covered, but it also opens for change and the following-up questions. This interview method is appropriate to this topic and it aids to understand the participants' point of view in their own words and their lived experience of their parents' marital dissolution.

Application of this approach in this study turned out to be very appropriate and helpful in generating more valuable data. Kvale (1996) suggests that a rough

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interview guide is necessary to draw up concerning the research question before directing to the interview site and thus adheres to it. Therefore, before leaving for the research site, I prepared interview guide and this could be found in Appendix, with topics and multiple open-ended questions related to the research objectives and questions. These questions cover both the retrospective questions about the parents' divorce and caring dynamics in post-divorce families.

The interview setting was situated in a dancing classroom. Before the formal interview, I asked the participants which kind of sitting arrangement was more comfortable with them, sitting on the chair or just on the floor. One of my primary concerns of asking their opinions about this was that I hoped my participants did not feel pressured and created a more relaxing climate for interview. Normally the stereotyped classroom is equipped with fixed tables and chairs. This easily made the participants feel they were in the class and attended to disciplines and rules. All the participants gave me the same confirmation that they preferred being interviewed on the floor. Therefore, I did not ask the school staff to arrange these sitting stuff for us. During the process of the interview, I noticed the participants feel much more relaxed and comfortable than before the interview. In interviewing, the participants gradually led me into their separate worlds. Sometimes the participants told me more information about their experiences of parental divorce. However, I did not attempt to interrupt or revert to other posed questions as planned. This is mostly because I regard these participants as experts and myself as novice (Solberg, 1994). During the process of the interview, my strong desire and interest in the participants' lived meanings of their parent's divorce were further strengthened by means of body language, such as eye contact, nodding, clapping and smiling. This also greatly facilitated the dynamic connection between me and the subject matter. By doing so I felt I got more knowledge than I otherwise would have.

4.4 Analysis of Data

The qualitative data analysis tends to come about all the way when conducting data collection in the research site. The analysis continually informs the on-going data collection and vice versa. Bogdan and Biklen (1992: pp.153) indicate data analysis as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes and materials that you accumulate to increase your understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others”.

The taped interviewed were transcribed and the field notes from the research site were written out. I sorted out and categorized and re-categorized the relevant data concurrently with coding. The process of assembling, disassembling, and sorting enabled me to reconstruct the data in a meaningful and theoretically valuable way. In addition, during the process of analysis, constant comparison to identify the similarities and variations of interview data existed all the time. Boeje (2010, pp.84) point out the constant comparison of data does not “speak for themselves, the researcher’s thinking, creativity, and theoretical knowledge” is of great importance to give new meanings to these data. Thus, data analysis is largely more than classifying and coding. The researcher’s interpretation of the data has great relevance to the theoretical perspectives of the phenomenon under study.

In understanding and accounting for the meanings from the participant subjects, the researcher should have the attribute to ‘theoretical sensitivity’. Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to the theoretical sensitivity as the researcher’s capability and attribute to give conceptual insight and understanding of the data. It is the capability of the researcher to make full use of their creativity, personal experience, and knowledge to conceptualize the data in new and theoretical terms. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that

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researchers should take care not allow their personal experience and knowledge to impose bias towards their interpretation of the data. I find Strauss and Corbin's suggestion (although their suggestion is particularly applicable for the researchers with employment of the grounded theory) is important for me when making analysis of children's experience. I use constant comparison with coding combined with literature review to improve theoretical sensitivity. However, it is unimaginable to attain what they suggest 'theoretical saturation'. That is really too ambitious for this study.

4.5 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity have been much employed as a criterion in the quantitative investigation to test and evaluate the quality of the research study. Over the recent years, it has lent its influence to the qualitative research. Patton (2002) points out that reliability and validity are two important factors that qualitative researcher should be concerned with when (s)he is designing the research study, making analysis of the data and assessing the quality of the research. However, the qualitative researchers are generally holding skeptical attitudes towards the conceptualizations of reliability and validity in quantitative paradigms. They create unique and more appropriate terms to speak about and judge the quality of qualitative research study, such as credibility, consistency, dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and trustworthiness and usefulness (Glaser and Strauss 1999; Seale 1999).

As far as reliability and validity is concerned, Morrow (1999, in Punch 2002, pp.325) points out another difficulty that adult researcher has to confront when conducting research study with children is that "they often asked if they can really believe children's accounts of their experiences". This is because of the general assumption

that it is likely for children to tell lies due to whatever reasons. However, Ennew (1994, in Punch 2002, pp.325) point out telling lies is not inclusive for children, “the same can also be for research with adults”. Punch (2002, pp.325) states “children’s accounts have their own validity in terms of being their own perspectives and the way the world seems to them”. From this point of view, I would claim both the validity and the possible reliability in this research study.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations should be put on the researcher’s agenda in any kind of research. There exists the fact that the research process creates unavoidable tension between the objective of the research to make valuable knowledge for the good of the researched groups and other people, and the rights of the participant subjects to maintain privacy and avoid being harmed. Privacy must be guaranteed and harm can be prevented or reduced on the basis of following up the appropriate ethical principles. This is also the case when carrying out the qualitative research. Protection of the participant subjects in this study becomes essential.

Throughout this study, a number of ethical considerations were taken into account. Informed consent verbally was obtained from all of the participants before kicking off the formal interview and renewed when I approached them the second interview time. The head teacher was asked to consent, and thus served as a gatekeeper who could have limited my access. One of the reasons for not obtaining informed consent from the parents in this study was the nature of this research and the interview questions. The participants took part in this study on a voluntary basis and were informed about their right to withdraw from the interview at any time due to whatever reasons. The research is purely for academic purpose and thus confidentiality must be respected

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and protected. All the personal information about the participants would be assured to keep secrets, such as their identities. When I transcribed the interviews and stored the data, every possible measure was done to protect the identities of the informants. The primary data was kept locked and password protected.

The consequences of a qualitative investigation should be addressed with regards to the potential benefits and harms generated in the study. Kvale (2009, pp.73) points out the “sum of potential benefits to a participant and the importance of the knowledge gained should outweigh the risk of harm to the participant”. Patton (2002, pp.415) also suggests, especially reverting to the interviewing, that the interviewer should “balance the value of a potential response against the potential distress for the respondent when asking the sensitive information”. This research study is concerned with children’s experiences of parents’ marital dissolution. Divorce is generally seen as a stressful experience. When kicking off the formal interview, the participants were informed that they just told me if they did not want to answer my posed questions or shared their stories with me. In the process of the interview, I attempted to minimize the potential harms. Most of the participants shared their experiences with me although in their heart parents’ marital dissolution was part of their lives. In asking and stimulating the questions, I did not take up the pushing strategies to gain their responses. When they were demonstrating hesitance, I found it was necessary to give them a little bit of time to think about whether they would take response. Thus, the genuine and valuable points of views from the participants can be elicited.

