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NEGOTIATING CHANGED CONTEXTS AND CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES: THE EXPERIENCES OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS LIVING IN IRELAND

PhD Thesis submitted to the School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Dublin, Trinity College.

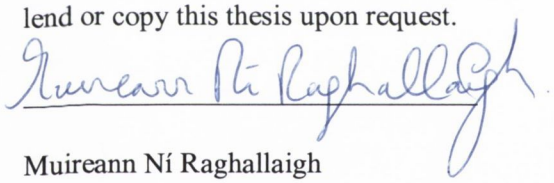
2007

Muireann Ní Raghallaigh

Under the supervision of Professor Robbie Gilligan.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and that it is my own work except where acknowledged. I agree that Trinity College may lend or copy this thesis upon request.



Muireann Ní Raghallaigh

Summary

This PhD study explores the experiences of asylum-seeking teenagers who have arrived in Ireland unaccompanied by parents or guardians (unaccompanied minors). The arrival of these young people is a very recent phenomenon in the Irish context, beginning only in the mid-1990s, and reflects a change from an overall pattern of emigration from Ireland to a new pattern of immigration into the country. To date, relatively little research has been conducted in relation to the lives of these immigrants, including asylum seekers generally and unaccompanied minors specifically. The literature that has emerged – both nationally and internationally - has often neglected the 'ordinary' lives of unaccompanied minors prior to their departure from home. In addition, in discussions of the losses and changes that these young people encounter, their own individual perspectives have often been disregarded. This has resulted in a lack of knowledge of how unaccompanied minors cope with their circumstances and a tendency to portray these young people as victims who are struggling with their traumatic circumstances.

By beginning from a strengths perspective, this study is somewhat different. Initially, the aims were to explore how unaccompanied minors manage the geographical and cultural transitions with which they are faced and to look at how their identities are affected by the interaction of the past and the present. Whilst these questions remained relevant throughout, the research's flexible and inductive approach allowed emerging, often unexpected themes to be explored in more depth. Through qualitative methods – including participant observation in a hostel where unaccompanied minors live and semi-structured interviews with 32 of the young people – the study placed emphasis on the perspectives of the participants in relation to the challenges they face and their efforts to cope with their circumstances. The young people talked about their past lives in their countries of origin, including both 'extraordinary' experiences of poverty, conflict, and lack of opportunity, and 'ordinary' experiences of relationships, teenage lives, and schooling. Through descriptions that constantly compared the past with the present, it became evident that moving to Ireland had led to great change in their lives. The young people coped with these changes and with the many other challenges of exile through the use of different coping strategies. These strategies involved maintaining continuity in a changed context, adjusting through the processes of learning and changing, adopting a positive outlook, suppressing emotions and seeking distraction, and viewing themselves as self-reliant. In addition, they often coped by distrusting those around them. The young people indicated several reasons for their distrust, all of which suggested that distrusting was something purposeful in their lives. They attributed their distrust to past experiences, being accustomed to distrust, being distrusted by others, being unable to tell the truth, and not knowing people well. However, almost without exception, they indicated that they have a strong trust in God. Faith and religious practice provided continuity, comfort, and companionship, thus helping the young people to negotiate their changed contexts and challenging circumstances. Faith also

facilitated the young people in using the other coping strategies that they adopted. Overall, by choosing between various ways of coping with their circumstances, the unaccompanied minors in this study emerged as 'active survivors' rather than 'passive victims'.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to all of the young people who participated in this research, both those in 'Valley Lodge' and those who willingly gave their time to take part in the interviews. Thank you all so much for allowing me the privilege of spending time in your living space and of hearing about your lives. Your strength continues to inspire me.

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor, Professor Robbie Gilligan, whose idea it was to undertake this study in the first place. From the outset he has always encouraged and supported me. His direction, advice, and guidance have been much appreciated. Thank you, Robbie.

I would also like to thank the HSE Personnel who helped to make the research possible by facilitating the consent process and by providing contextual information when required. Thanks to Gian Andreoni, John Donnellan, Oonagh Hogan, Theresa Kearney, Katrina King, and Binta Obola. A special word of thanks to Marilyn Roantree for always being available to answer my questions and to Marjo van Dijken for her general assistance and for her careful negotiation of my boundaries! Thanks also to Terry Fitzsimons for her help.

Thanks to Sr. Breege Keenan of the Vincentian Refugee Centre for assisting in different ways and for her comments on various chapters. Thanks to Berni Smyth of SPARK who helped in the recruitment of participants and to Anke Boehm for reading and commenting on my work. Thanks also to Michael Bruton for the help and guidance that he gave.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Professor Sheila Greene, director of the Children's Research Centre, and to all of my current and previous colleagues at the Centre who helped in various different ways throughout the study. Particular thanks to Audrey Bryan, Tina Byrne, Nicola Carr, Kellie Gallagher, Ann Marie Halpenny, Paula Mayock, Clíona Murphy, Síle Murphy, Liz Nixon, Karen Smyth, and Sadhbh Whelan, for their comments on my work and for their help, laughter, friendship, and support over the past few years. A special word of thanks to Pádraic Whyte and to Aoife Daly for their great friendship and encouragement. I will really miss sharing an office with both of you!

To all of my other friends for their wonderful and supportive friendships, and for putting up with my stress and my lack of availability, particularly in recent times. I promise, you'll see more of me from now on! Thanks to Hannaleena Ahonen, Regina Carolon, and Aoife Kelly for reading and commenting on aspects of my work, and to Kate Clarke for her help with the bibliography. Thanks to Ashling Toner for always being so flexible! A particular word of thanks to Fiona Martin and Maura O'Sullivan who have always been on hand to offer encouragement and support. Don't worry, I'm planning to move out of the office and back home any day now!!

A big 'go raibh míle maith agaibh' to my parents, Áine and Seán, for always being available to read my work and to offer support, encouragement, and love. Thanks also to my brothers Cormuin and Cian for their help and encouragement and to my travelling brother Fionn who has always managed to distract me from my work with his witty emails!

A 'buíochas an-speisialta' to Seosamh Mac Réamoinn for discussing aspects of my work with me, reading chapters, working on the bibliography, and always being available to figure out why microsoft word has a mind of its own! But most of all, thanks for your unfailing support, constant encouragement, and continuous belief in my ability. I have really really appreciated it.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge, with gratitude, the funding provided by the National Children's Office, Dublin, as well as that provided by the Children's Research Centre and the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

I really hope I have not left anyone out. If I have, thank you too!

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to unaccompanied minors, to their families, and to all those who work tirelessly on their behalf.

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Introduction and Overview

The population of Ireland has changed considerably in recent years. The country's long-standing pattern of emigration has been reversed: significant numbers of immigrants – including asylum seekers and refugees - have started arriving in Ireland in search of a better life. The increased proportion of non-Irish people living in Ireland has resulted in widespread debate about the relationships between immigrants and host communities, about integration, and about the supports and services available to members of 'new communities'. Arising from these debates, researchers have begun to look at the experiences and needs of immigrant groups. This thesis represents a further contribution to this growing body of research. Specifically, it addresses the experiences of unaccompanied minors living in Ireland, the first of whom came to the attention of the State in 1996 (Veale et al., 2003).

Definition of 'Unaccompanied Minor'

To begin with, it is necessary to define what the concept 'unaccompanied minor' means. In the Irish context, the terms 'unaccompanied minors/children' and 'separated children' tend to be used interchangeably, although neither is defined in Irish law, the reasons for which are unclear. However, several relevant definitions exist at a European and international level, and these go some way in clarifying the distinction between the two terms. For instance, in its *Guidelines on Policies and Procedures for dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum*, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines an unaccompanied child as:

> "... a person who is under the age of eighteen, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is, attained earlier and who is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so" (UNHCR, 1997, p. 1).

However, increasing attention has been paid to the fact that not all children who are separated from their parents or customary caregivers are unaccompanied as defined in this definition. For instance, some children may be living with extended family members, but may face similar risks to those encountered by unaccompanied refugee children (UNHCR, 2004). Thus, in recent years the use of the more inclusive term 'separated children' has been promoted by both UNHCR and the Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP).[1] The SCEP, in its Statement of Good Practice defines separated children as follows:

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[1] The Separated Children in Europe Programme is a joint initiative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Save the Children Alliance. It aims to promote a shared policy and commitment to best practice at national and European Levels in order to attempt to realise the rights and best interests of separated children. The programme has developed partnerships with

> "[Separated children are] children under 18 years of age who are outside of their country of origin and separated from both parents, or their previous legal/customary primary caregiver. Some children are totally alone while others, who are also the concern of the SCEP, may be living with extended family members. All such children are separated children and entitled to international protection under a broad range of international and regional instruments. Separated children may be seeking asylum because of a fear of persecution or the lack of protection due to human rights violations, armed conflict or disturbances in their own country" (2004, p. 2).[2]

In this study the term 'unaccompanied minor' will be used.[3] The research examines the experiences of young people who arrived in Ireland under the age of 18 (i.e. as minors) and who were not in the company of adult relatives. It does not include young people who were reunited with family members immediately upon arrival or soon thereafter.[4] Thus, 'unaccompanied' is used in preference to 'separated' in order to make a clear distinction between the young people involved in the study and those who are separated from their parents but who may be living with extended family members in Ireland.[5] These latter children were not the focus of this research.

Most unaccompanied minors who come to the attention of authorities in Western countries are also 'asylum seekers'. An asylum seeker is a person who applies for protection or refuge from the government of a country other than their own. The government then assesses whether or not the person can be defined as a refugee under the definition provided by the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 1 of the Convention, as amended by the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, states that a refugee is a person who

> "... owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

If the person is deemed to fit into the definition, he or she is afforded the protection of the government and is granted asylum or refugee status. In relation to unaccompanied minors, it is important to note that neither the UNHCR nor the SCEP definitions state that unaccompanied

---

organisations that work with separated children in different European Countries. In Ireland, this partnership is with the Irish Refugee Council.

[2] Similarly, the UNCHR now defines 'Separated Children' as "children under 18 years of age who are separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver" (UNHCR, 2002).

[3] When referring to the literature and to research, the term used by the author of the literature/research will be used, whether that be unaccompanied minor or separated child.

[4] Some children may arrive in the company of a sibling. If the sibling is not an adult (over 18) then they are both viewed as unaccompanied.

[5] When referring to these children as well, the broader term "separated children" will be used.

children are necessarily asylum seekers. In other words, while in practice most separated children may apply for asylum - in countries where it is possible to do so - others who do not apply for asylum are also included in the definitions and hence come under the remit of the SCEP. These may be children who are escaping from poverty or who are victims of trafficking or exploitation.

Research Questions

My own interest in this subject area emerged from my previous experience of working as a social worker with unaccompanied minors. This experience brought to my attention the many difficulties encountered by these young people as well as the many capacities that they display. During my work I began to wonder about how these young people managed the experiences with which they were faced. Given that little literature was available in the Irish context, I decided to explore these questions through the medium of PhD research.

From the outset, and arising from my social work training and from my experiences as a social worker, I adopted a "frame of mind devoted to the strengths of individuals and groups" (Saleebey, 2002, p. 8). In doing so, I decided to seek the views of unaccompanied minors themselves, rather than of practitioners or policy makers, as I felt that they were best placed to describe their situations. Initially I sought to explore how unaccompanied minors manage the geographical and cultural transitions with which they are faced. I wanted to examine whether they experienced interaction between their past and present circumstances and, if so, how they managed these experiences and how their identities were affected. Whilst these questions remained relevant to the study, my particular focus changed. The study's flexible and inductive approach allowed different themes to be explored in more depth. In particular, the themes of 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' lives were explored, as were themes of coping, distrust, and religious faith.

The following section provides an overview of the different chapters in the study.

Overview of the Study

Chapter one examines the historical background and current context within which the study took place. It looks at the Republic of Ireland's migration trends, situating the recent arrival of significant numbers of immigrants within the context of a long-standing pattern of emigration from Ireland. After outlining the development of refugee policy generally, specific attention is paid to unaccompanied minors within the Irish context, in terms of the historical context surrounding their arrival, their current circumstances, and policy and practice in relation to them.

Chapter two consists of the first literature review chapter. It examines literature that was deemed to be relevant at the outset of the study, literature pertaining to the challenges that unaccompanied minors face, as well as literature about coping and acculturating. Whilst particular attention is paid

to what has been written about unaccompanied minors specifically, I also draw on wider literature that is of relevance. The chapter concludes by identifying some significant gaps in our current understandings of the experiences of unaccompanied minors.

Chapter three describes the methodological approach that was adopted in the study. It explores the reasons for choosing a qualitative methodology, and why participant observation and semi-structured interviews were used as methods of data collection. The chapter describes how attention was continuously paid to ethics, to the sensitive nature of the research, to issues of culture and diversity, and to the relationship between the researcher and the participants. The chapter also looks at the actual process of conducting the fieldwork. In addition, the chapter is reflective in nature, and includes descriptions of how the process of undertaking the research impacted on me, as the researcher, and how the process of taking part in the research seemed to impact on the young people. The benefits of the methodology are noted, as are the many challenges that were encountered. A description of the process of data analysis and write-up is also given.

Chapter four is the first of four chapters that explore the key insights that emerged from the participant observation and from the interview phases of the study. In chapter four the past and present lives of the young people are considered. Whilst accounts of 'extraordinary' experiences of poverty and violence are presented, the particular focus of the chapter is on the existence of 'ordinariness' amidst the 'extraordinary' (Kohli, 2004), and on the multiple changes that the young people have encountered in their lives because of leaving home. The young people's descriptions of relationships, of teenage lives, and of schooling emerge in a comparative manner, with the past being contrasted with the present throughout.

Chapter five explores five different coping strategies used by the young people in dealing with the challenges and vicissitudes of their lives. Drawing on my observations and interactions with young people in Valley Lodge[6] (a hostel for unaccompanied minors), and on my interviews with the participants, it became apparent that the young people were coping with their circumstances in a myriad of different ways. Each of these coping strategies is discussed in turn. Frequently, participants adopted a positive outlook by appreciating what they had and by placing hope in the future. They suppressed difficult thoughts, emotions, and memories. They often sought distraction in order to aid this process. The young people also adopted a strategy of viewing themselves as self-reliant. In dealing with the cultural challenges with which they were faced the young people made concerted efforts to maintain some continuity with the past, whilst also adjusting to their new circumstances by learning and by changing.

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[6] 'Valley Lodge' is a pseudonym that is used in order to keep confidential the real name of the hostel in which the participant observation took place.

Chapter six explores a different coping strategy, that of distrust. Like many refugees, the majority of the young people found it difficult to trust, and many talked about only being able to trust certain people and only trusting people to a certain extent. By asking them why this was the case, this study represents a significant step forward in our existing knowledge. Little is known about the causes of refugees' distrust, especially from the perspectives of refugees themselves. The participants in this study attributed their distrust to past experiences, being accustomed to distrust, being distrusted by others, inability to tell the truth, and not knowing people well. Distrusting emerged as a purposeful way of coping.

Chapter seven is the second literature review chapter. This review was undertaken later in the study after religious faith emerged as a recurring theme in my conversations and interactions with the young people. Within this chapter attention is paid to literature that examines the impact of religion on identity, health, and social behaviour. In addition, literature pertaining to religion as a coping resource is discussed as is literature that exists at the intersection of religion and migration. The paucity of relevant research is highlighted.

Having set the context in chapter seven, **chapter eight** then explores faith in the lives of this study's participants. It examines how faith emerged as an important theme despite the fact that I had not set out to explore it. The narratives of the young people highlight the challenges of having to negotiate a very different religious culture having arrived in Ireland. However, despite the apparent indifferent attitudes of their Irish peers towards religion, the faith of the participants remained strong. Faced with the multiple changes and challenges of exile, relationships with God and religious practice provided the participants with comfort, companionship, and continuity.

The final chapter, **chapter nine** summarises the main insights that emerged from the study and draws these insights together within the *active survival circle*. This model highlights the centrality of faith in the lives of the young people and shows how faith is often connected with the other coping strategies that are used. In keeping with the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 2002), the chapter emphasises the capacities of the young people, thus portraying them as "active survivors" rather than as "passive victims" (Rousseau & Drapeau, 2003, p. 78).

Chapter 1: The Study's Historical Background and Current Context

Introduction

The arrival of asylum seekers in Ireland is a relatively new phenomenon which partially, but by no means exclusively, accounts for a shift from a long-standing pattern of emigration to a new pattern of immigration.[1] Unlike other European countries, such as the UK, it is only in relatively recent times that significant numbers of people of ethnic minority backgrounds have begun to live in Ireland. Indeed, Curry (2000) comments that prior to the 1990s, Ireland had been "one of the most racially homogenous countries in Europe" (p. 137). This chapter will attempt to situate unaccompanied minors within both historical and current contexts, thus providing a background to the study. A brief description of migration patterns will be given, in an effort to demonstrate the relative 'newness' of immigration and asylum seeking within the Irish context.[2] This will be followed by an outline of the State's responses to those seeking refuge – both programme refugees and asylum seekers. The remainder of the chapter will then focus on the arrival of unaccompanied children and on the development of services for them. Present-day policies will be outlined, as will recent statistics relating to this population group.

The Republic of Ireland's Migration Patterns

Migration patterns have had a dominant influence on the life and population of the Republic of Ireland.[3] Until very recently, whilst immigration into Ireland occurred, the dominant patterns were of outward migration or emigration from Ireland (Christie, 2002a). Although "waves of immigration" (Cullen, 2000, p. 4) were experienced by the country since the beginning of time, with the arrival of groups such as the Celts and the Vikings, it was not until the 1990s that immigration became a dominant feature of life in Ireland.

Referring to the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, Corcoran (1993) has stated that "[o]ver three centuries, emigration became incorporated into the Irish way of life" (p. 3). Between 1841 and 1911 the population of the Republic of Ireland declined sharply from over 6.5 million to 3.1 million (Central

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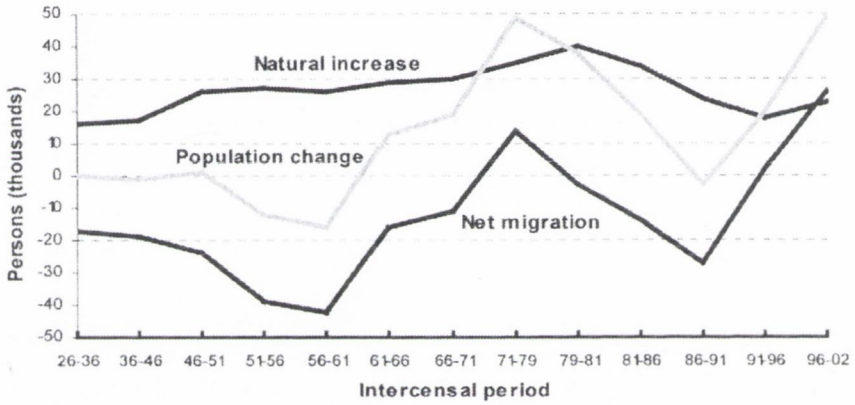
[1] Where emphasis is being placed on a word or phrase it is underlined. In contrast, italics are used to identify quotations from participants.

[2] While the focus of this chapter is on asylum seekers and refugees rather than on economic or other immigrant groups, in order to provide a contextual background some reference will be made to economic immigration and emigration.

[3] The Republic of Ireland refers to the 26 counties of the island of Ireland which gained independence in 1921, and also to the same geographical area prior to partition. In this thesis where 'Ireland' is used, I am referring to the Republic of Ireland.

Statistics Office,[4] 2004). This was largely as a result of the Irish Famine (1846/1847) and the emigration of many people in the subsequent decades. High levels of emigration continued in the beginning of the nineteenth century, contributing to a fall of over 5 per cent in the population between 1911 and 1926[5]. The rate of natural increase (i.e. births less deaths) rose between 1926 and 1951, but this did not lead to a corresponding rise in population. Instead, the population remained relatively stable at just under three million due to a continued rise in the number of people emigrating from Ireland, as is evident from *Figure 1* below.

Figure 1: Components of Population Change, 1921 – 2002



Source: CSO, Population and Labour Force Projections, 2006-2036

In the 1960s net outward migration declined and this decline was the main factor leading to a rise in population levels at that time. For a brief period in the 1970s previous trends were reversed resulting in net inward migration, due to opportunities available in the "resurgent" economy (Corcoran, 1993, p. 6). This reversal, coupled with an increase in births, led to the population increasing by just over 465,000 between 1971 and 1981 (CSO, 2004). A worldwide recession occurred in the late 1970s. Ireland's recovery from this recession was very slow and meant that net outward migration resumed again (Walsh, 1988, p. 4). The numbers emigrating rose sharply in the latter half of the 1980s. The result of this sharp increase, along with falling birth rates throughout the eighties, led to a small loss in population between 1986 and 1991 (CSO, 2004).

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[4] The Central Statistics Office will henceforth by referred to as CSO.

[5] The first census was held in the newly independent State in 1926.

The 1990s saw unprecedented growth in the Irish economy. Increased employment opportunities meant that the pattern of migration changed considerably. A small net inflow was recorded between 1991 and 1996 (CSO, 2004) and according to Boucher (2004, p. 185), Ireland officially became a country of net immigration in 1996. Largely due to this period of economic boom – known as the Celtic Tiger[6] - the number of people emigrating out of Ireland declined. There was a corresponding strong rise in the number of immigrants arriving in Ireland, with numbers peaking in 2002, when 41,000 immigrants arrived (CSO, 2004, p. 17). The CSO (2004) has observed that:

> "The country has moved from a long-standing pattern of emigration to a new pattern of relatively strong immigration and it is very unlikely that this will be reversed to any substantial degree over the [2006-2036] period" (p. 17-18).

Table 1 below clearly shows the increase in the number of immigrants arriving in Ireland, and the corresponding decrease in the number of those emigrating. As a consequence of these changed migration patterns, the population grew throughout the 1990s. The 2002 census recorded a population of 3.92 million, the highest figure since 1871 (CSO, 2004, p. 7).

[6] The Celtic Tiger is a nickname used to refer to the Republic of Ireland during its period of rapid economic growth between the 1990s and 2001 or 2002. The nickname derived from a similar phrase used to describe the East Asian economies – 'the East Asian Tigers' – during a comparable period of economic growth in that region between the 1960s and the 1990s.

Table 1: Estimated Migration 1995-2004

Year ending April	Out-migration	In-migration	Net migration
1995	33.1	31.2	-1.9
1996	31.2	39.2	8.0
1997	25.3	44.5	19.2
1998	28.6	46.0	17.4
1999	31.5	48.9	17.4
2000	26.6	52.6	26.0
2001	26.2	59.0	32.8
2002	25.6	66.9	41.3
2003	20.7	50.5	29.8
2004	18.4	50.1	31.6

Source: CSO, Population and Labour Force Projections, 2006-2036

In CSO statistics – such as those above - the term 'immigration' refers to persons coming to Ireland from another country for the purposes of taking up residence for over one year.[7] Therefore, these previously mentioned figures include people coming to Ireland for many purposes, including study, employment and retirement, as well as people who come here as asylum seekers.[8] Contrary to popular belief in Ireland, the majority of those who come to live in Ireland are not asylum seekers. Mac Éinrí, writing in 2001, estimated that asylum-seekers probably constitute no more than 10% of all foreign immigrants to Ireland since 1995. However, given that the number of people seeking asylum has decreased significantly in recent years and that the number of economic migrants arriving in Ireland has increased – particularly since the expansion of the EU on May 1st, 2004 - it

[7] "Appendices – Appendix 1: Definitions" (online). Available at: http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/other_releases/2003/progress/indicatorsreportpart3.pdf (Accessed 17 June 2006)

[8] Immigrants also include Irish people returning home having lived abroad.

is likely that the percentage represented by asylum seekers is now significantly less than Mac Éinrí's 10% estimation.

Whilst Ireland's history of emigration since famine times reflects the history of many of the immigrants arriving in Ireland since the 1990s, in many respects it seems that "neither the memory nor the legacy of Irish emigration seems to inform attitudes towards contemporary immigrants in Ireland" (Boucher, 2004, p. 185). Irish economic emigrants were often not welcomed or treated well in the past (Schlesinger, 1992; Coogan, 2002), and were frequently labelled "dirty, lazy, [or] feckless" (Ruane, 2000) by their host populations. In the 1950s and 1960s, 'No Irish' signs were often displayed in UK cities such as London and Birmingham. More recently, from their survey of Irish community groups and their interviews with members of the Irish-born population in Britain, Hickman & Walter (1997) found a "widespread, and almost completely unquestioned, acceptance of anti Irish racism in British society" (p. 234). However, it seems that many immigrants living in Ireland are now experiencing the kind of treatment experienced by Irish emigrants in the past. Whilst the response of the Irish population to the arrival of significant numbers of immigrant groups is "ambiguous, complex, and varied" (Torode et al., 2001, p. 59), it is frequently suggested that these immigrants – including asylum seekers and refugees - often experience difficulties integrating or feeling accepted by Irish people, and that racism and discrimination abound. Several research studies support this contention. For instance, in a survey questionnaire of 121 people of minority ethnicity – both adults and under-18s – Casey and O'Connell (2000), reported that 64.2% of the participants had experienced 'outright racist insults'. Galvin (2000), writing in relation to a study conducted with 28 asylum seekers of different nationalities, argues that asylum seekers themselves are conscious of Ireland's colonial past and struggle for economic development, and see this as something they have in common with Irish people. The participants in her study expected that the causes of their exile would be understood and appreciated, given Ireland's history of emigration, and they felt frustrated and alienated due to the "perceived contradiction between Ireland's own past history and its current ambivalent response to those seeking refuge" (p. 211). Elsewhere, commenting on one Irish MEP's turn-of-the-century assertion that racism was "endemic" in Dublin,[9] Ferriter (2004) suggests that the existence of racism towards those of different races was "particularly ironic for a country that prided itself on its empathy with the Third World and had such a long history of emigration" (p. 726).[10]

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[9] Comments made by Mr Niall Andrews Fianna Fáil MEP in *The Irish Time*s, 26 Feb 2000.

[10] Yet although it was during the last decade of the twentieth century that significant attention was drawn to the racist attitudes of Irish people, "racism and multi-ethnicity [had] been a reality in Ireland long before panics created by the arrival of a relatively small number of asylum seekers in the 1990s" (Lentin, 2001). Irish Travellers had long been subjected to racism from the majority population. Mac Gréil's seminal work in

In summary, migration has had an important influence on Irish population trends in recent centuries. Traditionally, Ireland has lost a large number of people through emigration out of the country. However, in recent years significant numbers of immigrants – including asylum seekers - have arrived in Ireland. The response of the Irish population to these changed trends has not always been a positive one, with immigrants frequently experiencing racism, discrimination, and difficulties integrating. Refugee policy has developed within this context.

The Development of Refugee Policy

Just as the general public in Ireland did not seem to learn from the legacy of emigration, neither was there any "policy learning" (Boucher, 2004, p. 185) by the Irish State. It is evident that throughout the twentieth century the Irish State has acted as a "reluctant host" (Fanning, 2000a) of refugee and asylum seeking people. Ward (1999) highlights the importance of examining the historical development of State policies towards refugees and asylum seekers in looking at the situation as it is today. She divides the State's response into three distinctive periods between 1922 and 1996:

- *Historical closure (1922-1956):* During this time, Irish migration policies depicted the world in terms of two categories of people – 'citizens' and 'aliens'. Keogh (1998) reports that the necessary legislation was in place in the 1930s "to control, and prevent where desirable, an influx of aliens who were likely to wish to become permanent residents" (p. 177).[11] Both Ward (1999) and Keogh (1998) suggest that the Irish government responded in a very minimal way to the plight of millions of people affected by World War II. The policy of 'closure' was maintained with the government citing high unemployment rates and high levels of out-migration as evidence for its inability to shelter refugees (Ward, 1999). Between 1939 and 1945, only 588 'aliens' were allowed enter Ireland.[12] These were mainly from Austria and Germany. In the years following World War II, a small number of refugees were permitted to enter the State, their acceptance being subject to very specific criteria (Ward, 1999). A large proportion of these refugees were children, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

1977, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland,* showed the existence of a high and severe degree of racial prejudice.

[11] This legislation comprised of the Nationality and Citizens Act and the Aliens Act, which were both introduced by the Fianna Fáil government of 1935. The Aliens Act was amended in 1946 and in 1975, and the amended act, along with details of a letter from the Department of Justice to UNHCR in 1985, provided the legal framework for State policy until the Refugee Act 1996 was implemented (Ward, 1999).

[12] British evacuees are not included in these figures as they did not come under the ambit of the Alien's Act (Ward, 1999).

- *Reluctant participation in refugee regimes (1956-1980):* Ward (1999) argues that between 1956 and the 1980s the government reluctantly participated in refugee regimes. Whilst the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was ratified by the Irish Government in 1956, less than 1,500 programme refugees were admitted in the forty years subsequent to the ratification (Fanning, 2000a). These included small groups of Hungarians[13], Chileans, Vietnamese, and Iranian Bahá'is (see *Table 2* below). These groups were largely accepted as a result of pressure from the UNHCR, as well as from private citizens and church organisations in Ireland, thus suggesting the 'reluctant' attitude of the government. In general, little understanding was shown for the needs of these groups, and the State effectively 'devolved' its responsibility for the refugees to civil society (Ward, 1999, p. 44; Fanning, 2000a).[14] Few of the Hungarian and Chilean refugees remained in Ireland in the long term. However, the Vietnamese and Iranian Bahá'is stayed in Ireland and became naturalised as Irish citizens (Ward, 1999).

- *Toward responsible participation (1980s-1996):* From the 1980s onwards the State began to move towards responsible participation in international regimes concerning both refugees and asylum seekers (Ward, 1999). To a large extent this was as a result of pressure from the EU.[15] In 1991 the Refugee Agency was set up by the State. The agency was responsible for coordinating the admission and resettlement of Convention refugees.[16] When the Bosnian programme refugees arrived in 1992 they benefited from a coherent reception and resettlement programme, the first of its kind of be set up and coordinated by a State body. Housing in the private rented sector was provided, as were English classes and specialised medical care. The Bosnians also benefited from the popular sympathy of the nation (Ward, 1999). Although Ward (1999) describes the Bosnian resettlement programme as symbolising "a long-awaited coming of age of the Irish State in its responsibilities to Convention refugees" (p. 47), Fanning (2000b) refers to the "limited

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[13] For further details of the Irish government's response to the Hungarian refugees, see Ward (1996) as well as a feature article in The Irish Times on October 14th 2006, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the Hungarian refugees (Sheridan, 2006).

[14] Since the foundation of the State, it has been common for the Irish Government to devolve State responsibilities to civil and religious organisations and individuals. This was particularly the case within the education sector, where most schools were run (and controlled) by the church rather than by the State (Ferriter, 2004; Whyte, 1980).

[15] The Schengen Agreement setting out a common EU policy on migrants, and the Dublin Convention, which agreed arrangements for establishing responsibility for asylum seekers who had moved from one EU country to another, came into force during this period, in 1985 and 1997 respectively (Fanning, 2000).

[16] Therefore, the Refugee Agency had responsibility for the resettlement of programme refugees and refugees who had been granted refugee status under the application process. Its remit did not extend to those seeking asylum (Ward, 1999).

success" (p. 96) of the programme, as evidenced by various pieces of research. For example, studies by Bradley (1999) and by O'Regan (1998) found that Bosnians experienced disproportionately high rates of unemployment. The study by O'Regan (1998) also found that 60.81% of Bosnian participants did not feel that they belonged to the community in which they lived, although this percentage changed depending on the length of time they had spent in the country.

While the late 1990s saw the arrival for the first time of significant numbers of people seeking asylum independently, the Irish government – under the auspices of the Refugee Agency and, subsequently, the Reception and Integration Agency[17] - continued to admit programme refugees into the country (see *Table 2* below). They included a relatively large group of Kosovar refugees who arrived between 1999 and 2000. In the first decades of the 21st century, the government admitted a quota of ten family units per year, including refugees of Iraqi, Chechen, Afghani, Somali, and Palestinian origin. The quota was increased to 200 people in 2005. One hundred and seventy-nine Iranian Kurds are expected to arrive in 2006, shortly after the time of writing (June 2006). The RIA has stated that, in general, unaccompanied minors are not included in their resettlement programme.[18]

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[17] The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) was established in 2001, when the Directorate of Asylum Support Services and the Refugee Agency of the Department of Foreign Affairs were merged. According to the RIA's website, the agency is responsible, amongst other things, "for coordinating the provision of services to both asylum seekers and refugees, coordinating the implementation of integration policy for all refugees and persons granted leave to remain in the State and responding to crisis situations which result in large numbers of refugees arriving in Ireland within a short period of time" (www.ria.gov.ie). In 2005 Ireland's Minister for Justice, Equality, and Law Reform announced the establishment of the Irish Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INIS), as a 'one stop shop' for migrants. RIA now forms a part of INIS.

[18] An exception was made with regard to the Bosnian group admitted in the 1990s. They included two unaccompanied minors – one male and one female, who were both 17 years old. The female was placed in foster care. The male was placed in a reception centre but was linked with a social worker and had his own individual resettlement officer, for the short period until he reached his eighteenth birthday (email communication with the RIA, 3/7/2006).

Table 2: Overview of Persons Admitted Under Government Programmes

Year of Arrival	Nos. Admitted	Country of Origin
1956	530	Hungary
1973	120	Chile
1979-2000	803	Vietnam – includes initial intake and persons admitted under family reunification.
1985	26	Iran
1992-2000	1341	Former Yugoslavia (Bosnia) – includes initial intake and persons admitted under family reunification.
1999-2000	1063	Kosovo – includes persons admitted under family reunification.
2000-2004	223	Resettlement quota, from various countries. No family reunification, births or repatriation figures are included.
2005	116	Resettlement quota – from various countries. No family reunification, births or repatriation figures are included.

Source: The Reception and Integration Agency[19]

In an 'age of migration' (Castles & Miller, 1998), it was inevitable that a wave of independent migration would hit Ireland and as Cullen (2000) states, "the only curiosity is that it caught so

[19] "Integration: Programme Refugees" (online). Available at: www.ria.gov.ie/integration/programm_refugees (Accessed 16 June 2006).

many people by surprise" (p. 16). Independent asylum applications were extremely low up until the mid 1990s. On average, 38 applications for refugee status were made annually between 1987 and 1993 (Ward, 1996). These figures rose rapidly from 1994 onwards, reaching a peak of 11, 634 applications in 2002 (Office of the Refugee Application Commissioner,[20] 2004). Frequently, politicians, officials, the media, and the general public seemed to view the growing number of asylum seekers coming to Ireland as a crisis. Calamitous imagery was used (Cullen, 2000) – people were 'flooding' into Ireland (King, 1999).[21]

The reasons for the rapid rise in individuals and families seeking asylum have been attributed to a number of factors, by a variety of authors. These factors are, amongst others: the fact that there are more refugees in the world today than ever before; the resurgence of the Irish economy and the creation of 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland; the introduction of curbs on immigration in other EU countries (Toner, 1998; Cullen, 2000); the fact that the welfare entitlements in Ireland in the mid-1990's were more generous than in some other EU countries (Toner, 1998; Ward, 1999); increased globalisation and increased use and availability of the Internet (Toner, 1998) and the global changes brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union (Ward, 1999). However, such reasons should be viewed with caution because, as Ward (1999) asserts, they imply "an element of calculation available to the claimant that is very often non-existent" (p. 45).

In any case, the government was not prepared for the huge increase in the numbers of people arriving. The procedures in place at the time were inadequate and policy development was extremely slow. The Refugee Act, 1996 was enacted 40 years after the government ratified the 1951 Convention. It was widely viewed as a progressive piece of legislation which drew considerably on international best practice and addressed issues such as rights to health care, residence, and social welfare, and access to the courts (Cullen, 2000). It also broadened the definition of a refugee to include those persecuted on grounds of gender and sexual orientation (Fanning, 2000). However, it was not fully implemented until November 2000 (Smyth & Whyte, 2005), perhaps again showing the government as 'reluctant hosts' of those seeking protection (Fanning, 2000). The delayed implementation facilitated the government to make restrictive amendments to the Act, such as the strengthening of the power of immigration officers to decide

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[20] The Office of the Refugee Application Commissioner will henceforth be referred to as ORAC. The ORAC was established under the 1996 Refugee Act (as amended). It has responsibility for investigating each asylum application that is made within the State and for making recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality, and Law Reform.

[21] In an interesting paper, entitled "Porous nation: from Ireland's 'haemorrhage' to immigrant inundation", King (1999) explores the evolution and transformation of metaphors of fluidity in describing outward migration from famine times, and, more recently, inward migration.

whether 'aliens' should be allowed to enter Ireland (Fanning, 2000).[22] The delay also meant that asylum seekers were left in a legal limbo. They awaited the results of their asylum claims, sometimes for a number of years, as the State attempted to play catch-up in terms of developing policy.

Yet, Fraser (2003) describes Ireland as having travelled a "tremendous distance in terms of establishing a credible asylum system" (p. 124). In recent years, the Refugee Act 1996 has been amended to a significant extent by the Immigration Act 1999, the Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act 2000, the Immigration Act 2003, and the Immigration Act 2004. Nonetheless, the asylum system continues to be criticised, by a range of individuals and groups. For instance, the Irish Refugee Council (IRC) has been critical of the Immigration Act, 2003. Whilst they welcome the fact that many of the new procedures ensure a speedier processing of asylum claims, many of these procedures - such as the designation of some countries of origin as 'safe countries' and the 'fast-tracking' of applications from these places - are said to be based on a "'culture of disbelief' whereby most asylum seekers are presumed to be abusing the system" (IRC, 2003, p. 1). Likewise, Cullen (2000) has been critical of the operation of asylum law in Ireland:

> "The Department [of Justice] strictly observes the Geneva Convention, but its interpretation of international human rights instruments could be said to be narrow and minimalist. It is particularly concerned not to create any 'pull factors' for non-EU immigrants, and slavishly follows developments in Britain to ensure this. Lawyers and other observers say the department behaves 'correctly' in legal terms in investigating applications for asylum. However, a recurring complaint made by asylum applicants to one group of researchers was that department interviewers appeared to be working on the basis of 'guilty until proved innocent' with interviews being conducted in an atmosphere of 'disbelief' (Toner, 1998, p. 7)" (p. 27-28).

Other critics have focused on policies that treat asylum seekers in a discriminatory way and that hinder an asylum seeker's ability to integrate. Fraser (2003) asserts that the challenge of integration exists whilst there is still a belief amongst some that 'floods' of asylum seekers are coming to Ireland, that everyone who looks 'different' is an asylum seeker, and that asylum seekers get free mobile phones and cars. In reality, the situation is of course a lot different: of the twelve million refugees that are in the world, Europe hosts 2.2 million refugees and Ireland hosts approximately 5,400 of these (Fraser, 2003).[23] Asylum seekers in Ireland do not have a right to work and are not entitled to the normal social welfare payments that Irish people receive. Under the Direct Provision

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[22] In relation to the Department of Justice, Cullen (2000) has stated: "The mentality underlying its primary responsibility, that of policing and maintaining security in the State, seeps into dealings with asylum-seekers, where officials sometimes give the impression that they are the wardens fending off 'the barbarians at the gate' " (p. 27).

[23] Cullen (2000) describes the number of asylum seekers arriving in Ireland as a mere "drop in the ocean" when compared to the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees throughout the world.

and Dispersal system, which became official government policy in April 2000 (Quinn & Hughes, 2005), the basic welfare needs of asylum seekers are met by accommodating them in centres where they are provided with three meals a day and a weekly allowance of €19.10 for each adult and €9.60 for each child dependent.[24] The scheme has been severely criticised on grounds that it is discriminatory, does not appear to have been poverty-proofed in line with the principles of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (2002), and is detrimental to human rights (Edmond, 2003). A study of asylum seeking children living in direct provision called for the abolition of direct provision on grounds that these children and their families live in extreme poverty and social exclusion (Fanning et al., 2001).[25] Thus, whilst the government's policy document *Integration: A two way process* (1999), is, according to Fraser (2003), an important contribution towards the development of integration, many of the government's present policies – including Direct Provision - are exclusionary and impede the integration process. Yet, Fraser (2003) places Ireland's policies within a comparative framework, by suggesting that policies are worse elsewhere:

> "Ireland has maintained high protection standards, by virtually shunning the practice of detention, by sensitising staff to the needs of children and women, including the determination of cases involving gender-related persecution" (p. 124).

In summary, the dominant suggestion within the Irish refugee literature is that the Irish Government has reluctantly hosted refugees. Since the foundation of the State, small groups of programme refugees have been allowed entry into Ireland. In more recent years, significant numbers of asylum seekers have arrived independently, and their arrival has signalled the development of policy in the asylum seeking area. Although Irish protection standards have been compared favourably with those of other European countries (Fraser, 2003), academics and advocacy groups have nonetheless continued to be critical of the State's responses to asylum seekers. The situation has been similar as regards unaccompanied minors.

Unaccompanied Minors in the Irish Context

'Sending' and 'Receiving' Unaccompanied Children: The Historical Context

Just as the Irish State did not foresee that an increased number of adult asylum seekers would begin arriving in Ireland, the arrival of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors was also unanticipated. This is somewhat surprising, as the movement of children across the globe to countries offering

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[24] It seems that the primary motivation for introducing this system was to follow the scheme which was to be implemented in the UK in April 2000 thus ensuring that the Irish welfare system did not act as a pull factor for asylum seekers (Edmond, 2003).

[25] Since the introduction of the policy, the Direct Provision rates of payment have never been increased, despite repeated calls from the Irish Refugee Council and other organisations for the payments to be revised (Irish Refugee Council, 2005).

protection and/or a better future is by no means a new phenomenon. Steinbock (1996) reminds us of stories in Western literature where children are sent to safety. For instance, Moses was set adrift on a river by his mother who wished to save him from the killing of all Hebrew male children.[26] More recently, Superman was sent to Earth in a rocket by his parents when the planet on which he was born, Krypton, was in danger.[27] As argued by Ressler et al. (1988), children have become separated from their families in practically every war, famine, and natural disaster. In the twentieth century they cite examples of the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the Hungarian revolt, the Nigerian Civil War, and the Vietnam War, amongst others. Added to these wars, are situations of famine such as in Ethiopia in the 1980s, or natural disasters such as the Asian tsunami in 2004. Usually these children have remained in their own countries unaccompanied by their parents or they have travelled to neighbouring countries, but sometimes, and increasingly, they have gone to countries further afield to seek safety and protection.[28] [29]

As regards the movement of unaccompanied children within an Irish context, Ireland, like many other countries, has acted as both a 'sending country' and as a 'receiving country'. [30] [31] Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the majority of Irish emigrants have been young, mainly under 25 years of age (Akenson, 1993; Travers, 1995). Many have left, without family members, before reaching the age of 18. Miller et al. (1995) describe how young Irish women migrated to America between 1815 and 1920 in search of "love and liberty" (p. 41), often obtaining work as domestic servants. In seven volumes of *The Famine Immigrants,* Glazier & Tepper (1983) provide a list of Irish immigrants arriving at the port of New York between 1846 and 1851. The list includes the names of immigrants, their ages and occupations, and their dates of arrival. Family members are grouped together. The list includes many children under the age of 18 who are listed on their own, or in

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[26] Referenced by Steinbock as: Exodus 1-2.

[27] Referenced by Steinbock as: DC Comics, *Superman From the Thirties to the Eighties 308-19* (Crown Publishers, New York, 1983).

[28] The increasing tendency of unaccompanied minors, and indeed of adult refugees, to travel longer distances in their search for safety may reflect the cheaper cost of air travel as well as easier methods of communication. Both of these factors make Ireland and other European countries physically and psychologically more accessible to those living in other continents (Joly, 1996).

[29] A further elaboration of why unaccompanied children come to Western European countries, including Ireland, will be included in the next chapter.

[30] For instance, the United Kingdom offered refuge to unaccompanied children before World War II, but during the war British children were also sent to refuge in other areas of the United Kingdom as well as to other countries such as the United States and Canada (Ressler et al., 1988).

[31] As stated previously in relation to definitions, unaccompanied minors are not necessarily asylum seekers. Thus, children who left Ireland without their parents, in order to get employment abroad, or to flee from conditions of poverty or famine, can be considered 'unaccompanied children'.

sibling groups, thus suggesting their arrival without parents or adult relatives.[32] At that time also, schemes were implemented for the emigration of young female orphans, often to Australia (McLoughlin, 1995). In post-famine times, children and teenagers also emigrated alone. For instance, in 1892, Annie Moore, a 15 year old girl from Ireland, became the first immigrant to set foot on Ellis Island. She had spent 12 days travelling to the United States in the company of her two younger brothers, but unaccompanied by any adult carers. Her parents were in the United States already, having previously emigrated there for a better life, and Annie and her brothers were subsequently reunited with them following a short period spent on Ellis Island, where the Federal Immigration Station was located.[33] More recently, during times of huge unemployment in Ireland in the twentieth century, such as in the 1980s, it was common for Irish teenagers – both male and female - to travel to the UK and to the United States to seek employment. Thus, during famine times and beyond, unaccompanied children left Ireland in order to escape poverty, famine, and unemployment, and in the hope of establishing a better future for themselves.

In terms of acting as a receiving country, it is commonly believed by practitioners, policy makers, researchers, and the general public that unaccompanied minors did not arrive in Ireland until the mid-1990s. However, this was not the case. Whilst the evidence suggests that children did not arrive independently for the purpose of seeking asylum until the last decade of the twentieth century, groups of unaccompanied refugee children had been permitted to enter the State prior to that time, particularly during World War II and its aftermath. Several authors have made reference to these children (e.g. Keogh, 1998; Molohan, 1999).[34] It seems that in the 1940's the Government's attitude towards refugee children was quite liberal, at least in comparison to its attitude towards adults. Keogh (1998) reports that offers were made by the then Taoiseach,[35] Éamonn de Valera, to admit groups of children for periods of rest and recuperation. Agreements were reached to allow 500 French children, 500 Jewish children, and an unspecified number of Dutch children to come to Ireland. However, the war itself hampered efforts to bring these children to Ireland and meant that the majority of them never actually arrived (Keogh, 1998). Yet a disproportionate number of non-Irish children came to Ireland as compared with adults. For the period 1 January 1946 to mid-1947, the number of 'non-nationals' registered under the Aliens

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[32] It may have been the case that some of these children travelled alone but were then reunited with family members upon arrival in the United States.

[33] 'Loving and Leaving Ireland' (online). Available at: www.coedu.usf.edu/culture/Story/Story_Ireland.htm (Accessed on 24 June 2006).

[34] Although these writers did not use terms such as 'unaccompanied children/minors' or 'separated children', it is clear that the children they describe fit into these categories. They came to Ireland from another country, without their parents, in order to seek safety or a better life.

[35] 'Taoiseach' is the official title of the prime minister of Ireland. It is the Irish word for 'chief' or 'ruler'.

Order (1946)[36] was 1,000.[37] Four hundred and sixty-two of these 'aliens' – almost half - were children, mainly of German origin (Keogh, 1998, p. 209). The majority of the children were brought in by the Irish Red Cross, under Operation Shamrock, following lobbying of the government by the Irish Red Cross and the Save the German Children Society. The children were aged between 3 and 15 years, with the young children often being accompanied by older siblings (Molohan, 1999). The Irish Red Cross and the Save the German Children Society cooperated with one another in organising care for the children, by placing them with foster families. Thus, the involvement of non-state organisations meant that the government bore little responsibility for these unaccompanied refugee children. The majority of the children stayed in Ireland for three years but then returned to Germany, as had been the initial agreement (Molohan, 1999). It seems however, that the government of the time had been happy to allow the children to remain in Ireland, had the consent of their parents in Germany been obtained (Molohan, 1999). Apart from those children brought in as part of Operation Shamrock, some private families also organised, of their own volition, to foster orphans of the war (Keogh, 1998).[38]

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children: The Current Situation

Just as it is not possible to accurately quantify the number of refugees who flee from a particular war or natural disaster, so too it is difficult to give an exact figure for the number of children who become separated from their parents during such events. Chaos abounds, and so, usually, precise figures never become available. Understatements in relation to the figures are likely to occur (Ressler et al., 1988). This is due to a number of factors, including the fact that many children might never come to the attention of authorities or to those making the estimates. Even when the chaos of war is left behind and children reach the safety of industrialised countries, there are

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[36] Under the Aliens Act (1935), the Minister for Justice had the right to require immigrants to comply with certain regulations such as registration (Mac Éinrí, 2001) The Aliens Order (1946) comprised further amendments to the Act.

[37] This figure excludes tourists and aliens who were exempted (Keogh, 1998).

[38] Yet, the government did not always adopt a more liberal stance with regard to admitting refugee children. Instead, the government displayed reluctance to host certain groups of children. In 1946, when the Irish government was asked to admit 100 orphaned Jewish children, the request was initially refused by the Department of Justice, on the grounds that it might lead to a rise in anti-Semitism (Keogh, 1998). The Department of Justice commented at the time that because Jews do not assimilate they are a "potential irritant in the body politic" (Memo, Department of Justice. 25 October 1946. NA D/T S11007 A., cited in Ward, 1996, p. 133). However, following a further request from the chief rabbi of Palestine, Mr Isaac Herzog, as well as reassurances that the children would only remain in Ireland temporarily and that Great Britain's Religious Emergency Council would incur all the costs associated with the children, the Taoiseach agreed to admit the orphans (Keogh, 1998). In May 1948, 100 children arrived in Ireland, most of whom were accommodated in Clonyn Castle in Co. Meath. According to two of these 'children', Alfred Kahan and Murray A. Lynn, who returned to Ireland on a visit in 2000, almost all of the Clonyn Castle Children had emigrated and resettled in different corners of the world within two years of their arrival in Ireland (letter to *The Irish Times*, May 04, 2000). Thus, their residence here was indeed only temporary.

difficulties in compiling accurate statistics. UNHCR (2004) suggest a number of reasons for these difficulties. Firstly, different countries define the terms 'unaccompanied minors' and 'separated children' in different ways.[39] Secondly, following the child's initial application, some countries update their statistics whilst others do not. Thirdly, the quality of registration procedures for unaccompanied and separated children varies from country to country (UNHCR, 2004). Nonetheless, the UNHCR provides us with some statistics that indicate the levels and trends of unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum in industrialized countries. The statistics show that in 2003 approximately 12,800 unaccompanied and separated children applied for asylum in 28 industrialized countries.[40] In that year, the countries with the highest number of applications were as follows: The United Kingdom (2,800),[41] Austria (2,050), Switzerland (1,330), and the Netherlands (1,220). In 2003, children lodged about 4% of the 303,400 new asylum applications submitted in the 28 countries (UNHCR, 2004, p. 2-4). As regards trends, the figures show that the number of unaccompanied and separated children applying for asylum peaked in 2001.[42]

The first unaccompanied minor to arrive independently in Ireland for the purpose of seeking asylum came in 1996 (Mac Neice & Almirall, 1999). In the subsequent years, there was an initial sharp increase in the number of children arriving (up until 2001), followed by a more gradual decrease thereafter. These trends are depicted in *Figure 2* (below) which charts the total number of children presenting to the Health Service Executive - East Coast Area (HSE – ECA)[43] since 1997, along with the number placed in care and the number reunited with family members.[44]

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[39] For instance, some countries include young people who are older than 18 in their statistics of unaccompanied and separated children (e.g. Holland), whilst others only include children up to the age of 16 (e.g. Germany).

[40] It should be noted that some countries that have a large number of asylum applications were not included in this UNHCR report because data was not available, or it was incomplete or not comparable enough. These countries were the United States, Canada, Australia, France and Italy (UNHCR, 2004).

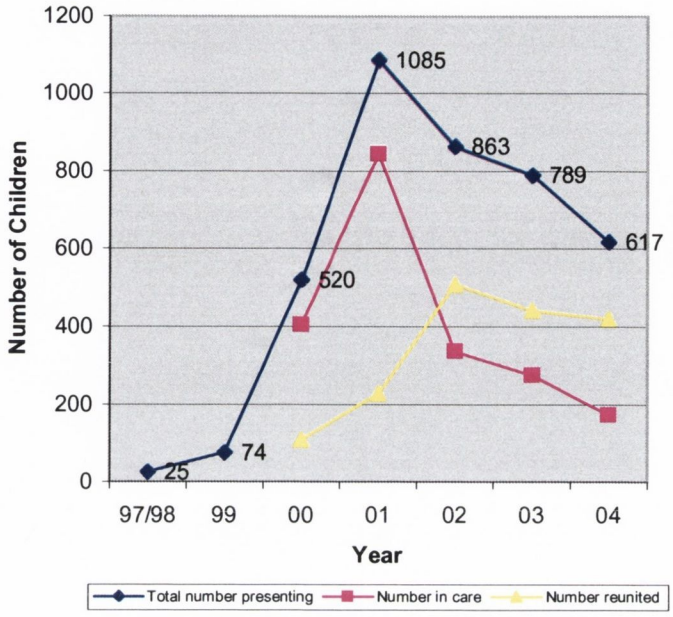
[41] These figures for the United Kingdom refer to the number of asylum cases. However, the average number of persons per case in relation to unaccompanied and separated children is assumed to be quite low (UNHCR, 2004).

[42] The 2001 peak refers to the 21 countries where comparable data was available throughout the period 2000-2003.

[43] The Health Service Executive (HSE) is the single body responsible for managing Ireland's public health and social services. It was established on January 1st, 2005, and replaced the Health Boards and a range of other statutory agencies. The HSE has statutory responsibility for children and young people in the care of the State. The area formerly known as the East Coast Area Health Board is referred to in this thesis as the HSE (East Coast Area (ECA)). This is the area that serves most of the unaccompanied minors and separated children arriving in Ireland. Under the new structures it is now encompassed by the HSE (Dublin Mid-Leinster) region.

[44] As Figure 1.2 indicates, a large percentage of separated children who arrived in Ireland in recent years were subsequently reunited with parents or extended family members who are already residing in the State. For instance, 45% of children who presented to the HSE (ECA) between January 2000 and March 2005 were

Figure 2: Number of children presenting to the HSE -ECA, number placed in care, and number reunited with family members already living in Ireland, 1997/1998-2004



Source: Derived from internal HSE data

Interestingly, in analysing *Figure 2,* if one adds the number placed in care to the number reunited, the total will not equal the total number of children presenting to the HSE. This is largely as a result of children disappearing or 'going missing'. This is an issue of increasing concern in recent years. Veale et al. (2003) refer to several possibilities for children going missing. These include that children may have been informally reunited with family members already living in the country or that the pressure of the asylum process, their living situations, and their lack of ongoing support, caused them to drop out of the process. More worryingly is the concern that some of these children were being put into domestic labour, forced into criminal activity or forced into the sex industry. Carl O'Brien of the Irish Times reported in June 2005 that more than 250 separated children seeking asylum had gone missing in the previous 4 years (O'Brien, 2005).

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reunited with family rather than placed in care. Under the *SCEP Statement's* definition of a separated child, those children who are reunited with extended family still count as separated children, and thus the Statement of Good Practice continues to apply to them. In Ireland, reunification assessments are quite cursory and families are rarely followed up or supported by social services after the separated child is reunited. This has led to concern for the well-being of children who have been reunified (Crowley, 2002; Conroy, 2003; Veale et al., 2003; Powell, 2004). A paper by Sunniva Mc Donagh (2005), a former member of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, gives examples of children whom the author had come across who had been reunited "with most unsatisfactory persons as guardians" (p. 46). However, as has been stated previously, because the focus of this study is on separated children who have not been reunited with their families (termed 'unaccompanied minors' in this study), little reference will be made to those who have been reunited.

Overall, the trends shown in *Figure 2* broadly mirror international patterns relating to asylum applications from unaccompanied minors, with numbers peaking in 2001 (UNHCR, 2004). In Ireland, the percentage of total asylum applications lodged by unaccompanied and separated children has tended to be lower that in other industrialised countries (UNHCR, 2004). However, in 2001, almost 6% of asylum applications made in Ireland were from unaccompanied and separated children, a percentage which is above the average of 4% found by the UNHCR. It is possible that this larger percentage of asylum applications coming from unaccompanied and separated children was partially as a result of problems with age assessment and of the tendency of some adults to apply for asylum as 'children' at that time.[45]

Although most unaccompanied minors living in Ireland live in the Dublin area, there are a small number of young people living in other parts of the country.[46] However, statistics regarding the number of unaccompanied minors living in Ireland as a whole are unclear. On an annual basis, the Department of Health and Children (DOHC) analyses statistics provided by the various HSE/Health Board areas. In its analysis of the 2004 statistics, the DOHC gave the following information regarding the number of unaccompanied minors in the care of the State on the 31st of December of that year (see Table 3):

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[45] UNHCR (2004) acknowledge the difficulty in determining the age of applicants. In 2001, a huge incentive existed in Ireland for adults to apply as children as it meant that they would receive more support, be allowed stayed in Dublin instead of being dispersed, and be entitled to full social welfare of IR£118 per week instead of living in direct provision centres. This led to concerns that adults were being placed in the same hostels as children, and sometimes sharing rooms with them. The 'Greulich-Pyle' method of age assessment was used for short period of time by ORAC, subsequent to 2001. The method involved taking x-rays of the growing hand and wrist to determine the approximate age of an applicant. However, the use of this method was then stopped as it was not deemed appropriate for use with multi-ethnic groups (Veale et al., 2003). UNHCR (2004) also state that such procedures "cannot be considered as absolutely conclusive and thus bear a certain level of uncertainty" (p. 3).

[46] Unaccompanied children living outside main points of entry in the country (airports, ports, etc), such as those living in Galway, are often young people who, upon arrival in Ireland, were treated as adults and dispersed to live in Direct Provision accommodation. However, they may then have been reassessed and accepted as 'unaccompanied children' by ORAC but remained living in the area where they were first placed.

Table 3: Total Number of Unaccompanied Minors in the care of Each Health Board on 31st December 2004

HEALTH BOARD[47]	NO. OF CHILDREN
ERHA	185
MHB	0
MWHB	4
NEHB	0
NWHB	0
SEHB	0
SHB	2
WHB	0
NATIONAL	191

Source: DOHC's Preliminary Analysis of Child Care Interim Dataset of 2004.

These DOHC figures give us a sense of the numbers of unaccompanied minors living in Ireland in 2004 and of their distribution throughout the country. It is clear that the vast majority of these young people lived in the Dublin area and received services from the HSE (ECA) in the former ERHA. However, these statistics only take into account those unaccompanied minors who were in the care of the Health Boards, either under Section 18 or Section 4 of the Child Care Act.[48] The

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[47] These statistics refer to the HSE at a time when it was still called the Health Board. Therefore, the former names of the different areas are used. The abbreviations stand for the various former Health Boards are as follows: Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA) (encompassing the East Coast Area Health Board), Midlands Health Board (MHB), Mid Western Health Board (MWHB), North Eastern Health Board (NEHB), North Western Health Board (NEHB), North Western Health Board (NWHB), South Eastern Health Board (SEHB), Southern Health Board (SHB), and Western Health Board (WHB). For the sake of consistency these former names are generally used throughout this chapter.

[48] Section 18 allows the HSE/Health Board to apply to the courts for a care order in relation to a particular child, and, upon granting of such an order, to take the child into its care. Section 4 concerns voluntary care. It places a duty on the HSE/Health Board to take a child into care in circumstances where it is not against the wishes of a parent, if he or she needs care or protection and would not otherwise receive it.

figures do not accurately reflect the number of unaccompanied minors who were receiving services from the Health Boards on the 31st of December 2004, as they do not include children who were dealt with under Section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991.[49] For instance, the table indicates that the SHB had 2 unaccompanied minors in its care on that date. However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the SHB usually does not take unaccompanied minors into its care. Instead, it accommodates them and provides them with services under Section 5. Thus, the DOHC's statistics under-represent the total number of children being accommodated by the HSE/Health Boards.[50]

The majority of unaccompanied minors who arrive in Ireland and who continue to receive services from the HSE/Health Board (rather than being reunited) are aged between 14 and 18 years (Conroy & Fitzgerald, 2005). As regards nationality, data from ORAC suggests that unaccompanied minors have come to Ireland from over 60 different countries in recent years. *Table 4* below summarises the nationalities of unaccompanied minors who lodged asylum claims between 2001 and 2003 and between 2004 and 2006.[51] The table shows that Nigerians represent the largest nationality of unaccompanied minors in Ireland, something which is consistent with data in relation to adult asylum seekers. In the cases of both adults and unaccompanied minors, Nigerians account for a higher percentage of asylum seekers in Ireland that they do in other European countries. For example, whilst Nigerians accounted for 39.2% of asylum applications lodged by unaccompanied minors in Ireland between 2001 and 2003, the corresponding figure for Europe as a whole is only 3% (UNHCR, 2004). In actual numerical terms, of the 39, 817 applications for asylum made by unaccompanied and separated children in Europe between 2001 and 2003, 1, 107 were made by Nigerians (UNHCR, 2004). Four hundred and fifty four – or 41% - of these applications were made

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[49] Section 5 places a duty on the HSE/Health Board to provide suitable accommodation for children who appear to be homeless, but does not require the child to be taken into care (Law Reform Commission, 2006).

[50] Even in terms of providing figures on the number of unaccompanied minors in the care of the HSE/Health Boards, the DOHC's statistics do not appear to be entirely accurate. For instance, whilst the figures in *Table 3* suggest that no unaccompanied minors were in the care of the WHB on 31st December 2004, my own contact with the WHB suggests that 2 unaccompanied minors were in its care on that date. It is unclear as to why this discrepancy exists. In addition, other unaccompanied minors (some of whom I interviewed) were receiving services from the local child protection team although they were not in the WHB's care.

[51] In *Table 4* U/A stands for 'unavailable'. Where less than 10 unaccompanied minors from a particular nationality have applied for asylum, ORAC does not release statistics in relation to them due to confidentiality reasons. Hence, the figures for these nationalities are unavailable. Instead, the category 'other' is created. In relation to the 2001-2003 stats, nationalities in the 'other' category include the following: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Burundi, Burkina Faso, China, Colombia, Congo, Croatia, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Lesotho, Macedonia, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Yugoslavia, and Zambia. In relation to the 2004-2006 stats, nationalities in the 'other' category include the following: Angola, Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Ghana, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kazakhstan, Liberia, Libya, Lebanon, Palestine, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe.

in Ireland. In recent years the percentage of claims made by Nigerians has decreased. For instance, in the 2004-2006 period 19.2% of asylum applications by unaccompanied minors were made by Nigerians. However, this percentage is still high in comparison with other countries: in 2005 in the UK, applications made by Nigerian unaccompanied minors accounted for only 2.6% of the total applications from unaccompanied minors (Home Office, 2006).

The reasons for the high numbers of Nigerian asylum seekers in Ireland, relative to elsewhere, is unclear. Veale et al (2003) have suggested that Ireland's strong missionary links to Nigeria have had a role to play in attracting Nigerians to Ireland. These authors contend that, as a result, Nigerians often view Ireland as a place of safety and opportunity. However, Veale et al (2003) offer no evidence for this contention. To date, researchers have not examined the reasons for the prevalence of Nigerians amongst the asylum seeking population in Ireland, including the population of unaccompanied minors.

Table 4 also broadly reflects the trends depicted in *Figure 2*, where the numbers presenting to the HSE-ECA peaked in 2001 and decreased considerably since that year. Whilst 1,159 applications for asylum were lodged by unaccompanied minors in the 2001-2003 period, only 390 applications were lodged in the subsequent three year period.

Table 4: Asylum Applications Lodged by Unaccompanied Minors in Ireland, by Country of Origin, 2001-2003 and 2004-2006

Country of Origin	Total No. of Applications		Percentage	
	2001-2003	*2003-2006*	*2001-2003*	*2003-2006*
Afghanistan	0	17	0%	4.4%
Albania	23	U/A	1.9%	U/A
Algeria	17	U/A	1.5%	U/A
Angola	46	U/A	3.9%	U/A
Cameroon	35	U/A	3.0%	U/A
China	U/A	11	U/A	2.8%
DR Congo	49	13	4.2%	3.3%
Ethiopia	U/A	14	U/A	3.6%
Eritrea	U/A	12	U/A	3.1%
Georgia	33	10	2.8%	2.6%
Ghana	26	U/A	2.2%	U/A
Guinea	U/A	20	U/A	5.1%
Iran	0	10	0	2.6%
Ivory Coast	16	U/A	1.4%	U/A
Kenya	23	14	1.9%	3.6%
Kosovo	20	0	1.7%	0%
Liberia	12	U/A	1.0%	U/A
Moldova	54	10	4.7%	2.6%
Nigeria	454	75	39.2%	19.2%
Romania	62	15	5.3%	4.4%
Russia	16	U/A	1.4%	U/A
Sierra Leone	45	U/A	3.9%	U/A
Somalia	38	66	3.3%	16.9%
South Africa	24	U/A	2.1%	U/A
Sudan	U/A	14	U/A	3.6%
Uganda	11	U/A	0.9%	U/A
Zimbabwe	28	U/A	2.4%	U/A
Others	127	87	10.9%	22.3%
Total	1159	390	100%	100%

Source: Office of the Refugee Application Commissioner.

Unaccompanied Minors in Ireland: Policy and Practice

Policy development in relation to unaccompanied minors has mirrored developments in relation to adults. There appears to have been no anticipation of the arrival of these young people, or at least if the phenomenon was anticipated, the government failed to engage in advance planning as regards service delivery. This failure is evident from the fact that two key pieces of relevant Irish legislation – the Refugee Act 1996 and the Child Care Act 1991 – make, respectively, little and no reference to unaccompanied minors or separated children. Section 8 (5) of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) simply sets out the obligations of immigration officers who come into contact with an unaccompanied child and the obligations of the health board in relation to the unaccompanied child's asylum claim:

> " (a) Where it appears to an immigration officer that a child under the age of 18 years who has arrived at the frontiers of the State is not in the custody of any person, the immigration officer shall, as soon as practicable, so inform the health board in whose functional area the place of arrival is situate and thereupon the provisions of the Child Care Act, 1991, shall apply in relation to the child
>
> (b) Where it appears to the health board concerned, on the basis of information available to it, that an application for a declaration should be made by or on behalf of a child referred to in *paragraph (a),* the health board shall arrange for the appointment of an officer of the health board or such other person as it may determine to make an application on behalf of the child."[52]

The Law Reform Commission has described the above provisions as "minimalist" (2006, p. 15), given that it provides no definition of an unaccompanied minor and gives no guidance as to how the HSE should apply the Child Care Act 1991 to children who arrive unaccompanied. In the Child Care Act itself, no reference is made to any category of refugee or ethnic minority children. These legislative limitations have led to varying practices in the care of unaccompanied children amongst different HSE/Health Board Areas, as has been mentioned previously. These different practices are summarised in *Table 5* (below). In general, the ERHA uses Section 4 of the Child Care Act 1991, relating to voluntary care. In contrast, the WHB tends to use Section 18, whilst the SHB generally uses Section 5. The Mid-Western Health Board uses both Section 18 and Section 5 depending on the age of the unaccompanied minor.

[52] In addition, the subsequent sections, Section 8 (5) (c) and Section 8 (5) (d), deal with administrative issues regarding unaccompanied minors.

Table 5: Responses of Different HSE/Health Board Areas to Unaccompanied Minors

Health Board area	Section(s) of Child Care Act 1991 that are generally used	Main types of care placements used
ERHA (Specialised team of social workers/project workers)	Section 4	Hostel accommodation
Southern (Homeless children's service)	Section 5	Hostel accommodation/ Supported lodgings[53]
Western (Child protection team)	Section 18	Foster Care/ Children's residential homes
Mid-Western (Project worker)	Section 18 (for under 16's) Section 5 (for 16-18 year olds)	Foster Care/ Supported lodgings/ Children's residential homes

Many commentators have voiced concerns about the care arrangements that are in place for unaccompanied minors. For instance, the Law Reform Commission has been critical of the use of Section 5 of the Child Care Act by some areas. It has referred to the "differences in standards of treatment of Irish and asylum seeking children" (p. 157), stating:

> "Any Irish children without a *de facto* adult guardian would expect to be taken into care. This is not necessarily the position for child refugees and asylum seekers" (The Law Reform Commission, 2006, p. 158).[54]

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[53] In an information leaflet on Supported Lodgings, the HSE's Promotional Unit defines supported lodgings as follows: "Supported Lodgings is the provision of accommodation, support, and a family setting to young people who cannot live at home but who are not yet ready to live independently. Supported Lodgings is best suited to young people who are aged 15 to 18 years who are in transition from care or who are capable of living without a full range of supports."

[54] Whilst these varied practices highlight the uncoordinated care of unaccompanied minors in Ireland, it is arguable that the use of different sections of the Child Care Act should not affect the quality of care being offered to these young people. The welfare of the child should be the first and paramount consideration no matter how a child is being cared for by the HSE. In addition, it is not only unaccompanied minors who are cared for under Section 5. Irish homeless teenagers are also frequently accommodated under this section rather than being taken into the care of the HSE.

Other criticisms have focused on the services offered by the ERHA which deals with the vast majority of unaccompanied children.[55] Whilst the government's *National Children's Strategy* (2000) makes a commitment that separated children will be treated "in accordance with best international guidelines" (p. 71), commentators have suggested that this does not happen in reality. For example, existing care arrangements are in breach of both the UNHCR *Guidelines on policies and procedure in dealing with unaccompanied children seeking asylum* (1997) and the Separated Children in Europe Programme's *Statement of Good Practice* (2004), on a number of obvious grounds. Most clearly, Irish care arrangements do not seem to ensure that the best interests of unaccompanied minors are of primary consideration in all actions, a principle that underlies both the UNHCR Guidelines and the SCEP Statement. Instead, resources seem to determine the actions that are taken, with resource and personnel limitations affecting the HSE/Health Board's ability to carry out its duties (O'Brien, 2005). This means, for instance, that not all unaccompanied children are allocated a social worker (Veale et al., 2003). Secondly, it is clear that the SCEP Statement's principle of non-discrimination is being contravened. For instance, critics have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that the accommodation provided for unaccompanied minors is very different to that provided to Irish children who are in the care of the State. Unaccompanied minors usually live in largely unsupervised hostels without qualified care staff whilst Irish children are generally accommodated in registered residential homes or with approved foster families.[56] The Ombudsman for Children, in her report to the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child, referred to "the inferior care provided to separated children seeking asylum" (Ombudsman for Children, 2006). In the academic realm, Christie (2002b) has commented on the discriminatory nature of care offered to unaccompanied children suggesting that social workers are having to provide services that would be judged as "grossly inadequate for Irish children" (p. 194).[57] Hostels that cater for unaccompanied minors do not come under the remit of the Irish Social Services Inspectorate, and

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[55] In criticising the system, media reports have tended to focus on three key issues: The lack of follow-up of separated children who are reunited by the HSE/Health Board with family members, unaccompanied children who have disappeared, and the inadequate care provided to unaccompanied children. *The Irish Times'* Social Affairs Correspondent, Carl O 'Brien has been foremost amongst the critics of services to separated children. See, for example, articles by Carl O'Brien in *The Irish Times* on 7/06/06, 8/06/06 and 10/06/06 (www.ireland.com), in relation to the illegal operation of residential centres for unaccompanied minors, as well as coverage of the story on RTÉ's morning Ireland available at http://www.rte.ie/news/2006/0607/morningireland.html. Amongst others, articles have also appeared in *Village* on 12/01/06 (www.villagemagazine.ie) and in *The Irish Examiner* on 27/07/04 (www.irishexaminer.com).

[56] UNHCR's Guidelines recommend that, "[w]hether they are accommodated in foster homes or special reception centres, children seeking asylum, should be under regular supervision and assessment by qualified persons, to ensure their physical and psychosocial well-being" (UNHCR, 1997, p. 10).

[57] Elsewhere, the Children's Rights Alliance has called on the government to end the "two-tier" approach to children in care, which treats separated children seeking asylum differently from Irish children (*The Irish Times*, 10/06/06).

thus are not registered and inspected in the same way that children's residential homes are.[58] In essence, it is clear that unaccompanied children are not treated as children first, and as asylum seekers, second, as advocated by the *SCEP Statement*. Instead, it seems that, because of their immigration status, the system offers less to unaccompanied children than it does to most indigenous children, a situation which clearly violates Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the principle of non-discrimination.[59] [60] [61]

Despite ongoing criticisms of the care arrangements and services offered to unaccompanied children, critics have also acknowledged the positive features of the Irish system and the significant improvements that have been made in recent years (e.g. Smith, 2003; Veale et al., 2003; Social Services Inspectorate, 2005). In the ERHA, the first unaccompanied asylum seeking children received few services from the State: yet again responsibility was essentially "devolved" (Ward, 1998, p. 44) to voluntary organisations like the IRC.[62] Initially, the children and teenagers were accommodated in self-catering hostels and B&B's along with adult asylum seekers, sometimes even sharing rooms with adults (Mac Neice & Almirall, 1999). As the children had little contact with social work services and hostels had no care staff, children were largely left to their own devices.[63] With time, services began to develop, culminating in the establishment of a specialised *Team for Separated Children Seeking Asylum (TSCSA)* based in the Dublin area.[64] The large increase in the number of unaccompanied children needing care meant that it was not possible to provide all of them with care within existing childcare residential services (Smith, 2003; Veale et

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[58] In its second shadow report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Children, the Children's Rights Alliance "calls for accommodation for separated children seeking asylum to be registered and covered by the National Standards for Children's Residential Centres" (2006, p. 72).

[59] This has been commented on recently by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in General Comment No. 6 (2005) entitled, "Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin". CRC/GC/2005/6

[60] Yet it is clear that it is not simply a matter of offering unaccompanied young people the exact same services as are offered to Irish young people in the care system. The needs of unaccompanied children are often very different to the needs of indigenous children in care, thus highlighting the complexity of the HSE's responsibilities. Veale et al. (2003) have argued that cultural developmental norms need to be taken into consideration.

[61] Whilst the Government of the UK has reserved the right not to apply the UNCRC to asylum seeking and other non-citizen children (Stanley, 2003), no such reservation has been made by the Irish Government which ratified the UNCRC in 1992.

[62] It is important to note that the relevant section of the Refugee Act 1996 had not been implemented at that time.

[63] The policy in place was that staff at the ORAC were to refer unaccompanied minors to the local child protection team, where their general social welfare queries would be dealt with. However, Mac Neice & Almirall (1999) reported that some children never had contact with a social worker or a care person.

[64] The TSCSA consists of social workers and project workers, as well as administrative staff.

al., 2003). Whilst Smith (2003), in a comparative analysis of policies and practices in European Union member States, highlights the good practice that exists in Ireland with respect to younger children living in residential settings, the majority of unaccompanied minors began to be accommodated in hostels. Over time designated hostels for these young people were created. Whilst hostels were originally the responsibility of Dublin City Council, the HSE/Health Board assumed direct operational responsibility for them in 2003, and this led to improvements in the standards of accommodation being offered. The capacity of hostels was reduced and minimum standards were agreed including the provision of study areas, and a minimum of 2 people to be on duty when under-16s were in residence.[65] Originally hostels were mixed and self-catering, accommodating male and female unaccompanied minors, all of whom were cooking for themselves and in receipt of supplementary welfare allowance.[66] In early 2005 this situation changed with the creation of single sex hostels, as had been advocated for by support organisations who had been consulted by Veale and her colleagues (Veale et al., 2003).[67] The hostels now provide meals for the young people, operating in a 'direct provision' style where the young people receive €19.10 per week. Although, in general, the hostels continue to be unsupervised by qualified staff, one mixed hostel for 12-16 year olds has qualified care staff present.[68] Most unaccompanied children in the 12-16 age bracket are accommodated in that hostel. Each hostel has a HSE project worker attached to it and these workers visit the hostel regularly to support the young people. Social Workers are allocated to the younger and most vulnerable children.[69]

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[65] HSE statistics suggest that the average capacity of the hostels was 32.5 persons as of May 2005.

[66] This consisted of a weekly payment of €124.80 (Veale et al., 2003). This was increased to €134.80 in 2004.

[67] As of June 2006, there are a total of 8 hostels in the Dublin area. Five of these hostels are single-sex units, three for boys and two for girls. Two hostels are mixed, one of which is for younger teenagers (12-16 year olds) and has a care team in place. The other mixed hostel consists of individual apartments for older children who have refugee status. There is also one hostels which caters solely for mothers and babies (email communication with HSE social worker, June 2006). Apart from hostels, the HSE in Dublin can accommodate up to 6 children in a residential home which is specifically for unaccompanied minors. Also, a small number of unaccompanied minors are accommodated alongside Irish children in residential homes for children and teenagers, or in foster families or supported lodgings in the greater Dublin area (Veale et al., 2003). The TSCSA can approach all fostering teams in the Dublin Area to seek placements for unaccompanied children. In 2004, a social worker from the TSCSA was appointed to a local fostering team to specifically assist in recruiting foster families/supporting lodgings for unaccompanied minors in the care of the HSE (email communication with HSE Foster Link Social Worker).

[68] In an article titled "Illegal asylum seeker centre funded by HSE", Carl O'Brien has suggested that this hostel is operating illegally. According to his report, the hostel was inspected by the HSE in 2005 but failed to meet the necessary standards for it to be registered (The Irish Times, 07/06/2006, www.ireland.com).

[69] Apart from being in receipt of Social Work services, unaccompanied minors also have a range of other services available to them. These include primary and second level education until the age of 18, legal advice from the Refugee Legal Service (which has a specialised children's unit), access to a psychological service specifically for unaccompanied minors, as well as a range of voluntary organisations who support the young

However, despite improvements in the services offered to unaccompanied minors in the Dublin area, Veale et al. (2003) highlight the inadequacy of the accommodation and welfare system for these young people by stating that it:

> "... fails to acknowledge the specific circumstances of separated minors, who have to cope with a new culture, often a new language, unfamiliar education system, without the supports of family, friends, or community of origin, while undergoing the inevitable stresses of the asylum determination process" (p. 44).

Largely, the system means that young people continue to be left to their own devices, with little supervision in the hostels, and with few, if any, significant adults in their lives. As *Table 6* below shows, the vast majority of unaccompanied minors in the Dublin area – 88.5% - continue to live in hostel accommodation, only one of which has any care staff in place.

Table 6: Number of Unaccompanied Minors in the Care of the HSE (ECA), by Type of Placement on 30th April 2005

Type of Care	No. of Unaccompanied Minors
Residential Care	11
Foster Care	5
Supported Lodgings	7
Hostels	181 (15 babies in addition)
Total	204

Source: Compiled from Internal HSE Data

Improvements have also taken place in other Health Board areas. Whilst the SHB initially placed unaccompanied minors in hostels for homeless young people, they now place them in more supported accommodation, such as in supported lodgings. In relation to the MHWB, separated children began arriving there in 1999, and were initially dealt with by the generic social work

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people in a variety of ways. These organisations include the Vincentian Refugee Centre, CDVEC, the Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project, and Barnardos. Services offered include summer projects, outings, a support group for unaccompanied young people who have failed in the asylum process (the PLUS campaign), and homework clubs.

department and accommodated in adult hostels. Following complaints about the hostels, informal arrangements were made with families of the same nationality as the children, who acted as host families in accommodating them (Kearney, 2004).[70] However, these arrangements were generally not successful with the young people moving into independent rented accommodation at the age of 17.[71] In 2001, a project worker was appointed by the MWHB to take specialised responsibility for the young people. Subsequently, the use of adult hostels and independent living arrangements has been discontinued, and separated young people have been placed with host families, in supported lodgings placements, and with foster families, depending on their ages and circumstances (Kearney, 2004). In the Galway area, unaccompanied children have, until recently, received few services from the WHB. Instead, a local voluntary organisation – SPARK[72] - assumed most of the responsibility for supporting the young people, who were living in adult 'direct provision' centres. The WHB in Galway now receive unaccompanied minors into its care – as outlined in *Table 5* - placing them in foster families and residential homes and allocating a social worker to each child.

As has been described above, the Refugee Act 1996, allows for the HSE/Health Boards to make an application for asylum on behalf of an unaccompanied child, where it is appears that such an application should be made.[73] This is viewed as an extremely positive aspect of the Irish system, given that in some countries only adults can go through the asylum process (Veale et al., 2003).[74] Whilst Smyth (2005) suggests that unaccompanied children in the asylum process are "square peg[s] in round hole[s], [children] in an asylum procedure designed by adults", she emphasises that Ireland "has come a long way in a short period in adjusting its asylum procedure to the needs of separated children" (p. 26). For instance, HSE/Health Board social workers and project workers support unaccompanied minors throughout the asylum process, helping them to prepare for interviews, accompanying them to appointments with the Refugee Legal Service, and attending

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[70] Kearney (2004) states that these families were identified by the young people themselves and that "a cursory social work assessment" (p. 13) of them was undertaken.

[71] As regards the placement of young people in independent accommodation, with continued support from a project worker, Veale et al. (2003) noted that, according to the HSE (Mid West Area), this type of arrangement, "facilitated social integration as youth began to rely on older people in the community, and tended to drift away from the service, getting back in touch when they needed to" (p. 47).

[72] SPARK stands for Support Project for Refugee and Asylum Seeking Kids.

[73] An outline of the Asylum Determination Process is provided in Appendix 1

[74] For example, in Denmark, children under the age of 15 are not allowed to apply for asylum, as they are considered incapable of expressing a fear of persecution. In Germany, those under 16 cannot enter the asylum process, as they do not possess legal capacity (Smith, 2003). The UNHCR, in its *Guidelines on policies and procedures in dealing with unaccompanied children seeking asylum* (1997) recommend that children should always have access to the asylum process, regardless of their age.

asylum interviews and appeals where they can offer emotional support to the young people.[75] However, given that there are no alternative forms of protection in place, the HSE/Health Board makes applications for asylum for separated children "even if it does not appear, subjectively and objectively, as though the child has grounds for asylum" (Veale et al, 2003, p. 62).[76] Examples might include children who state that they have arrived for economic or educational reasons, or children whose protection needs do not meet the criteria of the refugee definition.[77] This practice would not appear to be in the best interests of the child when one considers the stressful nature of the asylum process, as highlighted by participants in various research studies (e.g. Hewitt et al, 2005; Sourander, 1998; Stanley, 2001; Summerfield, 2000; Vekic, 2003).[78] In light of these issues, the Irish Refugee Council and the Law Reform Commission have recommended that a system of complementary protection be implemented in order to protect those who have a well-founded fear but who do not fit into the refugee definition (Veale et al., 2003; The Law Reform Commission, 2006). In 2005, it was proposed that a form of complimentary protection would be included in the new Immigration and Residence Bill (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005).[79]

In summary, the Irish State has operated as both a 'sending' and a 'receiving' country with regard to children migrating alone. Since the arrival of the first asylum seeking unaccompanied minor in 1996, polices and procedures have developed in an ad hoc manner. Significant improvements have

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[75] Smyth (2005) mentions a number of other adjustments made to the asylum procedure to cater for the needs of unaccompanied minors. These include the creation of dedicated units within ORAC and within the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) to deal with these young people. The members of these units receive specialised training in the conducting of interviews with children. Also, the applications of unaccompanied minors are prioritised, although the HSE/Health Board can ask for the postponement of an interview if it is deemed to be in the child's best interests.

[76] In relation to this, the General Comment issued recently by the Committee on the Rights of the Child states the following: "States should refrain from referring unaccompanied and separated children into asylum procedures if their presence in the territory does not raise the question of international refugee protection needs. This is without prejudice to the obligation of States to refer unaccompanied or separated children into relevant procedures serving child protection, such as those foreseen under child welfare legislation" (2005, p. 8)

[77] Examples might include children who are fleeing from a situation of generalised violence or natural disaster in their country of origin (Law Reform Commission, 2006).

[78] These studies will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

[79] In October 2006 the Irish government introduced the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006, Statutory Instrument No. 518 of 2006. The Regulations give effect in Irish law to Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004. They set out the minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted. According to the Regulations applicants can now apply for subsidiary protection if they have been refused refugee status. However, the proposed Immigration and Residence Bill which is due to be enacted in 2007 will introduce a single protection procedure system in which INIS will consider both refugee status and subsidiary protection. But until the enactment of the Bill people will still need to go through the asylum procedure before being able to apply for subsidiary protection.

been made in recent years. However, the critics argue that a lot more needs to be done if Ireland is to meet its obligations under the various international conventions and guidelines.

Concluding Comments

The experiences of the unaccompanied minors who participated in this study are situated within a context which includes both historical and current components. Historically, young people tended to emigrate from Ireland and the Irish State responded reluctantly to those in need of refuge – including children - resulting in few refugees arriving into the country. In recent years, the tide has turned, with Ireland becoming a destination for economic immigrants and those seeking refuge, including minors arriving without parents. Despite some positive individual and group efforts to embrace interculturalism, many of these newcomers have been subjected to racism, similar to that faced by Irish emigrants in the past. In terms of the State's response, although the Government seems to have begun to take responsibility for asylum seeking individuals, unaccompanied minors continue to be treated differently to their indigenous peers. Policies and procedures are still evolving, and, despite recent improvements, are characterised by a lack of coherency, with the various HSE areas interpreting their legislative obligations in different ways. But behind the changing demographics of Irish society, and the debates about adequate care, are individual young people who are separated from their parents. It is within the historical and current contexts outlined above that these unaccompanied minors face the challenges of establishing a new life in a new land.

Chapter 2: Unaccompanied Minors: A Review of the Literature

> *Being away from my country is like a dream and nightmare come true at the same time. America is the beauty and the beast. Perhaps because my country has become in my mind, both heaven and hell* (Chilean refugee in California, cited in Falicov, 2003, p. xv).

Introduction

Displacement presents numerous stressors for forced migrants and challenges them to cope effectively with their situations. Drawing on general literature regarding refugees, as well as on specific material concerning unaccompanied minors, this chapter gives an overview of the relevant theoretical and research insights that have emerged in recent years. The aims are to provide some contextual information that will serve as a backdrop to the current study, along with identifying some significant gaps that exist in our current knowledge.

To begin with, the pre-migration and post-migration challenges faced by unaccompanied minors are outlined. These include coming to terms with difficult memories of pre-exile lives, as well as dealing with contradictory messages provided by parents, the uncertainty of the asylum process, the frustrations of living in the care system, and the many losses and changes encountered in exile. Arising from this discussion, the strengths and resilience of unaccompanied minors and their sense of personal agency are emphasised. By drawing on theories of coping and acculturation, a description is then given of how unaccompanied minors deal with the many challenges in their lives. Given the importance of social support as a coping and acculturation resource, attention is paid to the lack of strong trusting relationships in the lives of unaccompanied minors. Finally, emanating from the review, significant gaps in the literature are identified.

In reviewing the literature, every effort is made to continually bear in mind that neither refugees generally, nor unaccompanied minors specifically, are homogenous groups. The individuals within these groups often show different needs, experiences, and expectations, thus suggesting their heterogeneity. Given this emphasis on the individuality of each refugee, particular attention is paid to research that adopted a qualitative methodology.[80]

Finally, it is acknowledged that a limitation of this literature review is its focus on literature in the English language.[81]

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[80] Qualitative research will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

[81] Occasionally reference is made to literature in other languages when it has been cited by an author writing in English.

Challenges

According to Ajduković & Ajduković (1993):

> "Displaced persons are exposed to extremely stressful and traumatic experiences not only when they are driven out of their homes, but throughout their displacement" (p. 844).

Based on their work with children uprooted by the war in Croatia, these authors suggest that refugee children are faced with two onerous processes. They are confronted with the multiple challenges of the developmental process. Simultaneously, however, they face the many traumatic experiences encountered by displaced persons. For children who are unaccompanied, these challenges are often faced alone, or at least in the absence of close kin. The sparse evidence that exists suggests that unaccompanied minors are more at risk than their accompanied peers (Eisenbruch, 1988; Freud & Burlingham, 1943; Ressler et al., 1988; Sourander, 1998; Thomas & Lau, 2003). The presence of family members is seen as a significant protective factor for refugee children (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1998).[82] In an oft-cited study, Freud & Burlingham (1943) studied the impact of war on children in England. They found that children who remained with their parents during evacuation were better able to handle the situation than those who were separated from their parents. Steinbock (1996) describes unaccompanied refugee children as "at least twice disadvantaged," (p. 47) firstly because they are separated from their parents and other close relatives, and secondly because they have had to flee from their countries of origin. Such descriptions of the vulnerability of unaccompanied minors arise from the perception that they face multiple stressors. The following sections will look at some of the challenges faced by refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors.[83] [84]

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[82] Yet, it must also be acknowledged that accompanied refugee children and young people are, at times, faced with challenges that do not confront those who are unaccompanied. In particular, difficult parental experiences of trauma and of adjusting to a new life, including poor coping capacities amongst parents, can have an indirect negative influence on children (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1993, 1998). Parents may be traumatised or preoccupied with cultural adjustment and thus psychologically unavailable for their children (Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Kline & Mone, 2003; Lynch & Cuninghame, 2000; Rutter, 2001). Based on their research with internally displaced families in Croatia, and drawing on the work of Garbarino et al. (1992), Ajduković & Ajduković (1993) found that "the emotional state and behavior of the mother are the main mediators between children's psychological functioning and traumatic experience" (p. 851). Also, children, who generally tend to adjust to new cultures more easily, may have to take on responsibilities such as interpreting for their parents. In the teenage years, intergenerational conflicts can be more pronounced than for other adolescents as young people learn the ways of life of a new country and may wish to abandon traditional beliefs, values and practices (Coelho, 1994). However, Miller et al. (2002) have suggested that intrafamilial conflict within refugee families may in fact be less pervasive than was originally thought. Adult Bosnian refugees in their research in Chicago characterised their families as highly supportive and as low in conflict.

[83] Although it is acknowledged that that these young people often experience stress during their journeys to countries of asylum (see Ayotte, 2000), the emphasis here is on challenges relating to their lives prior to migration and to their lives during resettlement.

Pre-Migration Challenges

The life experiences of unaccompanied minors prior to their forced migration can be expected to have a profound impact on their ability to adapt to life in a new country. Most of the evidence we have in relation to the pre-migration experiences of these young people is from studies that have looked at the reasons why unaccompanied minors have left home. A study by Ayotte (2000) is particularly insightful.

Ayotte (2000) conducted a Europe-wide study of why children come to Western Europe alone.[85] Her findings drew attention to the huge variety of reasons why unaccompanied minors leave their countries of origin and to the multiple pre-migration challenges that these young people have faced. She identified armed conflict, persecution, and separation from parents in the home country as the three most prevalent reasons for movement.[86] The author found evidence of young people coming to Western Europe because they were suffering from persecution as defined in the 1951 Convention: on grounds of race (e.g. belonging to a particularly ethnic group), religion (e.g. practicing a minority religion), nationality (e.g. belonging to a particular country), membership of a social group (e.g. on the basis of sexual orientation) or political opinion (e.g. being a member of a particular party). Others came because of poverty and a lack of educational opportunities, or because of family issues, such as the death of parents, or abuse and family breakdown. In addition, children came for medical reasons, to avoid doing military service, or to avoid being subjected to harmful traditional practices, such as ritual sacrifices or voodoo spells. Some children were also

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[84] It should be borne in mind throughout this thesis that the experiences of refugees, including those of unaccompanied minors, are usually discussed within Western cultural frameworks. As a result, questions of cultural interpretation become relevant. Experiences that Westerners – such as myself - perceive to be stressful may be associated with normative development in other contexts. Drawing on research with Somali unaccompanied minors in Canada, Rousseau et al. (1998) question the very concept of risk, stating that "trauma and separation, although key elements in the definition of risk in the case of unaccompanied children, do not carry the same risk universally" (p. 634). For instance, whilst Western developmental psychology depicts prolonged separation from parents as an adverse experience, in certain cultures – such as in Somalia – such separation is traditionally connected with the concept of learning and with the process of development that allows a boy to become a man. Rousseau et al. (1998) assert that "for the young Somali, forced exile due to socio-political and economic reasons, cannot be considered benign or nontraumatizing. Nevertheless, because of the special relationship it has with the traditional meaning of sending young boys off to learn about nomadic pastoral existence, exile can acquire for a lot of them positive attributes, and beyond all possible losses, can regain potential for change" (p. 635). See Rousseau et al. (1998) for further discussion. In addition, Boyden (2003) highlights the global influence of western models and understandings but questions "their applicability and utility across cultures and social contexts" (p. 2).

[85] Ayotte's (2000) study was qualitative in nature and involved interviews with 115 individuals – both separated young people and professionals. Other information was gathered through correspondence and materials received from the SCEP's NGO partners and through document searches. Together this information provided 218 mini case-studies of separated children from 28 different countries.

[86] These mirrored the primary departure reasons identified by Smit (1997, cited in Ayotte, 2000) in an earlier study of separated children in the Netherlands.

trafficked[87] to Western Europe, and suffered from sexual or other forms of exploitation either en route, when they arrived, or both. Ayotte (2000) drew attention to the serious effects of armed conflict on the lives of children and young people, as they were often subjected to sexual exploitation and violence and were sometimes recruited as child soldiers.

Similarly, armed conflict, persecution, and separation from parents were identified as prominent occurrences in a study by Thomas et al. (2004) that focused on the 'pre-flight experiences' of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in the UK.[88] The primary reasons for flight were: death or persecution of family members (37 UASC), persecution of a young person him or herself (21), forced recruitment (15), war (12), having been trafficked (10), and educational purposes (5). The study found that nearly half of all UASC (47%) experienced separation from or loss of parents and/or family members before leaving their countries. Family members were arrested, imprisoned, killed, deported to another country, persecuted or simply disappeared.[89]

Other studies that have not specifically sought to explore the departure reasons of unaccompanied minors, have nonetheless made reference to the causes of movement, mainly in an effort to put other findings in context (e.g. A study of Somali unaccompanied minors in the Nordic countries by Ayotte, 2002; a study of unaccompanied minors in Finland by Helander, 2001; and studies of unaccompanied minors in Ireland by Kinsella, 1998, and by Vekic, 2003). In general, the departure reasons mentioned in these studies have reflected the reasons identified by Ayotte (2000) and by Thomas et al. (2004). For instance, participants in Vekic's (2003) study identified various reasons for coming to Ireland including conflict, death of parents, poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and difficulties experienced because of one's ethnicity or religious beliefs.[90] Overall,

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[87] It is important to distinguish between 'trafficking' and 'smuggling', as the terms tend to be used interchangeably to describe the illegal child migration business. Whilst trafficking involves some kind of exploitation, smuggling does not. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children defines trafficking as follows: "Trafficking consists of all acts involved in the recruitment or transportation of persons within or across borders, involving deception, coercion or force, debt bondage or fraud, for the purpose of placing persons in situations of abuse or exploitation, such as forced prostitution, slavery-like practices, battering or extreme cruelty, sweatshop labour or exploitative domestic servitude." ['IRIN web special on separated Somali children' (online). Available at:

http://www.irinnews.org/webspecials/Somalichildren/Exe_SummaryCont.asp (Accessed 10 Nov 2006)].

[88] The researchers analysed social service case files and legal statements, and conducted semi-structured interviews with 100 UASC.

[89] Forty one percent of UASC had experienced or witnessed violence themselves. Thirty-two percent of the young people reported having being raped before they left their country of origin (Thomas et al., 2004).

[90] Vekic's (2003) study involved qualitative interviews with 18 unaccompanied minors attending three different secondary schools in the inner city of Dublin. The students were interviewed on three separate occasions during one academic school year, with the focus being on issues that affected their lives and schooling.

studies provide "a steady view of suffering" (Kohli, 2006b, p.3) and suggest that unaccompanied minors have often encountered multiple challenging situations prior to exile. Having reviewed the available Irish and European literature, Veale et al. (2003) observe:

> "A consistent profile emerges in which it can be seen that separated children predominately emerge from countries experiencing armed conflict, political repression or the breakdown of civil society as a result of the relationship between conflict and poverty" (p. 16-17).