In addition, Kvale (2009, pp.74-75) points out the “role of the researcher and of the researcher’s integrity is critical to the quality of the scientific knowledge and the soundness of ethical decisions in qualitative inquiry”. Kvale further indicates the importance of the researcher’s integrity is “magnified because the interviewer is the

main instrument for obtaining knowledge”. The role of the researcher is particularly important when the participant subjects are children. Due to children’s relative vulnerabilities and their unique positions in adult-dominated society, when they are involved in adults’ research, the researchers are great likely to impose their power and perceptions over the children. This kind of power imbalance exists all the time in the process of the research. Punch (2002, pp.329) points out the “adult researchers have the power to determine which data from the children to include and how to interpret”. Fine and Sandstorm (1998, in Punch 2002, pp.329) also indicate that adult researchers are “limited by their tendency to process children’s talks through adult researchers’ own view of the world”. Therefore, particular care should be taken when involving children into the adult’s research and the researcher’s integrity should be put into account.

4.6 Limitations of the Study

The participants in this research study primarily come from Peking. Peking is a relatively big city. This predominance of research data and research context can be viewed as a limitation. If locating the research site and gaining research data from the other cities, even from the rural areas, the research findings might be somewhat different and diverse. Another limitation related to the small numbers of the informants. Because of limited time, ten informants were recruited and this limited the data that were collected about their experiences of divorce. In addition, lacking in application of other qualitative investigation approaches in this study further poses its limitation, such as the employment of questionnaire, although it is generally viewed as the least recommended technique when carrying out research with children. However, it seems that it is able to obtain valuable and meaningful information with regards to children’s lived experiences with their patents’ marital dissolution. Visual

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approaches might be also helpful in encouraging the informants to tell me more experiences about their parents' martial dissolution.

5.0 Analysis of Children's Experiences of Their Parents' Divorce

A great multitude of research has developed over recent years in the exploration of the effect of parental marital dissolution on their children, and their research directions mainly point to the deleterious effects, which imply that children are assumed to be the victim of the divorce. However, with the emergence of sociology of childhood which I have mentioned in the previous chapters, children within such framework are increasingly recognized to be liberated from the images of passive status in the matters that concern them into a competent and autonomous social actor. Children's agency is exercised to some degree and their roles played in the social process are discovered and acknowledged, for example, their capacity to take positive actions towards family problems brought forth an exciting research agenda exploring children's lived experience in this aspect (Haugen, 2007).

This study, situated within such sort of theoretical framework, endorses a child-centered view to explore children's experiences of their parents' marital dissolution. In this chapter, I intend to make an analysis around the following sub-research questions which I am interested in. First of all I will focus on how children conceptualize their family after parents dissolved their marriage. Then I intend to see whether the family networks within the divorced families work as before. In addition, children's practice of care and support within the post-divorced families is also given attention. These sub-topics, inspired by Haugen's research works which is based in the Norwegian context, are quite of inter-relatedness; in doing so, general landscape in this respect may be better perceived and understood.

5.1 General Landscape about Parents' Divorce

The children are kindly invited, in this part, to recollect their memories about their

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parents' divorce. I have organized this part around some questions which as follows:

(a) When did parents' divorce occur? (b) How were you informed of their divorce? (c) How were your feelings about your parent's divorce at that time? (d) How about your feelings at present? In addition, whether children's aspiration to get married will be affected by their parent's divorce is also included into exploration. In order to get the answers of these questions, it is necessary to get children's perspectives and hear their genuine voices.

5.1.1 Children's Recollections Related to Divorce

In the following example, Peng, aged 14, shared his story with me. At the time of my interview, it was three years since his parents dissolved their marriage. He lives permanently with his mother. In his eyes, his parent is good and responsible parent. He told me, before the divorce, his mother, father and he got along well and he was cared about by both of them. So when he learned that his parent would divorce, he felt it was not possible and how could be like that. Peng's parent did not tell him much about the reason of their divorce. They just said that their disposition contradicts and could not live together any longer. And Peng's parent hoped to tell him more about their divorce when Peng grows a little bit older, Peng told me. Peng pointed out the reason behind parents' divorce and told me he did not think too much about it. He just thought parent had their reason not to tell him too much about it. After the divorce, Peng's father moved out and found another apartment to live in which was not quite far from Peng's living place. Peng remembered, more than one year later after the divorce that he got to know that his parent had separated in different rooms for some time before the divorce. His parent pretended to be still together for the sake of Peng. However, this was really tough for them. Finally, they decided to tell Peng about their divorce.

When Peng responded to my inquiry about his feeling at that time, he told me that he was mainly surprised during the initial days. However, he pointed out that this sort of surprise did not last for long and he was not quite bothered by his parent's divorce. Peng continued to tell me why he did not bother so much, because his parents and family relatives on both sides gave him much care, love and support. All these made him quite easily get out of this in a relatively short period of time. Peng particularly reverted to both of his parents and said they did a good job during the divorce process. "It seemed to me that nothing within the family has changed", he said.

When Peng looked back on his parent's divorce from now, he said:

"Parent's marital dissolution is not a very big, big thing for me. It is not the whole thing in my life. I think it did not make any difference to me. I just, like before their divorce, goes to school, eating, playing and meeting family relatives regularly" (Peng, 14).

Peng's life story illustrated above outlined the time of his parent's marital dissolution. His parent ended their marriage three years ago. All the other informants told me that their parents dissolved their marriage at least two years before at the time of my interview. From Peng's accounts, it can be found that his parents finally told him about their decision to get divorced, giving the difficulties and possible complexities in the pretending efforts after some time. Most majorities of the participants were told about the divorce decision by their parents. Some of informants really knew what happened between their parents before the divorce, and they were particularly sure that divorce would happen. Why these informants thought about the occurrence of would-be divorce, that is, they felt the conflicts, tears, endurance, cries, unhappiness and no mutual talking on the part of their mothers and/or fathers. To some degree,

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these informants are prepared for the divorce. This does not mean that they are quite happy about the divorce outcomes; on the contrary, they thought divorce was a good way for both of their parents in some sense. These informants reported, although they were informed about the divorce decision, they got a little bit of information about the reason behind parents' divorce, just as the case of Peng. It is worth noting that these children did not repeatedly ask their parents to tell them all what happened between their marriage in whatever means, such as crying, screaming, shouting, or even taking extreme actions. Some of them said that they respected their parents' decisions and choices. This demonstrates, to some level, children's understanding and consideration of their parents' conditions at that time and also indicates maturity in their ages.

When Peng told me his feeling about this parent's marital dissolution at that time, he mainly employed the word 'surprise' and pointed out he had such feeling only during the initial days. This is also the case for most of the informants in my study. They mainly showcased surprise at first:

"I did not know how to say that, surprised, surprised" (Jin, 13).

"A little bit of surprised when I was told about mum and dad's divorce" (Xie, 16).

"Oh, surprised, very surprised at first" (Tao, 13).

"I could not believe it. I was surprised at that" (Yan, 14).

However, this did not deny that they had no other feelings, such as upsetting, disbelief and confusion, etc, when they were told by their parents about the divorce. Nevertheless, it is worthy of noting that this kind of surprised feeling did not last for long time, at most no more than half a year. Several informants pointed out that they had no strong or extreme feelings about parents' divorce at that time. They just backed

up parent's divorce because they did not want to witness any more their parents, primarily their mothers, lead that kind of unrelieved and unhappy lives on a daily basis. They thought divorce was a good way to help their mothers get out of that sort of miserable situations. As Ling and Wang said:

“That was bad, very bad for mum to lead that kind of life every day. She born a lot for the sake of me and also the family. She was not happy. I supported mum to get divorced” (Ling,14).

“I was with the mum, I would not let her continue to do so, I helped her to make the decision of divorce”(Wang,14).

It is interesting to find out when these informants talked about the feeling about parents' divorce from now on, most of them, like Peng, thought parents' divorce did not quite matter to them. They did not consider that parents' divorce was a quite important thing for them in their whole lives. They expressed in similar way that their parents' marital dissolution was only a scenario in their lives. They, like before the parents' divorce, went to school, played with peers and did the things they wanted, only if they could not see their fathers on a daily basis. However, it should be noted that they do meet their non-resident fathers regularly upon the divorce. These informants “expressed little sense of having lost something very precious as a result of their parents' divorce. Divorce resulted from a parent is therefore not always a problem for children; it might constitute losses or gains” (Smart et al 2001, pp.70).

The findings in this research study may not show consistency with some of the international studies in this perspective. They affirm that children are greatly harmed by parents' marital dissolution, no matter from the perspectives of their physical and

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psychological development (Amato 1993; Amato and Booth 1997; Emery 1999b; Hetherington and Standey-Hagan 1999; Pryor and Rodgers, 2001). In addition, divorce is recognized as a potentially risk factor for children to change their daily lives' practices and their future development will also be affected finally (Amato and Booth 1997; Amato 1999, in Hetherington; Amato 2000; Amato and Sobolewski 2001; Amato and Cheadle 2005; Hanson 1999; Kelly 2000; Lansford et al.2006; Smart 2003; Thomson and Amato 1999). Most of these researches are based on making physiological samples and their preferences in this kind of methodology utilization are furthered reinforced by primarily soliciting perspectives from the adults. The results in my study, in a different research context, show a different picture which is diverged from the above-mentioned dominant views. Therefore, it is worthwhile and necessary to hear children's voices with regards to this. More importantly, children's experiences about their parent's marital dissolution should be contextualized and specified.

It is necessary to point out these informants 'general experiences, particularly their feelings with regards to their parents' marital dissolution might bear relation to several contributing factors such as age (Amato 2000; Hetherington 1989; Wallerstein & Kelly 1980). The variation in age might reflect their responses and understanding of divorce. Gender and personal disposition are also potential factors that affect their experiences of divorce. In addition, parents 'coping strategies, family resources and coping skills of informants' themselves play important roles in informants' experiences of parent's divorce and post-divorce family lives. These three elements are identified in common from these informants.

Most of the informants mentioned that their parents dissolved their marriage in a relatively peaceful way. This is evidenced by their accounts illustrated below:

"I heard of such saying that parents were not kind to each other and they became 'enemies' when they got divorced. This was not completely right" (Peng, 14).

"Parents got divorced without quarreling and shouting" (Jin, 13).

"They divorced. Everything went well in front of me. Mother did not blame dad, and dad did not blame mum either" (Xie, 16).

Parents adopted such kind of ways to deal with their marriage ending made informants feel that their parents were not hostile to each other even in the face of divorce, although several of them (informants) reported that they sometimes witnessed parents' quarrels before the divorce. They are satisfied with parents' copings and they also feel a little bit of relieved about the handling result.

In addition to the ways parents took to end their marriage, family resources was found to be one of the important elements in children's experiences of parental divorce. As far as Peng was concerned, he still felt to be loved, cared and supported by his parents and other family members on both sides (maternal and paternal). Peng told me a story which he still felt touched until now. One day, after the class, Peng went back directly to home and he had an appointment several days ago with his peers to play football in the playground nearby his home. In the course of playing, Peng hurt his feet incidentally and this made him unable to use his feet for some time. This brought about much inconvenience in motion for Peng. However, he did not want to take leave from the school and did not want to make his studies lagged behind either. He told his mother his intention and his father was also informed of this. Later, grandparents on both sides of the family also got this information. They took turns to send him to school in the morning and got him back in the afternoon. In addition, maternal grandmother made by her owns some special nourishment for Peng which

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helps the recovery of his hurt feet. During those days, his father tried to squeeze time to Peng's school to have lunch with him. It seemed to Peng that he is surrounded by family warmth and love. All these make him temporarily forget his hurt feet.

In other informants' reports, they told me that they, like before parents' divorce, still received affection and care from family members no matter in the process of and upon divorce. This proves the continuity in terms of love and care-giving from parents to children on the one side; on the other side, this makes the informants feel they are still living within the previous family climate and nothing has changed in spite of the fact in terms of family structural transformation. Grandparents on both sides of the family, are mentioned most by these informants to be significant sources of care and help in the event of family change, such as divorce.

Some researchers showed in their studies that children have capabilities and skills to go through parents' divorce (Butler 2003; Krementz 1985; Smith 1999; Wallerstein et al 2000). This is evidenced by my informants discussed below who demonstrated their varied coping skills in the process of parents' divorce. Peng said:

"I was not quite bothered by parent's divorce. At that time, I placed much focus on my homework and extracurricular learning. I was also the monitor (head of the class) and I had a lot of things to do in the class. This really made me distract from parent's divorce for some time" (Peng, 14).

By contrast, some informants said that they reverted to their grandparent to share their stories, ideas and feelings.

"I went to grandparents' home. We talked a lot. I was a little bit of relieved after talking with grandmas" (Xie, 16).

“Grandparents were very kind. They comforted me and told me how to do with it. I was lucky I was with them” (Tao, 13).

“I told grandma about my feelings and what I thought about parent’s divorce. They listened to me and tried to help me out of it” (Rong, 14).

It can find that grandparents are regarded as the important family members in children’s lives to turn to at times of stressful family matters. Why did they revert to their grandparents? One of the explanations they provided was that grandparents were reliable, considerate, full of love and also respectful. In addition, several informants indicated that they just made themselves occupied in all sorts of activities and got fun, such as listening to the music, watching TV and movies and playing. There was one female informant said that she shared her story with her best friend. She thought her best friend could understand it. She told me that understanding and comfort from her friend were important for her. Choosing the most intimate friend to confide private family things might be better and helpful for her in some way.

5.1.2 The Changes in Relation to Parents’ Marital Dissolution

Children whose parents got divorced are generally assumed to have experiences of losing something or having to change something, such as family relationships and other possible happenings. In this part, I intend to find whether the informants in this study have such experiences. I particularly place focus on two aspects: one is on their living place and attended school; while, the other is regarding their contacts with their non-resident fathers and other family kins.

In the previous sections, I have pointed out in the case of Peng, he and his mother were still living in the previous living place. After the divorce, Peng’s father moved

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out and found an apartment which was not far from Peng's living place. This was quite convenient for Peng and his father to meet each other on the weekends. And he, like before his parent's divorce, went to the same school on week days. This is also the cases for most of the informants in this study. They continued to live in their previous living places with their mothers on a permanent basis. As some of them said:

"I am with mum in that apartment, still there, dad found a new apartment" (Liang, 15).

"No, no change of apartment. I like this apartment" (Yan, 14).

"Mum and I still live in that place. I feel happy to be there with my friends in the neighborhood" (Lu, 13).

In addition to no change of living places among these informants, another accompaniment with it is no occurrence of school transferring. Nearly most of these informants continue to study in their previous schools. Only one female informant reported that she had to move from the previous living place, because her father had mortgaged that apartment. This informant and her mother rented a flat which was in proximity of her maternal grandparents' home. However, this informant did not change school. She told me that she liked that school, like her teachers and also she got along well with her classmates. Besides, the school was not far from her current living place. Therefore, she thought she had no reason to change school.