Whilst this profile may be consistent, it is clearly evident that unaccompanied children leave their countries for very diverse reasons. Whilst some witness the murder of family members and believe that their own lives are in danger, others leave home because of a lack of educational opportunities or for economic reasons. Indeed, as Athey and Ahearn (1991) state:

> "Refugee experiences can range from the relatively benign, such as the migration of political or religious groups in intact families, to the horrific, including genocide, massive destruction, and the dissolution of community and family groups" (p. 3).

Although our knowledge is increasing of the pre-migration stressors faced by unaccompanied minors, three words of caution are warranted. Firstly, studies of why unaccompanied minors come to Western Europe – whether involving interviews with professionals or with minors - are based on the reasons for departure that are articulated by the young people themselves. However, the experiences of practitioners and researchers (e.g. Ayotte, 2002; Bertrand 2000; Knudsen, 1991; Okitipi & Aymer, 2003) suggest that refugees, including unaccompanied minors, can be "silent or circumspect about their origins and circumstances" (Kohli, 2006b, p. 707). It is frequently believed that many do not articulate the true reasons for leaving their homelands (Thomas et al., 2004). In some instances, unaccompanied minors may not have been told why they were being sent away (Christiansen & Foighel, 1990) and so are unable to articulate true or coherent stories of departure. Others may fear that they will be deported if the true version of events is known. Anderson (2001) uses the term "secret task" (p. 196) to refer to the fact that unaccompanied minors in Germany are sometimes provided with a particular 'story' to tell the authorities, one which it is believed will obtain refugee status. The minors are then under immense pressure to stick to the facts of this story, even in instances where the true version of events might have led to 'success' in any case. But silence is not always related to fear of 'failure' in the asylum process. For some, silence may reflect a lack of readiness to talk about painful experiences. Refugees' feelings, perceptions, and levels of functioning may become restricted as a result of the multiple losses they have experienced. They become 'frozen' but this "frozenness" (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 32) and its associated silence serves

a useful purpose. It allows them to come to terms with their pain over time (Kohli, 2006b), and enables them to "regroup" (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 33).[91]

Secondly, departure reasons are often complex and multifaceted. The literature tends to suggest that unaccompanied minors leave their countries of origin for particular and somewhat straightforward reasons. In addition, asylum procedures are based on an expectation that people can give a specific reason for their flight. However, for many refugees, the interaction of multiple factors, over considerable time periods, act as precursors to departure. One particular event may act as the straw that finally breaks the camel's back (Helander, 2001; Ayotte 2002). Thus, unaccompanied minors have often faced a range of different pre-departure challenges.

Thirdly, and related to this second point, whilst studies of departure reasons give important insights into some aspects of unaccompanied minors' previous lives, their particular focus means that we have little knowledge of the contexts in which events have occurred. We know little about the "ordinary lives" (Kohli, 2006b, p. 708) of unaccompanied minors prior to their departure, including the not-so-stressful components. This reflects our general lack of knowledge of refugees as "ordinary people driven by ordinary desires" (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p. 64). At times, the literature seems to suggest that departure reasons fully account for unaccompanied minors' lives in their countries of origin. For instance, Thomas et al. (2004) claim to have examined the "pre-flight experiences" (p. 113) of unaccompanied minors. Yet, in reality, their description of their study suggests that they only explored reasons for departure. The 'pre-flight experiences' of unaccompanied minors are not entirely composed of events related to departure. Before leaving home due to somewhat "extraordinary" circumstances (Kohli, 2006b, p. 715), these young people may have had many youthful experiences that were more 'ordinary'. Indeed, Kohli's research (2006a, 2006b) suggests that, over time, and as trust develops, unaccompanied minors begin to tell social workers stories of "ordinary, well-loved lives, not just fragments of sudden departure" (Kohli, 2006a, p. 8). There is a need to try to understand the varied aspects of the lives of these young people in their countries of origin, rather than simplistically depicting their experiences as 'extraordinary', stressful, and challenging. This is particularly important given that the ability of unaccompanied minors to cope in exile is likely to be influenced by the nature of their lives prior to departure (Ayotte, 2002).[92]

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[91] The issues surrounding unaccompanied minors' mistrust of those around them will be discussed in greater depth at the end of this chapter.

[92] In particular, Ayotte (2002) draws attention to the fact that children who have experienced a 'secure base' in their countries of origin will be better able to deal with the stressful circumstances of their new lives. The 'secure base' will become internalised and will "form part of the child's sense of self which sustains them in exile" (p. 40).

In summary, despite the literature's neglect of the 'ordinary' lives of unaccompanied minors, it is clear that these young people have often been exposed to a wide range of challenging situations prior to migration. These experiences can lead to feelings of anxiety, sadness, uncertainty about the future, and fear (Davies & Webb, 2000). They can also have a profound impact on young people's futures. Whatever the situations encountered, the perception underlying their flight is that a better life is available in exile. Yet, leaving home does not mean that the pre-migration experiences are forgotten. Instead, unaccompanied minors are often "haunted by ghosts from the past" (Kohli and Mather, 2003, p. 201) as they deal with memories of the difficulties they encountered at home. Thus, pre-migration challenges continue to impact on young people after they have moved to a host country and at a time when a myriad of new post-migration challenges are encountered.

Post-Migration Challenges

Miller (1999) highlights the significance of looking at both pre- and post-migration stressors if we are to adequately seek an understanding of why refugees often exhibit high levels of distress. Whilst accepting that symptoms of psychological trauma and clinical depression are "widespread among those living in exile" (p. 287), Miller proceeds to suggest that:

> "... the available data clearly indicate that a considerable amount of distress experienced by refugees, particularly the high level of depressive symptomatology, is strongly related to ongoing stressors associated with life in exile, rather than to prior (i.e. pre-migration) experiences of violence" (p. 293).

Similar sentiments have been expressed by others, including Richman (1998) and Woodcock (1994). Researchers have begun to shift their attention from looking predominately at pre-migration challenges to focusing on how these past experiences interact with ongoing exile-related stressors "to produce and maintain the high levels of distress so commonly reported in the literature" (Miller et al., 2002, p. 342). Therefore, the following sections will explore some of the post-migration challenges faced by unaccompanied minors. To begin with, general stressors pertaining to ambiguous messages, uncertain futures, and lives in care will be discussed.

General Stressors: Ambiguous Messages, Uncertain Futures, and Lives in Care.

The exile-related challenges faced by unaccompanied minors are multiple and varied. As young people, unaccompanied minors face the normative challenges of adolescence, including challenges related to identity development, schooling, and friendships. In addition, they face particular difficulties related to their status as asylum seeking young people. For instance, they may experience hostility, bullying, and racism in their new country (Ayotte, 2002; German, 2004; Rea, 2001; Stanley, 2001), along with communication and language problems (Hopkins & Hill, 2006), and difficulties learning about and adjusting to a new and different culture, where they exist as "strangers in a strange land" (Kohli & Mather, 2003, p. 201).

Whilst many of the exile-related challenges faced by unaccompanied minors are similar to those faced by other refugee children, some are specific to their circumstances as young people separated from their parents. For example, the experiences of practitioners in Denmark suggest that unaccompanied minors often arrive there with contradictory "messages" (Christiansen & Foighel, 1990, p. 152), having been sent away by their parents for a variety of reasons, some of which are known to them and some of which are not (Ayotte, 2002; Christiansen & Foighel, 1990). As a result, the young people often experience conflicting thoughts, fantasies, and emotions (Christiansen & Foighel, 1990). They can feel both treasured and discarded, having been told that they were being sent away because their parents cared so much for their safety. Whilst they may experience relief at having escaped from an unsafe situation or from limited opportunities, they often worry about family members who are left behind and feel guilty at having been able to leave when others had to stay. In addition, unaccompanied minors can feel overwhelmed by a perceived responsibility to achieve refugee status, something that would allow their parents and family members to be reunited with them in exile. Likewise, they may feel under pressure to live up to their parents' expectations of them. They can also experience ambiguity as to whether being sent away should be considered "an honour or a punishment" (Christiansen & Foighel, 1990, p. 153), given the juxtaposition of both opportunities and stressful circumstances in exile.

As well as having to deal with complicated and ambiguous messages, unaccompanied minors also have to deal with the complexities and uncertainties associated with the asylum process. Like the messages, this is again a challenge that is specific to their circumstances as young people separated from their parents. Accompanied refugee children may be somewhat buffered from this stress due to the fact that their parents usually go through the asylum process on their behalf, or at least bear the responsibility for negotiating the bureaucracies of the process. However, unaccompanied children face the challenges of the system by themselves. Many studies have drawn attention to the stresses associated with the asylum process (e.g. a Finnish study by Sourander, 1998; a UK study by Stanley, 2001; Irish studies by Rea, 2001, and by Vekic, 2003). Young people are faced with being dependent on the structures of the system, dealing with the uncertainty of the process, and recollecting painful experiences during interviews (Green, 2000).

The available evidence strengthens Summerfield's (2000) claim that "insecurities over the ultimate fate of asylum applications may be pervasive" (p. 420). Studies have highlighted that the uncertainties involved in the process make it inherently stressful, leaving unaccompanied minors feeling anxious and in fear of being sent home (Hopkins & Hill, 2006). A study of asylum seeking children in Wales found that, for the unaccompanied participants, the lack of emotional support and the uncertainty of their position within the UK had "serious effects" (Hewitt et al, 2005, p. 53) on

them.[93] Unaccompanied minors felt frightened and anxious, found it difficult to concentrate or to sleep, and felt physically unwell due to worry about their asylum claim. The research lent evidence to the assertion that the asylum process and its procedures can have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of unaccompanied minors (Hewitt et al, 2005). Additionally, the uncertainty of the process means that unaccompanied minors are often unable to plan for their futures (Robins & Rylands, 2004). The restrictions associated with their status also mean that they are often frustrated by constraints on their ability to travel, or to access employment or education (Robins & Rylands, 2004). The anxieties created by the asylum process are further compounded by the lengthy nature of the process (Ayotte, 1998; Vekic, 2003), as was articulated by one young person who took part in Stanley's (2001) study:

> *We've been waiting for four years. How long are they going to make us wait? How can we settle? How can we make plans? We can't without knowing our status. Our lives are always in the air ... It is like they are killing us slowly* (Unaccompanied minor, cited in Stanley, 2001, p. 29).

Yet the asylum system is not the only system that unaccompanied minors need to negotiate. They also have to "find their way through a maze of systems of care and protection" (Kohli & Mather, 2003, p. 201). They have to adjust to the bureaucracies of the care system, to being looked after by professionals who take on parenting roles, and to living in care placements. In the Irish context, where unaccompanied minors usually live in hostels, these placements struggle to cater for individual needs. Whilst a minority of participants in Vekic's (2003) study spoke positively about their accommodation arrangements, many of the young people made reference to numerous stressors associated with where they lived, including a lack of privacy, a lack of quiet study areas, food that was disliked, and hostel rules.[94] Participants in Stanley's (2001) study in the UK voiced similar complaints.

Kohli & Mather (2003) have suggested that unaccompanied young people are at risk of losing the sense of being in charge of their lives, because of the multiple challenges they encounter. In Kohli's (2000) research, one young man remarked to his social worker that he had "lost the steering wheel to his life" (cited in Kohli & Mather, 2003, p. 202). The uncertainty of the asylum process, the contradictory messages associated with departure, and the frustrations of the care system may partially account for this sense of not being in control. Thus, these factors may serve as sources of considerable post-migration stress for unaccompanied minors. In addition, these stressors are encountered at a time when the young people are trying to cope with multiple losses

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[93] The study involved qualitative interviews with practitioners, policy-makers, young people, and guardians.

[94] Improvements to accommodation arrangements have been made since Vekic conducted his fieldwork in 2001 and 2002. Some of these improvements have been outlined in chapter 1. They include the creation of smaller hostels and the allocation of single rooms to many unaccompanied minors.

and changes in their lives, at a time when their "layers of connection" have been peeled away (Kohli & Mather, 2003, p. 202). It is to these losses and changes that I now turn.

Loss and Change: Relationships, Culture, and Identity

Many of the stressors associated with exile concern the losses that are encountered, and the refugee literature includes frequent references to these losses (e.g. Ajduković & Ajduković, 1993; Behnia, 2004; Delaney, 2006; Miller, 1999; Vekic, 2000). Frequently, loss pervades the lives of those in exile (Davies & Webb, 2000). Indeed, Ahearn & Athey (1991) describe loss as "a defining characteristic of refugee status" (p. 7). These losses are linked inextricably with change. Thus, forced migration and resettlement can mean that refugees lose everything that was once familiar to them (Bennett & Detzner, 1997), resulting in huge change and discontinuity in their lives. Blackwell & Melzak (2000) make reference to the fact that refugee children have to adapt to a:

> "... completely new set of circumstances – educational, social economic, material and physical, climatic, where there is hardly any dimension of life that remains constant" (p. 9)

Although all refugee children face "numerous and multiple losses" (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1993, p. 853), these losses and changes are often most pronounced for unaccompanied minors. In conceptualising the diverse range of issues faced by unaccompanied refugee children, German (2004) lists the losses they experience. They include: loss of family, friends, community, country, culture, language, identity, self-esteem/confidence, status, education, and plans for the future. In essence, separation and loss are "fundamental parts" (Kohli, 2001, p. 31) of the life stories of unaccompanied minors.

Of the myriad of losses experienced by these young people, it is reasonable to expect that relationship losses are particularly challenging. Whether these losses are as a result of death or separation, the social worlds of unaccompanied minors become seriously disrupted. Family and friends are left behind in countries of origin. Although at times contact is maintained with loved ones, such contact is often infrequent and minimal in nature. Often, no contact is maintained at all (Ayotte, 2002). Unlike other refugee children, unaccompanied minors usually begin their new lives knowing nobody around them and faced with the challenge of complete recreation of their social networks, a task that can be very daunting and that can lead to social isolation, loneliness, and a lack of social support.[95] As Delaney (2006) suggests, the experience of loss can be the most overwhelming psychological need facing social workers working with unaccompanied minors.[96]

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[95] The social isolation, loneliness, and lack of support that unaccompanied minors face will be discussed in depth later in this chapter, when exploring the coping resources that these young people possess.

[96] Whilst parents or close relatives may accompany most refugee children who leave their countries of origin, the exile process leads to changes in these relationships. Some of these changes have been outlined in

Although some of the losses experienced by unaccompanied minors are accounted for by the death of loved ones - often in traumatic circumstances prior to exile - other losses occur as a result of separation. As such, these latter losses are complex and "unclear" (Green, 2000, p. 4).[97] They may not be irrevocable, meaning that "all the child has lost exists somewhere and the reunion is therefore not impossible" (Green, 2000, p. 4). Unaccompanied minors may continue to hope for reunion with family and friends, as well as with the culture and familiar surroundings that they have been forced to leave. Whilst this hope may have value, the ambiguity surrounding these uncertain losses can complicate the coping and mourning processes (Green, 2000). Arising from her own personal experiences as the child of immigrant parents, Boss (1999) stresses the importance of dealing with these losses:

> "Personal narratives illustrate the bittersweet legacy of ambiguity about psychological presence and absence for immigrant families, especially when the psychological family is not in accord with the physically present family. Unless people resolve the ambiguous loss – the incomplete or uncertain loss – that is inherent in uprooting, and bring into some congruence their psychological and physical families, the legacy of frozen grief may affect their offspring for generations to come, compounding itself as more ordinary losses inevitably occur" (Boss, 1999, p. 3-4).[98]

For unaccompanied minors, family members are often physically absent but psychologically present (Boss, 1999). For instance, young people spend time thinking about loved ones who are absent (Vekic, 2003). Unaccompanied minors are often uncertain as to whether or not they will ever see parents, siblings, and extended family members again. Ambiguous losses are not given official community recognition through rituals such as wakes, funerals, or burials (Boss, 1999). As a result, refugees, including unaccompanied minors, are often left to deal with their losses alone:

> "The massive losses suffered by refugees have no prescribed rituals for healing and little social support. Society does not easily acknowledge the grief of a person who has lost everything they hold dear in their former country. In addition, refugee families may be so busy 'adjusting' that they cannot give themselves permission to grieve" (Fantino & Colak, 2001, p. 594).

Apart from the loss of relationships, unaccompanied minors, like all refugees, experience cultural losses and need to adapt to the new culture in which they are living. Rousseau et al. (1998) contend that:

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footnote 84. Thus, in essence, accompanied refugee children can also experience profound relationship losses.

[97] In her discussion of 'unclear losses' Green (2000) cites two publications by Mertz & Starka (1991) and by Hannemann (1997). Both of these publications are in Danish.

[98] Boss (1999) used the word 'family' to encompass both families of origin (those with whom people grow up) and families of choices (those whom people select in adulthood).

> "... in the case of unaccompanied refugee children, [mourning] represents not only the loss, either permanent or temporary, of an important person, but also of the loss of all the child's cultural references" (p. 618).

Similarly, Eisenbruch (1988) refers to refugee children as suffering from both "personal and cultural bereavement" having lost "loved ones, [their] homeland, and their greater community" (p. 282).[99] Unaccompanied minors are often "thrust into an unfamiliar environment operating on the basis of mysterious codes, different values, and curious ways of behaviour" (Ayotte, 2002, p. 42). Familiar ways of doing things may be entirely lost in a new and different society (Rutter, 2001), as may traditional belief and value systems with which a young person has grown up. Blackwell & Melzak (2000) discuss how refugee children's experiences of school in exile may be fundamentally different from their previous educational experiences. The more liberal classrooms of their new countries may "feel dangerously out of control" (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000, p. 8). In addition, some refugee children might have to cope with the differences between a strictly Islamic environment and a more liberal Western European society. Thus, refugee children experience the loss of one culture and the challenges of adjusting to a very different environment. Such experiences can affect one's sense of belonging and of identity. For unaccompanied minors, family members are not present to help them to retain aspects of their familiar ways of life, often leaving them with even greater difficulties in developing a sense of cultural or ethnic identity (Lindskov & Sørensen, 1999, cited in Green, 2000).[100]

Overall, refugees, including unaccompanied minors, experience a loss of a primary type – that of home. Indeed, Papadopoulos (2002) describes loss of home as "the only condition that all refugees share" (p. 9). For him, home represents not only the physical entity of where a person was reared, or their familiar geographical surroundings, but also "a sense of home as a psychological, deeply felt foundation of well-being" (Kohli & Mather, 2003, p. 206). Essentially, refugees become homeless, with this homelessness encompassing "not only physical and material dimensions but [...] psychological and existential characteristics as well" (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 25).

Home is a place where a sense of containment is experienced. It provides a "protective and holding enwrapment" (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 16), something of a secure base (Bowlby, 1988). One's

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[99] The grief associated with the loss of a loved one or with the loss of a country and culture can affect a refugee's physical and mental health. The process of grieving differs from culture to culture. The grief of someone from a non-Western culture could be perceived as 'abnormal' if viewed through Western psychological lenses. As Stroebe et al. (1996) state: "In some cultures people hold tight to those who are dead: in others they try quickly to relinquish all ties. In all cases the result, in general, is normal adjustment within the culture" (p. 36).

[100] The processes of adjusting to a new culture and of establishing a sense of self amidst numerous changes can also be stressful experiences (Sam & Berry, 1995). Later in this chapter a more detailed description will be given of how unaccompanied minors deal with the acculturation process and the process of forming a cultural identity.

sense of home forms a core part of one's identity, a foundation or "substratum of human experience" (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 17), along with other elements such as familiar sights, sounds, and smells. This foundation provides a sense of predictability and continuity. However, people are not usually aware of its importance until it is disturbed. When people become refugees, such disruption emerges:

> "A primary and fundamental lack develops which imperceptibly takes hold of refugees, in addition to whatever other tangible losses they are aware of and they consciously mourn for. [...] When people lose their homes and become refugees, there is bewilderment, a sense of unreality and of an inexplicable gap because people lose something that they were not aware they had, in the first place. [...] Thus, the primary loss of home creates an overall syndrome of homelessness as opposed to the security of homeness" (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 17-18).

Whilst refugees are aware of the loss of the physical aspects of home, such as the towns of their birth, they can be less aware of the loss of the non-physical aspects. The nature of such a loss is not tangible like other more secondary losses. Instead, the loss is more primary and ambiguous. This ambiguity can cause disorientation for the refugee and, as such, can be a stressful experience. Unaccompanied minors may feel isolated, not only from familiar people, but also from their origins and from their past (Kohli & Mather, 2003). Frequently, they do not bring anything with them from home, "like a memento or artefact, a photograph or passport that anchors them to the past" (Kohli & Mather, 2003, p. 207). The loss of home can impinge on an unaccompanied minors' sense of well-being, safety, and security (Ahearn & Athey, 1991). Their sense of homelessness means that they encounter the challenges of the homecoming process, which includes the task of "reconnecting with one's sense of self" (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 15).[101]

In general, the literature suggests that unaccompanied minors who have moved to Western Europe face numerous losses and changes. These losses and changes represent stressful aspects of their post-migration lives. Arising from these losses, including the primary loss of home (Papadopoulos, 2002), the young people face the tasks of mourning, as well as the challenges of adapting to a new culture and developing or re-establishing their sense of self. However, there are significant gaps in our knowledge. The literature is frequently based on the experiences of practitioners (e.g. Blackwell & Melzak, 2000; Green, 2000; Kohli & Mather, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2002) and infrequently on the voices of young people. Often, research that involves interviews with

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[101] Given the ambiguity associated with the loss of home, and the lack of tolerance that human beings have of such ambiguity, refugees may attempt to create some certainty in order to cope with their situations (Papadopoulos, 2002). Thus, as Papadopoulos (2002) suggests, "under the painful influence of this kind of loss, refugees tend to single out specific complaints as the sole source of their unhappiness. Often, these complaints are legitimate but they seem to acquire extraordinary and excessive significance, and they are evidently overcharged with feeling in a disproportional way. These may be focused on insufficiently attended needs connected with housing, schools, benefits, but mostly – physical medical symptoms" (p. 16).

unaccompanied minors has only looked at their lives in terms of service provision – such as care, health, and education - and their experiences of the asylum process (e.g. Stanley, 2001; Vekic, 2003), and makes little reference to the losses and changes that they face. In addition, without detailed knowledge of their 'ordinary' previous lives, we cannot attempt to understand the discontinuities they are experiencing. Thus, to adequately understand their present day experiences – and in particular the losses and changes they encounter - there is a greater need to take their pre-exile lives into account, particularly their more ordinary pre-exile experiences.

In summary, at a time when they are already facing the numerous demands associated with the adolescent years, as well as attempting to come to terms with the often-traumatic experiences of their pre-migration experiences, unaccompanied minors also face many challenges related to their lives in exile. They have to adjust to life in the care system and cope with the stressful asylum process and with ambiguous messages given to them by loved ones upon departure. They have to deal with numerous losses. They have to adjust to a new and often very different culture, by learning a new way of life and new types of interaction with very different people, some of whom may be hostile towards them. Whilst these pre-migration and post-migration challenges are somewhat distinct entities, they are also interconnected. There is a constant interaction between these various stressors: they influence each other on a continuous basis (Miller et al., 2002). For example, by affecting concentration, a pre-migration experience – such as having witnessed a violent incident - can adversely impact on a person's ability to learn English, thus making post-migration life more stressful. Similarly, a post-migration stressor – such as the loss of loved ones and of culture – can adversely affect a person's ability to recover from a traumatic pre-migration experience. Alternatively, as Rousseau et al. (1998) suggest, the mourning of losses can be complicated by the need to deal with traumatic experiences that have been encountered. Thus, past experiences, present circumstances, and future uncertainties become intertwined, creating obstacles that need to be overcome if young people are to adapt to their new lives and make successful transitions to adulthood. The next section will look at the question of whether unaccompanied minors display strength and resilience or vulnerability and victimhood in response to these numerous challenges.

Vulnerable Victims or Strong Survivors?

Given the multiple stressors faced by refugees, how do unaccompanied minors fare? Commonly, refugees are depicted as traumatised individuals in need of psychotherapy because of their pre-exile experiences. Refugee children are seen to display symptoms of stress at a physical, behavioural, emotional, and cognitive level (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1993; Kinzie et al., 1986, 1989; Paardekooper et al., 1999; Rea, 2001; Sourander, 1998), and evidence of psychiatric disorders such Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In her study of unaccompanied minors in Ireland, Rea

(2001) found that over half of her participants had behavioural symptoms of psychological distress in the moderate to severe range. Somatic complaints such as sleeping problems, feeling overtired, and head and stomach aches were common, as were symptoms associated with anxiety and depression, such as feeling unloved, feeling fearful, and wanting to kill oneself. Symptoms related to attention problems, such as having difficulties concentrating and feeling confused, were also common (Rea 2001).[102] In their review of literature on the psychological health of child and adolescent refugees and asylum seekers, Thomas & Lau (2003) found evidence of poor psychological adaptation amongst refugee children. Those identified as being at particular risk included unaccompanied minors, those who had experienced extended trauma, and children going through the asylum process, thus suggesting the interaction of both pre- and post-migration factors.

Overall, the literature on refugee children has tended to emphasise their vulnerability, just as the general refugee literature has tended to pathologize the very people who survive atrocities (Papadopolous, 2002). A focus on the vulnerability of refugee children has emerged from a pathology or problem orientation (Saleebey, 2002), as well as from a tendency to view children as helpless and dependent, and from a related tendency to view children who experience adversity as passive victims rather than as competent survivors (Boyden, 2003). Yet, whilst it is clear that these children face a range of stressful circumstances that constitute a risk to well-being (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1988, 1993), not all of them experience adverse outcomes. Increasingly, attention is being paid to the diverse manner in which children respond to the challenges of forced migration, and to the fact that many emerge as survivors rather than as victims. Researchers are beginning to acknowledge that refugee children cannot automatically be labelled as 'traumatised'. Each individual will deal differently with the challenges that are faced (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000). Baker (1990), who arrived in Britain as an unaccompanied refugee minor during World War II, emphasises the importance of not generalising about the effects of being a refugee:

> "It would be naïve to conclude that the refugee experience makes all of those who have gone through it more vulnerable to stress and mental illness. Much of the research and literature available on this topic comes from psychiatrists and psychologists and the danger is that perceptions and interpretations can be skewed to favour a 'clinical' view" (Baker, 1990, p. 65).

Furthermore, he suggests that the literature's emphasis on vulnerability may be due to the operation of a type of self-fulfilling prophecy that results in researchers 'discovering' vulnerability amongst refugee children. This pertinent point is also made by Summerfield (2000):

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[102] Rea's (2001) research was an exploratory needs-based survey that looked at psychosocial needs, social support, and estimates of psychological distress among 28 unaccompanied minors in Ireland. Rea used measures such as the Adolescent Zelf Report, as well as Social Network Maps and a Post-Migratory Living Problem Checklist.

> "... claims about mass psychological caseload among war-affected children may reflect the prior mindset of Western professionals – who find what they expect to find – and the use of psychological questionnaires on populations for which they have not been validated" (p. 426).

Along with the debatable validity of many of the psychiatric and psychological measures that have been used with refugees, researchers have begun to question the applicability of Western labels (e.g. PTSD) to people from other non-Western cultures (Boyden, 2003; Eisenbruch, 1991; German, 2004; Papadopoulos, 2002). In addition, they have started to acknowledge that a focus on psychopathology tends to ignore important environmental and relational aspects of young people's development and well-being (Boyden, 2003). Together, these 'questionings' of current research have led to a stronger focus on the capacity and resilience of refugee children (Dunkerley et al., 2005), and a gradual move away from depicting them as vulnerable victims of their circumstances.

This new focus reflects a broader commitment to a strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1997; 2002) and a move away from a "deficit approach" (Goldstein, 2002, p. 25). The strengths perspective is "a distinctive lens for examining the world of practice" (Saleebey, 2002, p. 20). In contrast with the deficit approach, the strengths perspective is "far more optimistic and hopeful about how life will turn out" (Goldstein, 2002, p. 25). Whilst problems and pains are neither forgotten nor ignored, the focus of the perspective is on people's strengths and capacities:

> "The fundamental premise is that individuals will do better in the long run when they are helped to identify, recognize, and use the strengths and resources available in themselves and their environment" (Graybeal, 2001, p. 234).

However, although the strengths perspective represents a foundation of practice within the discipline of social work, it also serves as a means by which social researchers can understand people. If social research begins from a strengths perspective, then it is more likely that the capacities of individuals will be recognised. Embedded within philosophical principles of liberation and empowerment, the strengths perspective embraces the notion of possibility. People are seen to have power and potential. The existence of hope is viewed as critically important for survival (Saleebey, 2002). The perspective derives from a value base that emphasises human potential to grow, heal, and learn; human ability to identify wants; self-determination; the strengths of people and their environments; and individuality and uniqueness (Fast & Chapin, 2002). The approach suggests that:

> "... from the ashes of destruction, mayhem, and oppression may emerge the human spirit, the capacity to be heroic. So we can never dismiss the possibility of redemption, resurrection, and regeneration" (Saleebey, 2002, p. 8).

Thus, a different viewpoint materialises – one based on the capacities and resources of people rather than on their deficiencies and deficits. The strengths perspective "has many kin" (Saleebey, 2001, p. 221), such as ideas about healing and wellness, empowerment and liberation, and solution-

focused and narrative approaches to therapy (Saleebey, 2001). In addition, the concept of resilience is closely aligned with the strengths perspective. Indeed, Goldstein (2002) sees resilience as "the attribute that epitomizes and operationalizes what the strength perspective is all about" (p. 30).

The notion of resilience is valuable in studying the experiences of refugees. Muecke (1992) draws succinct attention to this point by advocating for a "shift of focus from refugee pathology to refugee health" (p. 521):

> "... refugees present perhaps the maximum example of human capacity to survive despite the greatest of losses and assaults on human identity and dignity. The concept of resilience has been examined among a variety of populations who have been exposed to major life stressors and could be of use in the study of healthy refugees (Muecke, 1992, p. 520)

Masten (2001) describes resilience as referring to "a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (p. 228) and highlights the unremarkable nature of the phenomenon, or its "ordinary magic" (p. 227). Resilience can refer to either a state of being or the mechanisms/characteristics involved in achieving that state: a person can be resilient or they can show resilience to a particular risk (Ungar, 2004). Adverse circumstances pose risks to development but resilient children emerge with more positive outcomes than might be expected. In essence, such children do better than they ought to (Gilligan, 2000a). Succeeding against the odds is the hallmark of resilience. Resilience may have a "social or constitutional origin" (Gilligan, 2000a, p. 37): it may arise from an individual's personal qualities or from his or her experiences and the manner in which these experiences are processed. Many factors are associated with resilience, including 'personality related factors' such as self-efficacy, realistic appraisal of the environment, social problem-solving skills, and humour, and 'interpersonally related factors' such as positive, caring relationships, positive family or other intimate environment, and 'high enough' expectations (Norman, 2000).

These interpersonal factors highlight the importance of a supportive context (Fraser et al., 1999). In particular, given the emphasis on interdependence, relationships, and community within the cultures of origin of many unaccompanied minors, Rousseau et al. (1998) contend that it is important to "shift the focus of our reflection on resilience away from the person who displays it and more toward the social space where it is woven" (p. 633). Similarly, writing specifically in relation to the resilience of war-affected children, Boyden (2003) refers to the "highly problematic" (p. 9) tendency to de-contextualize and universalise childhood and to treat children generically as a mass of victims. Like Blackwell & Melzak (2000), she contends that by doing so one ignores the diverse ways in which children experience adversity and the multiple responses that they can have. Efforts should be made to understand children within their cultural contexts and to think of them as "agents of their own development who, even during times of great adversity, consciously act upon and influence the environments in which they live" (p. 1). In essence, whilst acknowledging that

some may be vulnerable, Boyden (2003) argues that many refugee children - especially those who are older - are resilient and resourceful, and make conscious efforts to cope with the adversity they encounter. They have considerable personal agency and use it when faced with adverse circumstances. She suggests that:

> "... in general, it turns out that children have considerable inner resources for coping with contradiction and that fears of permanent psychological stunting by change, confusion, and misfortune may be somewhat overblown" (Boyden, 2003, p. 13).

The shift in focus from vulnerability to resilience reflects a wider tendency to view children as "sentient beings who can act with intention and as agents in their own lives" (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 3) rather than as passive objects. Knapp (1999) conceptualises the child as an "active agent" (p. 56), who "thinks, chooses, decides, prefers, values, and so on. In this view, the child is not merely the source of effects, but is an agent that acts" (Knapp, 1999, p. 56). Refugee children are better able to cope with adversity when they have a sense of agency (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000). When they perceive themselves as capable beings they feel able to make choices in their lives and, as a result, their sense of helplessness and powerlessness diminishes.

Whilst studies that investigate the resilience of refugees are not yet given the same attention as research that looks at vulnerability and its manifestations (German, 2004), many authors have commented on the "impressive resilience" (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1998, p. 186) of forced migrants (e.g. Ahearn, 2000; Lynch & Cunninghame, 2000; Kohli & Mather, 2003; Muecke, 1992). An increasingly popular perception is that "most refugees are able to manage well enough in the aftermath of their experience" (Ahearn, 2000, p. 236). A growing body of research suggests that although some refugee children remain psychologically vulnerable and a few manifest 'disturbed' behaviour, most cope adequately with their experiences (Rutter, 2001). In a retrospective study of refugee youth in the United States, Miller et al. (in press) found that resilience in the face of adversity was "typical" (p. 16). Their participants – who were aged between 18 and 35 - did not report the kinds of psychological distresses reported by participants in other studies. The authors suggested that the passing of time, the availability of supportive family members, and having escaped from the violent situation may have served as crucial factors in their resilience. The narratives of the participants suggested that they saw themselves as active survivors rather than as passive victims. This is clearly evident from one 27-year-old Iranian's description of his experiences of war as a 10-year-old child:

> *I remember in 1985 it was getting so bad they were attacking cities ... This one night it was the loudest sound I've ever heard. It was kind of close and the sound was so loud you can't imagine ... I went and saw the ruins and the building got flattened and a lot of people died, so ... Yeah, that's a lot to go through ... I just remember we were at my cousin's house and we just got out so fast that I didn't even put pants on ... My aunt and cousin had a summer home and we left to go there because the Iraqis were going to continue their attacks and kill us all [laughs]. It was terrible. That was like the scariest thing that ever happened to*

> *me... I guess it makes you grow up kind of fast ... War was going on and it's one thing when you're shooting at each other at the border or where it's not affecting you but when it comes to the city where you live in, that's a whole different story. It wasn't like a psychological thing that dragged on for a long time. It wasn't like post-traumatic stress. But it was pretty scary. There's no doubt about that.* (cited in Miller et al., in press, p. 17).

Whilst the participants in Miller et al.'s (in press) study were accompanied, their findings reflect those of researchers who have looked at the experiences of unaccompanied refugees. Many of these young people survive and succeed, despite the stressors they have encountered. Drawing on Kohli's research with social workers (Kohli, 2001), Kohli & Mather (2003) assert that whilst a minority of unaccompanied minors in the UK are:

> "... deeply troubled and need psychiatric intervention, the vast majority are not as psychologically dishevelled as indigenous children who have been harmed by their families" (p. 204).

Similarly, the research of Rousseau et al. (1998) draws attention to the psychological resilience of Somali unaccompanied minors living in Canada.[103] The authors suggest that this resilience emerged as a result of the childrens' cultural interpretations of their experiences, as well as the culturally based coping strategies they used. Separation from family members was not viewed as a form of loss, but rather as having certain positive attributes (Mann, 2004). In Somalia, there is a traditional nomadic practice of sending young boys away from home to look after animals (Ayotte, 2002; Rousseau et al., 1998). These periods of separation from family are considered important learning opportunities. During these times boys obtain support from members of their peer group. As unaccompanied minors in exile, similar strategies were used: The young people relied predominately on their peers (Rousseau et al., 1998).

Although the resilience of some unaccompanied minors is evident by an absence of symptoms, the resilience of others is apparent despite symptoms being present. Some researchers have suggested that the functioning of young refugees might be quite effective in various domains even though they display symptoms of trauma and depression (Miller et al, in press; Rousseau & Drapeau, 2003). Thus, researchers need to be open to evidence of resilience even when pathology exists. Rousseau & Drapeau (2003) state:

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[103] The study by Rousseau et al. (1998) involved two phases. During phase one, unstructured and semi-structured interviews were undertaken with Somali boys aged between 13 and 18 years old who had arrived in Canada as unaccompanied refugee children. The researchers also met and worked together with key adult informants from the Somali community and with representatives of the host community who were responsible for assuming some kind of parental roles in relation to the young people. Phase two took places in the Horn of Africa – in Somalia, in Ethiopia, and in neighbouring countries that often receive Somali refugees. The data from phase two was used to understand and confirm observations made in Canada during phase one.

> "The discrepancy between symptomatology and social adjustment appears regularly enough in the literature to suggest that it is not merely a methodological artefact, but rather reflects a less well understood resiliency" (p. 68).

Recognising the importance of these issues, Rousseau & Drapeau (2003) undertook a longitudinal study of adolescent Cambodian refugees in Canada and compared them with a group of Quebec-born teenagers.[104] The findings suggested that, with time, the young people adjusted well despite having had to cope with both trauma and 'uprootedness'. The relationship between symptoms and social adjustment was found to be tenuous. The two groups – Cambodian refugees and Quebec-born teenagers - reported similar levels of emotional and behavioural symptoms. The Cambodian group did not experience more academic problems than the Quebec-born group. However, the host-country teenagers exhibited more risk behaviours than their refugee peers. In their conclusion, Rousseau & Drapeau (2003) emphasise the importance of paying attention to adjustment as well as symptoms so as to ensure that refugee children are viewed as "active survivors" rather than as "passive victims" (p.78).[105]

In other studies, the resilience of unaccompanied minors is evident but is often hidden within discourses of suffering and vulnerability. Although research has tended to concentrate on the difficulties the young people encounter in their displaced lives (e.g. Stanley, 2003; Vekic, 2003; Wade, Mitchell & Baylis, 2005) – and understandably so, given the plethora of challenges with which they are faced - at times the resilience of the young people comes through in a remarkable way. Within descriptions of loneliness, sadness, lack of integration and fear of deportation, one finds narratives of survival, achievement, and determination. Social workers interviewed by Kohli (2006a) said that they found unaccompanied minors to be "interesting and elastic in their capacities to survive and do well at times of great vicissitude" (p. 7). A study by Robins and Rylands (2004) drew attention to the resilience of a group of unaccompanied minor mothers.[106] One young mother's strength was clear from the advice she gave to her peers:

> *So what I'm going to say is just keep going ... keep going ... never say no, never give up ... you just keep going, always think positive ... do your best ... give all your energy to*

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[104] Fifty-seven Cambodian young people and their parents were interviewed every two years between 1994 and 1998. In the second phase of the study 45 Quebec-born teenagers and their parents were interviewed in 1996 and in 1998. Various questionnaires and checklists were used (see Rousseau & Drapeau, 1992 for further details).

[105] The authors acknowledge their reliance on a Western definition of mental health as a limitation of their study.

[106] This Irish based study looked at the experiences of unaccompanied minors who were also mothers (UMMs). The participants were accessed through the unaccompanied minors social work service in which one of the authors (Robins) was working. At the time of the study the social work service had 25 UMMs as clients of its service. Twenty three of them participated in the research which used both qualitative and quantitative methods.

> *anything ... commit yourself in anything and you will see ... you will be a winner ... that's all I can tell you ... that's all ... because it's really tough to be a mother in a foreign country* (p. 23).

Another example exists in a qualitative follow-up study of unaccompanied minors who had sought refuge in Sweden ten years previously (Wallin & Ahlström, 2005). The authors report that the majority of the participants expressed the belief that they were successful in exile. Success took place within the context of many challenges. The participants' perceptions of success took a variety of forms: one young person talked about having managed to be a single parent despite the absence of support from relatives, whilst others related their success to their education:

> *I've managed to go forward and am done training. Well, you have to struggle every day. I've moved forward, but you have to work and struggle* (p. 139).

In summary, pre- and post-migration stressors undoubtedly interact together to increase the vulnerability and risk faced by refugee children, especially those who are separated from family members. In the past, the literature tended to emphasise this vulnerability. However, there is now an emerging interest in resilience, with researchers increasingly drawing attention to the ability of unaccompanied minors to survive and succeed despite the challenges that they face. The limited available literature suggests that these young people often display good social adjustment and social competence. Faced with adversity, the young people often draw on rich resources of resilience and actively strive to enhance their potential and to achieve positive developmental outcomes.[107] Thus, efforts must be made to increase our understanding of how young people become resilient. Specifically, we need to look at how unaccompanied minors cope with the adverse and challenging circumstances that they encounter, and with the move to a different culture. In this light, it is to literature on coping and acculturation that we now turn.

Coping and Acculturating

This section of the chapter will explore relevant literature pertaining to how unaccompanied minors cope with the multiple challenges they face, and how they manage the process of acculturation and cultural identity formation. Although the concepts of coping and acculturation are discussed separately, it is acknowledged that the two concepts are interrelated.[108]

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[107] Whilst it is important to avoid generalising about the vulnerability of unaccompanied minors, it is equally important that we do not minimise the impact of these young people's experiences (Rousseau & Drapeau, 2003). As Saleebey (2002) states in relation to the strengths perspective: "It is as wrong to deny the problem as it is to deny the possible" (p. 270). A balanced view, recognising the individuality of each refugee, must be sought.

[108] For instance, Berry (1997) describes coping strategies as being related to acculturation strategies and sees them as moderating factors that affect the acculturation process. Lazarus (1997) argues that the stress, emotion, and coping paradigm provides a general and more useful framework for looking at relocation than does Berry's acculturation framework.

A Theoretical Understanding of Coping

The work of Lazarus & Folkman (1984) has been particularly influential in our understanding of how people cope, and by drawing on their work we can learn more about the ways in which unaccompanied minors deal with the stressors they face.[109] Lazarus & Folkman (1984) propose a transactional model of coping that suggests a reciprocal and evolving relationship between the individual and the world, something which ties in neatly with Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to development (Pargament, 1997). Lazarus & Folkman (1984) define coping as:

> "... constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141).

Coping is viewed as process-oriented. It is concerned with what people think and do in particular situations and how these thoughts and actions change as a situation develops or when somewhat different experiences are encountered.[110] Coping is contextual. It is influenced by a person's appraisal of the demands of the encounter and of his or her resources for dealing with it. For instance, does the person appraise the situation as threatening? In addition, does the person appraise himself or herself as being adequately equipped to deal with the situation? These appraisals are termed 'primary appraisals' and 'secondary appraisals' respectively.[111] Furthermore, the Lazarus & Folkman definition does not make assumptions about what is good or bad coping: coping is defined simply as a person's efforts to deal with a situation, whether or not the efforts are successful (Folkman et al., 1986). Finally, the use of the word "manage" in the definition suggests that coping is not equated with mastery: "Managing can include minimizing, avoiding, tolerating, and accepting the stressful conditions as well as attempts to master the environment" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 142).

The coping literature distinguishes between coping resources and coping strategies. Coping resources are environmental or personal assets upon which an individual draws when dealing with stressful situations. They include social supports and material resources, as well as personal

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[109] Most of the research on coping has been quantitative in nature, involving the measurement of coping through various different coping scales. In addition, research has focused mainly on adults, although in recent years researchers have started to look more at coping amongst children and adolescents (Frydenberg, 1997, 1999, 2003; Shulman, 1993), with the importance of adopting a developmental approach being recognised (Compas et al., 2001).

[110] This transactional model of coping with its process orientation contrasts with trait approaches which suggest that coping is something fixed and stable that represents a dispositional element of a person's personality.

[111] In relation to primary and secondary appraisals, Pargament (1997) states: "What makes a life experience stressful is not only the event itself, but primary appraisals of the threat, harm, or challenge the event poses to the search for significance, and secondary appraisals of the resources and burdens the individual brings to the coping process" (p. 99).

characteristics such as positive beliefs, health and energy, problem-solving skills, and social skills (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Particular attention will be paid to social supports later in this chapter.

The various coping resources offer people opportunities for action through particular coping strategies. The resources available to a person will influence what strategies are chosen (Thoits, 1995). As the definition suggests, coping strategies consist of behavioural and/or cognitive attempts to manage situations that are perceived to be stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping efforts that are focused on the demands are known as problem-focused strategies, whilst efforts that are directed towards the emotional reactions that accompany the demands are known as emotion-focused strategies. By engaging in problem-focused coping, a person attempts to change the troubled person-environment relationship by acting either on the environment or on oneself. By engaging in emotion-focused coping, a person seeks to change either the way the stressful environment is attended to or the relational meaning of what is happening (Lazarus, 1993). In general, problem-focused forms of coping are used more when the demands of the situation are appraised as controllable. For instance, Yemi,[112] an unaccompanied minor, might cope with the stress of forthcoming examinations by studying hard. Emotion-focused strategies tend to be used when demands seem uncontrollable (Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Thoits, 1995). Yemi might cope with the absence of his parents by changing the meaning of the situation and saying: "I decided that I don't really need my parents as much as I thought I did because I'm a teenager now and I'm ok on my own".

Whilst problem-focused coping is often expected to be more beneficial than coping that is emotion-focused, Thoits (1995) argues that there is no clear evidence to support this perception. She asserts that "coping effectiveness depends importantly on the type of stressful situation that the individual confronts" (p. 61). Similarly, Pargament (1997) contends that any evaluation of the impact of coping needs to take account of the particulars of the individual, the situation, and the social context. Moreover, he suggests that "[t]he task of finding a coping method that will be helpful to all people, for all purposes, across all situations seems difficult, if not impossible" (p. 123). Attention must be paid to the process of coping as well as to the outcomes, when evaluating how effective a person's coping is. In the process approach, effective coping is defined by the degree to which the various elements of the coping process are "well integrated and flow smoothly" (Pargament, 1997, p. 125). The means of coping, the ends being strived for, and the fit between the individual and his or her social system must mesh together if the coping process is to be helpful.

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[112] 'Yemi' is a fictional character used for the purposes of illustration.

Pargament (1997) maintains that throughout the lifespan responses to stressful situations are rarely uniform. Whilst coping strategies are commonly described as either problem-focused or emotion-focused, a diverse range of strategies is encompassed by this typology. Two individuals may respond very differently to the same circumstances. Additionally, an individual can show different responses to the same situation on different occasions. Frequently, measures such as Lazarus & Folkman's *Ways of Coping Questionnaire* and Frydenberg & Lewis' *Adolescent Coping Scale* are used to conduct research on coping. The many items on these questionnaires attest to the multiplicity of ways in which people respond to crises in their lives. For example, the *Adolescent Coping Scale* consists of 18 coping strategies, including seeking social support, focusing on solving the problem, wishful thinking, self-blame, working hard and achieving, seeking spiritual support, physical recreation, and focusing on the positive.[113]

Layers of social relationships influence the coping process, whether they are at a family, organisational, institutional, community, societal, or cultural level.[114] Yet, despite the obvious influence of these social and contextual forces, coping is not determined by them. Individual choices and possibilities are central aspects of coping (Pargament, 1997). Whilst the literature on coping – with its emphasis on appraisals - includes an implicit suggestion that people are actively involved in deciding how to deal with stressors they encounter, Thoits (1994) draws explicit attention to this aspect of coping. She describes individuals as "psychological activists" (p. 143), who perceive themselves in terms of important social roles, and who "dynamically construct and reconstruct their life circumstances and resources to protect their identities and self esteem" (p. 144). She sees people as agents who make and shape their lives, rather than as "passive subjects overwhelmed by situational stress" (Thoits, 1994, p. 143). Likewise, whilst Frydenberg (1999) emphasises the important influence of culture and context on adolescents who are learning how to cope, she nonetheless describes people as "agentive purposeful actors" (p. 23) who are involved in constructing and negotiating their experiences. Similarly, Pargament (1997) emphasises that an individual chooses how to cope. For example, faced with intense anxiety regarding the outcome of her asylum claim, Naja[115] might make a decision to spend less time alone so that she does not think about it as much. Alternatively, she may cope by spending her evenings in her room and thinking about the consequences of a failed application. Pargament (1997) depicts the concept of coping as

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[113] Likewise, the Ways of Coping Questionnaire includes eight factors representing a range of different coping strategies. The eight factors are: (1) Confrontive coping, (2) Distancing, (3) Self-controlling, (4) Seeking social support, (5) Accepting responsibility, (6) Escape-avoidance, (7) Planful problem solving, and (8) Positive reappraisal.