Moving (change of living place and school) is often mentioned as one of the several serious risk factors that children have to be confronted with and also experience due to parent's divorce (Haugen 2007). Moving is viewed to be in stressful association in

its own way. However, several researchers (Haugen 2007; Hogan et al., 2002) demonstrate in their respective studies that the majority of their participants continued to live in their previous family homes with their mothers and go to the same school. The findings in my research study show consistency with that in this regard.

In addition to the fact that these children made no change of their living place and schools, there is another striking agreement in their accounts that they still maintain regular contacts with their non-resident fathers and other family members on both the maternal and paternal sides. As some children reported:

“I saw dad on the weekends, I could see him on every weekends. Besides weekends, dad sometimes came here see me or took me to grandparents’ home”. Sometimes I went by myself to grandma’s home (Jin, 13).

“On the weekend, dad picked me up and drove me to his home. He cooked a lot of food for me. The food was very good. I liked it very much” (Xie, 16).

“I saw dad three or four times per year because he worked in another city. He came back to see me on holidays, such as New Year. However, dad often called me and asked about my studies and my daily lives. I knew he cared about me. I also loved him” (Tao, 13).

It indicates in these children’s accounts that they have frequent and even extra contacts with their non-resident fathers in addition to the legal visiting arrangements. And this is also the case for their contacts with other family members. Children’s gatherings with family members are full of moving and happy pictures. It seems that children really enjoy the time with their family members. In the case of Tao, although

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the physical contact with her father can be viewed as a little bit of distanced compared to other informants in this study, the emotional contacts between them still permeates in her daily lives. She can sense that her father still cares about her. This is really important for her, because she feels she still places an important position in her father's lives.

5.1.3 Attitudes to Getting Married

Parents' divorces are presumed to have relation to their children's attitudes to getting married (Amato 1996; Wallerstein 1985). Some research findings indicate that those children who experienced parents' divorce are less likely to entering into marriage relationship because they expressed uncertainties, worries and even horror. However, in this study, most informants did not demonstrate this sort of horror and skepticism about their future marriage. As Peng said in response to my inquiry of the possibility to getting married in the future:

“Well, definitely. Parent's divorce was mum and dad's divorce. My marriage is mine. It's different. I will get married one day and get also my baby” (Peng, 14).

Similar views regarding this inquiry are also echoed by other informants:

“Marriage, I will do that, I will do some day when I grow up” (Liang, 15).

“Getting married, of course. I hope to do that one day. That is a very good thing” (Yan, 14).

“I want to get married and with a baby. That is a family, a great family” (Lu,13).

From these informants' reports, it illustrates a relatively optimistic picture about their attitudes towards future marriage. They look forward to that happening. It can be said

that they have certainties to establish successful and stable partnerships. It is of great possibility that they can better deal with their marriage and avoid divorce occurring in their marriage lives. In addition, those informants distinguish well between their parents' marriage and their owns. In their eyes, there is no direct links between them.

5.2 Exploring the Conceptualization of 'Family'

When talking about family, everyone might get familiar with it because it is so common and is always viewed as taken for granted in our daily lives. Given its commonality, it might not be quite easy to get an exact meaning of what family is. Over the last decades, especially in the twentieth century, with the tremendous transformation of structure of every household, such as divorce, remarriage, cohabiting and other kinds of composition in relationships came about. Therefore, new words are created to describe the diversity of such composition of relationship, for instance, post-divorced family and one-parent family, etc. This research study highlights such kind of family context and aims to explore how the children themselves make sense of their families and family relationships upon parents' marital dissolution. I put the children's relationships and family lives within the context of the social institution of childhood (O'Brien et al: 1996, in Brannen & O'Brien).

5.2.1 Constructing Family from Diverse Perspectives

Jin, one of male informants in my study, aged 13, lives permanently with his mother and has a frequent visiting of his non-resident father. When he responded to my question to list his family members and the reason of such list, he gave me a list of his family which comprises his mother, his non-resident father, grandparents on both sides, uncles, aunts, brother-in-laws and sister-in laws. When he talked about the reason of such list, he point out that care and love as the main consideration:

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“In spite of parent’s divorce, they are still my parent. They are still there, love and care about me. My grandparents and other relatives on both sides also do so. We are one family before and after the divorce. I am still living in a big family” (Jin, 13).

Jin’s expression of such family list finds his support from other informants in this study:

“A family is somewhere you are cared, loved, not only for giving me food, clothes, stationery, pocket money.....Important is loving and caring for me.....” (Rong, 14).

“I am still in a family, with mum, dad, grandma, grandpa. Yes, dad and mum got divorced. But, they still attend to me. I am living well” (Lu, 13).

“Mother, father and other family members should be included in my family list. Father worked far away, but, he came back to see me if has free time” (Xie, 16).

Jin and Rong’s ideas of what counted as a family and who would be included in their family lists appeared in most informants’ cases, such as Lu and Xie. In these children’s eyes, although family went through great changes, social bonds, especially emotional bonds (such as love, affection and care), became a predominantly active elements in their conceptualization of family. As in Rong’s case, family should not be simply referred to giving material stuff, more important, it should be placed at a level of emotional interactions. For her, family should be about being valued, cared and treasured by their family members.

It finds from the children’s reports that most of them continue to view both of his/her parents as integral family members and feel like living within one family. Children feel and sense the continuum of care and affection from both parents and other family

kins. In their eyes, family does not simply collapse or disappear in the presence of parent's marital dissolution. Enduring affection and support are constructively finding its way between children and other family relatives within the post-divorced families. As Smart et al. (2001, pp.43) point out that "being a family in the formal legal sense is not the same thing as feeling like a family". In addition, they further argue that "affection is not something that can be legally enforced, nor is it an inherent feature of blood relationship, even between children and their parents". "What created real bonds between people were the value-full notions of love, care and commitment". Similar views are also expressed by other researchers, such as Morrow (1998) indicated in her study:

"What they said and what they thought about family is and what families are for, it was clear that love, care and mutual respect and support were the key characteristics for them of 'family'" (Morrow 1998, pp28).

In the same vein, Fleming and Atkinson (1999) and Morgan (1996) all assert that biological relations and legal ties by laws are becoming less important in comparison to emotional closeness in terms of understanding of family and family lives. In addition to the loving and caring relationship between children and their biological parents, Sviggum (2000) indicates in her research study when parents had repartnered, the criteria to include new mechanisms in the family appear to be the same as above mentioned. Among the informants in this research, some parents have made new partners. But none of these informants' parents got married with their new partners at the time of my interview. Whether their parents would get married with their new partners or not, these informants told me that the criteria to include parents' new partners in the family or not were completely based on the emotional bonds and feeling closeness. Two informants in my study expressed that their fathers were still included in the family in spite of decreased or no contact between them. Relatives on

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both sides were definitely supposed to be included in the family list because they had closely loving and caring relationship with all of them. Both of them expressed in similar ways that the reason of father's inclusion in the family was that they are their fathers and their biological fathers and this is a reality. In the cases of these two informants, it is clear that they conceptualize their family based on dual social bonds: biological and emotional association. Although the latter outweigh the former in their defining of family, its embedded importance and position might not be underestimated or even overlooked by these children.

5.2.2 Family Connected to Household and Home

Family is always mentioned in connection to household and home in terms of meaning expression. In this part, I consider it is necessary to have a glance over in spite of the fact that in the Chinese language, the equivalence to these English terms has distinct boundaries. Haugen (2007) in her research works puts these terms under parallel scrutiny. She points out that adults often think of their households as a home, whilst, children think that they have more or less two homes respectively on the one side of the mum and on the other side of the dad, and often go back and forth between them. In the Chinese context, *Jia* means equivalence to 'home' or 'household' in the English language. It also means people are living under the same roof or can be simplified as a living place. *Jiating* refers equivalent to family in the English language. None of the informants in my study conceptualize their family based on household or home association. One of the explanations they offered were they did not think and regard those in only one household or home as a family and as family members as well. This demonstrates that "families exist with and between household and not all households contain families" (O'Brien et al: 1996, in Brannen & O' Brien, pp.84). And most informants said that the preference to be staying in one household and the

time length to be there than the other quite depends upon emotional bonds and the quality of relationship between them and other family members. Just like these children told me:

“Mum is with me. I like living here. Dad’s home is a little bit smaller than mum’s. But, it is also full of love. I like it” (Xie, 16).

“I like mum’s home, dad’s home and also grandparents’ homes all the time, because I feel loved and cared all the time and really enjoys being there”(Jin, 13).

“Both mum and dad’s home are good for me. I like both”(Lu,13).

“I feel at home at both of their places”(Wang,14).

However, some findings, such as Levin & Trost (1992), demonstrate in their western research contexts that household counts as a central factor for conceptualization of family. Children place people sharing the same household into one family and regard them as the members of this family. These who live in another household are not supposed to be members of that family. In addition, a lot of children include their pets, such as dogs and cats, into the family, because they share the same household. From the above analysis, it can be found that what counts as family for the children should be contextualized. In this study, children draw on consistent emotional closeness, love and care as well as the least mentioned blood and legal ties between them and their parents as well as other family members as very important factors in their conceptualization of family. The findings here might shed light on the dimensions of understanding of family in a quite different social and cultural context. It also stresses that non-resident fathers, even with decreased or no contacts with children after divorce, can still be regarded as family members.

5.2.3 Maintenance of Family Networks

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The stability of continued and frequent contact really occurred between children and their family members. Most informants reported that they have a regular weekly visit to his non-resident fathers. It is worthwhile noting some informants indicated that custody arrangement was not as fixed as legal statements defined. In most instances, they stayed longer in their fathers' homes. Sometimes they could see their fathers twice or even three times per week. When their meeting with their fathers occurred on public holidays, they stayed with much longer periods of time. Children greatly valued these flexible arrangements that took account of their interests and social activities as well as those of their parents. In addition to the face-to-face contacts, those children often reverted to telephones to communicate with their non-resident fathers on a regular basis. Most children also expressed that they could feel the affection, care and companionship given from their non-resident fathers when they stayed together. They also demonstrated great hope and eagerness that they could see their fathers even more frequently if it is possible. This sort of active family dynamics give children a sense of being embedded in a network of family relationships. These relationships are mutually nurturing, satisfying and sustaining of each other. It seems to these children that they still occupy special places in the lives of their parents.

“I felt it good to be staying with dad. We were just in the room talking. I had a lot of fun stories to tell him. He also told me his interesting stories. We talked a lot every time we met” (Rong, 14).

“Well, it seemed to me time run so fast when I was with my father on the weekends. I wish time went slowly and slowly. Thus, I could have more time with him”(Peng,14).

“It was really happy to be with father. We did a lot of things together. It was very fun. Whenever dad sent me back home upon the end of the visiting days, I expected the next visiting days come soon” (Lu, 13).

“To be with father, I felt comfortable and good. Dad made faces and did funny behaviors. I could not help laughing. The time we were together was full of laughing moments. I enjoyed that very much” (Jin, 13).

5.3 Examining the Dynamic Relationship of Caring

Since the 1900s, some researchers, primarily in the West, revert their focus on the young carers and came about accordingly a growing body of literatures in this regard. Young carers are characterized as those who “generally under eighteen and have responsibilities for the care at home of a relative with disability or mental illness” (Meredith 1991b, in Becker et al 1998, pp.12). However, young carers, under such image, are often represented as being undermined to a great level in other respects of their daily lives, such as: their leisure time is curtailed; their studies are negatively affected and even forced to give up attending school and health problems might be further worsened if the young carer is not in very perfect health condition. In addition, Becker et al (1998, pp.12) argue that regarding the fact that young carers are often “neglected and ignored by the welfare professionals and organizations due to their unique status as children. At the same time, the young carers have no intents of their rights both as a carer and as children”.

Giving the facts which indicated above, we can find that children as young carers are gaining more recognition and attention both in the academic and public policy discourses. Meanwhile, potential risks young carers must be confronted to in the course of care providing have also aroused great concern and therefore be put within in-depth analysis. In this part, I put my concentration on these groups of young carers to trace how they construct their caring relationship with their parents and other family members after their parents dissolved their marriage.

5.3.1 Defining Care and Caring

The words care and caring are frequently used in our daily lives. However, it is not easy to accord a definite conception to that, given the fact that it can be placed in a wide of contexts and be attached diversified priorities in meanings by different researchers. Mayeroff (1971, pp.1-2) states that “to care for another person in the most significant sense is to help him to grow and actualize himself. In the context of a man’ life, caring has a way of ordering his other values and activities around it. Through caring for certain others, a man lives the meaning of his own life”. What Mayeroff tries to tell us is the nature of caring in his sense, that is, to help the other grow no matter the carer is providing care for a person or for an abstract stuff. In doing so, the carer is not only directed by the impetus for the growth of the cared for, but also carry with strong responsibilities and obligations which need the carer’s great devotion to.

In contrast to Mayeroff’s views of seeing caring as a virtue, Noddings (1984) and Noddings et al. (1996c) denies this kind of perspective. Instead, she thinks care and caring practices are in part innate to the human beings. That implies that human beings are inborn to be endowed with sympathetic attributes to the others. When we provide care for the other people, we do our utmost to meet their needs and demands as if they are our own. In addition, Noddings argues that care must come about between the people rather than between the people and other abstract stuff.

While, Tronto (1993), from a comprehensive perspective, elaborates upon the care and caring. He points out that care connotes some sort of engagement. He and Berenice Fisher jointly make the notion on this:

“On the most general level, we suggest that caring should be viewed as a species

activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web”(1993,pp.103).

Tronto specifically points out that this definition of caring is not “restricted to human interaction with others” (1993, pp.103). From this point of view, he stands by stand with Mayeroff. When people start to talk about care and caring, the prompt image comes to the mind is the caring relationship between mother and child. This kind of stereotyped presumption about caring is likely to leading us to a narrowness of “a dyadic understanding of romanization of mother and child”(Tronto 1993, pp.103). And this is not the complete and genuine picture either all around the world. In addition, in Tronto’s eyes, care and caring practices are by and large socially and culturally constructed and it operates in a fluid and ongoing process.