[114] For instance, Pargament (1997) suggests that culture shapes events, appraisals, orienting systems, coping activities, outcomes, and objects of significance.

[115] Like 'Yemi', 'Naja' is a fictional character used for the purposes of illustration.

rooted in a view of the world that sees people as both shapers and products of their circumstances. Therefore, possibilities and choices are integral to the coping process, with the assumption being that individuals "cannot not chose" (p. 87). Even if passive, avoidant coping strategies are used, individuals are still, at some level, choosing to cope in this way, even if they are not always aware of their choices. Frequently, a choice depends on what option seems most compelling:

> "Through a tertiary appraisal process [people] select the most compelling option, the strategy expected to bring the greatest gain and the least loss of significance through the use of the fewest resources and the accumulation of the least burden" (Pargament, 1997, p. 114, emphasis in original).[116]

Coping Amongst Refugee Children and Adolescents

The earlier discussion of pre- and post-migration challenges has suggested that unaccompanied minors face the task of coping with many stressors. Indeed, Ahearn (2000) states that displacement can be conceptualised as:

> "... an event, often violent and horrible, that produces loss, separation, stress, and trauma that is, in turn, mediated by support systems and coping ability" (p. 10).

Despite a paucity of studies, in recent years some research has explored how refugee young people cope with the stresses of their experiences. The research suggests that diverse coping strategies are utilised in order to deal with multiple challenges. These strategies have the potential to act as effective mediators between difficult situations and positive psychosocial outcomes, allowing the young people to display remarkable resilience in the face of ongoing adversity. A study by Goodman (2004), using qualitative methods, is particularly insightful. Drawing on this study, and on other relevant research, I will now outline some of the ways that refugee young people, including unaccompanied minors, cope with the challenges that they encounter.

Goodman (2004) explored the coping strategies used by unaccompanied youths from Sudan. She used a "case-centred, comparative, narrative approach" (Goodman, 2004, p. 1179). Interviews were conducted with 14 male refugees (aged 16-18) who had been resettled in the United States in the previous 6 to 12 months. They had fled from Sudan in the 1980s when their families were killed in the civil war. For over a decade they spent their lives in the company of other unaccompanied minors, fleeing and living in refugee camps. Whilst their descriptions suggest particularly horrific experiences of refugee life, the coping strategies they employed are still of relevance to our

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[116] Pargament (1997) identifies two functional mechanisms guiding the coping process: conservation and transformation. Conservational methods of coping attempt to protect 'significance' or things that we care about. When a particular situation places something we care about at risk, we make every effort to hold on to it. This is partly to do with the fact that we are drawn to what is familiar and feel threatened by what represents a change. In contrast, transformational coping involves efforts "to change the character of significance itself – to relinquish old values, to discover new ones, and to build a life around this new center" (Pargament, 1997, p. 110). See Pargament (1997), pages 108-114.

understanding of unaccompanied refugees generally, even those whose experiences have not been so difficult or traumatic. The findings underscored the resilience of the refugee boys and drew attention to the idea of resilience as a "culturally based phenomenon" (Goodman, 2004, p. 1194), as the coping strategies emerged from the sociocultural contexts in which they had been reared. The author identified four themes which she felt reflected the coping strategies used by the young people. These four themes are discussed here with reference to Goodman's findings and to other research on refugee children and young people, including some on unaccompanied minors. Links with coping theory are made.[117]

1. Collectivity and the communal self: The narratives of the refugee boys suggested that their sense of shared experience and of collective coping facilitated survival. They recounted stories of helping and encouraging each other, with their sense of responsibility towards others enabling them to continue their journey. Many believed that if they had been alone they would have given up. One participant stated:

   We had to encourage each other, advise each other not to give up, to still struggle for the future life. I encouraged myself and also I listened to other kids. Seeing how they survived made me more encouraged (cited in Goodman, 2004, p. 1183).

   In America, the participants continued to experience a sense of communal identity with other Sudanese refugees - those had been resettled or those who had remained in Africa.

   Goodman's (2004) findings show that social support is an important coping resource, as was theorised by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). However, the unaccompanied participants in Goodman's study differed quite substantially from many other unaccompanied refugee children in that they experienced flight and years of refuge as a collective group. In general, studies of unaccompanied minors tend to focus on their social isolation, with little reference being made to how collective coping may facilitate survival. The work of Rousseau et al. (1998) is a notable exception. They found that most Somali unaccompanied minors in Canada preferred to live with their peers than with families or in group homes. Peers provided them with social support, just as they had done in Somalia. Elsewhere, some authors have described how unaccompanied minors forge friendships with others in similar circumstances, thus suggesting that some collective coping may in fact be present (e.g. Stanley, 2003). The extent to which unaccompanied minors cope in a communal manner warrants further study.

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[117] These links are being made because of my belief that coping theory is relevant to research on unaccompanied minors. It should be noted that, unless otherwise stated, these linkages were not made by the original authors of the various studies.

2. Suppression and distraction: Both in their past and in their present circumstances, the participants in Goodman's (2004) study actively employed a strategy of suppression of traumatic memories in order to protect themselves from difficult feelings. This was an emotion-focused coping strategy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Suppression was facilitated by the young people's efforts to distract themselves. They kept their minds occupied with others aspects of life (e.g. schooling). Little emotion was evident in the traumatic stories the young people told. Goodman (2004) describes how "the unemotional retellings reflect the strategies of suppression that the participants referred to in their narratives" (p. 1185). However, "although the strategy of not thinking about traumatic things was described as effective for dealing with immediate danger and trauma, there was some indication that this strategy was not as effective long term" (p. 1185). Some participants reported that they experienced recurrent, intrusive thoughts of the past. This implied that "the desire to remember and the desire to forget created a dilemma" (Goodman, 2004, p. 1187).

   A number of studies have suggested that seeking distraction is frequently used as a coping strategy by refugee children (e.g. MacMullin & Loughry, 2000; Paardekooper et al., 1999). In relation to unaccompanied minors specifically, Stanley (2001) has made reference to the "common strategy" (p. 110) of young people keeping busy in order to distract themselves from thinking about their past experiences. She also reports that, at times, professionals encourage young people to take up leisure activities in order to address emotional or mental health needs. Similarly, Kline & Mone (2003) report that adolescents in a refugee camp in Liberia approached their memories carefully and purposefully and often made efforts "to hold memories at arm's length" (p. 327). One boy stated:

   I believe it would be better for me to work harder on math ... math will help me to learn a trade and earn money so that I can have a better life ... I do not think it will help me now to talk about what happened in the past (cited in Kline & Mone, 2003, p. 327).[118]

   Whittaker et al. (2005) found that it was important for young Somali refugee women in the UK to deal with emotions quickly rather than dwelling on problems. The participants tended to adopt a "get on with it" (p. 181) approach. Social workers in Kohli's (2006b) study attributed the silence of unaccompanied minors partially to the fact that they were too shocked to talk, thus suggesting that the minors may have been suppressing their feelings. Finally, based on interviews with professionals in Ireland, McCrea (2003) suggests that

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[118] Kline & Mone (2003) identified three common characteristics of adolescents who were coping well. These were as follows: (1) Maintaining an intact sense of purpose (2) Effective control of traumatic memories (3) Successful protection against destructive social isolation.

"greater access to youth work could provide separated children with some diversion from the pressures of their everyday lives" (p. 19).

3. Making meaning: The majority of Goodman's participants made sense of their experiences through their belief in the power of God's will. This belief helped them to accept their situations. Attributing death to God's will provided an easy answer and enabled the young people to suppress their feelings (Goodman, 2004). A small number of the young men made meaning by attributing their suffering to other reasons, such as bad luck or the behaviour of Arab enemies.[119]

   Goodman's depiction of the importance of God in 'meaning making' echoes several references in the literature to the significant supportive role played by God and religion in the lives of refugee children (e.g. MacMullin & Loughry, 2000) and unaccompanied minors (e.g. Robins & Rylands, 2004; Smyth & Whyte, 2005; Stanley, 2001; Wade et al., 2005). More specifically, despite the limited research on the role played by religion in the lives of refugees (Goździak & Shandy, 2002), some studies have highlighted how refugees are able to utilise their religious beliefs to give meaning to their suffering (e.g. Godźiak, 2002; Ai et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 1988; McMichael, 2002), thus helping them to be better able to cope with their difficult circumstances. The importance of faith as a coping resource and as a coping strategy is not surprising, given that coping strategies are often influenced by cultural contexts (Frydenberg, 1999; Pargament, 1997), and that these young people frequently come from deeply religious cultural environments.[120]

4. Emerging from hopelessness to hope: Violence and the monotony and hardship of life in a refugee camp meant that hopelessness was often pervasive for Goodman's participants. However, survival was made possible through hoping for a better future. The young people "crafted narratives of hope despite the realities of their daily lives" (Goodman, 2004, p. 1194). By looking to the future they were able to appraise their situations as hopeful, thus suggesting that an emotion-focused strategy was being used (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Education was seen as key to their future, even in the limited form in which it was available in refugee camps. As resettled refugees in the United States, education was seen as "the means to independence, hope, and being somebody" (Goodman, 2004, p. 1191), with the young people emphasising the many opportunities that it could provide. By focusing on their education and by working hard, the young people engaged in a problem-

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[119] In addition, one participant was actively seeking a reason for his suffering.

[120] Chapter 7 examines relevant literature pertaining to the religious faith of unaccompanied minors. Chapter 8 explores the importance of religion in the lives of the young people who participated in this study.

focused coping strategy. Overall, the hope provided by resettlement left the young people with a sense of agency. This contrasted sharply with the powerlessness they had experienced in Africa.

Again, this theme of emerging from hopelessness to hope, and the associated importance attributed to education, reflects the findings of other studies. Kline & Mone (2003) found that adolescents who continued to believe that their life had meaning and value showed hope and optimism about the future. The refugee literature also makes frequent reference to the importance unaccompanied minors attach to education and to learning English (e.g. Stanley, 2001; Vekic, 2003).

Further references to coping strategies are made by Miller et al. (in press). They identify 5 coping resources used by which refugee youth in dealing with the challenges of their lives in the United States. In particular, these resources highlight the importance of both social support and education. Unfortunately, Miller and his colleagues only provide a brief description of each coping resource:[121]

1. Supportive parent with whom open communication was possible: The young people viewed it as helpful to be able to talk openly to a parent about the family's experiences of violence and displacement.

2. Strong ethnic community: A young person's bicultural ethnic identity was facilitated by the availability of a strong ethnic community.

3. Supportive peers: Coping was further facilitated by the presence of supportive peers, especially peers of the same ethnic group. At times the support was provided by peers from other ethnic groups.

4. School: School provided stability, opportunities to achieve, and access to supportive relationships with teachers.

5. Secret life: Dating and activities such as smoking or drinking occurred within the context of a 'secret life' of which parents were not aware. This meant that conflict with adult relatives, including parents, could be avoided. This represented a problem-focused strategy

[121] The paper in which these strategies are mentioned deals largely with the psychosocial challenges with which refugee youth are faced. The authors undertook semi-structured retrospective interviewes with 40 young adults. They state that a subsequent manuscript "will examine the coping strategies and resources used to overcome these challenges" (Miller et al., in press, p. 6). This paper has not yet been written (email communication with Kenneth Miller, 25 April 2006).

that sought to address the incongruence between the desires of the young people and the desires of their parents.

In summary, whilst broader theoretical conceptualisations of the coping process are rarely applied to young refugees, it appears that the coping strategies of these young people fit well with existing theory. The sparse existing research suggests that they utilise a variety of coping strategies, thus lending evidence to Pargament's (1997) assertion that diversity is a "hallmark" of coping (p. 87). Evidence from various studies suggests that unaccompanied minors draw on coping resources that involve their cultural frameworks and their social relationships. They use both emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). They emerge as "agentive purposeful actors" (Frydenberg, 1999, p. 33), actively choosing the coping methods that are most compelling to them (Pargament, 1997). Their sense of agency is also evident in their adaptation to their new culture, something which is supported by their coping abilities but which is driven by the acculturation process. We now turn to this process.

A Theoretical Understanding of Acculturation

Unaccompanied minors usually have to contend with the challenges of adapting to a very different culture. Although many groups encounter this issue (e.g. economic immigrants, refugees, sojourners, Native Peoples, and ethnic groups), refugees may face the greatest risks given that their experiences are involuntary, migratory, and possibly temporary (Doná & Berry, 1999). In addition, young refugees also cope with the developmental tasks of adolescence. They live in interaction with multiple 'worlds' of family, school, and peer relationships (Cooper et al., 1995; Phelan et al., 1991). Hence, they need to integrate their experiences across these different worlds with their perceptions of themselves. Unaccompanied minors have to 'bridge' the worlds that any adolescent has to bridge. In addition, however, they also have to try to build bridges between their lives here and their lives in their countries of origin, in order to ensure that their historical senses of self fit their new worlds (Ayotte, 2002). The concepts of acculturation and cultural identity are useful in attempting to understand how these bridges are built or how unaccompanied minors come to live within and between two societies, their countries of origin and their countries of settlement. Each of these concepts will now be discussed in turn.

Acculturation refers to the "cultural and psychological changes that result from the contact between cultural groups, including attitudes and behaviours that are generated" (Berry et al., 2006, p. 3). Aspects of an individual's behaviour can change as a result of having contact with other cultures. Acculturation involves both "cultural shedding" and "cultural learning" (Berry, 2001), and is

influenced by a range of both situational and personal factors, (Berry, 1997).[122] For some, the process of acculturation is negotiated with ease, for others, it leads to "acculturative stress" (Sam & Berry, 1995, p. 11), and for a small minority it leads to psychopathology, because changes in the cultural context exceed an individual's capacity to cope (Berry, 1997).

Acculturation is viewed as a two-dimensional process:

> "In any intercultural situation, a group can penetrate (or ignore) the other, and groups can remain culturally distinct from (or merge with) each other" (Berry, 2001, p. 617).

Hence, an immigrant decides (a) whether it is considered to be of value to maintain his or her cultural heritage, and (b) whether it is considered to be of value to develop relationships with the larger society (Berry, 2001). These two dimensions are independent of each other. Immigrants adopt different acculturation attitudes, and from these attitudes they chose certain behaviours. Together, these attitudes and behaviours comprise different acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997). The various attitudes/strategies can be described as follows:

- Assimilation attitude/strategy: When immigrants seek involvement with other cultural groups and want to give up their heritage culture.
- Separation attitude/strategy: When immigrants wish to maintain their heritage culture and do not wish to have involvement with other cultures.
- Integration attitude/strategy: When immigrants wish to maintain their heritage culture whilst simultaneously seeking interaction with other cultures.
- Marginalisation attitude/strategy: When immigrants have little interest in maintaining their heritage culture or in having relations with other cultural groups.[123]

Of these four attitudes/strategies, integration has been found to be the most adaptive (Berry, 1997). Berry et al. (2006) conducted a cross-national study of immigrant youth living in 13 different countries. They found that integration was the preferred way of acculturating and those who exemplified the concept of integration showed better psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

In relation to refugees, Valtonen (1994) found that Vietnamese refugees in Finland utilised an integration acculturation strategy. They maintained their cultural and social identity but, at the

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[122] These factors include the society of origin, the society of settlement, group-level acculturation, and personal factors such as age, personality, length of time in the new country, social support, and coping strategies. Space precludes elaboration of these factors here. See Berry (1997) for a detailed discussion of the acculturation framework, including these factors.

[123] This often occurs as a result of enforced cultural loss as well as exclusion and discrimination in the country of settlement (Berry, 1990).

same time, they made contacts with the wider society, primarily through schools and places of work. Miller et al. (in press) show evidence of a variety of acculturation strategies being used by Afghan, Iranian, Vietnamese, and Cambodian refugee youth. Some of the young people had been born in the US and some had migrated there with their families before the age of 12. One of the main psychosocial challenges that the participants faced involved their negotiation of two worlds by managing the process of acculturation. The researchers studied the domains of schooling, language, and dating. However, links with the various acculturation strategies were not clearly made. Nonetheless, the narratives of the participants suggested that many of them "selectively [embraced] aspects of both cultures in which they lived" (Miller et al., in press, p. 41). For instance, one participant's words suggested that he had adopted the acculturation attitude of integration:

> *I feel comfortable in both societies. And so, I would consider myself a Vietnamese-born person living in America...who has ties to both cultures. ... You still appreciate the long black hair or a woman who speaks the Vietnamese language or understands the traditional side of things. In terms of the American side of things, you also want a woman to be able to speak her mind and who is comforting and self-supporting.* (cited in Miller et al, in press, p. 38).

A second concept, cultural identity (Phinney, 1990), can be viewed as an aspect of acculturation that focuses on immigrants' sense of self. It refers to the "sense of attachment a person has to a particular group, including beliefs and feelings linking him or her to these groups" (Berry et al, 2006, p. 3). The task of developing a sense of self is important for all young people (Erikson, 1968). According to Erikson, the adolescent faces an identity crisis which needs to be resolved if a healthy and integrated personality is to develop. Santrock (2007) defines an identity crisis as

> "...a period of identity development during which the adolescent is choosing among meaningful alternatives" (p. 384).

During this period the adolescent seeks to answer the question of "who am I?" in a way that is meaningful and that involves continuity between the past, the present, and the future. Identity refers to an individual's sense of uniqueness and belonging (Muzi, 2000). When a person's identity develops, his or her sense of self as an individual person comes to the fore. In addition, a person feels a sense of belonging to different groups within society, such as one's family or ethnic group. Individual identity is associated with <u>difference</u> (uniqueness) whereas collective identity is associated with <u>sameness</u> (belonging). Also, continuity is an important aspect of identity (Erikson, 1968):

> "... a major task in [the process of identity formation] involves the challenge of preserving one's sense of <u>personal</u> continuity over time, of establishing a sense of sameness of

> oneself, despite the necessary changes that one must undergo in terms of redefining the self" (Hartar, 1990, p. 376).[124]

A family and social milieu that "resonates with the needs and interests of adolescents" (Bukatko & Daehler, 1995) will influence cultural identity formation. In order to make a commitment:

> "... one has to feel that there is a high probability of support if he/she lets go of some alternatives. That support may be familial, social, or peer – ideally, all three" (Marcia, 1989, p. 406).

Whilst the issue of identity development is important for all young people, it is "especially relevant to the refugee child" (Eisenbruch, 1988, p. 286). Refugee youth face particular challenges in maintaining a sense of continuity of self, given the predominance of change in their lives. They experience "a rupture in the narratives threads running through their lives" (Summerfield, 1998, p. 16). Whilst young people arrive in a country of settlement with an identity primarily related to their culture of origin, this identity may change as they acculturate to their new environment. They face the challenge of developing an identity based on both their culture of origin and the culture of their new society. Phinney & Rosenthal (1992) contend that:

> "If minority youth are to construct a strong, positive, and stable self-identity, then they must be able to incorporate into that sense of self a positively valued ethnic identity" (p. 145).

The outcomes of the process of cultural identity formation mirror the acculturation attitudes and strategies (Berry et al., 2006). Again, the model that has been proposed is two-dimensional, with the two dimensions – ethnic identity and identity as a member of one's new society ('national' identity) – varying independently. Each identity can be either strong or weak, but when one is strong the other is not necessarily weak. People can belong to any one of the four possible identity categories (Phinney et al., 2001). One's cultural identity can be primarily ethnic, based in one's ethnic group, or primarily national, based in the society of settlement. Alternatively, one's identity can be integrated or bicultural, whereby a person retains a strong ethnic identity while also identifying with his or her new society (Phinney et al., 2001). However, resolving cultural identity issues can be very challenging, particularly for young people who have only recently migrated (Berry et al, 2006). When young people are unable to resolve the issues with which they are faced,

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[124] However, the concept of continuity does not mean that a person must remain the same throughout life. Instead it means that in order to have an identity achieved status it is better for a person to be able to trace the threads of continuity across their life-time. Viewing the person as a rational agent is of importance here (Moshman, 1999). The person constructs continuity in many respects. He or she influences the development of a continuous sense of self and as a rational being is able to rationalise what has happened in his or her life. Continuity may not be clearly evident within someone else's narrative, but the important point is that the person, him or herself, perceives there to be continuity between the self of the past, the self of the present and the self of the future (James, 1982).

they may exhibit identity diffusion (Marcia, 1994). Similarly, Phinney et al. (2001) suggest that an individual who identifies with neither their ethnic nor national culture has a marginalized identity.

Just as integration has been found to be the most beneficial acculturation attitude/strategy, research has shown that, in general, a bicultural or integrated identity is associated with higher levels of overall well-being compared with the other identity categories (Phinney et al., 2001). Vedder et al. (2006) found that:

> "... among immigrant youth, a truly bicultural orientation is beneficial for their sociocultural adaptation, and sociocultural adaptation in turn enhances their psychological well-being" (p. 165).

In addition, psychological well-being was found to be enhanced when the young people had a strong orientation towards their ethnic group (Vedder et al., 2006), thus suggesting the importance of one's sense of ethnicity (Phinney et al., 2001).

Research evidence suggests that young immigrants adopt different cultural identities. In a study of second generation British-Sikh young people, Hall (1995) found that they believed "with amazing consistency, that there was 'a time to act Indian and a time to act English'" and that there was "a great deal of time for them to play with identities that lie somewhere in between" (p. 254). A study of children of families who had fled to Britain from Chile (Flores-Borquez, 2000) highlighted the feelings of 'not belonging' that these children had. The author concluded:

> "... the children of exiles [...] do not perceive themselves as having established reference points on which to lay foundations for the development of self-identity. Their perception of their own identity and that of their parents is diffuse" (p. 221).

In attempting to 'negotiate two worlds', the participants in Miller et al.'s study (in press) were also faced with the challenge of developing a cultural identity. Their identities were found to be highly fluid and evolving, with the participants' narratives suggesting that a shift to a bicultural identity occurred with time. In general, at the time of the interviews, the young people did not feel truly Afghan, Vietnamese, Cambodian, or Iranian. However, neither did they perceive themselves to be fully American. Instead, there was "a palpable sense of an American identity to which they did not yet have access, a sense of not feeling truly at home" (p. 36, emphasis in original). In addition, the authors suggested that:

> "... refugee and immigrant youth in the US occupy a kind of middle space in terms of their ethnicity. However much they might wish to wholly occupy one or the other world, this is an impossibility" (p. 36-37).

Despite the obvious relevance of these research studies, we would expect the experiences of unaccompanied minors to be somewhat different to the experiences of second-generation migrant young people, or to the experiences of accompanied refugees, such as those in Miller et al.'s study (in press). Unlike second-generation migrants, unaccompanied minors usually have their own

memories of their countries of origin, having spent their childhoods there. In addition, unlike accompanied young people they do not have the opportunity to 'remember' and reminisce with their families about their childhoods, as they are separated from them. The absence of family members means that the task of maintaining aspects of their cultures of origin and of their ethnic identity is more challenging for them.

Although, to my knowledge, no studies have dealt specifically with acculturation or identity development amongst unaccompanied minors, some studies have made reference to the issues involved. Issues of culture, and particularly of cultural differences in relation to pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing were discussed in the study by Robins & Rylands (2004). A reference was made to one participant's intention to impart her culture to her child, and another reference was made to a girl's perception that her "view of everything" (p. 65) was beginning to change due to being in Ireland. However, the process of acculturation was not widely discussed in the study. From her Finnish study, Helander (2001) was able to conclude that most of the unaccompanied minors she interviewed felt that they were both Somali and Finnish although "some... feel like outsiders, that they do not belong anywhere or to any group" (p. 42). In Ayotte's (2002) study of Somali children in the Nordic countries, issues relating to cultural difference and identity formation in exile were explored. Ayotte (2002) found that children reacted "in different ways" (p. 45) to meeting a new culture. Some of the young people coped with identity development and the clash of two cultures by idealising their homeland and refusing to be influenced by the new society, thus suggesting that a separation acculturation strategy and a primarily ethnic identity had been adopted. Others, however, rejected or suppressed their culture of origin and embraced the new culture. This suggested that an assimilation strategy and a primarily national identity had been adopted. Ayotte (2002) also describes how there can sometimes be a tension between the inner and outer reality and provides evidence of this by citing one young adult:

> *Although I say my prayers, I am not acting like a Somali girl. I don't cover my head and dress like a Somali. It would be hard for me to go back and dress that way. I feel I am denying who I am, forgetting who I am, and losing my culture. I may dress like a Westerner, but I don't feel deep inside that this is me. I think in future I might dress differently* (p. 46).

Other participants had a sense of 'dual identity', thus suggesting that they had adopted an integration strategy or a bicultural sense of self.[125] Ayotte highlighted the importance of the two

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[125] For example, one girl talked about the efforts of her school principal to ensure that she assimilated. He did not want her to wear a headscarf nor to mix with other refugees. However, she refused to obey him: *"I don't want to be changed and assimilated like he wanted – a sort of brainwashing. I want to be integrated"* (cited in Ayotte, 2002, p. 22).

cultures in the young persons life: "How they are able to bridge two distinct cultures is of primary importance" (p. 54).

Thus, the limited available research suggests that unaccompanied minors probably use a variety of acculturation strategies and adopt various cultural identities when adjusting to life in a host country. However, it is important to note that acculturation attitudes and cultural identity are not formed in a vacuum. An individual's ecological context is highly influential (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Some contexts "support the possibility of integration and make it easier to develop a bicultural identity, whereas others make this resolution difficult" (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 499). The same can be said of acculturation attitudes/strategies. Yet, although the various systems have an impact on the individual, he or she as a rational agent, also has a part to play. Even though cultural and social environment will impact on acculturation attitudes and on cultural identity formation, individual agency and choice are centrally important (Giddens, 2001). The idea is that "individuals are being constructed but [are] also engaged in constructing themselves at the same time" (Fook, 2002, p. 76). Although influenced by contextual factors such as family and national policies, young people "actively [negotiate] forms of identity and belonging" (Berry et al., 2006, p. 214). Therefore, it can be expected that unaccompanied refugee minors "are not simply pawns of their circumstances" (Berry et al., 2006, p. 214). Instead, they seek out and create their own ways of dealing with the complexity of living in two different cultural contexts. Whilst acknowledging that unaccompanied minors may not always have the freedom of choosing (Berry, 2001), in general they make decisions about what acculturation strategies to use and what cultural identity to adopt.[126]

In summary, it is clear that theories of acculturation and cultural identity formation are useful in terms of enhancing our understanding of the situations of unaccompanied minors. The limited available research suggests that these young people, as individuals, chose various strategies and identities as they begin the process of acculturating to their new life. Whilst acknowledging that the young people will again operate as 'agentive purposeful actors' throughout their adjustment, their social support networks will necessarily play an important role in this process. These networks will facilitate the identity development process and will limit the possibility of considerable "acculturative stress" (Sam & Berry, 1995, p. 10) emerging. Thus, social support will now be discussed.

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[126] As an example of not having the freedom of choosing, some unaccompanied minors in Ireland may find it difficult to retain their ethnic identity, due to not knowing anyone else from their ethnic group with whom to speak their language or practice other cultural traditions.

Social Support: A Coping and Acculturation Resource

Coping theory suggests that social support is an important resource in the coping process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Additionally, social support networks are viewed as important resources in the acculturation process and in helping immigrants to develop an integrated sense of cultural identity (Berry, 1997; Marcia, 1989). Given that unaccompanied minors are, by definition, separated from their parents and hence unable to acquire support from them, the issue of social support in their lives is particularly important to consider. Therefore, this section will begin by describing briefly the importance of social support, before looking at the social networks of refugees, particularly those of unaccompanied minors.

Given the increased recognition of the impact of multiple environmental systems on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), it is not surprising that social networks and social supports have become important arenas of study in their own right. Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of social networks and social supports in our lives, leading Milardo (1988) to assert that:

> "The relationships we maintain with other individuals, some close and of long standing and others ordinary and brief, are among the most important features of life" (p. 13).

Garbarino (1983) describes a social support network as:

> "... a set of interconnected relationships among a group of people that provides enduring patterns of nurturance (in any or all forms) and provides contingent reinforcement for efforts to cope with life on a day-to-day basis" (p. 5).

Previously, social support had been defined by Cobb (1976) as "information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations" (p. 300). This definition underscores the significance of the perception that social support is available. During the 1970s, empirical studies emerged which examined the impact of social support on health. Cassel (1974, 1976) highlighted the importance of strengthening a person's social supports in order to protect him or her from illness. Cobb (1976) showed how social support could help to buffer individuals against negative outcomes when faced with a crisis. More recently, studies have shown that social support can have a positive impact on child and adolescent psychological health and adjustment across a range of stressful life experiences (e.g. Bao et al., 2000, in relation to homeless adolescents suffering from depression; Lee et al., 2005, in relation to immigrant college students coping with intergenerational family conflict; Legault et al., 2006, in relation to the resilience of young people in foster care). Drawing on the significance of a 'secure base' (Bowlby, 1988), Gilligan (2000) emphasises the importance of young people being facilitated to develop the "scaffolding of relationships necessary to sustain ['base camps' of social support] for exploring and coping with the vicissitudes of life" (p. 40). Essentially, social support can reduce the negative effects of stressful experiences by enhancing young people's ability to cope with stressful situations. It can "[facilitate] coping with crisis and adaptation to change" (Cobb, 1976,

p. 302), thus suggesting its potential importance for unaccompanied minors who are dealing with multiple crises and changes.[127]

According to Cutrona (2000), the nature of a stressful experience and the coping style of the stressed individual will affect the efficacy of social support. Support can be particularly beneficial when genuine caring is communicated and when people are encouraged to solve their own problems. In addition, Cutrona (2000) asserts that social support is most effective when it comes from those with whom we share close bonds and when opportunities for reciprocity are evident. She distinguishes between different kinds of social support that can be offered to people, and suggests that it is important to ensure "optimal matching between stress and social support" (p. 111):

- Nurturant support: With this kind of support, no attempt is made to solve the problem. Instead, comfort is provided. Through the provision of 'esteem support' a person is encouraged and belief in their ability is expressed. In addition, 'emotional support' can be provided whereby a caring attitude is communicated and empathy is exhibited.

- Instrumental support: Instrumental support involves efforts to solve or alleviate a problem. It can take two forms: 'Tangible support' involves doing or providing something to help with the problem. 'Information support' involves offering advice or suggestions.

These two broad kinds of social support – nurturant and instrumental - mirror the two types of coping strategies identified by Lazarus & Folkman (1984): emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. Although the categories suggested by Cutrona (2000) reflect previous descriptions by Cohen & Wills (1985), one significant difference is evident. While Cohen & Wills distinguish between esteem, informational, and instrumental support, they also include social companionship as a form of support, something that was not included by Cutrona (2000).[128] They describe social companionship as spending time with others through leisure and recreational activities. They suggest that:

> "... this may reduce stress by fulfilling a need for affiliation and contact with others, by helping to distract persons from worrying about problems or by facilitating positive affective moods" (Cohen & Wills, 1985, p. 313).

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[127] The affects of social support on both psychological and physical well-being can occur either directly or through a buffering mechanism (Jack, 1997). The direct or main-effect model suggests that social networks or resources impact positively on people irrespective of whether they are under stress. In contrast, the buffering model suggests that social support acts as a buffer by protecting people from the potentially damaging effects of stress on their well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

[128] However, Cutrona (2000) acknowledges that "daily companionship" (p. 107) is an important component of well-being.

Overall then, drawing on the work of Cohen & Wills (1985) and on evidence from research, Berndt (1989) makes the following comment about the multiple types of support children expect to receive from friends:

> "In their conversations with friends, [children] assume that they will be treated with respect and told that they are a person of value. They expect to be able to talk about their problems with friends, to discuss their feelings openly, and to receive helpful advice and comfort. When they are in need, they count on their friends to help. When they want a companion for activities, they assume that their friends will be eager to join them. In these, and other ways, children view their friendships as supportive relationships" (p. 325).

Thus, given the potentially important role played by social support in the lives of children and adolescents, what part does it play in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees, both young and old? Whilst social networks often have an influentially important role to play throughout the asylum cycle (Koser, 1997),[129] of particular relevance to this current study is the role played by social networks in helping people to cope with the challenges they experience in exile. Exile results in social ties being ruptured (Miller, 1999) and, given that one's identity is rooted in relationships with others (Blackwell, 1993), an individual's sense of self is thus threatened. New social supports that are created in exile have the potential – through nurturant and instrumental support and through social companionship – to help refugees to come to terms with the "ghosts of the past" (Kohli & Mather, 2003, p. 201), to adapt to their new society, and to develop or recover a sense of self. Essentially, social supports have the capacity to act as mediating factors, facilitating adjustment (Ahearn, 2000).

However, despite a frequently held perception that members of immigrant groups exist in solidarity with one another, building a sense of community and providing social support, and whilst recognising that such solidarity and mutual assistance exists in some refugee communities (e.g. Rousseau et al., 1998; Valtonen, 1994), refugees often report feelings of loneliness and isolation. Research in various countries has shown that refugees often suffer as a result of the loss of social networks and that they encounter difficulties in replacing these networks in the host country (e.g. Bennett & Detzner, 1997; McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Miller et al., 2002; Smyth & Whyte,

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[129] Influenced by work in the international migration field, Koser (1997) used the social network approach as a conceptual framework in his study of Iranian asylum seekers in the Netherlands. He found that social networks had an influentially important role to play throughout the asylum cycle - during the pre-flight stage, the flight stage, and the stage of exile (Koser, 1996b). Koser (1997) conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 32 heads of households and supplemental discussions with 'opinion formers' and representatives from within the asylum seeking population. He found that, in general, social networks influenced asylum seekers' decisions to migrate (mainly through the provision of financial assistance by relatives and acquaintances in Iran), their choice of destination (mainly through the provision of information regarding asylum policies given by smugglers or family members in Europe), and their adaptation to their host society (through the provision of emotional support and information usually given by relatives in the host country). The author highlighted how social networks served different functions for different individuals at all stages of the asylum cycle (Koser, 1997).

2005; Stanley, 2001; Vekic, 2003; Wade et al., 2005). Thus, the evidence suggests that although "in theory, immigrants are able to lock into established networks and take advantage of early experience and information," (McMichael & Manderson, 2004, p. 88), in reality resettlement can result in a loss of social capital[130] (Putnam, 2004) and in loneliness and isolation amongst immigrant groups. As a result, immigrants and refugees are often unable to draw on social support in their coping strategies. Rather than social support serving as a coping resource for refugees, their lack of social networks serves as an exile-related stressor. Several studies lend evidence to this point of view.

According to Miller et al. (2002), social isolation occurs as a result of the violence and dislocation experienced by refugees in their home countries, and the ensuing loss of community and separation from relatives and friends. In addition, it is caused by "obstacles" (p. 345) that hinder the development of a sense of community in the host culture. Such obstacles might include discrimination, language issues, the asylum-seeking process, exclusion from the labour market, and being relocated by the authorities (Bemak & Greenberg, 1994; Smyth & Whyte, 2005). Exile can result in days becoming "devoid of social interaction" (Miller, 1999, p. 295). This results in isolation being a salient source of distress among refugees. Miller et al. (2002) draw on their study of Bosnians living in Chicago to provide evidence of the predominance of isolation amongst refugees.[131] Participants embedded their experiences of isolation "within a comparative temporal framework" (Miller et al., 2002, p. 344), by juxtaposing descriptions of their current isolation with narratives of the rich social networks that had been available to them prior to migration. Feelings of isolation meant that many of the participants felt lonely and lacked social support. They missed their family and friends who were not with them in Chicago because of deaths and separations. Whilst those who had arrived in the US accompanied by their nuclear families had more access to social support and were somewhat buffered from experiences of intense isolation, many of the participants were alone and less fortunate.

Similarly, in a study using a non-clinical sample, McMichael & Manderson (2004) found that isolation was a salient feature in the lives of their participants. Drawing on in-depth interviews with

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[130] In recent years, an increased interest in social networks has emerged through the work of numerous authors studying the concept of 'social capital'. Although writers have described social capital in different ways, leading to a lack of consensus about its definition, it is generally accepted that social networks are at the core of the concept (Putnam, 2004). Features of social organisation encompassed by social capital include social networks, expectations, and trust, all of which are seen as having the potential to facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Runyan et al., 1998). Social capital essentially refers to connections among people –"social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Social capital has been found to facilitate positive outcomes with respect to the well-being of children and young people (Ferguson, 2006; Jack and Jordan, 1999; Runyan et al, 1998).

[131] A clinical sample was used in this study. Therefore the findings cannot be generalised to other refugee populations.

42 Somali refugee women living in Melbourne, they found – like Miller et al. (2002) - that the past gave meaning to the present:

> "... women's understandings of contemporary social relations are given comparative meaning through their juxtaposition with memories of social worlds in Somalia" (McMichael & Manderson, 2004, p. 89).

Many of the participants described loneliness and a lack of social support in Melbourne, something which contrasted to a life at home where "dominant norms and values provided an environment of trust and social support that suffused everyday life and social relations" (McMichael & Manderson, 2004, p. 91). Life in Melbourne was very different, with these norms having been eroded to a great extent. A sense of social solidarity was no longer present, meaning that, as one participant put it, *"everyone is just struggling on their own"* (cited in McMichael & Manderson, 2004, p. 91). For many of the women, it seemed that war, its wider repercussions (such as separation from family), displacement generally, and mistrust had led to a weakening of social relations. Social cohesion did not necessarily travel with the immigrants.[132] Their narratives suggested that "the lack of long-standing familial and social bonds in Melbourne precluded the establishment or the maintenance of trusting relations" (McMichael & Manderson, 2004, p. 93). Participants feared that they would be gossiped about and so kept their problems to themselves. But conditions of resettlement, such as financial constraints, limited employment opportunities, dispersed location of accommodation, and lack of transport also acted as what might be termed 'obstacles' (Miller et al, 2002) in the creation of a sense of community. As McMichael & Manderson (2004) state: "In theory, the connecting pins of social capital are present; in effect, the ideational and practical contingencies of resettlement dilute them" (p. 94).[133]

The various coping strategies/resources suggested by Goodman (2004) and by Miller et al. (in press) draw attention to the importance of supportive networks in the lives of refugee adolescents, as they cope with the challenges of exile. Several studies have made reference to unaccompanied minors being mutually supportive of each other (e.g. Goodman, 2004; Rousseau et al., 1998; Stanley, 2003; Summerfield, 2000). In general, however, research suggests that these young people experience isolation, loneliness, and a lack of social support (McCrea, 2003), like the adult refugees in the studies by Miller et al. (2002) and by McMichael & Manderson (2004). The views of unaccompanied minors have been elicited in studies by Anderson (2001), Conroy & Fitzgerald (2005), Hopkins & Hill (2006), Robins & Rylands (2004), Stanley (2001), Vekic (2003), and Wade

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[132] This was often due to the fact that the Somali community was made up of diverse individuals, coming from a range of different backgrounds within Somali society.

[133] Interestingly, participants found that income equality resulted in the depletion of networks of support and social capital. They felt that because most Somalis were struggling on minimal welfare payments, a culture of helping each other out did not emerge

et al. (2005) (amongst others) and these authors have highlighted the social isolation faced by many unaccompanied minors in different countries and the corresponding lack of social support that they experience. Poverty,[134] negative discrimination, and a lack of participation in full-time or mainstream education have been seen as causes of this isolation (Stanley, 2001). In their studies on unaccompanied minors in Ireland and in the UK respectively, Vekic (2003) and Stanley (2001) have highlighted the fact that many of these young people are not involved in their communities or engaged in extra-curricular activities. In Vekic's study (2003), the majority of young people reported that they spent their free time cooking,[135] shopping, doing homework, watching television, listening to music, or resting. Similarly, whilst acknowledging that individual experiences varied, Stanley concluded that the lives of many of her participants were characterised by "almost uninterrupted monotony" (p. 94).

Studies have also drawn attention to the fact that unaccompanied minors often do not have close friendships with citizen young people (e.g. Rea, 2001; Stanley, 2001; Vekic, 2003). They tend to make friendships with young people from within their own ethnic groups, or from within the immigrant community generally.[136] [137] Language barriers and living situations – such as visitation rules within hostel accommodation – can impact negatively on young people's efforts to make friends (Stanley, 2001; Vekic, 2003). As a result, friendships are often made with others living in similar circumstances, such as those who are also struggling with language barriers or contending

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[134] Garbarino (1983) refers to the impact of poverty on social relationships: "Economic inadequacy – very much a social rather than simply a financial concept – jeopardizes relationships" (p. 26).

[135] At the time of Vekic's study the majority of hostels catering for unaccompanied minors in Ireland were self-catering.

[136] Milardo (1988), in his discussion of 'networks of close associates' (p. 22) draws attention to the fact that individuals may interpret the meaning of 'close friendships' in different ways: "The interpretation of close friendship undoubtedly varies both phenomenologically, in terms of the respondent's personal definition of closeness, and socially, in terms of the actual content of interaction" (p. 24). The meaning of 'close' is rarely defined in the literature.

[137] Apart from Helander's (2001) study, research on the social networks of unaccompanied refugee children makes consistent reference to their lack of friendships with host peers. Although this has obvious worrying implications for their ability to integrate effectively into the new society, in many ways it is something to be expected. The general literature on friendship consistently states that people tend to be friendly with people who are similar to them (Bradford Brown & Klute, 2006). As Hartup (1996) states: "Common ground is a sine qua non in friendship relations throughout childhood and adolescence, suggesting that friends ought to be similar to one another in abilities and outlook. Folklore sometimes suggests that 'opposites attract,' but this notion has not found general support in the empirical literature. The weight of the evidence suggests that, instead, 'Beast knows beast; birds of a feather flock together' (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 11)" (p. 5). In relation to adolescents, Hartup (1996) highlights two general areas in which friends are most similar. These are: (a) school-related activities, aspirations and achievement and (b) normative activities including smoking, drinking, drug use, antisocial behaviour and dating. Such similarity between friends occurs due to a variety of factors. These include socio-demographic conditions, social selection, and mutual socialisation (Hartup, 1996).

with life in a hostel. In a study of refugee children living in Germany, including unaccompanied minors, participants reported that they felt like outsiders. However, they placed great importance on friendships that were made in their hostels (Anderson, 2001). Similarly, Rea (2001) drew attention to the fact that, in Ireland, the social networks of unaccompanied minors are mainly made up of other unaccompanied minors or asylum seekers. Although this suggested a level of peer support, Rea contended that it was:

> "... highly likely that these individuals [unaccompanied minors and other asylum seekers] are going through the same difficulties and would not be available on an emotional level" (p. 31).

In addition, the lack of friendships with citizen young people suggests that unaccompanied minors might have difficulties in integrating into their countries of settlement and in adopting either a 'national' or 'bicultural' identity (Phinney et al., 2001).

A study by Helander (2001) is exceptional in terms of its findings. This study was conducted in Finland, with 28 unaccompanied minors taking part in semi-structured, qualitative interviews. The researchers found that the participants had "quite big social networks" (p. 27), including friends and acquaintances they met through school, through hobbies and in their neighbourhoods. Some of their friends were Finns. A number of factors may have contributed to the rather different findings in this study. These include the fact that many of the participants had relatives living in Finland, a fact which clearly contributed to them having larger social networks. Also, efforts were made by the staff at children's homes to link the unaccompanied minors with members of their own communities as well as with a volunteer Finnish support family. These efforts clearly facilitated the young people's social integration.

Frequently, the literature makes reference to the social support – or lack thereof – that professionals provide to unaccompanied minors. In Stanley's (2001) study, social workers, teachers, and members of voluntary organisations provided assistance to the young people. Some of the participants praised the support with which they were provided, whilst others were critical of it. In general, in the UK and in Ireland, policy and practice analyses, as well as studies eliciting the perceptions of unaccompanied minors, have suggested that social work services offered to these young people are inadequate (Ayotte & Williamson, 2001; Stanley, 2001; Veale et al., 2003; Vekic, 2003). Kohli (2006a) offers a succinct summary of the UK literature:

> "Overall, the studies remain flat and unenthusiastic about social work practice, largely falling into a portrayal of professional ineptitude, having described failing organisational contexts. In their analysis, gaps trump successes, and the established furrow of telling social workers what they have not done, what they have done too little of, and what they ought to do, is firmly followed" (p. 10).

In an effort to re-appraise social work practice with unaccompanied minors, Kohli's research

(2004, 2006a, 2006b) involved interviews with 29 social workers in relation to 34 young people with whom they worked. The author found that the social workers were:

> "... practically helpful, therapeutically minded and companionable, thus distancing themselves from forlorn evaluations of social work with unaccompanied minors" (Kohli, 2006a, p. 11).

Kohli's research is very much exceptional, however, with most other studies being critical of the support received by unaccompanied minors from social workers.

Although the literature carries an implicit suggestion that unaccompanied minors need more support from professionals, several researchers have made reference to the danger of unaccompanied minors becoming dependent on formal support systems. Wade et al. (2005) highlighted that many of the young people in their study were "socially isolated and dependent on support from professionals" (p. 182). Robins & Rylands (2004) looked at the experiences of unaccompanied minor mothers and explored their perceptions of supports, stressors and services in their lives. Stressors in their lives included the absence of family and community of origin and experiences of social isolation.[138] The participants had access to a range of both formal and informal support networks. Formal support included that obtained from public health nurses, social workers, and places of worship. Informal support was obtained from partners, friends, and other mothers.[139] However, most of their support was obtained from the formal/professional realm, with little support being obtained from the wider community. Although friends and partners consistently rated highly as sources of support, this support was not available to the same extent as support from professionals. Robins & Rylands (2003) warn:

> "While it is extremely positive that there is [professional/service support] available, there is a risk involved that this becomes the only type available with the possibility of an entrenched dependency on such supports and increasing isolation from the wider, more informal, community supports" (p. 100).

Support from professionals – such as that experienced by these unaccompanied minor mothers - tends not to be based on equal or reciprocal relationships. As mentioned previously, Cutrona (2000) underscores the importance of people having opportunities to reciprocate support, given that people generally do not like to receive without the opportunity to repay. In relation to Bosnian refugees in

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[138] The participants also identified other stressors. These included: A history of traumatic experiences, professional services, inability to work, difficulties accessing education and childcare, and fear of deportation.

[139] The participants in this study related their experiences of support in Ireland to their experiences of support in their countries of origin. Interestingly, the nature of support was viewed as different in Ireland. Participants highlighted the availability of more material support in Ireland, something which would not be available at home, whilst more practical and emotional support were available in their countries of origin (Robins & Rylands, 2003).

the United States, Keyes & Kane (2004) emphasise the importance of reciprocity in creating a sense of belonging. Elsewhere, in discussing the importance of mentoring the talents and interests of young people in public care, Gilligan (1999) refers to the particular value of mentors who "emerge organically from within [young people's] networks" (p. 194). Therefore, it is important for unaccompanied minors to have naturally occurring relationships that involve mutual assistance, rather than only non-reciprocal "external" (Gilligan, 1999, p. 194) relationships with professionals.

Overall, whilst some unaccompanied minors have strong social networks and many friends and sources of support, the research literature frequently makes reference to the lack of social support experienced by these young people and to their experiences of loneliness and social isolation. However, care must be taken when interpreting the meaning of isolation. Firstly, the meaning that refugees attribute to their social isolation may be shaped by culture. The studies by McMichael & Manderson (2004), by Miller et al. (2002), and by Robins & Rylands (2003) show that refugees often use their past experiences as reference points for interpreting their present circumstances. Hence, discontinuity of culture may influence the perceptions that refugees have of their circumstances. For instance, if their culture of origin tended to emphasise social interaction, a less socially interactive host culture might have greater meaning for refugees. Drawing on research with older Southeast Asian refugee women living in the United States, Bennett & Detzner (1997) argue that experiences of loneliness and social isolation may be more distressing for people who have come from cultures where the self is constructed as a connected and interdependent self, and who have moved to a culture where the self is viewed as autonomous and independent:

> "Because the self is predicated on the presence of others, disruptions of role arrangements, their future uncertainty, and the experience of social estrangement may be more distressing and hold a distinctively different meaning for Southeast Asian elders than for older people in Western societies" (p. 142).

Secondly, although isolation is generally viewed as something negative (due to the fact that it can lead to feelings of loneliness and to a lack of social support) it may actually be adaptive at times. In certain situations refugees might ascribe positive meaning to their aloneness. For instance, the narratives of some of Miller et al.'s (2002) participants suggested that being alone was something that they chose in order to avoid distressing conversations and painful memories about the Bosnian war. It served as a form of self-protection for some of the refugees, thus suggesting that social isolation often emerged out of a person's sense of agency, rather than because of an "imposed reality" (Miller et al, 2002, p. 346). This highlights the complexity of social isolation (Miller et al., 2002) and the fact that some refugees, at particular points in time, may not want social support.

On a final point, and related to the complexity of social isolation, although a number of studies have looked at the social networks available to unaccompanied minors, little reference is made to the quality of these networks. Cutrona (2000) suggests that those with whom we have close

emotional bonds are likely to provide the most effective support in times of stress. Therefore, as Hartup (1996) argues, it is important to distinguish between having friends, the identity of friends, and the quality of friendships, if the significance of such relationships is to become clear. Similarly, Jack (1997) emphasises the need to look at the quality and availability of relationships and points to the fact that social network relationships are not automatically beneficial. Studies have tended to focus on the extent of professional support provided to unaccompanied minors, as well as looking at whether these young people have friends, and who these friends are (i.e. whether they are citizen friends or friends from their own countries). The quality of their relationships has been largely neglected in research circles. The next section will look at one quality of friendship – trust – given that trust is widely acknowledged as an essential feature of strong interpersonal relationships.

The Quality of Relationships - Trust

Flanagan (2003) offers a useful definition of trust:

> "Trust is a multidimensional construct that is fundamentally relational. It concerns oneself and some other or others whether they are intimates, strangers, or more abstract institutions or groups such as the government, the church, or humanity. The essence of trust is the belief that others are fair, that they will not take advantage of us, although they could. The latter point is essential to the phenomenon of trust. That is, trust is premised on freedom. Because the behavior of others is not under our control, trust is an act of faith, never fully certain" (p. 166).

Relationships without trust are often viewed as superficial, with Mitchell (1990) asserting that "no major or enduring relationship can exist happily or comfortably without trust" (p. 849).[140] Trust is viewed as a key component of relationships from a very young age. The crisis of trust versus mistrust occurs during infancy and is the first stage of Erikson's (1963) eight psychosocial stages of development. Interpersonal trust develops during this period, and this has been recognised "as an initial step in forming healthy human relationships" (Mitchell, 1990, p.1). However, it is widely recognised that this crisis of trust versus mistrust is not resolved once and for all at this early stage. Instead, as Santrock (2002) asserts, "it arises at each successive stage of development" (p. 356). This means that although someone might leave the stage of infancy with a sense of trust, they can still have "their sense of mistrust activated at a later stage" (Santrock, 2002, p. 356). This 'activation' can occur due to a single trauma which occurs in an individual's life, or due to long-term environmental conditions which an individual endures, suggesting that the "etiology of lack of trust is varied" (Mitchell, 1990, p. 847). However, as Terrell et al. (2000) note, there is a paucity of studies that look specifically at what causes people to be mistrustful, hence implying that our understanding of the etiology of trust is limited.

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[140] Similarly, Smith et al. (2003) define friendship as "a close relationship between two particular people as indicated by their association together or their psychological attachment and trust" (p. 150).

Arising from this general deficiency in our knowledge, our specific understanding of mistrust amongst refugees is even more limited. In relation to refugees and trust, Daniel & Knudsen (1995) state:

> "Unlike life under 'ordinary' circumstances, or more correctly, under circumstances over which one exercises a certain measure of control, in the life of a refugee, trust is overwhelmed by mistrust, besieged by suspicion, and relentlessly undermined by caprice" (1995, p. 2).

Increasingly, both personal accounts (e.g. Baker, 1990) and academic articles (e.g. Bertrand, 2000; Christiansen & Foighel, 1990; Daniel & Knudsen, 1995; Delaney, 2006; German, 2004; Hjern et al., 1991; Keyes & Kane, 2004; Kohli, 2006; McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Miller et al., 2004; Omidan, 2000; Robinson, 2002; Vekic, 2003) have made references to the difficulties that many refugees have in trusting. Hynes (2003) suggests that a "boundless social universe of mistrust" (p. 2) requires consideration by those engaged in research with refugees. Drawing on Baker's eight-phase process model (Baker, 1990) - a model that looks at the entire process of becoming a refugee - Hynes (2003) illustrates how the concepts of 'trust' and 'mistrust' relate to a refugee. She describes how refugees both mistrust and are mistrusted during each of the eight stages of the model: the period of threat, the decision to flee, in flight, reaching safety and a place of asylum, the refugee camp experience, reception into a host country, resettlement, and post-resettlement. Similarly, Daniel & Knudsen (1995) state:

> "... the various stages in the refugee's life cycle, which threaten life with radical discontinuity, are stages in which 'trust' is placed on trial" (p. 4).

From the work of Daniel & Knudsen (1995) and of Hynes (2003), it is clear that the trust issue is a two-way process. The title of Daniel & Knudsen's book – *Mistrusting Refugees* – seems to suggest this. These authors state that "from its inception the experience of a refugee puts trust on trial. The refugee mistrusts and is mistrusted" (p. 1). Refugees are often mistrusted by various people, ranging from people in their country of origin with whom they have had conflict and agents involved in their travel, to host governments, NGO employees, and sections of the local population (Hynes, 2006). From my own experience, I became aware while working as a social worker with unaccompanied minors, that my colleagues and I were becoming more and more sceptical of the 'stories' that many of the young people were telling. There was widespread belief amongst those working in the sector that many of the young people hide the truth and lie about their reasons for coming to Ireland. The situation does not seem to be unique to Ireland. For example, Silove & Ekblad (2002) comment on a recent upsurge in hostility towards asylum seekers in Western countries, an upsurge that has been fuelled by the fears of terrorism. In Britain, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants et al (1998) refer to what they term "a major shift from a culture of service to a 'culture of suspicion'" (p. 5). Inevitably, when refugees mistrust and are mistrusted, a

vicious cycle of mistrusting relationships emerges.

Although many researchers and writers have made reference to trust and mistrust in the lives of refugees, few have focused specifically on these issues (Daniel & Knudsen, 1995 and Hynes, 2003 are notable exceptions), and, to my knowledge, no studies have examined the causes of mistrust from the perspectives of refugees themselves. It is likely that some refugees may never have successfully resolved the trust versus mistrust crisis that they faced in infancy (Erikson, 1963). However, for others it is likely that mistrust became 'activated' due to the stressful circumstances of their lives. These stressors might be once-off traumas (such as witnessing a violent killing) or negative longer-term conditions of their environments (such as living in danger of being killed or in fear of deportation over a protracted period of time). For instance, Kline & Mone (2003) suggest that as a consequence of experiencing conflict it may be difficult for refugees to perceive people as trustworthy or predictable. Instead, they might feel fearful that information they give to 'strangers' will be used as evidence against them. Many unaccompanied minors have witnessed violence or other violations of human rights, have suffered disadvantage, poverty and disempowerment, and thus have been forced, to some extent at least, to leave everything that is familiar to them, in order to search for safety or better opportunities in a different country. Those in their lives whom they may have loved and trusted for years are left behind as they face the stresses of their new world alone. It seems plausible that their past experiences interact with the difficulties of integration and of an uncertain future, to create a situation where trusting others becomes a huge challenge. However, if we are to become clearer about the causes of mistrust amongst unaccompanied minors, research involving the perspectives of these young people is needed.

Whilst being unable to trust is viewed commonly as problematic, at times mistrust may be 'functional', as is suggested by Bertrand (2000) and by Jacobson & Landau (2003) in relation to their research with refugees. When entering the lives of refugees, researchers find:

> "... a type of functional distrust that maintains a level of integrity that allows the refugee the best chance of survival in a potentially hostile encounter, very similar to the functional aspects of silence" (Kohli, 2006b, p. 712).

However, it is likely that negative consequences of mistrust also exist. For instance, interpersonal difficulties may arise due to a lack of trust. Those who do not trust may feel guilty (Anderson, 2001), lonely, unloved, isolated, or suffer from low-self esteem (Mitchell, 1990).

As regards unaccompanied minors specifically, Kohli (2004) highlights trust and mistrust as important issues for them, but ones that are "scarcely mentioned" (p. 83) in UK-based studies. Although research on these young people has made occasional brief reference to their difficulties in trusting, researchers rarely provide detailed elaboration of trust issues. As an example, in Stanley's (2001) study, the issue of trust is given cursory attention. A quotation from one young person is

provided:

> *Since living here I have learned not to trust anyone ... We have had to learn not to rely on other people* (cited in Stanley, 2001, p. 89).

The author does not expand on this boy's perceptions, nor does she mention whether or not other young people expressed similar sentiments. In the Irish context, issues of trust and mistrust are treated similarly, with authors and researchers making passing reference to these matters (e.g. Christie, 2003; Delaney, 2006; Vekic, 2003). For example, some of the young people in Vekic's (2003) study reported that a fear of opening up to people impacted on their ability to make friends. While the author highlighted the young people's need "for the development of close relations, people they can trust, they can love and people who would trust and love them" (p. 67), little discussion of mistrust is provided.

Elsewhere, Kohli's (2006b) research described how social work practitioners responded to the silence of their clients. In order to practice effectively, social workers thought it important to build trusting relationships with unaccompanied young people. Drawing on the work of White (1997), Kohli distinguishes between the 'thick' and 'thin' stories that the practitioners' clients provided. Initially, the unaccompanied minors were often silent and provided 'thin' stories. The social workers offered various reasons for the existence of this silence, such as young people being too shocked to talk or feeling unsettled because of the uncertainty regarding their immigration status. Some of the young people had been told to tell a certain 'thin' asylum story and were fearful of deviating from it. Others wanted to focus on the practicalities of resettlement instead of dwelling on the past (Kohli, 2006b). However, social workers found that with the passing of time and the emergence of mutual trust, 'thicker', multi-layered stories were revealed. These included stories of both ordinary lives and distressing experiences (Kohli, 2006a).[141]

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[141] Similarly, in their study of refugee youth in the United States, Miller et al. (in press) identified three patterns of communication that existed within refugee families, some of which involved silence. The first pattern was one of 'non communication' about the past, whereby parents and adolescent children "shared a mutual desire to avoid discussions of familial experiences of violence and displacement" (Miller et al., in press, p. 26). Some of the participants – adolescents who were either born in the US to parents who were refugees, or arrived in the US as refugees before the age of 12 - felt that it would be two painful to hear and see their parents talking about their traumatic experiences. Others did not feel that there was anything to be gained by "re-opening old wounds their parents had sought to close" (p. 27) and focused on the here and now of life in exile instead. Miller and his colleagues also referred to a pattern of 'restricted communication' within the families, whereby parents remained silent about war and the journey of exile, despite the desire of their adolescent children to know and understand what their parents had experienced. These young people experienced emotional pain and frustration as a result of this pattern of communication. Finally, in other families, a pattern of 'responsive communication' was evident. In communicating with their children about their experiences of war and displacement, parents responded to the child's level of interest and developmental capacity to understand. This pattern led to more adaptive outcomes for the children, resulting in more harmonious familial relationships during childhood and leading to the children being "more at ease with themselves" (Miller et al., in press, p. 28) in early adulthood.

In summary, whilst the literature suggests that social support serves an important role as a coping resource and as a facilitator of acculturation, research on refugees suggests that they are often socially isolated, experiencing feelings of loneliness and lacking in social support. Whilst their difficulties in creating post-migration social networks are linked to a range of interrelated issues – including discrimination, poverty, exclusion from the labour market, and language barriers – it is likely that the difficulties that refugees have in trusting also has a crucial part to play. Refugees, including unaccompanied minors, often find it difficult to form strong trusting relationships that could serve as bases of social support, thus facilitating the coping and acculturation processes. However, we know little about the causes, nature, or consequences of mistrust, especially from the perspectives of refugees themselves. Trust is a significant component of meaningful relationships. Relationships are potentially significant in assisting refugees to cope with their past and present circumstances. Hence, an enhanced understanding of mistrust is important. More research exploring trust, mistrust, and their complexities is warranted. In addition, whilst it is easy to assume that mistrust means that no significant relationships are created, studies need to examine the meaning that young people attach to their friendships and relationships, in order to explore whether or not relationships can still be significant even when trust is not present.

Concluding Comments and Gaps in the Literature

In recent years increasing attention has been paid to the lives of unaccompanied minors who are seeking asylum in Western countries, including Ireland and the UK. The existing research suggests that these young people face numerous challenges. These challenges stem from their pre-migration experiences and the difficulties they encounter in exile. In the absence of family support, they cope with the traumas of the past, with the losses and changes experienced in the present, and with the uncertainty of the future. Given these numerous challenges, there is often a tendency to view unaccompanied minors as vulnerable victims of their circumstances. However, recent research has highlighted their many strengths. More often than not they show remarkable resilience and considerable personal agency. Faced with adversity, they come across as young people who survive despite their suffering.

Yet, although our understanding of the experiences of unaccompanied minors is increasing all the time, it is evident that there are still some major gaps in our knowledge:

- Firstly, we know little about the 'ordinary' aspects of life that unaccompanied minors experienced prior to departure – aspects related to their relationships with friends and family, their daily activities, and their school lives. Instead, most of our knowledge of their pre-exile lives stems from research that looks at the causes of departures.

- Secondly, whilst much has been written about the losses and changes experienced by

refugees, these writings are often not based on the perceptions of refugees themselves. By looking at the lives of unaccompanied minors from their own perspectives we can hope to explore their experiences of loss and change as a result of forced migration.

- Thirdly, whilst research indicates some of the ways in which refugee young people deal with their changed and challenging circumstances, more information is needed. In addition, the existing literature rarely draws on broader theories of coping, acculturation, and cultural identity development. These theoretical concepts could serve as useful tools in enhancing our understanding of the lives of unaccompanied minors and of their active efforts to cope resiliently with their situations.

- Fourthly, whilst refugees are generally perceived to experience difficulties trusting those around them, research has not explored the causes of this mistrust from the perspectives of refugees instead. In addition, although the social isolation and loneliness of unaccompanied minors are mentioned frequently, a link between isolation and lack of trust is rarely, if ever, created.

It is with these gaps in mind that we now turn to the current research. I begin by examining this study's methodological basis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Methodology refers to "how we go about acquiring the knowledge that exists" (Grix, 2002, p. 178). This chapter describes how knowledge was acquired in this study of unaccompanied minors living in Ireland. Firstly, it describes why a qualitative methodology was adopted, one that paid particular attention to the circumstances of unaccompanied minors. Several specific considerations were prioritised, namely the sensitive nature of the research, the relational context in which it was occurring, and issues of culture and diversity. Secondly, the ethical foundations of the study are described and the important role of reflexivity is highlighted. Thirdly, the actual process of conducting the study is outlined in detail, beginning with a description of the participant observation phase, including the theory behind this method, the rationale for using it, the challenges that I encountered, and the benefits of the approach. The interview phase is also described in terms of theory, rationale, challenges and successes. References to ethical issues are made throughout the chapter. Finally, the process of analysing the data is outlined, and key points in relation to the write-up are delineated, particularly as regards the limitations imposed by attempts to ensure anonymity.

Adopting a Qualitative Methodology

Research methodologies are embedded within epistemological and ontological assumptions – assumptions pertaining to knowledge and to existence. Arising from these assumptions, each methodology asks different research questions, uses different methods to answer them, and assesses truth claims in different ways (Trinder, 1996). A distinction is usually made between two approaches to data collection and analysis: qualitative and quantitative approaches (Gilbert, 2001). Broadly speaking, quantitative researchers rely on a positivist approach to social science (Neuman, 2003) and generally set out to "describe and categorize information [and] test assumptions" (Ahearn, 2000, p. 13). The approach is deductive, with research producing empirical evidence to test or refute theories (May, 2001). In contrast, qualitative researchers rely on interpretive or critical social science (Neuman, 2003), and are concerned with "the discovery of meaning through observation, description, decoding, and translation" (Ahearn, 2000, p. 15). An inductive approach is generally used, whereby theory is generated from the data. In studying the social world, researchers have long debated the efficacy of using qualitative versus quantitative methods, and, in doing so, have highlighted the various strengths and weaknesses associated with both approaches. Traditionally, within these debates, the two approaches have been depicted in polarised terms, as though one were the opposite of the other or as though they were incompatible. However, recently there has been an increased recognition of the fact that the approaches can be reconciled and that

they can compliment each other (Gilbert, 2001). Researchers have begun to realise that pragmatism as well as philosophy influences what approach is adopted. Thus, while acknowledging that both qualitative and quantitative approaches have important contributions to make in furthering our understanding of the social lives of unaccompanied minors, a qualitative approach was considered most appropriate to the current study because of the nature of the research questions and of the population under study.

Having previously worked as a social worker with unaccompanied minors, the tenets underlying qualitative research fitted neatly with my own position as a social worker, whereby I viewed social 'reality' as being composed of multiple realities, narratives, and interpretations. As such, qualitative methods are "closely akin to the processes of social work practice" (Scott, 2002, p. 924). Social work can be viewed as a hermeneutic endeavour, with the construction and interpretation of meaning at its core (Scott, 1989). Similarly, the exploration of meanings is integral to a qualitative methodology. Whilst there is often a temptation to adopt a quantitative, scientific approach - as without it we might feel that we "lose our credibility" (Agar, 1980, p. 13) - I recognised that adopting such a method could mean that the humanity of individual participants might disappear. In essence, qualitative methods were particularly appealing to me because they allow researchers to illustrate the humanity and individuality of those being researched.

Qualitative research arises from a phenomenological theoretical position. Rather than seeking facts and causes of social phenomena (Taylor & Bogden, 1998), and viewing the world as knowable - as happens within the positivist tradition (Trinder, 1996) - the phenomenological approach involves a focus on:

> "...the subjective experience of the individuals studied. What is their experience like? How can one understand and describe what happens to them from their own point of view? As the term suggests at its heart is the attempt to understand a particular phenomenon" (Robson, 2002, p. 195).

Social life is studied phenomenologically through the use of qualitative methods. Researchers seek to explore the continuously changing subjective experiences and perspectives of people and rely on their meanings and words to gain an increased understanding of the social world. This social world is seen to have multiple layers of meaning and perspective, with social reality constantly being constructed through the interplay of people's subjective interpretations and their environmental contexts (Halmi, 1996, p. 364). Therefore, people's everyday lives and their contextual situations are of prime importance. The search is not for the truth, nor for the objective reality. Instead, "the important reality is what people perceive it to be" (Taylor & Bogden, 1998, p. 3). All perspectives are deemed worthy of study, with particular attention being paid to the perspectives of those who are disempowered (Taylor & Bogden, 1998). In addition, the qualitative researcher must be open to constant adjustment and fluidity in his or her approach.

Qualitative research is characterised by the flexible use of multiple methods (Taylor & Bogden, 1998), which aim to provide us with richer data instead of trying to get closer to an objective truth (Flick, 1998). According to Flick (2002), one of the key essential features of qualitative research is the correct choice of appropriate methods and theories whereby "the object under study is the determining factor for choosing a method and not the other way round." (p. 5). Similarly, in relation to refugee research, Robinson (2002) states:

> "The new wave of 'refugee research' has often taken little cognisance of the special circumstances of asylum seekers and has routinely failed to consider either the special methodological challenge of researching this group or been reflexive enough to think about the positionality of the researchers or the consequences of their research" (p. 62).

Thus, the 'special circumstances' of asylum seekers and refugees ought to be considered when making decisions about the general approach of a research study and the specific methods that are to be used. Therefore, in this study, particular and continual attention was paid to three important considerations in relation to conducting research with unaccompanied minors. These were: the sensitivity of the research, the diversity of the research population, and the relational context of the research encounter. Each of these will now be discussed in turn.

Sensitive Research

Lee & Renzetti (1993) define a sensitive topic as

> "... one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data" (p. 5).

Whilst I recognised that sensitivity and the perception of risk are subjective concepts (Sieber, 1993), I anticipated that the young people might consider this research to be sensitive or risky because of my intention to delve into experiences that might be perceived as "deeply personal" (Lee & Renzetti, 1993, p. 6). I wanted to talk to them about their lives, lives that involve multiple challenges, including the loss of loved ones, the stresses of cultural adjustment, and future uncertainties. Sadness and loneliness are prevalent feelings that are associated with these lives. In addition, the fear of deportation can be constantly present for some young people. For these reasons it was anticipated that the interviews with the young people would be "emotionally charged" (Lee & Renzetti, 1993, p. 6), and that the participants might feel threatened by the levels of emotional stress involved. Therefore, consideration was given to these sensitive circumstances throughout the research process. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that participation in the research did not cause harm, as will be discussed later.

The Relational Context

From the outset, I anticipated that in my interaction with the young people a certain type of

"relational context" (Miller, 2004, p. 224) would exist – one primarily based on distrust. Given that refugees frequently distrust those around them, I expected that unaccompanied minors might not trust me. In addition, at the beginning I was quite mistrustful of the young people, having perhaps been influenced by the 'culture of suspicion' that surrounded me. As a result, I became quite preoccupied with the fact that the participants might not be open about their situations or might not tell me the truth about their circumstances. I sought to address this issue in the design of the study, particularly by opting for qualitative techniques (such as participant observation) that would enable me to build rapport with the young people.

Concerns about truth are prevalent in social research circles.[1] Within the qualitative discipline the issue of truth is a complicated one:

> "What the qualitative researcher is interested in is not truth per se, but rather perspectives. Thus the interviewer tries to elicit a more or less honest rendering of how informants actually view themselves and their experiences" (Taylor & Bogden, 1998)

In this study, it was logical to suggest that whether or not an unaccompanied minor's account was a 'more or less honest' one would be influenced by the 'relational context', or by the nature of the interpersonal relationship between the young person and me as researcher. As Oakley (1981) suggests:

> "The mythology of hygienic research, with its mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data collection must be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and admit others into their lives" (p. 58).

Whilst such 'personal involvement' is considered a potential source of bias by positivists, proponents of a qualitative methodology have begun to recognise the inevitability of this relationship existing, the impossibility of eliminating its consequences, and the likelihood that positive consequences may arise from it. They recognise that the research process is affected by "two important selves" (Miller, 2004, p. 224): that of the participant, and that of the researcher. Trust and distrust form inherent parts of the researcher-participant relationship. It is likely that refugees, including unaccompanied minors, will "shape their responses based on the relative degree of trust they feel toward the researchers" (Miller, 2004, p. 219). Thus, levels of trust and distrust

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[1] Questions about truth dominate many of the debates between the qualitative and quantitative disciplines. Many quantitative researchers, positivists, believe that the 'truth' is attainable, whilst qualitative researchers tend to believe that obtaining objective knowledge about people and their experiences is not possible. They recognise the subjective influences that impact on the research process. Hence, 'facts' become fluid and changing, influenced by context. However, beyond these debates, some more concrete issues exist. In essence, researchers are often concerned with the question of whether or not research participants are honest and tell the truth.

will affect the quality of the data. Obtaining 'backstage' access to unaccompanied minors' lives is unlikely to occur when trust is absent (Goffman, 1959; Miller, 2004).[2]

If, as researchers, we are to accept that trust is an important aspect of the research encounter, then it is important to take into consideration the difficulties that refugees may have in trusting. Apart from refugees' general lack of trust in people, and hence the difficulties they will have in trusting the researcher,[3] particular trust issues related to research per se may also be evident. Lipson & Meleis (1989) describe how many recent immigrants are not easily recruited for research purposes because they tend to distrust organisations, are suspicious of research in general, or do not understand the purpose of research. Culturally, research is "a strange process for many asylum seekers" (Thomas & Byford, 2003, p. 1401). Robinson (2002) has stated that, frequently, asylum seekers have learned not to trust people in order to survive. She goes on to ask a very pertinent question: "If they have learned not to trust strangers why should they trust a stranger who is a researcher?" (p. 64). Hence, as aspects of the 'relational context', trust and lack of trust amongst unaccompanied minors were key considerations throughout this research.

Culture and Diversity

I recognised that the unaccompanied minors are very different from me. From the beginning, I sought to take account of the fact that my different age, culture, language, socio-economic status, and gender might impact on the research process. I was aware that my Western perspectives could not automatically be applied to the perspectives of unaccompanied minors (Ahearn, 2000), and that difficulties might arise in interviews because of differences in verbal and non-verbal communication (Ryen, 2002).[4] Given these differences, I paid attention to the fact that it might be difficult to build rapport with them, as is often the case in cross-cultural research.

Yet, I also recognised that differences existed within this difference (Torode et al., 2001). I came to this research with the opinion that attempts to generalise about unaccompanied minors are inherently flawed, and that a variety of these young people's voices exist (Davis, 1998). The diversity of children is increasingly being recognised in child research. Emond (2005) states:

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[2] Also, from her experience of research with refugees Omidian argues: "without trust, one hears only either what the interviewee wants the researcher to hear of what they think one wants to hear. Neither is satisfactory" (2000, p. 60).

[3] For instance, Bertrand (2000) describes, how, in his research with refugees awaiting transit and resettlement from a camp in Thailand, establishing trust with the refugees was one of his main challenges. He states: "It was difficult for me to convince them that I did not have any of the decision-making powers that other foreigners had in determining the fate of refugees" (p. 93).

[4] For instance, Smyth & Whyte (2005) describe how eye contact means different things in different cultures. In many African countries respect for elders is shown by not making eye contact with them when in conversation. In contrast, within Ireland, not making eye contact suggests that someone is being evasive.

> "Homogeneity does not necessarily exist as a result of similar age categories and the generalizability of child-related research must be resisted ... Sociology must be open to the possibility of many 'childhoods'" (p. 136).

It was these 'many 'childhoods'' and the individual experiences of the young people that I wished to explore. Whilst common patterns may be evident in the meanings expressed by people, "ultimately subjective experience is unique" (Scott, 2002, p. 925). Daniel & Knudsen (1995) argue that:

> "... agents of the host country seek to level down each refugee to a common denominator, an ideal-typical refugee, and neutralize differences so as to provide each refugee not only with a fresh start but also with an equal one" (p. 5).

Whilst caseworkers in host countries may perceive "individualities" to be irrelevant, for the refugee such individualities are "the foundation on which a meaningful world may be rebuilt" (Daniel & Knudsen, 1995, p. 5).

Hence, I sought not to reduce unaccompanied minors to single variables but to study them in their complexity and entirety in their everyday contexts (Flick, 2002), and to recognise the young people as individuals with a range of different perceptions of the world. I recognised that unaccompanied minors come from many different countries and backgrounds. Therefore, I saw the research as "a process of understanding difference" (Davis, 1998, p. 327) and sought not to discover the 'typical' experience, but to account for the diversity of experiences and perspectives. At all times, I strove to act in a culturally competent manner, by attempting to maximise sensitivity and minimise insensitivity in my interactions with the young people.[5] I approached the young people with a willingness to learn about their particular experiences and cultures (O'Hagan, 2001) and adopted a stance of "respectful curiosity" (Torode et al., 2001, p. 82) in relation to them.

In summary, a qualitative phenomenological approach was adopted in this study, in an attempt to understand the life-perspectives of a group of unaccompanied minors. The young people's 'special circumstances' were given ongoing consideration throughout the study. Particular attention was paid to the sensitive situations of the young people, to the fact that the research's relational context was likely to begin from a position of distrust, and that the group under study comprised diverse individuals, both culturally and otherwise. Alongside this qualitative methodology, a broader ethical and reflexive approach was adopted. This approach will be described in the next section.

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[5] Some of the particular strategies that I used in order to maximise sensitivity will be discussed later in this chapter.

An Ethical and Reflexive Approach

Throughout the study I prioritised the adoption of an ethical approach, and this was facilitated by ongoing reflexivity. This emphasis on ethics arose from the fact that I viewed it as a privilege to be able to spend time with unaccompanied minors and to talk to them about their experiences, particularly given that I was getting a somewhat private view of sensitive aspects of their lives (Grafanaki, 1996). Sieber (1993) has argued that ethics are particularly important to consider in sensitive social research, given the risks of harm involved. Bulmer (2001) describes ethics as:

> "... a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human dignity leaves one ignorant of human nature." (p. 45)

Thus, whilst it was clear that an ethical approach might serve as a limitation in the research endeavour, ethical issues were always given priority. They were to the forefront in the planning and conducting of the fieldwork, as well as in the analysis and write-up stages, thus reflecting Kvale's (1996) contention that ethical decisions arise "throughout the entire research process" (p. 110).

Overall, whilst paying specific attention to the particular population being studied, the study was conducted within the parameters of the ethical guidelines for conducting research with children, as outlined by the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin (Children's Research Centre, unpublished). Throughout the research, attention was paid to a core set of values underlying the ethical guidelines, namely:

- "Having a commitment to the well-being of those participating or involved in the research process (**Beneficence**)
- Having a commitment to doing no harm (**Non-Maleficence**)
- Having a commitment to the rights of those involved including the right of individuals to take responsibility for themselves (**Autonomy**)
- Being child-centred in [one's research] approach, listening to children, treating them in a fair and just manner (**Fidelity**)" (Children's Research Centre, unpublished, p. 3).

In adopting these values, particular consideration was given to two standard ethical issues - consent and confidentiality (Ryen, 2004). Both of these issues will be described in more detail later in this chapter, when discussing the processes involved in the participant observation and interview phases of the research.

However, consent and confidentiality were not the only issues that were considered. Ethical issues in research are often presented as large and controversial dilemmas such as whether a researcher should inform a third party when a child makes an allegation of abuse. Yet smaller but significant ethical issues arise continuously during fieldwork. Guillemin & Gillam (2004) refer to these as

"ethically important moments" (p. 265) where:

> "... the approach taken or the decision made has important ethical ramifications, but where the researcher does not necessarily feel himself or herself to be on the horns of a dilemma" (p. 265).

An example of such a moment might be when participants indicate discomfort with their answer to a question. In such instances, "the moment of response is an ethically important moment because there is the possibility that a wrong could be done" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 265). Lengthy deliberation about the issue cannot occur, but the manner in which the researcher responds in such an instance is crucially important. From the outset I anticipated that such moments were likely to continuously arise during various stages of the research. By viewing ethical issues in this way – as small but important moments rather than as large and controversial dilemmas – I would suggest that the ethical soundness of the study was enhanced. In addition, engaging in reflexivity helped to ensure that that the entire research process was an ethical one. Continuous reflexivity ensured that as a researcher I was always aware of 'ethically important moments' and of my responses to them.

Guillemin & Gillam (2004) describe reflexivity as "a process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated" (p. 274). Similarly, Mason (1996) advocates "active reflexivity" (p. 6) by the researcher. In her view, detachment from the knowledge being generated is not possible. Therefore, researchers need to try to understand their role in the process. They should "constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process, and subject these to the same scrutiny as the rest of their 'data'" (Mason, 1996, p. 6).

Reflexivity is "an active, ongoing process that saturates every stage of the research" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). It involves both self-awareness and personal exposures (Davis, 1998). In this research, reflexivity featured during the planning, participant observation, interviewing, analysis, and write-up stages. I reflected on what part I was playing in constructing the system in which I was engaged, and, in turn, what effect the system was having on me. I noted my thoughts and feelings about what was happening and scrutinised my actions and responses on an ongoing basis.[6] These reflections were viewed as "invaluable data in and of themselves" (Omidian, 2000, p. 57). They represented a different perspective in a methodology that aimed to highlight multiple perspectives. As Devereux (1967) stated in relation to participant observation:

> "Fortunately, the so-called 'disturbances' created by the observer's existence and activities, when properly exploited, are the cornerstones of a scientific behavioural science, and not

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[6] My own reflections were a major part of my field-notes during the participant observation. During the interviewing phase, I noted reflections both before and after the interviews and these reflections were used when analysing the interview data.

> [...] deplorable *contretemps*, best disposed of by hurriedly sweeping them under the rug" (1967, p. 7).

Similarly, Scott (2002) recognises that the personal responses of the researcher can be a rich source of insight in the research process:

> "Good qualitative research is thus more likely to be achieved by writing the researcher into the research than by trying to 'sanitize' it by writing them out of the text." (p. 929).

This does not mean that the researcher provides his or her opinion in an uncontrolled way. Scott (2002) warns against this and advocates for even greater rigour given the researcher's inevitable use of self.[7]

In summary, an ethical approach, involving on-going reflection, was adopted throughout the study. Attention to ethics formed an integral part of designing and conducting the research, and reflection helped to ensure that ethics were prioritised at all times. The chosen methods – participant observation and qualitative interviewing – were used within this ethical and reflective framework. The actual process of using these methods will now be discussed.

The Process

Participant Observation Phase

Why Participant Observation was Chosen

The first qualitative method I used was participant observation, which is viewed as the "key to ethnographic research" (Omidian, 2000, p. 45). While ethnographic methods were developed by anthropologists to understand and describe 'other' cultures (Emond, 2005), in recent years these methods (including participant observation) have been utilised by a variety of disciplines exploring a range of areas of interest (e.g. Emond, 2005; Lee Treweek, 2000; Omidian, 2000).[8] Essentially, the ethnographer or the participant observer:

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[7] Thus, by engaging in reflexivity, I accepted that it was not possible for the research to be conducted in a purely objective manner. Traditionally, qualitative research has been criticised for being subjective. Qualitative researchers have been seen to rely on the close personal relationship that the researcher makes with those being studied (Bryman, 2001). Researchers have tended to write themselves out of research. To a certain extent, these views and practices prevail today. However, some writers have begun to recognise that objective research is a mythical concept (Green & Hill, 2005). Researchers are, as Denzin & Lincoln (2000) state, "biographically situated" (p. 18). The researcher "speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 18), and these characteristics, as well as academic, professional, and personal preconceptions will influence how the research is conducted and how the experiences of others are interpreted (Davis, 1998). As researchers, each stage of the research, will be influenced by our biographies and even by our moods or feelings on a particular day.

[8] Emond's study looked at young people's experience of living together as a group in a children's home in Scotland, Lee-Treweek's research examined the work of auxiliary carers in two homes for older people in

> "... participates, overtly or covertly, in people's lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 2).

In this way, the ethnographer explores the meanings research participants have of their social worlds (Emond, 2005). Within ethnography, participant observation is a widely used method and is associated with flexible designs (Robson, 2002).[9] During participant observation researchers get to see what the informants "routinely do and how they routinely interact" (Omidian, 2000, p. 46). Although Taylor & Bogden (1998) argue that data collection is 'unobtrusive' in this type of research, it is generally recognised that the researcher does impact on the environment being studied. Indeed, Tedlock (2000) refers to the fact that the term 'participant observation' is an oxymoron that implies "simultaneous emotional involvement and objective detachment" (p. 465). Elsewhere, Koepping (cited by Flick, 2002) addresses this paradoxical role. To him, in participant observation, the researcher:

> "... as social figure must have exactly those features that Simmel has elaborated for the stranger: he has to dialectically fuse the two functions in himself, that of commitment and that of distance ... [The researcher therefore tries to realize] what is outlined by the notion of participating in observation, the task of which is to understand through the eyes of the other. In participating the researcher methodologically authenticates his theoretical premise and furthermore he makes the research subject, the other, not an object but a dialogical partner" (Koepping, 1987, p. 28).[10]

Although this research could not be classified as ethnographic, in the strictest sense of the term, participant observation was used. I decided that I wanted to spend time in a hostel where unaccompanied minors live. This part of the research was seen as both an exploratory and supportive phase (Robson, 2002). For a number of reasons participant observation was seen as a useful prerequisite to conducting qualitative interviews:

- I felt that an extensive phase of participant observation would give the young people a chance to get to know and trust me. This was considered important given the difficulties many unaccompanied minors have in trusting. So, participant observation served an important 'relationship building' function.

- I believed that by spending time in the milieu of my informants (Taylor & Bogden, 1998), I would have the opportunity to learn about their daily experiences and would be able to

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Britain, and Omidian utilised participant observation in her study of the Afghan refugee community in California.

[9] According to Wax (1980), the terms 'ethnography', 'participant observation', and 'fieldwork' have been used interchangeably in the literature.

[10] In this research reflexivity paid a huge part in striking a balance between 'commitment' and 'distance'.

explore - through observation, participation, and informal discussion - the meanings the young people have of their social world.

- Participant observation was consistent with an inductive methodological approach. It allowed themes to emerge and allowed general research questions to become more specific (Taylor & Bogden, 1998).

Following discussions with ex-colleagues who worked on the TSCSA, I identified Valley Lodge as the hostel in which I wished to conduct the research. This setting was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the hostel accommodated both female and male unaccompanied minors. Secondly, unlike many of the other hostels at that time, Valley Lodge had a sitting room area in which the young people often gathered in the evening. I identified this as being potentially beneficial to me, given that I wanted to spend time in the company of the young people. Thirdly, arising from my previous work as a social worker, I had a good relationship with the manager of this hostel, which I hoped would facilitate my access to the setting. Having decided that I wanted to conduct the research in Valley Lodge, I then arranged to meet with HSE/Health Board officials to negotiate their permission.

Negotiating Access and Consent

Miller (2004) describes the process of entering refugee communities as "complicated" and suggests that it takes "time, negotiation, and a respect for the gradual development of relations based on trust and mutual respect" (p. 218). Indeed, from the outset, obtaining access to Valley Lodge and consent for the participation of its residents in the research was considered a complex issue, which involved both the HSE/Health Board and the unaccompanied minors. Personnel of the HSE/Health Board, who have responsibility for the care of unaccompanied minors, serve as "gatekeepers" (Bloch, 1999, p. 376). When conducting research, access to the young people can be negotiated through them. In the case of this research, it was deemed both practical and ethical to seek the cooperation of the HSE/Health Board. Practically speaking, it would not have been possible to spend lengthy periods of time in Valley Lodge without having the permission of the HSE/Health Board. From an ethical perspective, in research with children, parental consent is frequently sought (e.g. Buckley et al., 2006; Smyth & Whyte, 2005; Hewett et al., 2005[11]). As unaccompanied minors are without parents in Ireland, the HSE/Health Board act as 'corporate parents'. Therefore, they are in a position to give parental-type consent.[12] Given my knowledge of the multiple challenges faced

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[11] Hewett et al. (2005) in their research with asylum seeking children in Wales sought the informed consent of parents/guardians when the young people were under 16 years of age.

[12] Vekic's (2003) research on unaccompanied minors took place without the consent of the HSE. In addition, he provides little information about the consent process that was used for the young people themselves, only

by unaccompanied minors, I felt that it represented best ethical practice to obtain the HSE's/Health Board's consent.

Therefore, meetings were held with senior HSE/Health Board personnel in Dublin to discuss the research and to negotiate access to the hostel and to the young people. Yet, whilst I sought the cooperation of the HSE/Health Board, the research did not become a collaborative endeavour between the HSE/Health Board and myself. Instead, I took care to ensure that I did not become accountable to the organisation and that my research could be conducted independently, albeit facilitated by key personnel.

In securing a cooperative relationship with the HSE/Health Board, and in negotiating access and consent, trust was of crucial importance. I was aware of other people who had encountered difficulties in obtaining permission to conduct research on unaccompanied minors. Anecdotal evidence suggested that HSE/Health Board personnel were afraid that research might prove too upsetting for the young people. In addition, it was felt that unaccompanied minors were already being asked too many questions by different professionals. As such, research was perceived as another stressor that the young people did not need in their lives. However, it seemed that the willingness of senior management to cooperate with my research, as well as the enthusiasm of on-the-ground staff in assisting me, arose from the fact that I had previously worked on the TSCSA. Some of the personnel involved knew me. They seemed to trust that the research would be carried out in a sensitive and ethical manner, and with the best interests of the young people to the fore. Essentially, I had "street credibility" (Robson, 2002, p. 382) and therefore, the HSE/Health Board's consent was negotiated with relative ease.[13] In addition, the hostel manager had no objections to the research being conducted in Valley Lodge. This meant that I was then permitted to approach the young people to obtain their consent.

Obtaining informed consent from potential participants involves ensuring that they are "fully cognisant of the agreement they are entering into with the research" (Smyth & Whyte, 2005, p. 29). As well as being informed, consent should be voluntary (Children's Research Centre, unpublished). This is particularly relevant in research with young people as they might construct the researcher as an authority figure to whom they must acquiesce (Mahon et al., 1996). Similarly, in studies with

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to say that "each child was firstly asked whether they wished to participate in the interview process. They all agreed and furthermore acknowledged that it would be important to them if people could understand them a little more" (p. 5).

[13] The negotiations resulted in a letter of agreement being drawn up between the East Coast Area Health Board and the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College. This letter was then signed by the researcher and by representatives of the East Coast Area Health Board and of the Children's Research Centre, (see Appendix 2).

refugees, researchers face the challenge of ensuring that the informed consent is "a real and not a trapped one, as could easily be the case of refugees often feeling in debt to the host country" (Dyregrov et al., 2000, p. 423). Language and cultural barriers add further complications to the process. In addition, obtaining informed consent can be particularly complex in situations where participant observation is used (Thorne, 1980). In this research I recognised that individuals might have different reactions to my being in the hostel, and that the rights of each young person needed to be respected. The rights of some unaccompanied minors not to participate were important. However, I felt that others might be enthusiastic about the research taking place and that they had as much right to be allowed participate as did others to refuse participation.

Following discussions with the HSE/Health Board, with my supervisor, and with senior staff at the Children's Research Centre, it was decided that if a significant majority were in favour of the research going ahead it would continue. However, those not wanting to participate needed to be accommodated also. For this reason informed consent from the young people was sought on two separate issues. The first related to my presence in the hostel, whilst the second related to the actual participation of the young people in the research process. I recognised that whilst a young person might not mind me being in the hostel, he or she might not want me to be gathering information in relation to him or her. Arising from this differentiation, *Figure 3* illustrates the potential combination of responses that the young people could give when I sought their consent.

Figure 3: Illustration of responses from potential participants in relation to their participation in the research and to the presence of the researcher in the hostel

		PARTICIPATION	
		No	Yes
PRESENCE	No	"I don't want Muireann to be in the hostel and I don't want to tell her anything"	"I would like Muireann to interview me but I don't really want her to be hanging around the hostel"
	YES	"Its o.k. if Muireann is in the hostel but I don't want her to collect information from me or about me"	"It would be great if Muireann came to our hostel to find out about our lives. She can interview me too if she likes"

Seeking consent from the young people was viewed as an on-going process rather than as a once-off procedure. The young people were spoken to on separate occasions and were given information about the research gradually and in different formats, as has been suggested by Hill (2005), thus giving them time to consider their various options in relation to my presence and their participation.[14] This facilitated them to make an appropriately informed decision, hence ensuring that the consent was truly valid (Hill, 2005).[15]

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[14] To begin with, a poster was put up in Valley Lodge. After that, a personalised letter was sent to each resident of the hostel, using a list provided by the HSE/Health Board. I then spent time in the hostel speaking to the young people individually, in order to inform them as much as possible about the research and in order to give them a sense of what it would be like for me to be spending time in the hostel on a regular basis. They were given leaflets to read. In addition, I met with the young people as a group, after this was suggested to me by one of the residents.

[15] Hill (2005) states that children should be told such things as the aims of the research, what time and commitment is required, who will know the results, whether there will be feedback, and whether confidentiality is promised (p. 69). All of this information was provided to the young people in the current study.

Following this process of information giving, consent forms were distributed (see Appendix 3).[16] When requested or when necessary, these were translated into the young people's native languages and interpreters were used.[17] [18] The consent forms included an explanation of confidentiality and its limits, and of my efforts to protect the identity of the participants at all times. Whilst Taylor & Bogden (1998) highlight the importance of guaranteeing the confidentiality and privacy of people that are studied, there is an "emerging consensus" (Mahon et al., 1996, p. 151) that absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed to child participants (Hill, 2005). Therefore, the young people were informed that the information they gave me would not be passed on to other people, except when I believed their safety or someone else's safety was at risk.[19] Those who wished to participate signed the form, and I signed it also, thus showing that I was agreeing to abide by the principles of confidentiality.[20]

Over time, verbal agreement to my presence in the hostel was obtained from all of the young people. Written consent to participate was obtained from a majority.[21] When young people did not

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[16] Whilst the consent forms were lengthy, they were written in simple language. I went through the forms with individual young people in order to ensure that they understood them.

[17] Whilst an interpreter was only used once during the interview phase, interpreters were frequently needed during the initial consent process. Often, I noticed how young people seemed very happy to be given the information in their own language. In addition to translating the information that I wished to relay, the interpreters were sometimes asked by the young people to translate other things that they wanted to communicate to staff members or to other residents in the hostel. The young people really appreciated it when I facilitated them by bringing in a translator and they often expressed their gratitude to me for doing so. They seemed to look on me more favourably as a result. It seemed that providing interpreters helped to build stronger relationships with some of the young people.

[18] Finding appropriate interpreters was difficult. I made concerted efforts to find interpreters that were not used by the HSE/Health Board or by the ORAC as I did not want a young person to associate the interpreter with these services or to think that information they had given to the HSE/Health Board or to ORAC would then be passed on to me (or vice versa) by the interpreter. Given the limited number of interpreting companies available, this proved difficult.

[19] This was reiterated to the young people throughout the research.

[20] During the research a dilemma arose as to whether the confidential obligations in the work of other professions, should be of concern to me as a researcher. Having previously worked as a social worker, I was in many respects viewed as an "honorary insider" (Scott, 2002, p. 927), and so was privy to information that was not generally in the public domain. I was aware that I could probably have obtained a certain amount of confidential information about the young people from social workers, either by going through official channels or by asking social work friends who knew and trusted me. However, in my efforts to distance myself from the social work team so as to build trusting relationships with the young people, I decided from the outset that I would not seek permission to have access to case notes on the young people. In addition, for ethical reasons I chose not to ask friends on the social work team for information about young people. It proved difficult at times, however, to abide by these principles. Frequently, my former colleagues discussed clients in front of me, not considering that I no longer worked with them. I drew this to their attention on a number of occasions, as I felt uncomfortable with it and also because I didn't want my perception of the young people to be influenced by their opinions and comments. However, the temptation to 'milk' the 'honorary insider' role was always present. In general, though, I resisted it.

[21] Newly arrived young people who were accommodated in the hostel were approached about consent issues shortly after their arrival.

consent to participating in the research I undertook not to write about them in my field notes. The consent issue was revisited with the young people at different stages throughout the fieldwork.[22]

The Process of Participant Observation: A Challenging Experience

My visits to Valley Lodge took place between November 2003 and March 2005. During this sixteen-month period I initially visited the hostel twice a week. I subsequently reduced the visits to once a week and visited less frequently towards the end. In total, sixty-one visits occurred. In general, I arrived in the hostel in the early evening time, when the young people were returning from school and stayed there until around nine o'clock.[23] I usually based myself in the living room, although I often spent time in the dining room, in the games room, or in the grounds of the hostel. I chatted to the young people, ate with them, watched television with them, and participated in games they were playing (e.g. Monopoly, Jenga, table tennis, football).[24] In addition I attended two 'Young People's Meetings'. These were meetings that were held on a monthly basis with the Project Worker. At the meetings, issues regarding Valley Lodge were discussed and the young people were given an opportunity to voice their opinions. Although the majority of the participant observation occurred in the hostel, at times, when invited, I accompanied the young people on shopping trips, to church services, and to events organised in their schools.

Every effort was made to ensure that conversations I initiated were as non-threatening as possible, given that the participant observation was particularly concerned with building relationships. Frequently, conversations related to school and to free-time activities, and to the activities we were doing together. Conversations that were more directly relevant to the research questions emerged

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[22] Throughout the consent process, and indeed throughout the fieldwork, I was aware that the young people might find it difficult to articulate their true feelings or to dissent to my presence in the hostel, given the authority and power associated with my status as an adult (Hill, 2005). Constant reflection meant that I took account of this possibility at all times. This reflection allowed me to be aware of how I was perceived by the young people. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I was surprised at how the young people seemed to engage with me quite easily, greeting me warmly and chatting to me during the time I spent there. I felt confident that they were happy about the research taking place, and that their consent was valid, so to speak. However, as time went by I sometimes felt that certain young people did not want me to be in the hostel any longer. Yet, when I approached them asking if it was ok if I continued to visit the hostel, these young people often expressed surprise at the question and indicated that they had no problem with my being there. In addition, they were given an opportunity to write anonymous comments about the research but none of them availed of this. Upon reflection, these young people could be described as 'indifferent consenters'. Whilst they seemed to have no problem consenting, they often did not engage with me, thus giving me the impression that they did not want me to be there. In reality, it may have been that they just did not care one way or the other about the research or about my presence in the hostel, and that they were indifferent to what was happening.