Based on his definition of caring, Tronto identified four phases of care: (a) caring about is the first phase of recognizing that care is needed; (b) taking care of is the second phase which “involves assuming some responsibility for the identified need and determining how to respond it” (Tronto 1993, pp.106). (c) care giving is the phase where needs of caring is fulfilled and met. And care-receiving is the last phase where “the object of care will respond to the care it receives” (Tronto 1993, pp.107). These four phases identified by Tronto pave the way for the production of multifaceted elements of the ethic of care, that is, attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. Tronto further adds that the good and proper actions on the basis of the ethic of care must be “integrated into an appropriate whole, which is not just simple to achieve. It requires a deep and thoughtful knowledge of the situation, and of all of the actor’s situations, needs and competencies” (Tronto 1993, pp.136). Tronto’s

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identification of caring by means of four phases is present in my informants' constructions of caring within the family context.

In addition to these researchers' works on caring, other researchers place care and caring into analysis and make subtle distinction between similar terms. For example, the distinction between 'caring about' and 'caring for' is aimed to "differentiate between the actual tasks associated with caring and the emotional meaning of the relationship between the carer and the cared for" (Morgan 1996, pp.98). From this perspective, caring is viewed as an intrinsically complex connection which needs the input of labour and feeling. A similar view is also expressed by Finch and Groves (1983) who refine this to a labour of love and Traustadottir (1991, in Morgan 1996 pp.98) reverts to caring for work and caring about love to distinguish its meaning.

Another group of distinction is often made between informal and formal care. The former is "often unpaid and carried out by persons who are usually linked to the cared for by ties of marriage or parenthood or on some other personal basis. The latter is paid and normally supplied by the persons who have no such ties" (Morgan 1996, pp. 98). I find this kind of distinction relevant with my current research and all of my informants taking part in this study can be classified within the group of informal carers.

5.3.2 Children in Care Construction

It can clearly find that care can be understood from a diversity of dimensions already mentioned in the preceding parts. Children in the family undoubtedly interact with other family members. With such dynamic relationship, even in the process of parents' divorce, children have been playing active roles to provide care to their parents and also to other family members.

Lu, one of male informant in my study, is 13 years old at the time of my interview. His parent dissolved their marriage two years ago. He was informed of his parent's decision to get divorced at that time. He learned that his parent's characters conflicted a lot and could not get along well any longer. Before the divorce, he felt a little bit of such conflicts between his parents. One day, he talked with his father, before he moved out, whether he has told his divorce to his grandparent. Lu's father said "no". Lu told me that his father did not say this because he really did not know how to tell this to Lu's grandparent. Lu knew his father well. His father is a reserved and introverted man and always keeps to himself. In addition, his father is a responsible and obedient son in his grandparents' eyes and he really did not know how to open his mouth to tell this to his grandparent. Lu learned his father's difficulty in telling divorce to grandparent and asked his father whether he could tell divorce to his grandparent some day in a suitable manner. He told his father that it might be better he said this with his grandparent at first. His father nodded with thanks hug with Lu. Lu learned his father's ideas on this matter and comforted his father not to worry about this and this would work out. Lu told me that he loved his father and saw his father was so kept to himself and really worried about his father's health (his father was bothered by sickness for some time).

Later one day, Lu went to his grandparent's home and disclosed his parent's divorce to grandparent in a joking way, Lu told me. Lu's grandparent showed surprise at this and asked how could happen like this. Lu told his grandparent about the reason of divorce and indicated it did not matter and everything would be fine. Lu told his grandparent that they might respect father's choice to divorce. They got divorced due to disposition conflicts. And if they continued to live in the same household, their conflicts will escalate gradually. That would be even worse for both of them and also for us, Lu continued to point out.

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In the same vein, another story is told by Wang, one of female informant in my study. She told me her provision of care to her mother in the process of divorce. Regarding her parent's divorce, she indicated that she understood and also backed up her mother's decision to get divorced with her father. Her mother made a tough decision when she was thinking about the divorce. Wang told me that she knew there was still love between her mother and her father. However, her father became so addicted to bad activities that he could not come back on the right track at that time. He said that her father ruined this family. However, she pointed out that she did not hate her father and thought her father was not a bad father by nature. She continued to tell me that her father went astray by accident and would be come back on the right track one day in the future. At the same time, she understood her mother's feelings and hoped to make her mother live out of the current circumstance. She seldom saw her mother smile, or even laugh over the last several years. She hoped her mother smiles and laughs a lot every day after the divorce.

In Lu and Wang's cases, we can view them as sentient human beings who had certain degree of capability in their age to provide practical care and support to their parents when family went through changes, such as parental marital dissolution. Lu's illustration of care provision to his father is worth noting because its peculiarity in terms of its uniqueness in competence and coping skills' expression during that given period of time. The other informants in my study did not report such kind of care provision. Both Lu and Wang showed great understanding and concern of their parents' situation at that time and were motivated by automatic feelings and pure love to do so. Lu reported that he was really worried about this father in view of this father's disposition and health problems. He thought he could help his father out of that tough situation. Wang also reported that she cared about her mother and of course her father in certain sense in spite of the latter destroyed the family. She loved by

nature both of her parents and did not hate her father. Her provision of care and support in this way is also responded by several informants in my study who had similar experiences of parents' divorce. One of the predominant elements which Gilligan(1982, in Smart et al 2001, pp. 93) elaborates in his studies of the ethic of care is the avoidance of harm or hurt. This element can be identified in the above cases indicated by my informants. No matter Lu, Wang or other informants, they demonstrate sincere attitudes and strong feelings not to make their parents get hurt in whatever ways in the process of the divorce.

In addition, the children in this research project demonstrate themselves to be emotional and moral actors who are able to take the perspective of the other and of placing themselves in other' shoes, notably understanding the needs and feelings of their parents (Brannen & Moss 2003). This kind of view is also echoed by Mason (1996a, in Smart et al 2003, pp. 93) who argues that "we need to pay attention to the significance of thinking and feeling in the activity of care". She reverts to the same word of 'sentient' to suggest that "attending to the well-being of others, being attuned to the individuality of others as well as interpreting the moods of others" might be embraced and attached importance in talking about the ethic of care. She further argues that the current framework of care in academic field puts too much attention on the labour of care rather than its thoughtfulness. In the process of taking on care-giving roles and fulfilling it, children's agency as carers and their caring identities are actively constructed.

Morgan (1996, pp.106) asserts that many of the everyday routines within the household are "work in the sense of the expenditure of effort and personal resources. And this kind of idea should be extended include the carer and the receiver of care". What Morgan suggests is that work, especially the household work, should not be

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understood in only confined sense and can be viewed as a variation of caring. This suggestion is welcomed in my study. This kind of conceptualization of children's household work is an indicator of general perception and understanding of the modern child. Under the tenet of such conceptualization, children's involvement in the household work is primarily seen as a form of socialization. This is evidenced by the following children's accounts:

"I do a lot of household work: washing the dishes, cleaning and buying the newspapers. I like to do these stuff work" (Rong, 14).

"Mum is too busy. She feels tired when she comes back from work. I should do the household work" (Xie, 16).

"I sweep the floor, wash, and make simple food for mum" (Yan, 14).