[23] Occasionally I also visited the hostel on days that the young people were not attending school – for instance, during school holidays and at weekends.

[24] As a token of appreciation for consenting to my presence in the hostel I bought the young people a football shortly after my arrival. I also bought presents for the group at Christmas time – including games such as Jenga and Monopoly.

on occasion (e.g. conversations about religion, trust, countries of origin, and impressions of Ireland).[25]

Some brief notes were taken whilst in the hostel, usually at times when I was sitting alone. These notes were then elaborated on during my bus journey home and were written up in detail the following morning. The notes I wrote contained descriptions of things that happened and conversations that occurred, as well as my own reflections.

Overall, despite the relative ease with which I gained access to Valley Lodge, I found the actual process of participant observation to be a very demanding experience. In particular, I faced numerous challenges relating to my role. Those involved in participant observation have a wide range of participatory/observational positions from which to choose. Depending on the level of participation/observation in which the researcher engages, four different roles can be distinguished. These are: the complete participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant, and the complete observer (Gold, 1958). Drawing on Hessler (1992), Emond (2005) suggests that "these can be seen as a continuum with a wholly observational role at one end and complete participation at the other" (p. 124). The flexible nature of ethnographic research allows for the fact that the role taken up by the researcher may not be predetermined and instead may emerge as the researcher becomes familiar with the ethnographic site. I recognised - as Emond (2005) did in her ethnographic study in a children's home in Scotland - that it might be problematic to conduct the participant observation "from the extremes of [the] continuum" (Emond, 2005, p. 125). In addition, I did not choose one specific role. Alternatively, I adopted a variety of roles at different times during the research process. In doing so, I was influenced by my perception of what the young people wanted, as well as by what I felt was most appropriate at a particular point in time. For instance, whilst sometimes I participated in games with the young people, at other times I simply observed. This often depended on who the young people were, as some seemed to accept me more than others. I found that "common sense [dictated] that [my] stance should be congruent with the surroundings and shifted along the continuum" (Padgett, 1998, p. 56).

Yet, adopting a role was not a simple matter of choosing from the options available. I faced many difficulties in relation to my role. These arose from how staff perceived me and how I perceived myself. In dealing with these difficulties, and in answering the 'what should I do?' and 'what should I say?' dilemmas that I encountered, I constantly reminded myself of the primary aim of the participant observation: at all times, I tried to be cognisant of adopting a role that would be

[25] References to these conversations and discussions are included throughout the remainder of the thesis.

consistent with building relationships, and tried to act in ways that would serve this overall function.[26]

As has been stated previously, I was very aware of the many differences that existed between the young people and me. In attempting to understand their worlds and build trust with them, I felt that differences in ethnicity and culture, and my status as a 'non young person' created barriers (Fine & Sandstorm, 1988). In an effort to minimise the differences between us, I recognised the importance of adopting a non-authoritarian role. Fine & Sandstorm (1988) suggest that:

> "... to observe adolescents means giving up some of one's ascribed, age-based 'authority' to learn about a world physically close and cognitively similar, but often emotionally and socially distant" (p. 72).

As an adult, and especially as one who had previously worked as a social worker with unaccompanied minors, I expected many of the young people would view me as a figure of authority (Hill, 2005).[27] Therefore, from the beginning, I placed an emphasis on "separation and independence from 'officialdom'" as is advocated by Hynes (2003, p. 15) in relation to research with refugees. This was explained to HSE/Health Board staff and to the hostel manager at the outset, and a letter to this effect was posted on a wall in the staff area of Valley Lodge, for the attention of all of the staff members. In my interactions with the young people, I continuously stressed that I was not a member of staff and that I was no longer employed by the HSE/Health Board.[28] I attempted to demonstrate my separation from officialdom by avoiding conversations and interactions with staff and by refusing to take on staff-type duties. I made every effort not to engage in disciplining the young people, and concentrated on building rapport with them instead. In doing so, I made use of the strategies suggested by Taylor & Bogden (1998): I "[paid] homage" (p. 48) to the routines of the young people, established what I had in common with them, helped young

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[26] However, the principles of respecting the young people and of acting genuinely underscored my interactions and conversations with them at all times.

[27] None of my long-term clients from my time as a social worker were living in Valley Lodge at the beginning of the research, partially because there was a nine-month gap between the time I left my social work job and the time I started the participant observation. However, a few of the young people recognised me from seeing me in the social work offices. In addition, I had met one of the young people and conducted an initial assessment with him on his day of arrival, and he too remembered me. During the time I spent in Valley Lodge one girl who had been my client on a long-term basis was placed there for a week of respite care.

[28] I informed the young people that I had previously worked as a social worker. Whilst I considered not providing this information, unless asked, I decided that openness and honesty was the best policy. A small number of the residents in the hostel had met me previously when I worked as a social worker. I felt that it was likely that they would tell other people about my previous job or that they would make casual reference to it. In addition, staff of the social work team and the hostel manager knew me from my time as a social worker, and frequently greeted me accordingly. Therefore, instead of hiding my previous work history and risking that the young people would feel deceived if they found out of their own accord, I made a decision to tell them from the beginning.

people out when asked to do so or when appropriate, behaved in a humble manner, and showed interest in them.[29] In essence, I made efforts to assume a friendship role with the young people, as is advocated by Fine & Sandstorm (1988). These authors describe the characteristics of this role:

> "The key to the role of friend is the explicit expression of positive affect combined with both a relative lack of authority and a lack of sanctioning of the behaviour of those being studied. In turn, adopting the friend role suggests that the participant observer treats his or her informants with respect and that he or she desires to acquire competency in their social worlds" (p. 17).

However, my efforts to adopt a non-authoritarian, friendship role met with difficulties, thus demonstrating that the roles qualitative researchers play in the field are not always of their own choosing. Mitchell (1993) argues:

> "Qualitative research roles are, in practice, tentative offerings, possible forms of self, subject to negotiation and to the vicissitudes of the action settings. The mistaken belief that the researcher's role is unmitigated by those whom he or she studies remains the positivist's unachievable hope." (p. 12-13).

In my particular case, my role was continuously mitigated by those around me. As a result, it proved problematic to distance myself from figures of authority, such as hostel staff and professionals who visited the hostel. Whilst some adults carefully negotiated their contact with me, many of them did not seem to fully understand my desire to remain separate from them. It seemed that staff members and professionals identified with me, perhaps because I was an adult, or a fellow professional, or a former social worker, or simply because I was not an unaccompanied minor. I observed that when presented with the choice of sitting beside me or beside a young person, they often seemed to be drawn towards me. In addition, when conversing with me, the staff members sometimes spoke in hushed tones of voice about the young people. I was extremely uncomfortable about such conversations, both in terms of the young people's rights to confidentiality, and in terms of the potential consequences for my efforts to build trust. On one occasion, one of the members of staff started talking to me in the reception area and talked about particular young people, his relationship with them, and how they were getting on with their asylum claims. Afterwards I wrote:

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[29] For instance, I 'paid homage' to their routines by watching whatever they chose to watch on television (usually programmes that I did not like!) and by encouraging them to change the channel if they arrived in the room when I was watching something of my own choosing. I often talked to the boys about football or to the girls about fashion in an effort to establish what I had in common with them. I helped the young people by assisting them with homework or by providing them with information or advice, when asked to do so. I made every effort to be humble at all times in my conversations with them and in activities that we did together, and adopted stances of "respectful curiosity" and of "not knowing" (Torode et al., 2001, p. 82) when appropriate. In addition, I showed interest in the young people at all times, by engaging in conversation with them and by listening intently to their stories and to their concerns.

Although I suppose this information about John was useful in many ways to know, I was really uncomfortable having this conversation with Greg. I have said to the kids that I will not be talking to others about them and I feel that this kind of conversation breaches this agreement in many ways, even though I was really trying to change the subject and get away from Greg. Mary and Abdul passed by a few times and noticed me talking to Greg and I felt like perhaps they didn't feel they could come over. I thought maybe they were wondering what we were talking about as I'm sure the conversation seemed quite intense. It would be awful if one of the young people overheard us mentioning his or her name. How would they trust me? At the same time, I don't want to appear rude to Greg – although I probably did as I was trying to hurry away!

[Field notes, 27/11/03].

Indeed, even when conversations were more general and neutral, I felt uncomfortable. In addition, it was often made clear – in front of the young people – that I was being treated differently and more favourably. For instance, following a number of incidents in the kitchen, a new rule was brought in whereby the young people queued for dinner at the kitchen 'hatch' and were not permitted to enter the kitchen. However, when I was queuing on one occasion with the residents, a staff member told me that there was no need for me to queue:

Mark said that I could go into the kitchen instead of waiting at the hatch. I said no, that I was fine and he repeated it again saying he didn't mind me coming in. I again said no, but was firmer this time and said I would prefer to be treated like everyone else. I think he was surprised by this. Perhaps I should write another letter outlining that I really don't want to be treated differently to the young people?

[Field notes, 11/3/2004]

Incidents like this one drew further attention to my status as a 'non young person'. They made me look more like a member of staff than a student, thus hindering the development of a non-authoritarian, friendship role. These difficulties in distancing myself from staff members arose despite my efforts to prevent and tackle them. Apart from my discussions with the hostel manager at the outset, and my initial letter, I also wrote another letter when the problems continued. In addition, on a number of occasions I explained my position to individual staff members and I actively avoided interactions with other adults in the hostel. However, these efforts often seemed fruitless. The situation was made particularly difficult by the frequent changes in personnel in Valley Lodge and on the TSCSA, as it proved virtually impossible to explain my role to every individual.[30] [31]

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[30] Initially, the staff members consisted of 'house/security staff' and kitchen staff who worked on various shifts. However, during the course of my fieldwork many changes in staffing occurred. Apart from some of these initial staff members leaving and being replaced, with time, care workers were employed in the hostel. These staff came from an agency and so a range of different workers covered different nights. Eventually a consistent team of care staff was employed close to the end of my participant observation. In addition, an

Apart from the staff's impact on my ability to be non-authoritarian, I also encountered difficulties from my own personal perspective. I had to adjust to a very new non-social worker role, and had to become accustomed to a different type of relationship with unaccompanied minors.[32] As a researcher, and one who was focused on building relationships, I perceived it to be crucial not to correct the young people, and made every effort not to do so. At times this meant that I had to collude with what was happening around me. As an example, on one occasion as I sat watching television with a group of young people, I saw a boy sneaking into the room with his dinner. He hesitated when he saw me, knowing that meals could only be eaten in the dining room. When I winked at him and turned my attention back to the television, he proceeded to eat in the room, probably realising that I was not going to do anything about his infringement of the rules! This explicit type of collusion was a somewhat rare occurrence, however. In general, I simply pretended to ignore what was happening without giving any indication as to whether I approved or disapproved. Occasionally I found it difficult not to discipline. For instance, I often observed one young person being teased by other residents. When this happened the confines of my role frustrated me. I felt that defending him would not be consistent with my position as researcher. Doing so would jeopardise my non-authoritarian role and would identify me as a figure of authority. Yet, simultaneously, I felt uneasy that I was colluding with what was happening for the sake of conducting better research.

Furthermore, I frequently felt 'role-less', as my new function as researcher often seemed to involve doing absolutely nothing! Often, like Omidian (2000), I sat idly in the sitting room, with nobody to talk to, and observing little of interest. I felt awkward about my lack of role and frequently hid behind this awkwardness by reading or watching television. I embraced opportunities to play games with the young people, to help them with homework,[33] or to chat to them. Whilst it was clear that I was most comfortable as either a complete participant or as a participant-as-observer (Gold, 1958), participation opportunities did not always arise. Frequently, some of the young people showed a lack of eagerness to engage with me. At times, some of them provided monosyllabic

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NGO set up a support project in the hostel during the time I spent there. This project employed three staff members.

[31] For instance, I often arrived in the hostel to find a new agency staff member in situ.

[32] I found it difficult to adjust to this new role. Indeed, my supervisor continuously reminded me to take off "my social work hat"!

[33] During my time in Valley Lodge, the NGO that was based there initiated a homework club. I was approached about the possibility of becoming a volunteer. Given the importance I was attaching to distancing myself from staff members, I declined this offer, especially as it would have involved meetings with staff members to discuss the academic progress of the young people. However, I occasionally helped at the homework club on a less formal basis, when, for instance, a particular young person needed help and there were not enough volunteers in place.

answers when I tried to chat to them, or ignored me altogether. At other times, they excluded me – either consciously or unconsciously - by speaking amongst themselves in their own languages.[34] As a result, spending time with staff members was often a tempting option and one that I struggled to resist on a continuous basis. Emond (2003) suggests that the initial period of fieldwork might create a sense of vulnerability for researchers, especially as they are no longer in the role that they are used to, and have not – as of yet - been accepted by the young people under study. However, I struggled with my changed role throughout the participant observation phase and never managed to feel fully accepted. Whilst I developed close relationships with a few of the young people and felt welcomed by them, overall I did not feel that I belonged in Valley Lodge. At times I felt that I was disliked and, like Lee-Treweek (2000) in her participant observation in a nursing home, I "could not feel comfortable" (p. 118) and frequently "wanted to desert the place" (p. 119).

A particularly problematic factor, which exacerbated my attempts to belong, was the huge turnover of young people and of staff members in the hostel. For instance, on the first evening I spent in Valley Lodge (18/11/2003) there were 18 young people accommodated in the hostel. Between that day and my last day (8/3/2005) a further 58 residents were accommodated, some for a few nights and others for lengthy periods.[35] Frequently, young people with whom I was building relationships moved on to different accommodation settings. In addition, new young people arrived and struggled to distinguish between me and the many other staff members who came and went. In essence, it was difficult for me to build strong trusting relationships and to become accepted in the group amidst the constantly changing environment of Valley Lodge.

Participant Observation: A Worthwhile Endeavour

Despite my despondency during this phase of the research, the participant observation yielded some important successes that enhanced the overall study and that were consistent with my original reasons for undertaking this type of fieldwork. Firstly, whilst the 'indifferent consenters' (see footnote 22) did not interact very much with me, there were other young people who spent a lot of time in my company and who, in my opinion, grew to trust me. I believe that because of my lengthy interactions with them, these young people were more open in the subsequent interviews. I

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[34] There were a significant number of Yoruba speakers from Nigeria in the hostel at all times. They often spoke in their own language. Interestingly, those with whom I created the strongest relationships were young people who were not Yoruba speaking, and who did not have peers from within their own culture in the hostel. In many respects, it seemed that these young people experienced the same sense of exclusion from the Yoruba speakers and that they were more isolated within the hostel setting, having fewer close friends. As a fellow non-Yoruba speaker, I had something in common with them and they were drawn to me. In some senses, they seemed to fit in with me in a way that they did not fit in with the Yoruba speakers.

[35] Of the eighteen young people who were in the Valley Lodge at the beginning of the participant observation, only eight were still there at the end.

moved beyond the 'front stage' that they presented to the world and managed to glean access to at least some of their 'back stage' performances (Goffman, 1959).

Secondly, and partially arising from this first point, the extensive period of time spent visiting the hostel contributed to my understanding of the social worlds of unaccompanied minors. I was privy to spontaneous conversations and interactions that would not have been accessible to me if I had simply relied on an interviewing methodology. Subsequently, during the analysis of my interview data and in my theorising, I was able to draw on the knowledge and insights I gleaned in the participant observation phase. Whilst some of the negative emotions I was experiencing risked hindering my ability to gather data, upon reflection it seemed that some of these emotions were forms of data in their own right (Mason, 1996). Specifically, and in keeping with Lee-Treweek's (2000) account of her participant observation, the emotions I experienced during this phase of the fieldwork gave me insight into how many of the young people themselves might experience the hostel setting. For instance, just as I became frustrated by the lack of stability in the hostel, so too did the unaccompanied minors. The high turnover of staff and young people meant that their Irish home often provided little constancy. In my conversations with them, they recounted feeling upset and angry when staff members left, or when they or their friends were being transferred to other accommodation settings.[36]

A third success of the participant observation phase was that it allowed my general research questions to become more specific. In addition, the inductive approach meant that at times, I was able to "be surprised" (Chadwick et al., 1984, p. 222) as particular themes emerged unexpectedly. For instance, whilst my work as a social worker had suggested that religious faith might be important to the young people, the extent of its importance only became evident during the participant observation phase. As a result, I decided to explore faith issues in greater depth in the interviews.

In summary, whilst the participant observation phase was a very complex and challenging experience – particularly in terms of negotiating access and negotiating my own role - it was a worthwhile endeavour. Primarily it was chosen as a means to build trusting relationships with unaccompanied minors. It was partially successful in this regard, and it also allowed me to develop useful insights into the experiences of the young people, insights which strengthened the interview phase of the research. It is this phase that will now be discussed.

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[36] Similarly, it is likely that my feelings of not belonging and of not feeling at home mirrored (albeit on a much smaller scale) the experiences of the young people, especially during their initial stages in exile. I often observed that newly-arrived young people seemed very lost initially, and, like me, that it took them time to build relationships. Additionally, it was evident that young people felt included by some groups and excluded by others, just as I did. Overall it seemed that many of my emotions reflected those of the young people, although in a different and microcosmic way.

The Interview Phase

Why Qualitative Interviews were Chosen

The second qualitative method used was interviewing. An interview can be described as "an *inter view,* an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (Kvale, 1996, p. 2, emphasis in original). Kvale adds:

> "The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as 'wandering together with'." (p. 4).

Interviews are regularly used by various professions (Fontana & Frey, 2000), and have been referred to as the "favoured digging tool of a large army of sociologists" (Benney & Hughes, 1970, p. 190).

Research interviews vary in form, ranging from face-to-face individual and group interviews, to self-administered questionnaires or telephone surveys. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. Greene & Hill (2005) distinguish between these latter three types by stating that "[b]etween a totally prescribed set of questions and a totally unstructured exchange lies the more frequently occupied territory of the semi-structured interview" (p. 14). Indeed, this was the territory that I occupied in this study, as I felt that the terrain of this territory was particularly suited to the nature of my study, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, this particular method seemed suited to the purpose of the research. In exploring the lives of unaccompanied minors in Ireland, I wished to obtain descriptions, meanings, insights, and perspectives, rather than facts, answers, findings, and proofs. Semi-structured qualitative interviews seemed appropriate to this task. Westcott & Littleton (2005) argue that, "an interview is not about 'unearthing things'; rather it is about constructing an account with a child" (p.150). Essentially, in keeping with the phenomenological approach, participants answer the questions that are asked, whilst simultaneously constructing narratives and formulating their own conceptions of their experiences. Thus, the purpose of the interview is, "to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, p. 5). However, whilst knowledge is obtained, the interview is not a neutral tool for collecting data. Rather it is an interaction between people, leading to insights that are negotiated and contextually based (Fontana & Frey, 2000):

> "Thus the focus of interviews is moving to encompass the hows of people's lives (the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday lives) as well as the traditional whats (the activities of everyday lives)" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646, emphasis in original).

Secondly, I felt that semi-structured interviews – and particularly the flexibility associated with

them - were especially suited to the population under study, unaccompanied asylum seeking teenagers. The strength of the qualitative interviewing technique is its elasticity. It allows for a dynamic approach, which, like the strengths perspective, recognises that each individual is unique, and that the interview can be tailored to particular circumstances. In addition, the ability to follow up on the answers that the subject gives is an inherent feature of semi-structured interviewing and is indicative of its flexible nature (Kvale, 1996). Like participant observation, when surprising or unexpected themes emerge, the lack of rigidity means that the researcher can explore these new topics, thus allowing theory to arise inductively. Such flexibility allows greater understanding of the participant's viewpoint.[37]

My recognition of the suitability of qualitative interviews for research with teenagers was by no means unique. Increasingly, the 'hows' (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646) of children's and young people's lives have been explored through face-to-face semi-structured interviews (e.g. Keogh & Whyte, 2003; Mahon & Higgins, 1995). Researchers have started to recognise that children and young people have opinions and that their views "can and ought to be taken seriously" (Mahon et al., 1996, p. 146). This current perspective is in sharp contrast with perspectives of the past, whereby:

> "... [we assumed] that children have nothing of interest or importance to tell us about their lives and that we adults understand much better than they what is good for them and how events impact on them" (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 18)

As has been mentioned previously, there is a growing tendency to see children as agents rather than as passive objects. Essentially, children and young people have started to be treated as "beings" rather than as "becomings" (Morss, 1996, p. 158), and, as a result, their views have begun to be sought. Whilst it is a somewhat challenging task for an adult researcher to understand the experiences of a child (Green & Hill, 2005), the inherent flexibility of qualitative interviews facilitates this endeavour. It allows the researcher to build rapport, to respond to unexpected perspectives that a child articulates, and to tailor the interview to the individual circumstances of the child, including their apparent level of understanding.

Increasingly too, researchers have used qualitative interviews in research with refugee populations. They have been used with refugee adults (e.g. Miller et al., 2002; Robinson & Segrott, 2002) and with refugee children and young people (e.g. Hewett et al., 2005; Miller et al., in press), including unaccompanied minors (e.g. Hopkins & Hill, 2006; Robins & Rylands, 2004; Stanley, 2001). When faced with differences in language and culture, the flexible nature of qualitative interviews can facilitate communication and understanding, particularly given that it allows researchers to

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[37] This flexibility contrasts with standardised interviews or questionnaires, which impose restrictions on what topics should be dealt with and in what sequence the questions should be asked (Flick, 2002).

seek clarification and ask further questions when necessary. Indeed Korac (2003) suggests that qualitative interviewing is an important way of learning from refugees because "it permits fuller expression of their experiences in their own terms" (p. 53).

Thus, for these reasons, semi-structured qualitative interviews were chosen as the main tools for eliciting the experiences of unaccompanied minors.

Recruiting Interview Participants

In recruiting participants to take part in the interview phase, I recognised that interviews may raise suspicions for asylum seekers (Thomas & Byford, 2003). From my experiences as a social worker, I was aware that thoughts and discussions of 'the interview' are prevalent within the dominant discourse of asylum seekers in Ireland. 'Interviews' are equated with the 'substantive asylum interview' that is attended as part of the refugee determination procedure. Therefore, whilst every effort was made to ensure that the young people were fully informed as to what was involved in the research, the use of the word 'interview' was avoided in order to reduce the chances that the young people might be fearful of the encounter. Instead, they were asked if they would be willing to meet me to 'talk' about their experiences of moving to Ireland and of living here, and about the differences and similarities between Ireland and their countries of origin.

Initially, it had been anticipated that interviewees would be recruited amongst the young people living in Valley Lodge. However, only 8 of the residents agreed to take part.[38] [39] Those who participated were mainly those with whom I had developed the strongest relationships. Yet there were some young people with whom I became quite friendly and spent a lot of time, who did not want to participate in the interviews. It seemed that a type of "paradox of intimacy" (Mitchell, 1993)[40] had developed: it may have been the case that <u>because</u> these young people had become

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[38] The reasons for this were unclear. The young people rarely articulated why they did not want to participate and these reasons were never sought. However, one boy indicated one possible explanation by saying that he had taken part in research before and that it never made a difference. In addition, I often wondered whether the young people became suspicious of me because of the protracted nature of the participant observation phase. It may have left them wondering what I was <u>really</u> doing in the hostel and with the information I was gathering.

[39] On two occasions young people said they wanted to take part but the interviews never happened. One girl said she would come back to be about a suitable time. She subsequently moved out of the hostel and did not respond when I texted her. Another girl – someone with whom I spent a lot of time - said that she wanted to participate but then failed to turn up at the arranged time. A further time was arranged but she did not come on that occasion either. I saw this as an "indirect way of refusing to participate" (Mahon et al., 1996, p. 150). The next time I saw her in the hostel I asked her to text me if she still wanted to take part but reassured her that she was free to decide not to participate. The girl did not make further contact with me.

[40] Mitchell's (1993) "paradox of intimacy" (p. 21) is somewhat different to how the term is used here. Mitchell (1993) describes how genuine intimacy between researchers and participants carries with it "implicit expectations constraining the scope and forms of inquiry" (p. 21). He suggests that "trusted insiders are expected to understand and assiduously avoid displaying certain kinds of inquisitiveness. A breach of these

friendlier with me, they had more to lose by discussing sensitive issues with me or trusting me.[41] This may have acted as another reason for a lack of willingness to be interviewed.

When it emerged that an insufficient number of Valley Lodge residents were willing to take part, it was hoped that a snowball sampling strategy would be used, whereby the interviewees from the hostel would identify other unaccompanied minors who might take part. This strategy proved unsuccessful. Therefore, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted instead, whereby I selected cases that fitted the criteria of the study and that maximised variation (Gobo, 2004). Purposive sampling is deemed particularly suitable for selecting participants from a "difficult-to-reach, specialized population" (Neuman, 2003, p. 213), such as unaccompanied minors who may be suspicious of research.[42]

Many methods were used to recruit the young people. Initially, two eighteen-year-olds were recruited through a personal contact in a support organisation for refugees.[43] In addition, eight young people from Valley Lodge were interviewed. I also targeted a number of young people whom I knew, again attempting to maximise variation in the sample. Two young people who were known to me from my time as a social worker, and who did not live in a hostel, were approached about participating by their current social worker. They agreed to take part. In addition, I had contact details for two other young people – who were no longer under eighteen – and I contacted

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expectations is particularly dishonouring when committed by intimates, although novices may be permitted an occasional faux pas. Thus, the paradox of intimacy" (p. 21).

[41] For instance, it is likely that young people who felt unable to tell the truth about their circumstances in Ireland may have felt reluctant to discuss their lives with someone with whom they were friendly and whom they liked, as they may not have wanted to lie or be economical about the truth with such a person. This type of paradox suggests that it may be somewhat simplistic to assume that building relationships with refugees leads to 'better' interviews. It may simply depend on the individual circumstances of the person involved.

[42] Theoretically, it would have been possible to obtain a list from the various HSE/Health Board areas of all the unaccompanied minors known to be living in Ireland. From this list, probability sampling could have been used, and HSE/Health Board staff could have approached the selected young people about their interest in participating. However, I felt that this approach was not appropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly, I did not want the young people to be informed about the research by HSE/Health Board personnel, as I felt that they would then associate it with the HSE/Health Board and might be less likely to take part. Neither did I wish to simply obtain the young people's contact details from the HSE as I felt that their contact details should not be given out without their prior consent. Secondly, I was not seeking to interview a 'representative' group of young people. Thirdly, I felt that the particular circumstances of the young people precluded the successful adoption of a probability sampling strategy. I believed that a more personal approach was needed, given the difficulties unaccompanied minors often have in trusting. I felt that a purposive sampling strategy could facilitate this more personal approach.

[43] When young people were aged 18 or over it was not deemed necessary to obtain the consent of the HSE. Whilst these two interviews were undertaken as pilot interviews, a decision was made to analyse the interviews along with the rest of the transcripts, and to include the findings from these interviews with the other findings. This decision was made because of the difficulties I had in recruiting a sufficient number of young people and because of the important and different insights that were gleaned from these two interviews.

and recruited them directly myself, as I felt that their particular circumstances would mean that their interviews would be especially informative (Neuman, 2003).[44]

As I was aware that a small number of unaccompanied minors lived in locations outside of Dublin, I felt that it would be interesting to learn about their experiences, which might be expected to be somewhat different to those of their Dublin counterparts. Therefore, contact was made with relevant NGO and HSE/Health Board personnel, and their cooperation with the research was obtained. These individuals approached the young people about the research and gave them written information that I provided.[45] If the young people were interested in participating they were then asked if their contact details could be passed on to me and I in turn contacted them. Seven young people were recruited in this way.

A further eleven young people were recruited through two other hostels in the Dublin area. Again, permission was obtained to approach young people living in these hostels – one hostel for boys and one for girls. I liaised with the hostel project workers who arranged for me to meet the young people in the hostels. I spent some time hanging around in the living areas of these hostels and chatting informally to the young people, before then speaking to the young people as a group about the research. Written information about the study was also given. Following the group discussion I spoke individually to the young people and obtained the contact details of those who were interested in participating.[46]

In total 32 young people were interviewed.[47] The use of incentives may have facilitated their recruitment. In research with both adults and children, utilising incentives as a recruitment and retention strategy is a controversial issue (Rice & Broome, 2004). Initially, I dismissed the idea of offering incentives to the young people, as I felt that it was unethical. However, when I had difficulties recruiting young people to take part, the idea of using an incentive was suggested to me

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[44] In an effort to protect the confidentiality of these two individuals the nature of their circumstances cannot be detailed here.

[45] Because of geographical distance it was not practical for me to personally introduce the research to these young people. Therefore, HSE personnel were used in these cases.

[46] A former resident of Valley Lodge was living in one of these hostels at the time. He proved very helpful by making me feel welcome. He helped me to gain some "street credibility" (Robson, 2002, p. 382) by chatting enthusiastically to me and introducing me to his friends. He had already been interviewed by me so he encouraged people to take part and was able to tell his friends what was involved.

[47] The interviews took place between August 2004 and August 2005. Whilst most of the young people were just interviewed once, three young people were interviewed on two occasions. In two cases this was because the young people had a lot to say. In the third case it was because the young person was in a rush to see a football match that he had forgotten about and so I suggested that I come back on a different day to complete the interview.

by an experienced researcher. Through reflection on the issues involved, I began to see incentives in a different way. I wrote in my research diary:

> *I suppose I had thought of incentives before but I somehow saw them as unethical – as a type of bribe. [...] But now I see it differently. I'm expecting them to give their time [...] to talk to me for what is in essence my research, which in reality will have no influence on them. Even if it does inform policy it will be long after they have left Health Board services. This is the real world, where young people have better and more enjoyable things to be doing. Why would they want to spend their time talking to me? Upsetting themselves perhaps.[...] By giving them a voucher I will be showing them my appreciation, rewarding their efforts. At the same time, the fact that they are getting vouchers will hopefully influence some of them to take part, but is there anything wrong with that? It's not really a big enough reward to make them take part if they really didn't want to, yet it's a little incentive to maybe convince them to take part if they are in two minds.*
>
> [Research Diary, 7/9/2004]

Thus, based on the fact that an incentive would also act as a token of my appreciation, a decision was made to give €20 vouchers for participation in the research interviews.[48] In general, the vouchers were given at the end of the interview along with a thank you card that articulated my appreciation for the time they had given.[49] Attention was paid to ensuring that the offer of an incentive did not become a form of "subtle coercion" (Rice & Broome, 2004, p. 170). For instance, rather than placing great emphasis on the fact that the participants would be rewarded for their participation, I generally made only passing reference to the voucher at the end of my description of the research. Greater emphasis was placed on informing the young people about the research and ensuring that they were consenting freely.[50]

Overall, the interviews took place at a variety of locations depending on what suited the young person. Some of the interviews were held in their places of residence, some were held in my place of work, and some were held in other venues including the lobby of a hotel and the office of an NGO. An interpreter was used in one interview.[51]

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[48] HSE/Health Board personnel were made aware of the decision to give vouchers to the young people.

[49] Some of the young people had already been interviewed by the time this decision was made. However, the vouchers and cards were sent to this young people in the post, so as to ensure equal treatment and fairness.

[50] Whilst the promise of a voucher may have – true to its name - acted as an incentive to participate, I did not at any stage feel that a young person had consented solely for the purpose of obtaining the voucher. I reached this conclusion because the young people engaged enthusiastically with the interview process and conversed eagerly with me. In addition, at the end of the interviews many of the young people expressed their gratitude for the voucher that they received and mentioned that it was not necessary and that they would have taken part even if it had not been offered.

[51] In the remainder of the interviews interpreters were not used as the young people spoke good English. In one interview the young person had difficulties expressing herself in English. I offered to come back on a different day with an interpreter but the girl was adamant that she did not want to speak in her own language as she wanted her English to improve.

Profile of Participants

The interview participants represented a diverse group, as is evident from the details outlined in the tables below. They included 18 females and 14 males and ranged in age from 14 to 19 years, with the average age being 16.5 years. As *Table* 7 indicates, 23 of the participants identified themselves as Christians whilst 9 identified themselves as Muslims.

Table 7: Gender, Age, and Religion of Interview Participants

Gender		**Age**						**Religion**	
M	*F*	*14yrs*	*15yrs*	*16yrs*	*17yrs*	*18yrs*	*19yrs*	*Christian*	*Muslim*
14	18	3	5	6	8	6	3	23	9

Table 8: Regions of Origin of Interview Participants

Region of Origin	**Number**
Eastern Africa	14
Western Africa	13
Middle Africa	2
Southern Africa	1
Western Asia	1
Eastern Europe	1

In relation to the participants' regions of origin, the vast majority were from Africa, as is indicated in *Table 8* (above). Of the 30 African participants, 14 were from Eastern Africa and 13 were from

Western Africa, including 12 from Nigeria. In addition, one young person was from Eastern Europe and one was from Western Asia.[52]

The young people had been in Ireland for varying lengths of time, ranging from two weeks to almost five years, but with the vast majority (30 out of 32) having been in Ireland for less than two years. Seven of the young people had refugee status and one had Irish citizenship. The remainder were at different stages of the immigration process, as is outlined in *Table 9.*

Table 9: The Participants' Length of Time Living in Ireland and their Immigration Status

Length of Time in Ireland (in years)				**Stage of Asylum Process / Immigration Status[53]**					
<1	*1-2*	*2-3*	*3+*	*Pre-Interview*	*Interview Stage*	*Appeal Stage*	*TLR Stage*	*Refugee Status*	*Irish Citizen*
12	14	1	1	9	4	4	4	7	1

As regards the care arrangements for the young people, at the time of the research interview, 18 of the participants were living in hostels for unaccompanied minors, 5 were living in private rented accommodation, 4 were living in children's residential homes, 4 were living with foster families, and 1 young person was living in an adult direct provision centre. Of these, 25 lived in Ireland's capital city, Dublin, whilst 7 lived in regions outside of the capital city, including Galway city, Cork city, and Co. Clare (see *Table 10*).

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[52] In the interest of protecting the anonymity of the participants, in general the regions of origin of the participants are named rather than the specific countries of origin. I felt that by naming the nationalities of some of the young people their identities might be evident, especially in the case of young people who came from countries that are not strongly represented within the population of unaccompanied minors living in Ireland. The regions used are those identified by the United Nations scheme of geographic regions.

[53] The category 'pre-interview' stage includes participants who were in the process of applying for asylum or who had already done so but who had not attended their substantive asylum interview. 'Interview stage' includes those who had attended the substantive asylum interview in accordance with Section 11 of the Refugee Act 1996 and who were awaiting a decision on the outcome of this interview. 'Appeal stage' includes those who had failed in their initial application for asylum and who were appealing this decision through the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT). 'TLR' includes those who had failed at both the interview and appeal stages of the asylum process and who were thus applying to the Minister for Justice, Equality, and Law Reform for temporary leave to remain in the state. 'Refugee status' includes those who had been recognised as refugees by either ORAC or RAT. The category 'Irish Citizen' includes one participant who had obtained refugee status and had subsequently received Irish Citizenship. A guide to the asylum determination procedure is included in Appendix 1.

Table 10: The Care Placements of the Participants and the Location of these Placements

Placement location → / Placement type ↓	**Dublin region**	**Outside of Dublin region**	**Total in each accommodation type**
Hostel	18	0	18
Children's Residential Home	3	1	4
Foster Family	1	3	4
Adult Direct Provision Centre	0	1	1
Private Rented Accommodation	3	2	5
Total Dublin/outside Dublin	25	7	32

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Consent was obtained from the relevant HSE/Health Board personnel before subsequently approaching the young people about being interviewed. The research was explained to the young people, and every effort was made to ensure that they were as informed as possible. I gave them information about why the research was being conducted, the types of questions I would be asking, how long the interview would take, what would happen to the research when it was finished, as well as information about confidentiality, as outlined previously.[54] I attempted to ensure that the

[54] Frequently, the young people expressed concern about the interview being taped. Omidian (2000) describes how many of the refugees with whom she worked have refused to be recorded. She attributes this to distrust and histories of oppression. In dealing with these concerns about being taped, I outlined in a detailed way why I wished to tape the interview. In addition, I promised that nobody else would listen to the tapes and that the tapes would be locked in a filing cabinet in my office. The young people were also informed that when the tapes were no longer needed I would dispose of them carefully. Following this

explanation did not "shade over into pressure" (Hill, 2005, p. 70) by stating frequently that it was their choice as to whether they took part of not. During the course of the interviews, consent was re-obtained on an ongoing basis, as is advocated by Lipson & Meleis (1989). On a number of occasions I became aware of declining motivation during an interview and I understood this as "an indirect way of withholding or withdrawing consent to participate" (Mahon et al., 1996, p. 152). In such instances the young people were asked if they wanted to stop and when they indicated that they did the interview was terminated at an early stage.

The Process of the Interview Phase

> "Interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets" (Oakley, 1981, p. 41)

Based on my experience as a social worker, on my reading of the literature, and on initial analysis of the participant observation field notes, a general interview guide was developed (see appendix 4). This guide helped to ensure an appropriate level of consistency and structure, but the questions asked were tailored to the circumstances of the individual young people, when these were known to me.[55] Given that a semi-structured approach was adopted, "[p]ermanent mediation between the course of the interview and the interview guide [was] necessary" (Flick, 2002, p. 92), depending on the content of the conversation. Many open questions were used and as the researcher, I probed for additional information, thus allowing narratives to emerge. I paid attention to Bertrand's (2000) advice:

> "One should be very attentive to what is worrying persons being interviewed. With research of this kind, using questions of little interest or rattling off a list of questions, refugees will react negatively, refusing, avoiding, or failing to respond" (p. 92).

In designing the interview guides and in conducting the interviews, special consideration was given to the fact that those being interviewed were refugee young people who might find it difficult to speak about their experiences. Qualitative in-depth interviews can pose emotional risks to participants, especially when they concern sensitive issues or difficult experiences. This is suggested by Lee (1993):

> "[T]he person from whom a depth interview is sought must agree at the behest of a relative stranger to give a not inconsiderable amount of time and effort to the interview. They may be asked to reveal a great deal about themselves, perhaps at some emotional cost. Moreover, there is no guarantee that informants will realize before an interview begins

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explanation, all but one of the young people were in agreement about having their interviews taped. Thus, one interview was not taped. Extensive notes were taken instead.

[55] The questions were not followed in a step-by-step procedural way. In addition, certain sections of the interview schedule were given more emphasis as the focus of the research changed.

> what they might reveal, in what ways, or at what risk. Nor may it be easy for the researcher to convey all of this in an informed manner before beginning the interview" (p. 103)

Several strategies were used to try to ensure that the interviews did not cause harm. Firstly, attention was paid to the 'relational context' of the interviews. The young people were frequently nervous about what was involved in the research, even when they already knew me quite well. As a result, before the tape was turned on I always engaged in informal chat with them in order to put them at ease and build rapport and trust. This was deemed particularly important given the difficulties many unaccompanied minors have in trusting. Rather than viewing the interview as a type of 'hygienic' encounter (Oakley, 1981) in which I needed to remain aloof and objective, I attempted to create a warm atmosphere. In addition, drawing on the contention that young interviewees want "serious listening inside a funny shell" (Williamson & Butler, 1995, p. 77), humour was frequently used to make the situation less formal and to develop rapport with the participants.

Secondly, a conscious decision was made not to ask the young people about why they left their country of origin or how they travelled to Ireland, as it was felt that they were already asked these questions on enough occasions.[56] I was concerned that these questions might be particularly difficult for them to answer, and so they were avoided, again in the interest of protecting the young people from emotional harm (Children's Research Centre, unpublished). Like Hewett et al.'s (2005) research with asylum seeking children in Wales, not asking these questions represented a strategy for "reducing the intrusiveness of [the research] interviews" (p. 27).

Thirdly, and related to these first two points, the young people were always treated with sensitivity. Lee (1993) suggests that in-depth semi-structured interviews are particularly suited to exploring sensitive topics, as such interviews "permit greater sensitivity to the meaning contexts surrounding informant utterances" (p. 104). Sensitivity was facilitated by the flexible nature of the approach, as well as by the attention that I paid to the relational context, as discussed previously. I displayed empathy and unconditional acceptance (Bertrand, 2000) and I "[moved] off center stage" (Bertrand, 2000, p. 42), thus ensuring that I was in a position to listen attentively. I also made every effort to ensure that the interview was not becoming too upsetting an experience for the participant. This was illustrated by the fact that consent was renegotiated throughout the encounter.

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[56] In Ireland, unaccompanied minors are generally asked these questions at the point of arrival (i.e. by immigration officials), at their initial assessment with the duty social worker, and throughout the asylum process at the various stages. In addition, it seems that this question is also often asked by members of the public. For instance, during the research, I observed how these questions – and in particular the question of 'how do they get here' – was almost always the first question I was asked when I explained to people what I was researching.

Fourthly, reciprocity was used in an effort to make the interview less formal and to reduce the power imbalance between the young people and me. This strategy is advocated by Lipson & Meleis (1989) in relation to research with immigrants. In particular, sometimes the young people had questions for me, including requests for information or advice. When appropriate, I answered them or suggested someone else whom they could ask.[57] Sometimes they asked more personal questions regarding whether I was married, who I lived with, etc. Having reflected on this when it initially happened, I generally provided honest answers.[58] At times I offered such information voluntarily, in an effort to build rapport with them.

Overall, these strategies suggested that I attempted as much as possible to place myself in the young person's shoes, an approach suggested by Bertrand (2000) in relation to conducting research with refugees. In many respects I believe that these strategies were quite successful. To begin with, from my perspective, not only did I enjoy the interviews, but I obtained rich and meaningful insights into the young people's lives.[59] Additionally, it seemed that the young people also benefited from the experience of taking part, something that surprised me.

Whilst little has been written about participants' experiences of being interviewed (Lowes & Gill, 2006), there exists a prevalent perception that children need to be protected from "the invasive questioning of researchers, who otherwise [risk] exploiting or abusing the children's lack of understanding and/or lack of power" (Mahon et al., 1996, p. 150). At the beginning of this research, I held such a perception in relation to unaccompanied minors. I felt that research might be invasive and distressing for them. Therefore, I felt that gatekeepers needed to be careful about which researchers were allowed to have access to unaccompanied minors.

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[57] Mahon et al. (1996) suggest that it is not appropriate for researchers to take on roles that involve giving advice or help. However, in this research, I did not make a blanket decision about whether or not I should take on these roles. Instead, which asked for information, help, or advice, I made specific decisions depending on the circumstances involved. In general, the questions were quite innocuous and so I felt able to answer them and provide the information that was requested. For instance, one young person – who had enjoyed swimming in the sea in his country of origin – asked me where he could find somewhere to swim in Dublin.

[58] However, if I found the questions too intrusive I simply said that I didn't want to answer that question.

[59] Although there were exceptions, even those whom I met for only the first or second time on the day of the interview, generally responded very openly and gave detailed accounts of their experiences. Yet, whilst this might seem to suggest that the participant observation phase was not necessary in the study, I do not believe that this was the case. The Valley Lodge participants gave particularly open accounts of their lives, and tended to speak about more personal or upsetting aspects of their lives. This included one young person who, during the initial group meeting to discuss the research, had written: "I would like to tell Muireann about what is like to came to Ireland but I don't want to tell her much further about me". Nine months later, this participant spoke freely about his past and present circumstances. In addition, three young people from Valley Lodge were interviewed on two occasions because they had more to say than other people. I felt that this was because they were particularly comfortable with me because they had grown to know me well.

My decision to include unaccompanied minors as participants was premised on the somewhat arrogant assumption that my experience as a social worker would allow me to undertake sensitive research that would not be as intrusive as other studies might be. Having included the young people and having reflected on the process, I now believe that being interviewed for a research study might be a positive experience for many unaccompanied minors. Omidian (2000) recounts how her Afghan participants thanked her for listening to their stories and being sympathetic to their situations (Omidian, 1996). Similarly, the majority of the young people in this study seemed to appreciate the opportunity to talk about their lives. They spoke eagerly and enthusiastically. Most were in no rush to leave and were willing to meet me again, if necessary. In particular, many of them seemed keen to talk about their 'ordinary lives' prior to exile and about the differences between their countries of origin and Ireland, even though talking about these experiences was sometimes painful for them. When the interviews came to a conclusion it was common for participants to spontaneously make remarks such as the following:

> *I happy to tell you because ... I like to tell someone, to talk someone about my country.*

And:

> *Thank you ...Ehh, I, I think I enjoyed it much as well.*

I believe that such positivity may have been partially accounted for by the nature of the research, by my efforts to build rapport, and by my sensitivity to the specific circumstances of the young people. Such positivity suggested that these participants may have actually benefited in some way from taking part. It is reasonable to suggest that being listened to by an interested listener can make a research interview a positive experience. As Saleebey (2002) states, in connecting the strengths perspective with story and narrative, "a story told and appreciated is a person, family, or culture affirmed" (p. 282). Indeed, Lowes & Gill (2006) conducted research into people's experiences of being interviewed about an emotive topic and discovered that:

> "... the participants found the expression of their experiences during the in-depth interviews a helpful or 'therapeutic' contribution to their well-being. [...] It would appear that providing a non-judgemental and confidential environment, where participants can talk about their experiences in an open and unhurried manner with someone who is genuinely interested in what they have to say, can be of mutual benefit to researchers and participants" (Lowes & Gill, 2006, p. 594).

Similarly, Dyregrov et al. (2000) investigated how refugee families responded to taking part in research. They found that the participants evaluated the experience positively. The children suggested that they found it good to talk and that participation in the interview made things clearer

for them.[60] In Vekic's (2003) study of unaccompanied minors, the author observed that having the opportunity "to speak out and talk about their grievances was in many ways therapeutic" (p. 5) for the participants. Yet, whilst it should not be considered problematic if research interviews are 'therapeutic', it is clear that research and therapy have very different purposes (Kvale, 1996). Thus, the potential therapeutic benefits of participating in research cannot be used as a justification for conducting research in the first place (Mahon et al., 1996). Nonetheless, the fact that the young people seemed to enjoy participating in the study suggests that researchers should not be discouraged from conducting research with unaccompanied minors.[61] Research may not be as threatening or upsetting as is often thought. The young people will often enjoy talking about their experiences. In addition, research can be empowering for them, given that they are being viewed as 'experts', and as bearers of important information that researchers want to access. However, the research process is most likely to be experienced in a positive way if careful and ethical consideration is given to the specific circumstances of unaccompanied minors.

In summary, semi-structured interviewing was adopted as a research technique because of my perception that it was particularly suited to the population being studied and to the questions being explored. Despite difficulties in recruiting participants, 32 interviews were conducted. Rich, insightful narratives were collected. Every effort was made to ensure that the interviews did not cause harm to the young people. Overall, it seemed that participation in the interviews was a positive experience for the young people and one that they enjoyed and appreciated. Detailed accounts of past and present life experiences were obtained. These interviews were then analysed, along with the data from the participant observation phase. The analysis and write-up stage will now be discussed.

Analysis of the Data and Write-up

Data analysis is the process of searching for patterns in data (Neuman, 2003). In this study, analysis was considered an "inherently ongoing accomplishment" (Rapley, 2004, p. 27), reflecting Strauss

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[60] Dyregrov et al. (2000) had previously interviewed the families in a study about how adults and children communicated about the question of repatriation. The researchers then returned to these families to ask them about their experiences of having participated in the previous research. The authors acknowledge the possibility that the data might be biased because of the same interviewers going back to re-interview the group. As a result, the group might have felt unable to be totally honest with the researchers. However, reliability was strengthened by the trust that had developed between the researchers, the interpreter, and the participants, as well as by the consistency between different answers throughout the in-depth interviews.