All the informants in my study reported that they participated in household work on a regular basis. This kind of participation and contribution can be found within the family both before and after parental divorce. This demonstrates the continuum in care-giving within the family context. The household work these informants are engaged in are diverse, ranging from washing the dishes, sweeping the floor, cleaning the house, running errands, preparing the meal and so on. It is interesting to find that many informants reported that they are now more actively involved in such household work. One of my informants, Peng told me that before parents dissolved their marriage, his involvement in the household work was partially out of willingness on the one hand and also his parents' requests on the other hand. Since the divorce, things changed and what he is doing now is completely out of willingness and responsibility. Peng shared with me his experience in this regard. He said:

“Before the divorce, primarily mum prepared the meal for me and my father. And mum also got up early to prepare the breakfast and made extra packed lunch for me so that I did not have to go outside the campus to buy food at noon. Since the occurrence of divorce, sometimes mum came back late and she worried about whether I had dinner. And she called me again and again to ask about that. I knew she was worried about me. Later, I thought I should make food by myself not to let mum worry about me” (Peng, 14).

Peng continued to tell me, now he could make dishes for the whole family although the dishes did not taste quite delicious and cooking skills needed to be improved. From Peng’s stories, it appears that he should take responsibility not let his mother worry about him. Several of my informants indicate that responsibility as one of the motivator to be involved in housework in mums’ homes.

“I should do this, it is my job to do the household work” (Wang, 14).

“Mum still did the household. However, I should help her and I did so” (Yan, 14).

“Most of the housework is mine. I should take up them. Mum has done much of it before the divorce. Now, I can do that” (Liang, 15).

Children’s engagement in the household work is also present in their non-resident fathers’ living place and grandparents’ homes on both side of the family. Most informants reported that they did household work whenever they were in their fathers’ homes. Several informants told me that their fathers were not attended to by their mums anymore and their fathers’ homes were really in a mess whenever they stepped in the room. They pointed out in similar ways they should help dads clean the room and they should do so. Responsibility taking proves to be an overlapping element in children’s motivation to be engaged in household work in their non-resident fathers’

homes. As Becker et al (1998, p.22) points out that “the transformation in family structure might be one of factors in terms of the nature of caring responsibilities involved”. Therefore, it is worth noting the motives behind children’s care giving”.

5.3.3 Children as Care Recipient

The caring of children has “for many generations been a major source of preoccupation for academics, policy-makers and educators” (Cockburn 2005, pp.71). And this is well documented by many researchers (Chalmers & Aggleton; Statham; all in Brannen & Moss, 2003; Finch and Groves 1983; Smart et al 2001). Most informants in the post-divorce families continued, like before their parents’ divorce, to receive care and support from their parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and also other family relatives. All of my informants lived permanently with their mothers; therefore, their mothers were primary source of care-giving on a daily basis. Xie and Liang reported their particular experiences in this aspect. In both of the cases, their mums demonstrate great caring affection to their children.

“Although I am grown-up a little bit, I can do something myself. But, mum still cares about me all the time upon her divorce with my dad. If I do something wrong, she does not criticize me directly. She learns the reason and process of what I do. Then she will sit down and talk with me and tell me what it is the matter with my behavior. Every time she talks with me, she never shouts at me” (Xie, 16).

“Mum lives with me. She cares about me in everything. For example, I study very hard and often stay up late. Mum also accompanies me to stay up late. I know, she is tired after work during the daytime. I ask her to go to bed early and need not to be along with me. She always says she is not sleepy. Sometimes, I get hungry at ten or eleven o’clock, she makes some food for me. She really cares about me a lot” (Liang, 15)

In Nodding's analysis of ethic of caring, she points out that it is generally related to the experience of women. And this is the stereotyped perception in reference to the caring relationship between parents and children. It is without conflicting views that women are natural carers or men should be excluded from such experience. This sort of presumption is further reinforced in most societies, especially the patriarchal contexts, women tend to be identified with caring roles with children. This is the case for the Chinese society. Patriarchal family system might be existing to a relative degree in some of areas and this in turn reinforces such identification of women in caring. Woman still plays a major role in the care of children within the family.

In terms of the extent of care giving from both sides of the family, children found out it was relatively much higher than before the divorce. Some informants pointed out, before the divorce, especially their non-resident fathers, due to work, business travels or whatever reasons, paid not quite sufficient attention and care to them in comparisons with their ever-present mothers. However, at the time they received my interview, they told me this has changed a lot after the divorce. Non-resident fathers delivered more care and support to them, including caring on their daily lives, studies, physical and emotional health. They were satisfied with the current care and support from both of their parents.

From this point of view, it can be identified that "gender does not determine carers" (Cockburn 2005, pp.72) as these non-resident fathers do undertake care-giving roles and work. Dalley (1988, in Cockburn 2005, pp.72) also points out that there are increased levels of sympathy and support given to the male carers, in spite of the natural experience of women as carers. Although these arguments are mainly derived from the West context, it is conceived to be also applicable to the Chinese context.

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From their accounts, these informants thought providing care and support were their parents' responsibilities, they did not take it for granted. They considered it was love between them that take precedence over the responsibilities.

Within the family system, grandparents are generally viewed as an important person to give care to grandchildren. This study shows consistency with this point of view. All the informants in my study reported that grandparents on both side of the family, especially grandmother continued their caring to their grandchildren in spite of the fact that their daughters or sons dissolved their marriages. This demonstrates the continuity of care-giving on the part of the grandparents within the family context. This is also in side with the idea that the older generations take on the position of net care and support givers and that this is perceived as normal and proper in some sense (Finch, 1989).

There is another obvious aspect children expressed in the receiving of care is that their voices are heard somehow. Several informants said that sometimes they did not think their mothers and/or fathers, or other family members provide the appropriate and necessary care to them. Peng told me maybe my parent thought I need more emotional and physical care from them due to the divorce. Therefore, in the interactions with them, they showed extra care and consideration to me. Just as Peng said:

“I did not mean their doings were not right. However, sometimes it seemed to me that it their care-giving was not appropriate and put me under some kind of pressure. And I should give much more caring to my patents in later years just in the same manner” (Peng, 14).

One day, Peng told his ideas about the care to both of his parents. Thus, his parent knew what their care-giving to Peng meant and how they should do subsequently in the future. From Peng's accounts, we can find that children's perspectives about the care-receiving and care-giving is different from their parents. To some degree, Peng's parents underestimate his ability to cope with the divorce matter. Therefore, it is necessary and important to hear children's voices in this regard and with that, the care-giving provided from parents or others is practical and appropriate in their children's eyes. In addition, from Peng's accounts, we can find that he is exercising some degree of rights in terms of voicing their own needs and concerns about the issues in relation to them, although he did not quite realize it is right in a full sense. It seems that Peng's parent's provision of care makes Peng in an uncomfortable and stressful condition; thus, Peng reverts to the means to expressing it to his parents. His voices in this respect receive the respect from his parents and turns out to be of great value and meaningfulness both in theory and in practice.