[61] Hill (2005) suggests that whilst key adults can form appraisals as to whether or not children should take part in research, they may be "over-protective and exclude children who would like to take part in a study" (p. 73). In light of the fact that many of the young people who participated in this study expressed their appreciation of having the opportunity to take part, it is likely that professionals may indeed be over-protective of their unaccompanied minor clients.

& Corbin's (1998) grounded theory approach, whereby "method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship with one another" (p. 12). Analysis started prior to the first stages of actual fieldwork. Conversations with various people about the research, reading of the literature, and my past experiences all served as wellsprings of information. I mulled over these on a continuous basis, and I frequently made notes about them in my research journal. This initial analysis influenced the design of the study. In addition, the analytic themes that arose were explored during the participant observation and interviews (Rapley, 2004). The fieldwork stage allowed new themes to become evident, and priority was given to these "emergent concepts" (Ager, 2000, p. 31). Constant analysis occurred during the participant observation phase and insights that emerged were explored in the interviews. Also, analysis occurred during the interviews, with new knowledge being produced. Indeed, drawing on the work of Gubrium & Holstein (2002) and Rapley (2004), the interviews were viewed as:

> "... spaces in which both speakers are constantly 'doing analysis' – both speakers are engaged (and collaborating in) 'making meaning' and 'producing knowledge'" (Rapley, 2004, p. 27).

Interview transcription began during the interview phase, allowing for on-going mediation between the interviews and analysis. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, resulting in 1271 pages of transcripts.[62] The young people's accents, and in some cases their lack of fluency in English, meant that this was a very time consuming process, which involved continuous listening and re-listening to sections of the tapes.[63] [64] Yet, by transcribing, I became very familiar with the interviews and with the themes that had emerged. This tedious task was not simply considered "a technical detail prior to the main business of the analysis" (Silverman, 2005, p. 184). Instead, it was viewed as an integral part of the analysis phase.

Following on Rapley (2004), my approach was "broadly 'discursive' " (p. 26), whereby I did not try to establish:

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[62] The individual transcriptions were assigned identity code numbers to ensure confidentiality.

[63] A decision was made to obtain help with some of the transcription. As I had previously told the young people that nobody else would listen to the tapes, I made contact with a number of them and sought their consent for the tapes to be transcribed by two people whom I knew and trusted. These people signed confidentiality agreements. However, their lack of familiarity with the participants and with the conversations that had taken place meant that transcribing proved even more difficult for them. Hence, I personally transcribed all but two of the tapes.

[64] As the young people and the tapes were often difficult to understand, the transcripts (and hence the quotations used in the write-up) often include a number of symbols that indicate various difficulties I had in understanding what the participants were saying. For instance, when I thought they were saying a particular word but was not entirely sure, a bracketed question mark was placed after the word. In addition, at times words or phrases were completely inaudible and in these instances blank spaces in the form of '_____' were used.

> "... the 'truth' of [participants'] actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts but rather how specific (and sometimes contradictory) truths are produced, sustained and negotiated" (Rapley, 2004, p. 26, emphasis in original).

I drew on a variety of methods such as conversation analysis and narrative analysis, thus suggesting that I used an eclectic approach, somewhat similar to the type of eclecticism used by social workers when they combine different practice theories in their work with clients (Payne, 2005). Through repeated readings of the field notes and the transcripts, reflection on the data, and consideration of theory, codes were constructed:

> "Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to 'chunks' of varying sizes – words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one (e.g. a metaphor)" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56).

Whilst the participant observation field notes were coded manually, the interview transcripts were coded using QSR NUD*IST Vivo data management software, as this was deemed most useful for managing and quickly retrieving the large volume of data that had been produced through the interviews. An initial coding manual was developed, but this was constantly revised during the analysis. New codes were generated as additional themes became apparent through the reading and re-reading of the notes and scripts (Neuman, 2003). At all times, the codes and categories that developed were explicitly grounded in the questioning of ideas, concepts, and understandings in the present study (Ager, 2000), as is advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

These codes were attached to lengthy paragraphs and dialogues rather than to specific words or phrases (Miles & Huberman, 1994), thus allowing that data to speak for itself to a large degree (Neuman, 2003).[65] This also ensured that the voices of the participants were privileged. The codes were not mutually exclusive. For instance, within one paragraph, if a number of important themes were present, several codes were attached. In addition, during the coding process I actively sought out negative instances and included them within coding categories. Such willingness to seek out "disconfirming evidence" (Seale, 1999, p. 73) was consistent with a view that de-emphasised my authority to pronounce on social reality, "preferring instead an approach that [supported] multiple perspectives and polyvocality" (Seale, 1999, p. 73). For instance, whilst the code 'trust' generally comprised of quotations that showed the young people's lack of trust, several 'deviant cases' (Becker, 1998) indicating that participants were able to trust were also included within this category.

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[65] I believed that this was particularly suited to the population under study. I did not feel that it was appropriate to analyse specific words being used as I believed that I could easily misinterpret these words given the various language and cultural barriers that existed between the young people and me.

Drawing on the work of Strauss & Corbin (1998), the process of coding involved an open coding method, whereby I identified broad categories and assigned initial codes or labels. Subsequently, axial coding was used, which involved further elaborations of open codes (Seale, 1999). I developed subcategories of the open codes in order to be more precise about the nature of the themes being analysed. This form of coding stimulated thinking about linkages between themes and raised questions about what themes should be explored in more depth and what themes should be dropped (Neuman, 2003). A final form of coding – selective coding – involved integrating and refining categories that had emerged in order to form a larger theoretical scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) (see examples of open, axial, and selective coding in appendix 5). The individual codes were then printed into separate 'codebooks', and I practiced what Fuller & Petch (1995) have termed "immersion in the data" (p. 85) by reading and re-reading these 'books'. Through this process of further analysis I identified the major topics to be addressed in the writing of the thesis. As such, theory emerged from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

When writing the various 'insights' chapters, priority was given to the voices of the young people through the use of quotations from the various 'codebooks'. Therefore, unlike the approach taken by some other researchers in the field of refugee studies (e.g. Goodman, 2004), I decided, as far as possible, not to change the grammar or syntax that was used by the young people. Although this means that the reader might sometimes find the quotations difficult to understand, I felt that this approach would allow me to more adequately represent the young people whom I had interviewed. In addition, it leaves my insights open to greater scrutiny and gives readers the opportunity to decipher for themselves what the young people are saying. This approach, along with the use of triangulation (the use of multiple methods – e.g. participant observation, interviews, and reflections on the fieldwork and on my previous professional practice), helped to ensure that my data analysis and interpretation were reliable. In addition, particular attention was paid to highlighting multiple perspectives and taking account of negative instances (Seale, 1999), rather than generalising.

In writing about the various insights that emerged, I made every effort to keep the participants' identities anonymous. Ensuring anonymity is difficult, especially when the community being studied is a small one (Ryen, 2004), as is the case with the community of unaccompanied minors living in Ireland. Researchers have not always been successful in attempting this task (e.g. Vekic, 2003).[66] To maximise the chances of protecting the identities of the young people, I felt that it was necessary to exclude certain quotations when they involved information that could potentially be

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[66] Vekic (2003) gave pseudonyms to his unaccompanied minor participants and gave information about the nationalities of each person and about their ages and family circumstances. Upon reading this report, as a former social worker, it was easy for me to identify what my clients said about particular aspects of their lives.

identifying. At times I altered particular aspects of quotations that could point to the identity of the speaker (e.g. nationality, ethnicity, or even age or gender in some cases). In addition, it was usually not possible to link quotations together, either in the form of giving the speakers pseudonyms or by referring back to something else that the person had stated. Like the experience of Canda & Phaobtong (1992) in their work with southeast Asian refugees, these precautions limited the extent of my understanding of the young people's lives. However, this limitation was deemed necessary in order to adhere to an ethical methodological approach.

In summary, analysis of this data was considered an on-going process and focused particularly on emerging concepts rather than on pre-conceived hypotheses or theories. In the writing of the thesis the young people's voices were emphasised and specific consideration was given to ensuring that identifying information was omitted.

Concluding Comments

Frederick Ahearn Jr. (2000) in his discussion of methodological approaches to the study of refugees, depicts the qualitative researcher as an explorer who investigates the world and who is excited by discovery and meaning. The methodology of this research sought to hear the voices of unaccompanied minors as they explore their new lives in a new land and as they reflect on their previous experiences. The research was conducted with the individual contextual circumstances of each young person in mind, and with the acknowledgement that as an adult, Irish researcher my understanding would always be "partial and imperfect" (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 18). Through a constant reflexive approach during all phases of the study, every effort was made "to ensure that [my] research [left] either no footprint or a benign footprint" (Robinson, 2002, p.66) on the lives of the participants. The rich narratives that emerged will now be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 8.

Chapter 4: Past and Present Lives: The 'Ordinary' Amidst the 'Extraordinary'

> *So, it's really different. To you, is like, you, you are living in a different world. But for me, I just feel home is like, you know, a different world now. I feel it is like a millions of billions of miles away. So that's [...] That is so different.*

Introduction

This chapter discusses the everyday life experiences of the unaccompanied minors who participated in this research, both in terms of their pre-migration lives and their lives in Ireland. Throughout, their past and present lives are detailed in a comparative manner, reflecting how the young people tended to narrate their experiences. By using a comparative discourse, it becomes evident that the young people experienced multiple changes as a result of leaving home and coming to Ireland. For example, the 'extraordinary' aspects of their past lives – particularly those relating to poverty, conflict, and lack of opportunity – contrasted sharply with the multiple possibilities which they perceived to be present in Ireland. However, given that we know little about the "ordinary lives" (Kohli, 2006b, p. 709) of unaccompanied minors prior to departure, particular emphasis is placed on their more 'ordinary' past experiences, such as their relationships at home, their experiences as teenagers, and their school lives. Thus, amidst descriptions of difficult past lives, fond memories were also evident. Having moved to Ireland these positive aspects of past lives were no longer available. As a result, the young people were faced with adjusting to life without loved ones, different cultural expectations, and different norms of behaviour.[1]

Problems and Opportunities

Initially, the young people often painted a dull and negative picture of their past lives. In contrast, they saw life in Ireland as filled with potential and opportunity. In this section, elements of the young people's 'extraordinary' past experiences are described and are set within a context of their very different lives in Ireland.

In reflecting on their previous experiences, the young people portrayed life at home as difficult, thus suggesting the existence of pre-migration stressors in their lives. Sometimes their descriptions of difficulties arose through general descriptions of what life had been like at home, whilst at other times they arose when the young people articulated their reasons for leaving their countries of

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[1] Even without knowing anything about the life experiences and perspective of the participants, the fact that the participants came from a diverse range of different countries, that they were of different ages and genders, and that they had been in Ireland for varying lengths of time, highlights the importance of not generalising about them. Thus, every effort is made not to generalise. Instead, key themes that emerged in the study are highlighted whilst acknowledging that these themes may not apply to all of the young people.

origin.[2] In one case, a boy talked very openly about the events at home that precipitated his departure. During his early childhood, he and his parents had lived for a period of time in a neighbouring country due to ethnic conflicts in their own country. Later, after they returned home, his father was imprisoned because of his involvement in particular political activities. The boy described in detail what happened one night during his early teenage years, shortly after the release of his father from prison:

> ***YP:***[3] *It was in the night, it was around two or three o clock ...There was a bang on the door. And you know it was unusual because we never had that kind of banging on the door before. So, I think we knew that it was, you know, something not good. So, my mother and father, they woke up and they opened the door and they said 'who do you think you are', [...]*[4] *There was you know, shouting. So I knew it wasn't good.*
> ***M:*** *You were in your bedroom were you?*
> ***YP:*** *Mm-hmm. I knew it wasn't good. So, you know [...] I made my bed, quickly quickly, and I put my slippers on my bed, quickly quickly, and you know, and I went behind the wardrobe and, [...] oh, you know they was asking for, all of us, because they knew, I, I was their child, so they would wonder where I was. And my mother told me, told them that I was in my grandmother's house. So I hide behind the wardrobe. So, they came in my room and they searched. They searched inside the wardrobe, they opened the wardrobe. Imagine then I was scared to death! And then, I saw them. They were kind of, they were four. [...] And then they had, you know this, they had this type of gun [...] And each one had them, so, before I noticed I heard like three shots... So they closed the door ... and then I stayed there for a second because ... you know, I, I, I, didn't know what happened. I didn't know. I just, was kind of shocked for a second. Eh, I thought I was dreaming or something, so I was looking, there I was behind the wardrobe, and I thought I was really dreaming, so I got out of the wardrobe and I went to the ... sitting room. There was blood everywhere. So I had to get dressed, I was, I was You can imagine, I was, I, I, I thought I was dreaming, but....it, it was real. Then I had to get dressed, I had to get in my pyjamas, run fast. I went to the, to my [...] friend house, because I don't think they knew them. And I went there, I was in, I had a bike, I just _____ my pyjamas because I thought they would come back. [...] And then I took my bike and I went there ...*

This boy's strength and sense of agency are clearly evident within his description. In addition, his detailed account of the murder of his parents lends insight into the type of 'extraordinary' events that many unaccompanied minors experience in their home countries, prior to departure. His experiences mirror those of many children who have been referred to in literature discussions of pre-migration stressors and reasons for departure (Ayotte, 2002; Helander, 2001; Thomas et al., 2004; Vekic, 2003). But, in my study, few other participants volunteered such detailed descriptions

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[2] As has been described in the methodology chapter, the participants were not asked about their departure reasons. However, some of them gave unsolicited accounts of why they had come to Ireland.

[3] 'YP' stands for 'Young person' and 'M' stands for 'Muireann' (researcher).

[4] Where [...] appears, a section of the quotation has been left out in order to shorten it and facilitate ease of readership. As explained in the methodology chapter, where _____ appears a word or phrase has been omitted because it was inaudible. A bracketed question mark means that I was unsure as to whether or not I have heard the participant correctly.

of the reasons why they left their home countries. Instead they choose to be 'silent' (Anderson, 2001; Kohli, 2004). Although several young people mentioned specific causes of their departure, they did not seem to want to elaborate on their brief descriptions, and were not asked to do so, given that this was not the focus of the research. Essentially, they provided "thin stories" (Kohli, 2006b, p. 710). Avoidance of military service, having witnessed the murder of a prominent person, and escaping female circumcision, were all mentioned as departure reasons. Often, descriptions of reasons for leaving were rather vague with the participants talking about 'problems' or a lack of safety in their countries of origin:

> *Alright. I was born in 1988 and I started school in 1995. And, I was studying until 2002 to....actually, my father leave my country in 2000...Christmas 2000 and he went to England. And he was there for two years, two years and half and then, he was calling me to...come over, to _____ over here, so I say no problem for me, because of some problem for me and my brother and the family, you know. That why he was worried about us, so he was calling us to bring us to Europe. To be safe. And I leave my country in 2002 to.....now I'm here. And.....[pause] I think that's the shortest story about my life.*[5]

Whilst this boy makes vague reference to problems encountered by his own family, many of the other participants spoke in more general terms about problems in their countries of origin. They did not focus on their own specific personal difficulties. Whilst this may partially have represented a form of suppression or a desire to remain silent, it was often clear that the young people felt that many people had difficult lives in their countries of origin. They perceived themselves to have been the lucky ones who had managed to leave. Like the participants in Goodman's (2004) study, there was evidence that the young people felt a sense of connection and solidarity with those who remained at home, and that they empathised with them. Frequent references were made to people suffering, and to general difficulties in the societies in which they had lived. In addition, the young people often provided a context for their personal pre-departure problems, by talking about the more general difficulties in their countries of origin. This was clearly evident in the narrative of one girl, who grew up in a rural Nigerian village, and who had been sold into prostitution by her uncle when she was 17 years old:

> ***YP:*** *It's just that, ehm, they gave me out, my uncle gave me out for prostitution in Lagos. So, what I was doing. I was in the hotel, prostituting. And there was this kind man that helped me down to this place. You understand? In Nigeria, nobody wants to hear your story. Nobody wants to help you. It's hard for _____for someone to help you because [...] Everybody there is suffering. There are some people that are rich. Maybe (?) the rich does not like to mingle with you. ____You understand?*
> ***M:*** *They are very separate, like.*

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[5] This response was given by the young person following a question asking him to tell me about his life. Other young people responded in a similar way to such a question. This suggested one of two things. Either departure reasons accounted for an important part of their identities, or the young people were assuming this was the information I wanted as they were used to giving such information to social workers, immigration officials, etc.

YP: *Yeah. They are very separate.*

It is clear that this girl related her own negative personal experiences to the tendency for life in Nigeria to be problematic in general, stating that *"nobody wants to help you"* as *"everybody there is suffering"*. Such references to generalised problems were commonplace. Some of the participants described circumstances in which there was either a general breakdown of law and order or in which sporadic violence was commonplace. At times, descriptions of daily life were dotted with references to civil unrest and its effect on the community. Usually such unrest involved localised clashes between clans or members of different ethnic groups, or elements of larger-scale violence which spilled into local areas. Several of the participants talked about their schooling being interrupted because of a lack of safety. Other aspects of life, such as leisure activities and religious services, were also affected. One girl mentioned that the priest sometimes could not come to their village because of *"war"*. Others found that their freedom was curtailed due to the lack of safety in their surrounding environments.[6] Many of them talked about their parents being worried about their well-being and putting strict rules in place in an effort to protect them. Sometimes this meant that the participants were not allowed outside or that they could only go to certain areas, during certain time periods. According to one participant, his mother always *"overprotected"* him, as she feared that he would be targeted because his father was a *"known person"*. Similarly, another boy, whose half-brother had been killed in the conflict in his country, told how his mother constantly worried about his safety and feared that he too would be killed:

> *My mum told me when I, when you, really, when I go out to school every day, you know, till I came back she was like kinda worried. Because when my Dad, Dad and my half brother, when they were going out that time, they just like, eat lunch and they were trying to, to hire for us a bigger van like that to, we were going to move because they were fighting in our village. [...] So, they just went there and my, my Mum, she was telling me, she said 'I hear like gunshots. Like five or ten gunshots. Like, ____ nearby. And I just like, and they just went. And I was saying, I was worried. And my, your brother just, and your father came with no car and he was, you know, his son on his shoulder. And he was dead. So, it was really sad. And it's like whenever you go out to school and you didn't come back on time, I would just think about, that image comes like ...' She was like, kinda really worried every time if she, if she hears gunshot and my father is not home. She is always worried until he comes. So, it's always like, from day to day, the same image, you know.*

Hence, for this boy's mother, the 'ordinary' daily experience of her son going to school was imbued with a different meaning because of the 'extraordinary' circumstances in which they were living. As a result of her worry, she curtailed her son's freedom. When this happened, it frustrated the boy. However, looking back with hindsight from the safety of Ireland, he was able to understand his mother's concerns and see that his home country was not safe.

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[6] The theme of freedom will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

For other participants, violence and civil unrest were not prominent features of their lives in their countries of origin. However, they nonetheless perceived their pre-departure lives as problematic. They painted pictures of home countries fraught with corruption and lack of opportunity, or of personal circumstances of hardship and suffering. Whilst a minority of the young people described circumstances of relative wealth, many spoke of situations of poverty. One boy described how, from a young age, he lived on the streets after his mother sent him to a neighbouring country to escape from civil unrest. He told how he was one of many children living on the streets and, like others, became involved in crime in order to make money for. Eventually, however, he was helped to escape from his situation:

> ***YP:*** *Because in street of [that city] you have loads of parking boys*[7] *who they don't have mothers or who don't have parents. [...] So, they take care for themselves. [...] Now, 'cos, I want, 'cos there wasn't, there wasn't anybody to, to tell me this bad or this wrong, so in the street I was taking everything. I was taking drugs. I was, I was doing everything. Ehh, in that ____ I joined the, the thungs*[8] *because I, I need money. You know. I need money to buy, you know, whatever I want. So, they use us in every way they want. Then sometimes, those, ehm, police, who work in the government, they use us to travel (?) the, ehm guns and drugs. And even, ehm, sometimes, ehm bad things happen to us. Really bad things. But I don't think I will mention that.*
> ***M:*** *That's ok. That's grand.*
> ***YP:*** *So, life there was very difficult. So ehh, it's it's like, you pray for your best. And you, you live in your own life and you try to, you know, to to live strong. It was very hard. And, one day I, I met this guy and he helped me. He take me out of ehh, of street life. And he, he employ me somewhere in [that country]. Ehm, in a big store. Ehm, I worked there about six, six months. I worked for six months and he saved some money for me. [...] Ehm, after six months he told me, aw, whether I can, he can, I can go somewhere else. Somewhere safer. Ehh, like how would, even if it was you, someone told you if you want to go somewhere else and you know how life is there, you would say yes. And, he, he told me it's a good life. Wherever he would take me. 'cos, I agreed. I could take any chances. I, I experience everything. So, I wasn't, you know, caring about what, what would happen next. So, I ____ like I was living like that. So, now, after six months now he told me he would take me somewhere and I, I agree.*

Again, there is some evidence of 'silence' and suppression in this boy's narrative, with him not wanting to elaborate on the *"bad things"* that sometimes happened to him and to his friends. Also, he makes a general reference to life in his country of origin being *"very difficult"*. His use of the pronoun *"you"* suggests that people in general had to *"pray for [their] best"* and try to *"live strong"*, rather than just himself. However, his words, like those of many other participants, suggest his determination to survive despite his circumstances, and his willingness to accept an offer of help when it arose.

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[7] In Kenya, the word 'parking boy' is used to describe homeless street children.

[8] This word was used by the boy and seemed to mean criminals or gangsters. As I had not heard of the word before he spelt it for me and spelt it as 'thung', saying it was different from the word 'thug'.

Apart from accounts of violence and poverty, many of the participants drew attention to the fact that the public infrastructure and services in their countries were underdeveloped or inadequate. They made references to bad communications systems, to poorly equipped schools, to a lack of public transport, and to the absence of social welfare systems. The underdevelopment of infrastructure and the poor quality public services meant that the participants believed that opportunities were limited in their countries of origin. Often, these aspects of home life were described within comparative accounts. One boy, who had only been in Ireland for a week at the time of the research interview, talked about these differences:

> ***M:*** *So what do you see as the differences between Ireland and Somalia?*
> ***YP:*** *Oh, it's really difference. Is very difference. Is very, now Somalia, ehm, they don't have the, you know, something,[...] They don't have electricity. They don't have, you know, schools. They don't have, you know, like this bus. The, a few of them. But, you can't walk you know, bus in ehm ... if you need to go in another city you can take, you know. Donkey. [Laughs]. Yeah. This. Ahh, it's it's very difficult, you know.*

Again, life at home was perceived as difficult. Growing up in such contexts, some of the young people were aware that very different countries existed elsewhere. Frequently, they mentioned that they heard people talking about other countries or that they saw images of life elsewhere on television:

> *But sometimes, like when, when you, when you go to cinema with my parents and I watch the movies and the cars and everything is like kinda beautiful. So, kinda beautiful. Wow! So. I knew this life.*

Another participant, a Somali boy, talked about his knowledge of other countries increasing when UN peacekeeping troops from countries such as France and Belgium were deployed to his country in the 1990s. I asked him whether he had thought these countries were very similar to Somalia:

> ***YP:*** *No, no [laugh] I knew they were, they were better. Like, even my Dad used to tell me ...*
> ***M:*** *You knew they were better?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. My Dad used to tell me everytime, ehh, like Somalia there is no government. It's the only country in the world that there is no government. And, there's actually like better life than this, better future, better education but you, you can't have it. So, unfortunate ... and he always used, he used to talk about us, like, 'oh what's he talking about?' [laughs]*

When this boy's father spoke about other countries with governments and better education systems, countries where better futures were possible, he was not able to fully understand what was being described. He didn't know what a government was. In contrast, when he moved to Ireland he quickly learnt that there was a government in place and what it meant. From the vantage point of his new life, he was able to appreciate his father's words. He expressed concern about his peers at home who were growing up carrying guns, with no understanding of government:

> *Sometimes, really [laughs], you know, I think like there was never been a government in Somalia, like. And there will never be. Because when you see the like, the way, things are going on. Every kid, even if he's a teenager, like carrying a gun. [...] He, he didn't know*

> *there was a government. He doesn't know what police is. He doesn't know what traffic means. He doesn't know what's taxis means ... You know, they don't know anything about life. So, you think about that. These kids, like, they were born during the war. 1991. Now, they are like 14, 15, all of them. So, they don't, I don't even know what government was, I didn't know what was that. Just, like I saw the, that life and I thought that that is just (?) the life. So it's gonna be hard for them to learn. To get a government because all the teenagers now they don't even know what government is. And those, and those are the generations that the country's getting. You know.*

Thus, whilst this boy had some knowledge of life outside of Somali prior to departure, his understanding was very limited. His only true experience of life was of a Somali life, and so he thought that type of life was the norm. His account suggested that he was concerned that his peers in Somalia would never experience a more 'ordinary' life, with a government and a proper infrastructure.

Overall, the young people described home circumstances in which educational and career opportunities were severely curtailed due to poverty, civil unrest, corruption, inadequate services, or lack of governance. In contrast, Ireland was perceived to be a safe country that provided the participants with multiple life opportunities. The young people frequently expressed their relief at being in a safe place and expressed hope that they would be permitted to remain in Ireland. Some young people talked about being able to walk around freely in Ireland without feeling unsafe. Others talked about the opportunities for good jobs that they would have after completing their education. The girl who had come to Ireland having escaped from prostitution described her initial impressions when she arrived in Ireland and her longer-term feelings of safety following her initial adjustment:

> *It was lovely. Cold. Freezing. It was nice. It was cold. Freezing. I like Ireland because it's a peaceful country. I'm not scared anymore. Just ____ I'm scared in Nigeria. Thinking about my uncle coming to take me. Sleeping different men. [...] Nigeria. Hungry. Do you know? I go to school but not all the time. I always work. _____ things at home. I'm happy. I'm happy in Ireland. I just pray that God will help me.*

Although most of the participants tended to problematise the broader contexts in which they had lived at home, within descriptions of difficulties positive accounts sometimes emerged. For instance, some felt that home life was less stressful and complicated than life in Ireland. Although it may have been a difficult life physically, it was a simpler life mentally. This rather positive perspective arose in the otherwise negative pre-departure narrative of one girl. She described the hard physical work she had been required to do at home on a daily basis. She lived in a rural African village. Her mother had a small farm, growing crops and rearing chickens. This participant described how she worked on the farm and, as the only daughter, helped in the home as well – fetching water, cooking, and washing clothes by hand. She described how she had to cycle a long distance to school because there was no public transport. From time to time, her schooling was interrupted by conflict or because her mother could not afford school fees. She described the

lifestyle at home as *"hell"*, saying *"you would think this is heaven and that is hell"* and gave this as her reason for not wishing to return, even if her country became safe for her again. Despite this, in general she did not perceive her life at home to be stressful, unlike her life in Ireland:

> ***YP:*** *Apart from where I come from there was war, but ehm ... in other things it wasn't very stressful*
> ***M:*** *[...] But at home like you were talking about having to work and that...at home you would have had to pay for your education and you'd have to work...you know you were working at home and what you describe was very...like very you know it was hard work ...but it wasn't stressful was it not?*
> ***YP:*** *No...[pause] because you get used ... [pause]...if its work with the hands its even like exercise, it won't stress you, your heart and brain...but if its worrying with the heart it stresses you....*

Our dialogue clearly suggests that I was surprised by the participant's conclusion that life at home *"wasn't very stressful"*. In contrast, the stresses of the asylum process and of missing loved ones meant that *"worrying with the heart"* was an integral part of her life in Ireland. Another girl expressed a similar view of her situation. She had maintained contact with some of her friends in her country of origin and found it difficult to get them to understand what her life was like in Ireland. She perceived her life at home to have been *"easier"* than her life in Ireland, and her words suggest that this was because life was simpler at home, involving less thinking and fewer choices:

> ***M:*** *And do you tell [your friends at home] about what you're doing here?*
> ***YP:*** *Well ...[pause] I, I tell them but they wouldn't really understand. Because, people think it's much easier in here but, it's not easier than (?) at home. I think it's ... it's much easier at home, because you live with your family and you know everything (?) about your life. You just go to school and ...it's kind of fun. You never thought about your life. Because as, if you, if you are a woman, as you get older you just get married or something. You don't have to think about whose going to marry me or ____ am I going to get married.*
> ***M:*** *It just happens automatically?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, it just happens.*

These descriptions suggest that with the benefit of hindsight, and the experience of living in Ireland, some of the young people could see positive elements of their pre-departure lives. Their narratives suggested that it was not a matter of simplistically seeing one life as 'good' and the other as 'bad'. Such descriptions draw attention to the importance of understanding the lives of unaccompanied minors in a more in-depth way.

In summary, the young people's accounts suggested that their pre-migration lives frequently involved multiple challenges arising from poverty, conflict, and lack of opportunity. Compared with these negative descriptions, Ireland was equated with opportunity and possibility. However, further exploration suggested that these initial accounts did not represent the full story of the young people's lives in Ireland and their lives at home. 'Thicker' stories were present, although they were often "wrapped in silence" (Kohli, 2006b, p. 714). By deliberately not focusing on problems at

home and on reasons for departure, this research allowed the participants to talk about what might be termed their more 'ordinary' circumstances of childhood and adolescence, many of which were positive in nature. Although frequently neglected in the literature, these circumstances are crucially important to understand if we are to seek to fully appreciate where these young people have come from and to what extent their lives have changed as a result of leaving home. The remainder of this chapter will look at some of the 'thicker' life experiences of the young people. To begin with their experiences of relationships will be discussed.

Relationships

The young people's descriptions of their relationships with family members, friends, and neighbours give important insight into aspects of 'ordinary' life prior to departure. In addition, however, such descriptions give us a greater understanding of what life is like for unaccompanied minors in Ireland, a life that takes place without these loved ones. Thus, by describing past experiences, further light is shed on the challenges faced in the present.

Relationships with Family and Friends

From my experience of working as a social worker I was very sensitive to the fact that questions about family members might not be welcomed, and so I rarely asked such questions, instead waiting for the young people to initiate these conversations. During one hostel visit, after a long conversation with 'Sarah'[9] about Christmas in her country of origin, and not being allowed out to celebrate New Year, I noted the following reflections in my field notes:

> *Sometimes it's hard to know whether it is ok to ask questions about home or not. For instance, should I have continued asking Sarah about living at home, about where she lived when she was on her school holidays, about who wouldn't allow her to go out around New Years? In many ways, the natural thing to do when getting to know someone is to ask about their family. Does she have brothers and sisters? What do her parents do? But I feel I can't. I said I wouldn't ask about why the young people left and I know that why Sarah left might be to do with her family. I suppose I need to trust that she will talk about them if she wants to and if she feels she can. After all, one would presume that the most natural thing for her to talk about would be her family too. Yet none of these children have mentioned their families yet. I don't want the young people to think I am not interested in their families, yet I don't want to start asking about something they are not yet ready or are not willing to talk about. It is difficult to get the balance ...*
>
> [Field notes, 26/11/2003]

[9] Sarah is a pseudonym. I have used pseudonyms when referring to young people or hostel staff members in my fieldnotes.

Although I made these reflections early on in the participant observation, throughout my entire time in the hostel young people rarely mentioned their family members or their friends at home. There were a few exceptions. For instance, one boy spoke frequently and openly about his parents and often received telephone calls from them. However, in general it seemed that talking about family members was not something that was done openly or spontaneously.

During the interviews however, in describing their daily lives at home, most of the participants made reference to their relationships with family members and with friends, thus providing information that is seldom present in the literature on unaccompanied minors. Some of the participants made frequent references to their parents and to other family members, whilst others did not wish to talk about their families at all, choosing to be silent. As regards the participants' relationships with family members, it was evident that some had been close to their parents and had positive memories of these relationships, whilst others had grown up in situations in which their parents were abusive or in situations where they did not have much contact with them.

Although most of those who spoke about their parents tended to talk about their mothers, on occasion the young people spoke about their relationships with their fathers. One girl described both her mother and her father and her belief that she had a closer relationship with her father. This led her to feeling particularly hurt when she had to leave her country because of her father's actions towards her:[10]

> *Well ... it seems strange, but ... I seemed to get closer to my Dad than my Mum. When I was growing up. My Dad is very harsh. But ... my Dad is harsh, my Mum is a disciplinaire. You understand. Why? ... My Dad could beat me, like, once in six months. My Mum would beat me every day. You know. She is doing it to discipline you and get you right because she always say, 'you are a female. You will meet men. You going to families. While men, it is families that are coming to them, you know. But you, you are a ... You have to be right. You have to be perfect'. You know, so [...] that's the way she always says it, you know. So I tend to get closer to my... I seem to get comfortable with my Dad than with my Mum like. Most of the things, like, if I want anything, I usually goes to my Dad. _____ Like, the rest of my brothers now, the rest of my siblings, they would rather go to my Mum. Because I knew, if they go to my Dad, my Dad will still send you back to my Mum. Go and get it from your Mum. But me, I seem to get closer to him because ... I don't know why. To me, I felt he likes me. And John. I felt he likes both of us. So that was why, like, when that thing happens it pains me more. Because I felt, I'm connected to him. I'm close to him. You know.*

Elsewhere, some young people described particularly close relationships with siblings. One boy, whose father had to leave his country when he was twelve, became particularly close to his older brother following his father's departure:

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[10] In the interview the girl did not state what her father had done.

The only the person, can talk to me is my brother and the only person can talk to my brother, that's me. We understand each other very well, you know. Actually, I love my brother more than my father and my mother. Because the time my father leave my country, you know, four years ago ... four years ago, I was eleven ____ twelve, and my brother helped me a lot, you know.

In general, however, such direct descriptions of how the young people felt about parents, siblings, or friends, were rare. Instead, general conversations about time spent with family members and friends showed the fondness and love that the participants felt for them, as well as giving insight into the 'ordinary' daily life experiences of the young people. They talked about helping their mothers with household chores, about eating together and going to religious services as a family, and about playing and conversing with siblings and with friends. One boy, who seemed to have had a particularly close relationship with his mother before she was killed, described how they used to spend their time together:

What kind of things we would ... She would read me stories, she would, we would play games, cards ... eh, we would cook, you know, we would ... [quiet tone of voice]

The tone of voice in which these words were spoken suggested this boy's sadness. Descriptions like this one highlighted the multiple roles played by significant people in pre-departure lives of the participants. Young people described how different people played with them, cooked meals for them, helped with homework, chatted, and listened to them when they had problems or worries. One boy described how his father often told him stories about the history of his country and about life before the war began. Also, parents and other older family members gave guidance and advice which helped to direct the behaviour of the participants. In particular, mothers were mentioned as people to whom the young people went when they needed help or support.

Frequently, the young people also talked about members of their extended family. Sometimes extended family members lived in their households. Some of the participants were cared for by grandparents or by aunts or uncles, following the death or disappearance of parents. Often, members of the extended family seemed to play a significant role in the lives of the young people – at times this role was positive, at other times it was negative. One boy made frequent references to his grandparents both during the interviews and during my contact with him in the participant observation phase. He talked about how he and his older brother visited their grandparents on Thursday evenings after school and did messages for them when necessary. They did this despite objections from their grandparents:

Because always they don't let me to do something for them. Because they don't want, you know, they don't want tell another person 'we are getting old'. Most of the thing they do, they do that themselves, you know. [...] You know. And seriously I look after them. [...] You know, sometimes [...] I get in and I see my grandmother _____ in the house. I fighting to her. 'You need something, you call me. I come here'. Even sometimes, I'm in school. My mother tell me, my mother she call me, 'they have to do something. Can you go fast after school?' I leave the school at that time, you know. They need something, they call

me, I'm going there. It's no problem, I'm at party, I'm with my friend, even I leave my mother for my grandparents, that's what I'm doing.

As well as talking about family members, the young people made frequent references to time spent with neighbours and with friends. In describing the life left behind, many of the participants talked about the existence of a sense of community that had been a part of their home cultures. The participants talked about how people socialised informally by dropping in to see their friends whenever they wanted to do so. Some spoke about spending their evenings at home visiting neighbours. These descriptions contrasted sharply with their present-day lives in Ireland. People often did not know their neighbours. Also, socialising was perceived to be more formalised in the Irish context. Companionship, and the support associated with it (Cohen & Wills, 1985), had often been effortlessly available in their home countries. However, the situation was different in Ireland. Friends were more difficult to come by:

Yeah, I used, like, here you get friends, but they are really really, few. [little laugh]. I don't have friends, like. Few friends. But at home, like, in the evenings, you can just go the neighbours. You just go and visit them. But here, everything is on time. And, like, when you are going somewhere, like, you have to call to make an appointment. But there you just drop in, they don't mind.

Having a sense of community also meant that help was easily available when needed. The young people talked about neighbours helping their families out in times of need. A male participant described how it was *"normal"* for him to drop into his friend's house for dinner, if he was hungry, or for his family to borrow money from their neighbours. Another participant mentioned how neighbours would come and *"console you"* or would give you a *"kilo of milk"* or other food items if needed, thus providing both 'nurturant' and 'instrumental' support (Cutrona, 2000).

Missing Those Left Behind

Having moved away from their countries of origin, many of the young people missed the sense of neighbourliness that they were used to, as well as their families and their friends. In relation to friends, although the young people seemed to have people to 'hang around with' in Ireland, their narratives suggested that they did not have close friends whom they trusted.[11] As regards family, many of the participants spoke in general terms about missing family members. One girl's words were particularly heartfelt. Her sense of loneliness was palpable, both in this utterance and throughout my conversation with her:

Eh, I pray ... eh, I pray to God blessing (?) me. Yeah. I need to find my Mammy, my family. Yeah, because I'm tired like this. Here alone, every time. Ah, I'm tired, tired, you know.

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[11] Chapter 6 will explore the young people's experiences of trusting and distrusting people.

Whilst other participants' accounts were not so emotional, they often described specifically what it was that they missed about not having family members with them in Ireland. Their descriptions focused on the daily reality of not having parents, siblings, and friends available. These descriptions gave further insight into both their pre and post-departure lives. They talked about specific aspects of their relationships with people that they missed – often involving 'ordinary', everyday interactions with particular individuals. They missed spending time with these people and chatting to them, they missed playing and eating together, and they missed benefiting from the advice, guidance, and support of those who had been important members of their social networks. One boy gave a very simple, yet resonant, description of what used to happen in his house in the morning time. He would get up at 6am and he and his mother would sit down together, pray, and then eat fresh bread baked by his mother. They would then cycle together to his school before his mother cycled on to her workplace. These morning rituals contrasted sharply with mornings in his hostel accommodation in Ireland:

> ***YP:*** *Like, the way I would wake up, say like, half an hour breakfast with my mother and then we go to school, and then ... You know. It's not the same.*
> ***M:*** *Why is it different? Like, obviously, like your mother isn't there, that's a big difference.*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah and the other difference is like you have to wake yourself up. The difference is like, you ... Like, you know the way, like the, your mother tells you, like 'good morning. Blah, blah, blah. Did you have nice dream, like, blah, blah, blah' You know, that kind of stuff. Which, which Jane,*[12] *wouldn't ... I mean, which, you know Jane, on the staff? She wouldn't come and ask you how was your dream, blah blah blah blah. Which, is, like a difference. Your mother is your mother, you know like. If, nobody can fill that position.*

Such a description lends insight into the routine and mundane experiences of every-day life that had changed - fundamentally and irrevocably - for this participant. In a context where parents were absent, 'ordinary' experiences - such as someone asking about one's dreams - took on particularly significant meanings.

It was also very common for participants to talk about missing food from home and their mothers' cooking. Although some participants were able to cook for themselves or had 'home food' cooked for them by their carers, the majority of the young people were provided with meals in their hostels. Most were critical of the meals they were given and longed for a greater variety of foods.[13] During the interview phase, one boy contrasted the hostel food to the huge variety of different foods available in his country of origin. He remembered the time his mother would spend preparing meals, and told of an incident when she had given out to him for tasting the food before it was

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[12] Pseudonym for staff member in Valley Lodge.

[13] This was an issue that arose repeatedly during my time in the hostel. Having eaten with the young people on many occasions, I was easily able to empathise with their complaints, and found myself beginning to avoid meal times during my hostel visits, because I did not like the food!

ready. He longed for his parents to join him in Ireland so that he could experience their cooking again:

> ***YP:*** *Seriously, my mother, she work on the food. For example, she spend one hour to stay and see what's going on. Test it in the salt in the pepper, and, you know, vegetable or so. Seriously she work on the food. [...]Sometime my mother she keep the food away from me. 'Go away, don't come here'. I remember one time, it was like New Year. I was in touching [...] the chicken, I was taking it out from the plate. My mother put the boiled water in my hand. That's burn. My mother says 'This is not fair. The people sitting over there, they are just like you, hungry. So, it's not fair, you come eat before them. You know. It's not fair'. And my hand was burning. [laughing]. That was bad. [...] Actually, I just waiting for my, you know, because if my father come here I can cook for myself. So. I just waiting for that time. One of them just come you know. [...] Because both of them they cook very well. [...] Just cook something for me. Please God. Because over here you know, in Meadow House*[14] *even in Valley Lodge, sometimes you eat, it's a little bit chilly, a little bit salty.*
> ***M:*** *It's not the way you would make it*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. It's not exactly the way ...*

In the absence of parents and family members, it was evident that their roles were often 'replaced' – to a degree - by social workers, project workers, teachers, or members of voluntary organisations. Many of the young people likened their social worker or project worker to their parents, and expressed appreciation for the support that they provided. However, they knew that these professionals could never adequately fill the positions of parents. One female participant talked about the support provided by her project worker. Although she knew that she could turn to her for advice and support, she stated that she didn't always *"feel free to talk with her"* because she knew that her project worker was listening to the problems of all the young people in the hostel. Instead, she longed to be able to talk to someone who was closer to her. Elsewhere, a male participant stated that he felt that he was well cared for in Ireland but pointed out that *"the way I would be looked after with my parents is not the same way I would be looked after here"*.

In addition, participants were aware that although professionals might genuinely care about them, they were being paid to be in this caring role. They were not available at weekends and the participants knew that relationships with them were neither equal nor reciprocal. Their awareness of the limitations of these relationships echoed the concerns of a number of researchers about the danger of unaccompanied minors becoming dependent on professionals whilst remaining isolated from more informal supports (Stanley, 2001; Wade et al., 2005; Robins & Rylands, 2003). One boy described his social worker as the only person he could trust. At first, he stated that his social worker was his *"first friend"*, but then he acknowledged that the relationship was not a proper friendship:

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[14] Pseudonym for another hostel for unaccompanied minors

Ehh, about social workers, there's, I think [...] you can tell them everything 'cos they are like my parents now and I don't have anybody else. So ... if I have anything, or if I am, am thinking about anything, I will talk to them. So, ___ my, my, my first friend is like my social worker. [...] Yeah. ...[pause] But, I can't say he's my friend. Just, because is just, you know, is like, ehh, is like, taking responsibility for me. So he's just like my guardian. That's it. But, I need a friend. You know, some, like my age and ...ehm, ehm,...somebody ____ spend time together, most of the time. 'Cos social worker he is out there, now. I don't know where he is. You know, and, and, he don't work Sundays, he don't work Saturdays. But if you have a friend there, it doesn't matter is Monday or Tuesday, a friend is there every time. And you, it doesn't matter he is away or where. But, it's you, if you call, if you call him or her he will come. But if now I call my social worker, he'll tell me, 'oh wait until Monday. Or, I'll, I'll next week I'm not working'. You know? So that is work. So he is not a friend. He is just a guardian. [...] It's not a, it is not a relationship that one. It is just. I think it is a work thing. It's just work.[...]. He is getting paid. Like, a friend, a real friend, a friend, he, he or she, she, he can't be, nobody is paying to be my friend.

For this boy, the research interview seemed to allow him time to reflect on his relationship with his social worker. From this reflection he was able to identify the limitations of the relationship, his need for *"a real friend"*. Although his social worker played an important part in his life, he felt that this type of relationship was not enough.

However, the narratives of the young people suggested that making 'real friends' was not always easy. Frequently, the participants made reference to feeling different to their Irish peers and it seemed that this sense of being different represented a barrier to forming close friendships. The participants felt that their histories, values, and interests were not like those of their Irish peers. In addition, current circumstances sometimes contributed to the young people feeling different. For example, as asylum seekers, the participants were generally in receipt of €19.10 per week. Their peers at school seemed to have access to considerably more money. One boy described how, as a result, he felt different to those in his class:

I mean you feel ... how ... you feel different. Although you might have Irish friends, you would feel actually different, because maybe they would have expensive runners, maybe go to clubs, expensive pens, school bags ...[...] Like, here you have ... in [my country], like, you don't have to compete for fashion like those kind of, you know. But here, someone buys runners in your class and you know, everyone must compete. Getting more better runners ...

For this boy, not only did he have to deal with feeling different from his peers, but he also had to cope with a changed culture, one in which it was necessary to *"compete for fashion"*. In addition, he had to deal with a changed sense of self. In his country of origin his peers had been jealous of him as he had come from *"a wealthy family"*. Now, his situation was reversed. Thus, like many of his peers, change and difference was a central theme in his narrative. In such a context making close friends was not always easy.

In summary, many of the participants had grown up with close relationships and with constant companionship. They had fond memories of 'ordinary' lives spent with friends, neighbours, and

loved ones. In Ireland they missed these element of their previous lives. Their words implied that loss was indeed something that pervaded their lives (Davies & Webb, 2000). In particular, they missed their parents who had played multiple roles in their lives. As teenagers, they frequently talked about parents attempting to control their behaviour. It is to this theme, and the more general theme of teenage life, that we now turn.

Teenage Lives: Cultural expectations, Secrecy, and Freedom

Having arrived in Ireland to seek asylum, the participants in this study were frequently labelled as 'asylum seekers', 'refugees', or 'unaccompanied minors'. Yet, behind these labels, they were teenagers who experienced many of the 'ordinary' aspects of childhood and teenage life, both prior to departure and since arriving in Ireland. In this section, some of these life experiences are outlined. Again, by exploring their past experiences, life in exile can be more fully understood.