In this part, we have made an analysis of children as care-receiver on the one side as well as care-giver on the other side. Children as care-receiver has been much documented in the academic and policy-making discourses. It is taken for granted that children do receive care and support within the private sphere and the public social settings. However, children as care-giver is not sufficiently researched all around the world, only in some developed countries. Thanks to the research works from these countries (e.g. U.K and Australia), there is a developing recognition that children should not be placed in the position as simply the recipient of care. In this study, it shows in evidence that the children, situated in a developing country, do provide a lot of care and support to their mums, non-resident fathers and other family members even upon their parents' marital dissolution. As Cockburn (2005, pp.73) states that and "understanding of the complexity of the adult care relationships is very crucial in

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challenging the paternalism associated with care, providing recognition of children as active agents within this relationship”. This kind of view is also echoed by Nodding, in her framework of ethic of care, reciprocity and interdependence in the relationship between the carer and the cared-for is attached great significance. This is also applicable for children constructed as care-giver and care recipient at the same time in their daily life course.

6.0 Concluding Remarks

Divorce has always been seen as a stressful event within the family life, especially when it relates to the children. When children are placed in the divorce context, they are generally viewed as the passive victims of their parent's marital dissolution due to their competence, vulnerability and low levels of coping skills based on age, gender and disposition, etc. The majority of academic researches in this realm are primarily based on the clinical assessments and these findings are thereby generalized to indicate that all the children around the world involved in the divorce process are destined to be negatively affected by that. Although the subsequent researches in this field make a diversion to focus on children in divorced families in comparison with the children in intact families, the findings demonstrate the same pictures as those in the clinical evaluations.

Until recent years, thanks to the increasing development and influence in the realm of the so-called 'new' sociology of childhood, children's agency is given much more attention and specifically examined in the matters concern them. This is also the case for the children in the divorced families. Previous studies about divorce in relation with children are predominately derived from the Western contexts, Whist, little is known from the Chinese context, especially with the intention to research children as active social actors in this regard. In this research study, the children in the Chinese context are targeted and given the opportunity to voice their own ideas and experiences with regards to their parents' marital dissolution. The research questions are framed out which is inspired by Haugen's (2007) research works, although the latter conducts her researches in the Norwegian context.

In the process of research interviews of these young children, they tell me their own unique experiences concerning their parents' marital dissolution. From their accounts,

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I can find out that the children involved in their parents' divorce on the whole show positive experiences to a relative degree and at the same time they also point out that their parents' divorce is not a big thing to them in their life course. This does not mean that children shrug their shoulder and demonstrate indifferent attitudes towards parents' divorce. On the contrary, it illustrates that children do not regard their parents' divorce as a key experience that will guide and shape their future daily lives.

In terms of the changes in their living places and attended schools, all the informants in my study continued to live permanently with their resident mothers and no change of school occurred. In addition, most of my informants kept close and frequent interactions with their non-resident fathers and other family members on both sides of the family. Even though two informants lost contact or even no contact with non-resident fathers, they still kept interactions with their grandparents and other family relatives on the paternal side. This reveals the continuum rather than discontinuity in terms of family relationship maintaining upon family change, especially between children and non-resident fathers.

It is interesting to find out that children make sense of their family in particular ways, and construct family ideas based on such elements which they consider essential in their eyes, such as love, care, support and affection. These active constituents are also effective as to their parents' new partners and extended kins. Blood and legal ties are the least mentioned factors in children's accounts of family defining. This sort of findings in my study might shed light on the dimensions of understanding of family and meanwhile it underpins that it is important to contextualize the informants and its research outcomes. I will not intend to make a generalization that all the Chinese children will conceptualize their family as the informants in my study.

In close relation with the family understanding, care and caring are also explored in

this study. I place particular focus on the caring dynamics between children as care-receiver and care-giver. Children acted as care-receiver has been widely reported and researched in the academics and policy makings. When the informants in my study went through parents' marital dissolution, they continued to receive care and support from their parents, grandparents and also other family members on both sides of the family. Because they are living permanently with their mothers, mums become the primary care-givers. From informants' accounts, I find out that their non-resident fathers are giving them more care and support in comparison with before divorce. In addition, grandparents, especially grandmothers, play important roles in the care giving of grandchildren as before their sons' or daughter's divorce. In one sense, it can be said that the older generation takes on the net carer roles and this is generally perceived as normal within the patriarchal Chinese context.

It is undoubtedly true that the informants in this study receive the care and support from their parents and other family members even upon parents' marital dissolution. However, they are not working only as care-receivers. It is found out from this study that children have been playing an active role in the provision of care and support to their divorced parents and other family members. Almost all of the informants provided practical household work support within the post-divorced families on a daily basis. In addition, several informants expressed unique care and support giving, that is, to make their parents, especially their mothers, avoid getting hurt or harm. This extends the carer's image which is confined to the input of labour to the thinking and feeling activities in other shoes. This kind of extension of care activities should also be applicable to the children as care-givers, like those informants in this study.

From the above summarized, it can be clearly traced that when children are actually placed in the centre of research and their voices and ideas are practically sought to, different and meaningful perspectives and research outcomes might shed light on the

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dimension of understanding in specific social phenomenon, such as family change, or even challenge the previously assumed perception about children and their images, for instance, only as the passive victims of parental marital dissolution. These informants in the Chinese context do demonstrate that they have a relatively positive experience of their parents' divorce on the main and they employ their competence and skills in their ages to become constructive actors in the course of divorce and of their post-divorced daily lives. They should be seen as fully fledged family members to be actively engaged in taking certain degree of responsibility for their own well-being and these of other family members. Their unique ways of thinking about families and practice of post-divorced family lives transform the assumed ideas that children should "no longer just belong to families. Rather, they should be seen as reflexive agents in their own rights and they are part of the creation of families" (Mayall 1994, in Smart et al 2001, pp.18).

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Appendix-Interview Guide

Instructions

1. To introduce myself and the purpose of this research study.
2. To explain why it is essential to listen to their voices in this regard.
3. To talk about the interview method and the topics that I will be asking during the interview. These are involved in their recollections about their parents' marital dissolution; conceptualization of families as well as caring practice in post-divorced families.
4. To be alert to ethical considerations before, during and after the research project, including: informed consent; confidentiality and anonymity; the potential benefits and harms would be generating in the study and researcher's role and power.

Recollections on Parents' Marital Dissolution

-----When did parents' divorce occur?

---- How were you informed of their divorce?

---- How were your feelings about your parent's divorce at that time (Surprised; disappointed; sad; angry; relieved; mixed feelings or others)?

----- Could you tell me a little bit about why you have such feelings?

-----What has changed in your daily life since your parents dissolved their marriage? Especially reverting to the relationship with your non-resident parent as well as with other family members? Did you move to other places? Did you transfer to another school?

-----How about your feelings at present?

----- Whether your aspiration to get married will be affected by your parent's divorce? school?

Family

-----What is your idea about the 'family'? How do you define it? How are its relations with household and home respectively?

-----What is it like with your family (Nuclear, extended or other composition)? What does such 'family' mean to you?

-----What has changed in your idea about the 'family' after you experienced your parent's marital dissolution? Please tell me some detailed examples? What did such kind of change mean to you?

Care (and Support)

-----What is your idea about care (and support)? How do you conceptualize it?

-----Did you receive care and support from anyone when you experienced your parents' marital dissolution (Your mum/dad/other family members/friends/teachers/neighbors etc.)? What kind of care and support and how did you receive that (tell me some detailed examples)? How did you view these care and support (their values)?

----- Did you give any care and support to your mum/dad, especially during or after their marital dissolution? And to others (Siblings or family members) as well? If so, please tell me about it by illustrating some concrete examples? What did you think about the fact that you gave care within your post-divorced family?