In speaking about their lives at home, many of the participants depicted their parents or other caregivers as strict disciplinarians. Many described how their behaviour at home was tightly controlled by guardians, in an effort to ensure that they acquitted themselves in a manner that respected the behavioural norms and expectations of their societies. Specifically, efforts seemed to be made to protect children and young people from 'Western influences'. Drinking alcohol and smoking were usually prohibited, or at least strongly disapproved of, and young people were expected to display high moral standards by behaving 'appropriately'. In particular, the young people frequently mentioned the cultural norms regarding dating. They described how it was perceived to be unacceptable for people of their ages to have boyfriends or girlfriends. When I was in Valley Lodge, one boy remarked to me how relationships between boys and girls were not possible under Islam, the predominant religion in his country. He said that it was *"not easy to be familiar with girls"*, although he got to know some girls through the political activities in which he had been involved. Also, children and young people were taught to have respect for their elders, and this usually seemed to involve expecting children to refrain from speaking their minds or giving their opinion.[15]

Whilst parents, caregivers, and society generally attempted to exert strong control on the lives of the young people, they were not always successful. Although some of the young people described not daring to disobey their parents for fear of the consequences, many described a type of "secret life" (Miller et al., in press, p. 14)[16] spent with siblings and friends. Within this 'secret life', the rules and norms of society were broken. However, attempts were made to hide such behaviour

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[15] The expectation of showing respect will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

[16] See chapter 2 for elaboration of this concept.

from parents and from the community at large. For instance, many of the youngsters described how people of their age – including themselves, siblings or friends - often had girlfriends or boyfriends in secret. In relation to this, one girl's narrative suggested that secrecy represented a way of escaping from the *"control"* that parents tried to exert on their children. This differed from life in Ireland:

> *It's just different because your mother and your father controlling you and you can't go with some boy [...] And you can't go with some man. If they see you they can kill you, you know. And they can beat you. And if you are going with your boyfriend you have to go secret. You can't show them anybody, you know?*

Disobeying rules and doing things in secret meant that many of the young people had memories of getting into trouble with their parents for things that they did with siblings or with friends. Amongst other things, they described instances where they stayed out later than they were allowed in the evening, where they went to the cinema when children were not allowed to do so, when they were disrespectful towards teachers, and when they played in areas which their parents perceived to be dangerous. The young people tended to describe these memories rather nostalgically, despite the obvious discord that had been involved at the time. From the vantage point of their new worlds, where parents were absent, these instances were remembered fondly. This was evident from the animated way in which one Muslim boy described what he did on a Friday, when he had no school:

> ***YP:*** *When I woke up, I would be like, I had breakfast, watch about my Dad, and then if he's not in, I just go out with my friends. [laugh] And play football in, in the beach and come back to lunch.. Then I'll go to sleep, then I'll woke (?) up around three or three thirty. Then I'll go out and play football. Then sometimes if I came home around seven I will be in trouble because I'm late. I have to be home around six. Six pm. [...] Every Friday I was in trouble [laughs]. I ___ I go to beach like. And if my Dad hears that I was in the beach or like if, if he, because he can see like, the sea sand in your sandals ... [...]*
> ***M:*** *Ok. And what was, when you say you'd get into trouble, what would that mean?*
> ***YP:*** *He give me like, like five hits with his belt. And that's it. He tells me go, to go to sleep. [...].*
> ***M:*** *And would he ehm, like why were you not allowed to go to the beach? [...]*
> ***YP:*** *I know lots of my friends, like, get eaten by shark. Yes. There's no, you know, security guard, or like, ehm, coast guard ____ Just go there and if you get drowned and that's it. You just like, the people who went with you they just leave you there and they coming back to your family, and "he's got eaten by shark" or "he's drowned" or whatever. So, he didn't like that idea and he used to tell me that it's not ehh, even safe. When you go in there you have to pass through, like, militia's party (?). But the good thing about the kids is when you passing through the militia, they don't ask you 'hey come here. What your tribe is?' We just like have our ball with us and we have, you know, the swimming thing and stuff. Just, they don't give us much attention. You just like pass there. But my ... when we, when I came back to my father ____ I have passed that street, that street. I _____ and there those militias are there. 'How did you do that?' And he just beats me up. 'Don't ever ever go that, go that place'. And it's like, you can't even go out this week. It be like kinda detention. [...] On Friday you can't play football. You have to stay ___ and I used to hate that. So, I would never tell him wherever I go. But he'd ___ , he would hear it from, you know. It's like, the village, if he goes out, he talks to ehh, my friend's Dad or something. ...*

This boy's description suggests that amidst 'extraordinary' circumstances, in which his father

worried about his safety because of 'the militia', aspects of 'ordinariness' prevailed. He enjoyed playing football with his friends, but often got in trouble for doing so. In addition, his description, and those of several other young people, suggested that behaviour was monitored by the community generally. When norms of behaviour were broken, parents were often informed by people within the community. In the eyes of the young people, this represented a less positive aspect of the sense of community that often existed in their countries of origin. Several of them gave examples of teachers disciplining them for something they had done at weekends, or of neighbours reporting their behaviour to their parents. In contrast, a female participant felt Irish people tended not to involve themselves in other people's business:

> *And people here are so reserved. ... They don't really want to interfere with other families...and you really take long to see your neighbours here. ...Yeah, you wouldn't even know your neighbour. So, of course, everybody is just on their own. And yet the other one is just like a community. You, you would be passing, like, in a village, everybody would know that is a girl from mister so and so. So anything you do, you know it's going to go back.*

Thus, descriptions of the sense of community that existed at home were juxtaposed with descriptions of more individualistic lifestyles in Ireland, where young people had more freedom and were not held accountable by community members. In general, the participants believed that the behaviour of young people was not as tightly controlled in Ireland as it had been in their countries of origin. The participants perceived young people in Ireland to be permitted to speak their minds more freely, and to behave in ways that would not have been considered appropriate in their home countries. One boy felt that nothing was *'wrong'* in Ireland and that people were *'living free'*. Another boy talked about Irish young people having *"freedom to do anything"* they want. In particular, the participants frequently talked about the norms of having boyfriends or girlfriends in an Irish context, which contrasted sharply with the norms in their home countries. Whilst secrecy and privacy surrounded dating in their home cultures, dating was perceived to be open and public in Ireland. On one occasion during the participant observation phase, I went to a local shopping centre with one of the girls:

> *... we started walking back. As we were going over the bridge a teenage boy and girl were standing there, kissing. Karen remarked on how they must like kissing (we had passed them earlier at a different place too)! She then went on to comment that in Nigeria people don't kiss in public like that. That if they did, everyone would stare at them. She said that people only kiss in private.*
>
> [Field Notes, 3/03/04]

Similarly, one boy, whose friends were mainly Irish, described his shock when he learnt about the norms of behaviour at a school *"social"*[17]:

> ***M:*** *And what about when, when people have a girlfriend here, is it different to having a girlfriend at home? Like ...*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, really. But like ... Do you know the way people like at social here and everything like that, then they go, just come to you... do you want to shift*[18] *my friend and things like that? [laughs] The first time I went out and they were like 'do you want to shift my ...' My friend was like, ehm ... asking a girl. I was saying ' are you stupid? She wouldn't say yeah. Get real'. But he was like 'Ah no, no. That's the way we do it here'. I thought he was joking or something like that. I was seeing (?) like deep shit in the jungle (?), like 'Wo!' [laughing]*

This boy could not believe that a girl whom he didn't know might want to *"shift"* him. However, his friend quickly informed him that *"that's the way we do it here"*. The participants account suggests that this had not been the way 'it was done' in his country of origin. Again, difference and change were encountered.

In many respects, the participants in this study often experienced even more freedom than their Irish counterparts, given that many were living in hostels that were not strictly supervised.[19] For instance, during the participant observation phase I noted how the young people spent hours of their time watching television – particularly MTV – with little supervision of what was being viewed, something which would seem very different to their home experiences.[20] Also, on one visit to the hostel I suspected that some of the young people were leaving the hostel to go drinking. Although this was just a suspicion, and one that never arose again during my time there, it led me to reflect on their freedom, and to note the following in my field notes:

> *It's amazing how much freedom these young people have... how they could be doing anything and nobody would know...*
>
> [Field Notes, 20/11/03]

Overall, the young people tended to embrace their newfound freedom and seemed to prefer this to having their behaviour tightly controlled, as had been the case previously. Although there was evidence that many continued to engage in secretive behaviour that they hid from their social workers and carers - some spoke about smoking and drinking, for example - the need for secrecy

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[17] He seemed to be referring to a teenage disco organised in his school.

[18] 'To shift' is a phrase used by teenagers in Ireland to describe kissing.

[19] Thus, this freedom that they were experiencing may have caused the participants to think Irish teenagers had greater freedom than was actually the case.

[20] According to those participants who had televisions in their countries of origin, parents tended to carefully monitor what was watched. Also, children had frequently been forbidden to go to the cinema and in some instances they were not allowed to listen to Western music or to the radio.

in relation to their daily adolescent activities was not so great.[21] To begin with, the mechanisms for controlling their behaviour were not in place to the same extent, particularly at a community level. The young people did not have the same sense of fear of the consequences of their actions, and so were able to enjoy the freedom they experienced. From my observations in the hostel, it was clear that the young people came and went as they pleased, and rarely had to account for their whereabouts. Also, the yardstick of what was appropriate behaviour had moved. It was obvious to the young people that, in an Irish context, more behaviours were viewed as permissible or culturally appropriate than had been the case in their previous lives. As a result, for instance, many of the participants felt able to talk openly about having boyfriends or girlfriends in Ireland.

In reflecting on their previous experiences, several of the young people commented on the fact that they had been treated like children in their countries of origin. In contrast, they felt that in Ireland they were being treated like young adults. Many seemed to have engaged with the 'rights' discourse and had developed a sense of their 'rights' as individual young people. From the vantage point of life in Ireland, some reflected on what they perceived to be the excessive nature of the control that had previously been exerted on their behaviour. One girl felt that her behaviour would be very different if she returned to her native Nigeria. She believed that she would speak her mind more and stick up for herself. Her words suggested that, within the Irish context, she had developed a strong and independent sense of self:

> ***YP:*** *I've changed. I'm ... a lot freer here. Here, now I can do what I want. Let's say now I come here and I go back to my parents, I wouldn't live the way I was living before. 'Cos, in Nigeria, whatever your parents say that's what you have to listen to. You don't, you can't say what you want. But if I'm going, if I'm, if I, the way I came here, if I'm supposed to go back to my parents now, I do what I want. I can tell them, this is what I want and you can't tell me what ... you can tell me what to do but if it's really something that is my decision, you can't make that for me. And, when, if I go back to Nigeria, the way I think is, I can, my parents, my Mum won't be able to tell me not to make friends ____. If she doesn't want them to come visit me, I can stay with them downstairs or something. But she can't tell me not to make friends again. 'Cos, I think, [laughs], I've gotten more, I can speak more now. I've gotten, like, I have more freedom to speak now.*
> ***M:*** *Ok. To say what you think?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. To say what I think. Yeah. And, let me say, in Nigeria, if I was, if I go back to Ni, if I want to have a boyfriend, I think I can bring him home and tell my Mum, 'this is my boyfriend'. [...] And, I can easily tell her, this is not meant to be. You can't just decide that I'm this age I can have a boyfriend if I want to. Yeah. I can (?), let me just say, in some ____ (?) now I can see more what I want. In Nigeria you are just restrict, restricted to say what adults want. 'Cos in Nigeria, they say something like, 'adults don't tell lies'. You can't tell an adult what you are saying is not correct. It's like disrespectful. Now, I can really say what I want. I can tell you if you are not saying the right thing. Something like that.*

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[21] It seems that whilst as adolescents 'secrecy' was largely not needed, as asylum seekers secrecy may still have featured strongly in their lives. For instance, many remained 'secretive' about their reasons for leaving their countries of origin.

M: *So, but you were saying earlier though that ehm ... you know about respect? That, if your mother tells you to do something, because of how you feel about your mother, you and she's your mother, you'd respect her? So, if you went back, would you be, would you feel disrespectful?*
YP: *No. I would still respect her. It's just now I can really ... I think ... I would just let her see my point and if she doesn't get it, I can just, I wouldn't tell her about it again, I can do something like that. _____ But I wouldn't like to disrespect her. I wouldn't like to not do what she _____*

This girl felt that she had changed and that she was *"freer"* now in Ireland. However, she asserted that, whilst wanting to put forward her point of view, she also wanted to continue to show respect for her mother. This implied that she was attempting to build a bridge between her old and new culture, the importance of which has been highlighted by Ayotte (2002).

Although, like this girl, many of the young people seemed to enjoy their new-found freedom and the relative lack of efforts to control their behaviour in the Irish context, some struggled with their new situation. A female participant talked about wishing she was *"under [her] parents"*. She wanted more guidance to prevent her from behaving in ways that she would later come to regret. For many, the norms of behaviour which they observed in Ireland were not in keeping with their identities. One boy talked about his tendency to continue to behave in a manner appropriate to his parents' expectations, despite their current absence in his life. As an example, he said that he found it difficult to comfortably watch videos that he felt were *"against values"*. He struggled with the discontinuity with which he was faced:

YP: *But, it's, it's really hard. You know. You will miss them sometime. And ... it's really hard. And, the thing is, I still have to behave like the way they told me. [laughs] It's still like they're around, some, someway. Somehow I still behave the way they told me like, to behave like. [...] Sometimes I, I find myself like not even going to cinemas [laughs]. Really, yeah. It's like that.*
M: *Because you know you wouldn't be allowed at home?*
YP: *Yeah. It's almost (?) like I still behave in the way that I should. But, I really like them to be around. [...] Sometimes you think, like you know _____ freedom, but it's not about freedom when you think about it. It's like having your parents ____(?). And your brothers and sisters. 'Cos it's hard. That bit is hard. [...] Sometime when, it's like alone in my, in my room, even if I'm doing homework, I just like, think about that, sometimes. You know, you just like, you can't even hold your tears back.*

The boy's words suggested that, to some extent, his previous relationships with his parents continued to influence him in his new life. He did not seem to be experiencing the sense of freedom spoken about by many of his counterparts, as he felt somewhat tied to his old world.[22] Thus, it is

[22] Some of the participants who had a lot of freedom in their countries of origin felt very restrained by the rules of the hostels in which they lived, especially when they were not permitted to do things that their Irish peers were doing. As the same rules applied to all young people living in a particular hostel, there was little flexibility in what residents were and were not allowed to do, something which I observed during my participant observation. For instance, one participant talked about not being able to attend a sleep over party

evident that although most of the young people felt able to behave more freely in Ireland, some participants had other experiences. In essence, a variety of perspectives were apparent

In summary, the participants described how their parents had tried to control their behaviour in their countries of origin. They recounted 'ordinary' stories of breaching the rules and cultural norms that were in place. Upon arrival in Ireland, they were often shocked by the level of freedom that young people had. For many, it seemed that in Ireland anything was permissible. Whilst many embraced this new found freedom and held negative perceptions of their past experiences, some seemed to struggle to adjust to their changed circumstances. Examples of such 'ordinariness' and change were also evident within the educational realm. It is to experiences of school that we now turn.

School: Respect and Discipline

Descriptions of 'ordinariness' emerged in relation to schooling as well. Within these descriptions, schooling at home was again compared with schooling in Ireland. Yet again, this theme suggested the huge changes that the young people had experienced. In particular, they frequently mentioned the different behaviour of students in Ireland, the absence of respect for teachers, and the lack of appreciation of educational opportunities.

Appreciating Education

Many of those who narrated stories of poverty had been unable to attend school, as they, their parents, or their caregivers could not afford the school fees involved. In other instances, where school fees were not required, sometimes children could not attend as their families needed them to work, either within or outside the home. They spent their days selling goods or running errands for people in the marketplace, hairdressing, undertaking household chores, or looking after younger siblings. For those who had not attended school in their countries of origin, the experience of living in Ireland was highly valued for the opportunity it gave them to pursue their education.[23] Many emphasised that having an education would facilitate them to have a better future. For this group, being able to go to school meant that life in Ireland was fundamentally different to the life they had led previously. One girl, who had spent most of her time at home engaged in housework, noted how *"time [was] not walking fast"* there! In contrast, time passed quickly in Ireland, as she was

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in his friend's house due to the rules of the hostel, and stated that if he were at home his father would give him permission to go. In essence, he believed that he would have more freedom if his parents were with him.

[23] Given that the participants lived in different locations, many different schools were attended. Even those who lived in Valley Lodge did not all attend the same school. Both mixed and single sex schools were attended. Some of the young people were in schools that had a lot of non-Irish pupils, including many unaccompanied minors. Others attended schools with mainly Irish-born students. To my knowledge, none of the young people were attending fee-paying schools in Ireland.

engaged in education and doing something which she perceived to be good for her future. Another girl, who had never attended school in her country of origin, emphasised her schooling as one of the main reasons why she liked her life in Ireland:

> ***YP:*** *I like Ireland, you know. Because, never I, I have life like this. You know. You go to school, yeah ... In my country, I no have this. But here, you know, I have school. Eh now, I know write. You know, before I ...*
> ***M:*** *You didn't know...*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, I didn't know. Write. Reading. Here, I know reading. Write. Yeah.*

However, for most of the participants, schooling and education had played a significant role in their countries of origin, with attendance at school accounting for a major part of their daily lives. Usually, those who attended were very appreciative of the opportunity to do so, as they knew that many young people of their age were not getting such an opportunity. Education was valued at home. The situation was different in Ireland. One girl talked about education not being highly valued by Irish young people:

> *One thing I notice in Ireland is their attitude towards school ... It's .... It's not good, like. Is like, they feel like going to school is like, 'I'm being forced, like. I would rather be somewhere else.' You know. Like, in my country now ... going to school, is like, an opportunity which lot of people don't get. [...] There are kids that would still be sent home for not being able to pay [the fees] ... So, like, over there, if they got an opportunity to go to school, it's ... it's more, they feel more important. [...] But, where in Ireland, the attitude towards schools (?) is different. I remember in school ... there was a day I went on my break. And there was this girl. [...] She was in third year. She was preparing for her Junior Cert and she was saying after the junior cert she is not coming back to school. So, I now asked her, I say 'Why won't you come back to school?' 'I don't want to come back to school'. So I now asked her, 'so actually really, what would you like to become?' She says she would like to become a medical doctor but she couldn't become that without going to school. But she could get a job without going to school that would pay her more. So, she was saying, what is the point? Even if she graduate, is it not a job she is going to look for? And she might as well start it now and start saving towards it now. So, you see the difference, is like. Because it is easier to get a job here than back at home. Back at home, you be ... even you have your degree, you would still be like ... maybe there is one position to be filled and there would be three thousand applicants. You know? And they would be using a lot of criteria to narrow the ... the applicants. So, you want to obtain as much level as you can. [...] So, for you to go and get into the system, you will have to be determined. And you know what you want.*

Like this girl, many others talked about the importance attached to education in their countries of origin. In contrast, they felt that education was taken for granted in Ireland because it was free. In their opinions, it was not valued because jobs could be obtained without a good education. However, other perspectives were also voiced. Several of the participants mentioned that education did not necessarily lead to success in their countries because corruption was rife. For instance, one Nigerian girl felt that education had little value in her country as it was *"influence"* rather than education that led to success.

Respect and Behaviour

Whilst various differences were encountered upon starting school in Ireland, including differences in attitudes to education,[24] the young people's descriptions regarding issues of respect, behaviour, and discipline were particularly striking. Often, these descriptions arose spontaneously. For some, a general question regarding differences between their country of origin and Ireland elicited immediate descriptions of behaviour and punishment within the classroom setting in Ireland, and how they differed from their home country.

The participants connected descriptions of student behaviour to notions of respect and disrespect. As has already been seen, the young people's accounts of life in their countries of origin suggested that cultural expectations and norms had a huge impact on how daily life was led. They frequently and spontaneously talked about the importance of respect in their home countries. In essence, the expectation of showing respect for elders – including teachers - was depicted as an integral part of the culture within which the participants had been reared. This cultural expectation had a strong influence on how the young people behaved. Although the value of respecting elders did not exclusively relate to the treatment of teachers, cultural differences with regard to respect became particularly evident through attendance at school in Ireland.

In general, the young people believed that certain types of behaviour and communication (both verbal and non-verbal) indicated that respect was being shown, and that other types of behaviour or communication implied disrespect. For instance, several participants made the point that elders, including teachers, were addressed in a formal manner in their countries of origin:

> ***YP:*** *So, people that are older than you, you just kind of like ... you know the way everyone calls each other names here, and everything like that? Like I came in here, I said 'Muireann'? Normally, in Nigeria, like, if, you know, the way, if you're older than me, then I'm going to say 'Sister Muireann' or 'Aunty Muireann', or something like that. Do you know? So ... and ehm, and I go, kind of bow a bit to you like that* [He demonostrates]. *'Hi sister Muireann' or something like that.*
> ***M:*** *Ok, so you'd bow your head down a little?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, yeah. Exactly, yeah. People does that, like, mainly.*

However, this boy argued that what was permitted and expected in one country differed from what was permitted and expected in another. This depended on the culture. Thus, in Ireland he reserved 'respectful' forms of address for occasions when he was with Nigerian adults. It was not necessary

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[24] In addition, the young people sometimes compared the educational system in Ireland to the system that had experienced previously. In general, the system in Ireland was perceived to be better, particularly in relation to schools having superior facilities. The curriculum was mentioned too. For instance, one Somali boy described how schooling at home had emphasised the teaching of the Qur'an and that there had been no specific curriculum to follow, with the teacher teaching *"whatever he thinks is good for you"*. In contrast, in Ireland he studied a variety of subjects and learned what was required by the different syllabi.

to use them when with Irish people, as such forms of address did not have the same cultural meaning within the Irish context. Therefore, he learnt to adapt to different situations, and moved between two cultures in his interactions with those around him, in an effort to show appropriate forms of respect. In his opinion, in Ireland the level of respect was *"kind of quite low"* compared to his country of origin. Disrespecting elders was *"allowed"* in Ireland, but *"back home"* – according to the boy – "*like, you are not allowed to, like, disrespect anyone older than you, really.*"

Although at times it was evident that the participants held certain individuals – such as parents and grandparents - in high esteem, often the narratives of the young people suggested that respect was something which was expected rather than earned or genuinely felt. Like the boy just mentioned, they related stories of acting in a respectful manner towards others rather than actually feeling respect for someone. Frequently, showing respect came about as a cultural expectation, rather than because someone was admired, appreciated, or held in high esteem. This was evident in one girl's description of her relationship with her brothers. She makes a clear distinction between someone who is genuinely respected and someone who is feared:

> *There is different between respect and fear, like. If you respect somebody, you may respect somebody and you love that person. Yeah, but when that fear is there, you don't love that person. You rather get rid of the person you fear, so ... That is the way it works. There is the fear. Like, you know, if you don't do these things there is punishment with it. [...] Different people with different opinions but to me like ...I have two ... I have four brothers, right, but let me talk about the two old. The oldest one which is John. Ehm, I'm sorry to say but I fear John. But, the next one which is Mark. [...] But I respect Mark than John. And with the respect that goes with Mark, it make me love him more. He's app ... he's more approachable to everybody. And me and John, we are always quarrelling. And when we quarrel he is talking to my parents and he would say I don't respect him and that kind of thing. I say, 'what you understand is I don't respect you but I fear you which is not good. What, is not the respect you want, but you want me to fear you. And I fear you but it doesn't go with love'. You understand? [...] And one thing I always say, respect is earned. Is not demanded. You know, when the respect is demanded, it goes with fear. _____ love, it's not there. You know, you are not doing those things willingly.*

This girl's account mirrors that of many other participants. Often, the young people's descriptions suggested that they showed respect and behaved in certain ways in an effort to avoid punishment, both in their home and school lives. However, the relationship between respect and fear was not clear-cut. Some of the young people described fear and respect being present simultaneously, whilst others – like this girl - felt that respect was not truly present if fear was evident.

The young people's descriptions of behaving in a respectful manner at home contrasted sharply with what they witnessed amongst their peers in Ireland. In particular, the young people commented on the behaviour of students at school and how there was a huge difference between how young people behaved in Ireland and how they behaved in their countries of origin. They used their memories of schooling at home as central reference points in their evaluation of their present schooling experiences. Whereas at home respect was almost always evident, respect was often

missing within the Irish context. One boy described how in his country of origin, students sat quietly as soon as they *"smell [the teacher's] perfume coming from, like, outside the gate"*. In contrast, he described his classroom in Ireland as *"really totally different. Totally. Totally crazy"*. The teacher struggled to *"calm the class down"*. For him, like many of the other young people, moving to Ireland meant that his classroom experience was transformed from one of quietness, attention, and fear, to one of noise, distraction, and disrespect. The situation was fundamentally different. Many of the young people described their initial shock at the behaviour of students. What they witnessed contrasted sharply with the way students behaved in their countries of origin:

> ***YP:*** *The discipline here. I don't think the kids are much disciplined than in Africa, eh, I don't think. You know, in Africa, I would say that most of the kids in school are much more disciplined. [...] Because here, you, the kids swears in class, they throw things around the class, they talk to teachers in, in this manner which is not supposed to happen, you know, so it's very different.*
> ***M:*** *Ok, ok so when you came here first what did you think of that?*
> ***YP:*** *I was, I was like sitting in class, like, and the teachers were talking to the kids and the teacher, the kids were talking back, you know, in a rude way. So I found that very ... very different. I was, you know, "What?", the kids are not allowed to talk like this to the teachers, the kids should have eh some kind of respect for the teachers, but which does not happen in Ireland, well it happens, but not a lot you know.*

Thus, in this boy's opinion, the manner in which his classmates behaved demonstrated their lack of respect for their teachers. Based on the cultural values within which he had been reared, the students *"should"* be showing *"some kind of respect"*. Like this boy, the narratives of the participants frequently suggested their disapproval of the behaviour of their classmates, with participants saying that it was not *"right"* or *"fair"*. One student referred to the discipline of students in Ireland as *"quite, like, embarrassing"*.

In their descriptions of classroom behaviour, several of the participants took great care to comment that not all young people in their countries of origin were respectful, just as not all young people in Ireland were disrespectful. Sometimes non-Irish classmates were the ones who misbehaved. In general, however, the participants tended to generalise about the behaviour of Irish students, perhaps suggesting that the behaviour of those who caused trouble stood out in their minds. In addition, they suggested that the peer culture supported these students in their misbehaviour. The culture surrounding the appropriate way to behave was different in Ireland compared to in the countries from which the participants had come. In Ireland, students seemed to have different attitudes towards fellow students who got into trouble. Whereas being in trouble in Ireland could be viewed as 'cool' and could enhance a person's status amongst his or her peers, in the participants' countries of origin such behaviour was frowned upon by other students. One girl related a story about students in her school in Nigeria who received a suspension because they sneaked out of boarding school to attend a party. She described how other students had a different attitude to them when they returned, branding them *"a bad kind of person"* and not wanting to be friends with them

as a result. She felt that in such a situation in Ireland, students would not lose respect for those who had been suspended. Instead, they would be asking them if they had enjoyed their suspension. Similar sentiments were expressed by another girl who suggested that 'being cool' bore different cultural meanings in different contexts:

> ***YP:*** *[Being cool here is] being bold and all that stuff. Being stuck up and thinking you are all that. When you're not. [...]*
> ***M:*** *[Thinking] you're everything, like?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. Like being cheeky to the teacher and like being bold to the principle, _____, saying 'yeah, yeah, whatever. Get away from you'. And all that stuff. You know, that kind of cool person. But in [my county] it's different. You are more of the intelligent person, that ... everybody, like ... people actually like people who are more intelligent and ... [...] being friendly to people and all that stuff. Like, if you are rude to people and all that stuff, they won't really like you.*

Whereas 'being cool' had once been associated with intelligence and friendliness, for this girl it was now associated with *"being bold and all that stuff"*. Hence, the changed peer culture represented another difference about which the young people had to learn. It seemed that the peer culture in Ireland allowed misbehaviour and cheekiness. Such a culture, and the behaviours associated with it, resulted in the participants seeing themselves as different to their Irish peers. As a result, a 'them and us' type discourse arose, with the identities of the unaccompanied young people emerging as separate and different from the identities of their Irish peers. This was clearly evident in the narrative of one girl who reflected on what she and her Nigerian counterparts thought of the behaviour of their classmates:

> ***YP:*** *I said, wow, I said you wouldn't dare talk to your teacher that way back home in my country. You can get very punishment for it.*
> ***M:*** *Yeah. And do you find it's just the [...] Irish girls who are doing this?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, a lot. Most of the girls in my country, like from Nigeria, they say the same thing as me as well. They say, 'they are making too much noise, they have to be quiet'. There was one time, they almost made, they made the teacher cry, do you know? I was very sorry for her...*

The accounts of many of the young people suggested that the cultural value of respecting elders was an intrinsic part of their sense of self. One girl talked about the freedom that Irish young people had in being able to say *"anything you want"* at any time. In contrast, she grew up knowing that she could not simply *"talk back"* to her parents. Her words suggested that she naturally knew that respect was important: *"It's in you, yeah"*. One young man described how the notion of respecting others had become a part of him and that this meant that he couldn't behave in the manner that those around him were behaving. Although he felt that teachers at home were treated with respect because students feared them, this did not mean that he could start being disrespectful in Ireland in the absence of such fear. For instance, he did not feel that he could easily swear at a teacher:

We could only do it (swear) because we would be still young. But what I, what I believe is that the way we've been brought up at home, will always be part of us. We could love to do it but we're kind of scared to doing it.

Whilst part of him wanted to start behaving like many of his Irish peers, the way in which he had been brought up prevented him from doing so. Thus, for this boy, the cultural values associated with his upbringing were psychologically present even though they were in many ways physically absent in the Irish context (Boss, 1999).

Yet, the opinions expressed by the young people in the interviews did not seem entirely consistent with what I witnessed in Valley Lodge. Frequently, I felt that the participants acted disrespectfully, both towards their peers and those who were older than them, including myself. Indeed, disrespect was perceived to be such an issue by the staff, that it was on the agenda of a 'Young People's Meeting', with the residents being asked to get into smaller groups to discuss what 'respect' meant and how they could show respect for staff. After a different 'Young People's Meeting', I made the following notes:

People were wandering in and out. I felt that there was a lot of disrespect being shown with some young people laughing amongst themselves, saying things in to each other (in particular the boys) and not being quiet when they were asked. At one point Shane, who had not come into the meeting, was standing at the door and Joe went over to him from where he was sitting and they were both talking, loudly. [The staff member] asked for them to be quieter and said they could leave if they wanted. Luke, who was sitting next to me, asked her to close the door. He was shaking his head and 'tutting' obviously annoyed at the noise. [The staff member] told Joe and Shane that she was going to close over the door but said that they were welcome to come in if they wanted to. They did both come in a little later...

[Field notes, 3/03/04]

However, analysis of my field notes showed that, in general, the young people from Valley Lodge who participated in the interview phase were not the young people who seemed to cause problems in the hostel or who struck me as acting disrespectfully. For instance, neither Joe nor Shane (who are mentioned in the above field notes) took part in the interviews. Thus, it may be the case that those who were most 'respectful' were more likely to take part in the interview phase, possibly in an effort to please me, or because they felt that taking part was the 'respectful' thing to do.

Classroom Punishments

Most of the participants viewed the absence of punishments as the cause of the disruptive behaviour of students in Irish schools. Memories of punishments and fear in the classroom were prominent features of the young people's descriptions of schooling in their countries of origin. One evening in Valley Lodge, Kate, John, and I had a lengthy conversation about school at the dinner table, and corporal punishment was one of the things Kate and John spoke about:

> *... They both talked about how in their schools at home you would be beaten for misbehaving and how this was completely acceptable. Kate said that if a child went home and complained of being hit by the teacher, the parent would probably hit them again. So children would often try to hide any scars they had from being beaten. Kate said as well that if you had to go to hospital after being hit in school, you would be asked where you got your injury. If you replied that the teacher beat you, you would simply be asked what you had done. John spoke about something that children sometimes put on their hands so that when they are beaten their hands look like they are bleeding. The teacher then stops hitting them as they think they have injured them quite badly.*
>
> [Field notes, 2/01/04]

The memories of Kate and John were by no means unique. In fact, all of the young people who had attended school in their countries of origin talked about teachers disciplining students by means of corporal punishment. Sometimes, punishments consisted of beatings with canes or belts. Other types of punishments included being forced to stand outside in the scorching hot sun for hours at a time, kneeling on hot concrete stones, or having to do physical work such as collecting stones or cutting the grass, again often under the hot sun. One girl described how she had been punished *"uncountable times"* by teachers for infringements such as not combing her hair, speaking in her ethnic language, not wearing shoes, or performing badly in exams. Again, comparisons were used. Descriptions of punishments at home were juxtaposed with very different descriptions of the punishments that were given in Ireland. In general, the absence of corporal punishment in Ireland was viewed as a positive thing. However, some participants felt that if teachers were allowed to hit students in Ireland, students would then behave more respectfully and, consequently, an environment conducive to learning would be created. Many of the young people did not perceive the disciplinary actions of teachers in Ireland to be truly 'punishing'. Such an opinion is evident in the answer given by one girl when I asked her whether punishments at home were different to punishments in Ireland:

> ***YP:*** *Well, I think here the only punishment I ever notice is maybe suspension. Or they would said ... what is that thing, that you stays after school ...?*
> ***M:*** *Detention.*
> ***YP:*** *Detention. Which is ... to me, I don't think its punishment.*
> ***M:*** *No? Why not?*
> ***YP:*** *No, but like ... you give somebody a suspension, it's like somebody that wants to escape from school! [laughing] And you give him ... that's means you are making him to stay more away from school. Or you make, you make the person stay in a separate class. That's detention. In a class for an hour or two hours. That ... he could stay in the class and be doing an assignment or that kind of a thing. It's not punishment. But if it's back at home, ohh God! There could be lots of punishment. Like, sitting in the sun. Kneeling down in the sun on a stone. Like, that ... barbaric punishment. Like, they could cane you. Like, beat you up. You know. [...] to me, the punishment that went on, like I would prefer, to be beaten, because I knew if I was beaten I would get over it. But the ... asking you to kneel down in the sun, on a stone for like, thirty minutes, one hour ...You know. [...] You would be so hot. And you are ... if you are kneeling down on a rock that is different, but you are kneeling down on a gravel, or a, you know, rough ground. You know. You, you, you would*

be hot. Your temper would .... [laughs]. Your skin ... everything would be. You know. Ahh! That is too much. That's too much.

Usually the threat of such punishments resulted in the existence of a climate of fear in classrooms in the young people's countries of origin. In contrast, because fear was not perceived to be a predominant feature of classroom life in Ireland, the young people felt that relationships between students and teachers were more positive. The participants saw the value in teachers talking to students about misbehaviour and trying to steer them onto the right path:

> ***YP:*** *The, the, the way students and teachers are ... ... are communicating, it was different. 'Cos, like in, in that school I was [at home], we are just, ... we are giving the teacher total respect. 'Cos if you don't give him respect he will do some, just _____ thing. You will be beaten, like hell. He will beat you, big time. But here, they just, you know, if you do something they talk to you, they cushion you good, tell this ...*
> ***M:*** *They what?*
> ***YP:*** *They just cushion you. To, to show you the way. To tell, to tell you this is the bad way and this is not good. So, that was a big differerent. And I think that's the way. That's the good way. [...]Yeah, it's a good way. 'Cos you are not scared of anybody. You are not scared and you are free to, to talk. You are free to say whatever you want. And whatever way you are thinking ...[...] So, you don't have, you don't have ... things on your mind just kicking (?) there and kicking (?) maybe this is bad. Or this is good. But, now, that's happening in, in [my country]. But here if you speak, ahh, your mind will be, it will be fresh and you will not hold anything in your mind. You know, 'cos you are not scared and whoever you are speaking with he is, he is telling you, everything.*

This boy described how, rather than using corporal punishment, teachers in Ireland talked to students about their behaviour and tried to point them in the right direction. This approach was valued by the participant as it meant that he was *"free to talk"* without being fearful. As a result, he could say what he was feeling rather than 'holding' things in his mind.

Aside from 'cushioning' students, as this boy suggests, teachers were also described as providing students with help and support in both the academic and the non-academic realms of their lives. Many of the participants described how students and teachers often spent time joking and chatting with one another, which was in sharp contrast with the more formal interactions between students and teachers in their countries of origin. In essence, the classroom atmosphere was friendlier in Ireland:

> *Ehh, like, the, the, I think there is more friendliness in the classroom with the teachers and the student, than in Africa. Because in Africa you'd be scared of everything. The teacher. Everything. You'd just be scared of ... oh my God I don't know what to say. He might smack me or he might not smack me. You know? Like, but here, in this place, I think students interact more with, with the teachers*

In summary, as an 'ordinary' daily experience, schooling within the Irish context was depicted much more positively than schooling within the contexts of the young people's home cultures. The participants placed great value on the education with which they were being provided in Ireland. In the refugee literature, schooling is widely believed to provide refugee children with such things as

stability, opportunities to achieve and access to supportive relationships with teacher (Miller et al., in press). However, my conversations with the young people draw attention to the fact that attending school can also be a very challenging experience for refugee children, given the multiple differences with which they are faced within the school environment.

Concluding Comments

Our knowledge of the pre-departure lives of unaccompanied minors is often limited to accounts of difficulties and problems. As a result, the impression is given that somewhat 'extraordinary' experiences – of war, poverty, and lack of opportunity - fully represent these young people's lives. Life at home is seen as negative, dangerous, and lacking in opportunities, whilst life in the host country is seen in a more positive light, representing safety and possibility. However, such accounts do not give the full story. 'Thicker stories' are often present (Kohli, 2006b). By deliberately not focusing on problems at home and on reasons for departure, this research allowed the participants to talk about what might be termed their more 'ordinary' circumstances of childhood and adolescence, many of which were positive in nature. Although frequently neglected in the literature, these circumstances are important to understand if we are to seek to fully appreciate where these young people have come from and to what extent their lives have changed as a result of leaving home.

The broader contexts of the lives of the participants were varied. Some experienced poverty and violence, whilst others did not. Some had close relationships with family members, whilst others had spent their childhoods away from their families. Although different experiences and perspectives existed, the participants consistently used comparative descriptions, with aspects of their lives at home being compared to aspects of their lives in Ireland. In essence, the participants' understandings of their present circumstances depended on their memories of the past. This meant that their perceptions were "inseparably embedded within a comparative, temporal framework" (Miller, 2002, p. 344). Therefore, in an effort to maintain the type of narrative discourse used by the interviewees, the findings of this chapter were presented in a comparative manner, involving a constant and fluid movement between the past and present experiences of the young people.

To a large extent, positive and negative experiences existed side by side, both in their past and present lives. Regarding life at home, recurrent negative themes of poverty, lack of opportunity, and violence, were interspersed with fonder memories of family, friendships, and culture. For some, an 'ordinary' life was suddenly interrupted by an 'extraordinary' event, which led them to leave their countries. For others, there was evidence that 'extraordinariness' was a constant feature of their lives as they grew up. Yet, even in such circumstances, more 'ordinary' experiences – such as attendance at school, engaging in secretive behaviour with friends, doing housework, and spending time with family – also occurred. Regarding life in Ireland, the young people spoke

positively about the opportunities with which they were being provided, opportunities which contrasted sharply with their previous experiences. Many of them spoke of appreciating the peace, safety, and freedom of their new world. However, their descriptions of missing family, and of lacking close relationships, suggested that more difficult aspects of their present lives also existed, aspects which were very different to their past circumstances. Added to these difficulties and differences were the challenges of adjusting to a new culture and trying to adapt and fit in. Yet, although the young people did not simply dichotomise their experiences into 'the good life' and 'the bad life', without exception they considered living at home to be less desirable than living in Ireland, given the present circumstances in their countries of origin.

The comparative narratives of the participants showed that 'difference' was a central theme in their stories, thus suggesting that they did indeed experience a "rupture in the narrative threads running through their lives" (Summerfield, 1998, p. 16). Difference was evident in three separate but interrelated ways. Firstly, it was clear that no matter what their prior circumstances, the young people experienced huge discontinuity and change in their lives having moved to Ireland. Their lives in Ireland were fundamentally different to the lives that they had left behind. Whilst some differences were positive, others were negative. Yet all differences – whether in relationships, in cultural norms, in daily routines, or in environment – challenged them to adjust to their new circumstances. Secondly, the narratives of the participants frequently suggested that <u>they themselves</u> were different to how they had been in the past, often as a result of having changed in order to adapt to their new world. For instance, they were able to act more independently and were freer to behave as they wished. Thirdly, the young people often perceived themselves to be very different to their Irish peers, meaning that 'fitting in' was problematic. Their circumstances were different, and frequently their interests and their ways of behaving were different too. Overall, the extent of difference in the lives of the participants represented a somewhat 'extraordinary' aspect of their new lives.

The young people were challenged by the differences that they faced. At times, it was evident that the participants felt uneasy about difference in their lives – whether it was the differences they noticed around them or within themselves. Some found it difficult to accept the changes they encountered. It seems that this uneasiness arose from the fact that the changes were often not in keeping with their senses of self. 'Difference' meant that it was difficult to belong to Irish society, and, as a consequence, difficult to establish a coherent sense of self, given the importance of belonging and continuity as aspects of identity (Muzi, 2000). These differences, the difficulties inherent within them, and other challenges relating to the participants' lives as unaccompanied asylum seekers and as teenagers, represented potential sources of stress. How, then, did the young people cope with the many challenges in their lives? How did they manage the experience of living somewhere that seemed to be *"a different world ... millions of billions of miles away"*? Chapters 5,

6, and 8 will explore these questions.

Chapter 5: Coping with Challenges and Changes

Introduction

As is evident from the previous chapter, the participants had to deal with past traumas, present difficulties, and future uncertainties, whilst also encountering huge changes in their lives. At a stage of development where they were attempting to establish a continuous sense of self, the difficulties and discontinuities in their lives had the potential to be particularly problematic. How, then, did the young people cope?

Drawing on my interactions with the young people during the participant observation and interview phases of the research, this chapter explores the various coping strategies that were being used. Five strategies are outlined. They suggest that the young people coped by maintaining continuity, by learning and changing in order to adjust, by adopting a positive outlook, by suppressing emotions and seeking distraction, and by viewing themselves as self-reliant. These strategies show that the young people emerge as 'active survivors' who display strength and capacity, rather than as 'passive victims' who are dependent and vulnerable. Each of these different ways of coping will now be discussed in turn.

Maintaining Continuity in a Changed Context

Many of the participants sought to maintain some continuity in their lives in an effort to cope with their changed contexts. Continuity of culture, conversation, and contact were frequently sought, and those with whom the young people had relationships often facilitated this process. Faced with change, and with the multiple losses associated with exile, continuity facilitated the formation of continuous sense of self (Erikson, 1968; Hartar, 1990). Holding on to elements of their old lives meant that some losses were partial rather than absolute, and that changes were less daunting. One girl felt that adjusting to life in Ireland was made easier by the fact that it was possible for her to eat food from home and go to a familiar church:

> *... Ireland now, I don't think it's difficult because the ... [...] Maybe the Irish people may not accept it but it's mixed culture now. And there is different cultures here, you understand? There is African shop. If I want my Nigerian food I can get it. And if I want to go to Nigerian church I could go. But assuming all these things are not there and it's purely Ireland, you know it would be more difficult because you really miss home. You know? Because that life is not there. But the way it is now. I'm in Ireland but if I want to live a Nigerian life, you could still get it, like. You can still ... there is some Nigerian clubs, so I heard, and there are some Nigerian theatres that they show Nigerian films. You know. So, all these things are there.*

Thus, for this girl, like many others, her sense of missing home was lessened by the fact that she was able to continue to "*live a Nigerian life*". This continuity facilitated her to cope with a very

changed and challenging context.

Friends played an important role in facilitating this continuity, by providing cultural and conversational links with countries of origin. Whilst some young people made clear choices not to interact with people from their country of origin, most talked about the importance to them of having friends of their own heritage. For many of the participants, networks of friends of their own heritage were available to them through their hostels, schools, or churches.[1] One girl stated that she had met people from her country in the hostel where she was placed when she first arrived in Ireland. These young people knew others from her country and introduced her to them. Thus, a whole network of people of her ethnicity was made available to her. She perceived it to be important to have friends from her country of origin. It contributed to her happiness as it meant that she had people with whom to celebrate important national celebrations. Her use of *'we'* and *'our'* in her dialogue suggests her strong sense of belonging to her culture of origin:

> ***M:*** *In what way [is it important]?*
> ***YP:*** *In all ways. Like, maybe there is public holiday. Like, we all get together _____ be happy (?).[...] Like, independence day. We'd all come together. [...] And talk. Talk about home. Listen to music. Our traditional music and then eats our traditional food....*

However, unlike this girl, not all of the young people had contact with people from their countries of origin. Although one girl chose not to have friends from her own culture, because of the sense of hurt she felt from her past experiences, a small number of others had simply not had the opportunity to meet people of their own ethnicity. During my time in Valley Lodge, one participant joked with me that it was my task to find someone from his country of origin, as he knew nobody of his own ethnicity in Ireland. On another occasion, he joked with a staff member about this same issue:

> *Orla[2] mentioned something about a new girl coming. Larry immediately asked where she was from. When Orla said she was from Nigeria, Larry said why wasn't there more people from [his country of origin]. Orla joked that she tried to get more young people from [his country] but that there just aren't any coming! Larry said that she should ring [a certain European country[3]] and find some...*
>
> [Field notes, 8/06/04]

Whilst this boy, and others like him, found it difficult not to have friends of their own nationality, they still made concerted efforts to maintain aspects of their cultures of origin. In doing so, they

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[1] At times, professionals facilitated the creation of these networks by introducing young people to one another.

[2] Orla is a pseudonym for a staff member in Valley Lodge.

[3] The European country mentioned by the participant was the country which had colonised his country of origin.

demonstrated a strong sense of agency. Culture came across as an important aspect of the young people's identities. When the participants held on to elements of their culture, the threat posed by change was lessened, as was their sense of loss. From time to time, the young people were able to speak their language, watch films from home, and eat food from home, often in the company of others from a similar background. In this way, their culture became an explicit and integrated part of their daily lives in Ireland, rather than a hidden part of their private selves.

Watching films from one's country of origin acted as a significant means of retaining aspects of one's home culture. During the interviews, young people of various nationalities frequently mentioned watching films from their countries as a way of passing the time. On a number of occasions in Valley Lodge, Nigerian films were shown. From my perspective, these films were very different from the 'Western' Hollywood films or programmes such as *Dismissed* or *Room Raiders* that the young people usually watched. The Nigerian films were films that I would have expected young Irish people to find boring and somewhat old-fashioned. Nonetheless, they seemed to be immensely popular with the hostel residents, and were watched by large groups of young people.[4] Through watching these films, the Nigerian young people got the opportunity to remember their cultures. Although such remembering often highlighted the difference between their past and present lives, it nonetheless ensured that their countries of origin were not forgotten. In watching the films with others of their own nationality, a sense of solidarity, belonging and continuity was established. In watching the films with people of different nationalities – such as myself - and in explaining to them what was happening, it seemed that a sense of pride of culture was created.[5]

Apart from films, food was also depicted as an important aspect of culture for the participants. Having an opportunity to eat food from home was highly valued given that the majority of the young people lived in settings where such food was not cooked for them. Also, their small weekly allowances did not enable them to buy their 'home foods'.[6] Some talked about their friends cooking them traditional meals from time to time. Others, however, lived in settings where food from home was cooked for them. One girl mentioned that sometimes she and her friends taught the cook in their hostel how to make their traditional meals. For others, staff members in residential homes sometimes gave them money to spend in ethnic food-stores. Foster parents sometimes cooked

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[4] However, at times non-Nigerian residents complained about the films, as they could not understand them. On one occasion, two non-Nigerian boys complained to me and to staff members when such a film was being put on. The other residents eventually turned off the film after the two boys complained to staff that Nigerian films had been watched three nights in a row.

[5] Although sometimes these films had subtitles in English, this was not always the case. When subtitles were not provided, the young people often translated for me explaining what was happening.

[6] Most talked about buying food from their home countries in the future, if they were earning money and able to cook for themselves.

'home food' for young people. One boy, who was living with a Nigerian foster family, smiled broadly when he talked about his foster mother cooking food from his country of origin, food such as rice, eba, amala, gari, pounded yam, and akara. By giving the young people the opportunity to eat their food from home, staff members and foster parents played an important role in facilitating them to maintain continuity in their lives. This eased the process of acculturation by ensuring that the past was not entirely lost in the present.

Music and language were other aspects of culture that the young people sought to maintain. Although they quickly started to listen to the music being listened to by their Irish peers, and although some lost interest in music they had listened to previously, many spoke of having an interest in music from both their past and present lives. In Valley Lodge, apart from watching MTV, the young people tended to listen to music in their bedrooms. Therefore, I generally did not know what music they liked. However, on a number of occasions, music that I did not recognise was played in the sitting room or games room, and the young people informed me that it was music from their countries of origin. Also, one boy asked me to copy a c.d. of music from his home country that had been lent to him by a friend. Another participant, whom I interviewed, told of how he liked to listen to the music of Dolly Parton as his mother had listened to that music when he was at home. Hence, some continuity with the past was created.

In relation to language, many of the participants valued opportunities of speaking in their native languages. One Somali girl said that it was important for her to have friends from Somalia *"in case you don't forget your language"*. During my time in the hostel, I noticed how the young people often spoke in their native languages when they had the opportunity to do to. This was particularly the case for the Yoruba[7] young people, as there were many of them who could speak together in the same language. In my conversations with the young people – those who were from Nigeria and those who were not – we frequently spoke about languages. The young people seemed to enjoy teaching me words from their languages and learning some Irish in return, as is evident from the following field notes:

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[7] The Yoruba people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Joe came into the room and greeted me with a big smile as he always does and shook my hand. He sat near me. At one point we began teaching each other parts of our own languages (Irish and Yoruba). Joe taught me how to say 'I am fine' (Mo-a-pa) 'How are you?' (Ba-o-nee) 'Goodbye' (O-dabo) and 'My name is Muireann' (O-roo Ku me nee Muireann) [my phonetics![8]] I taught him how to say 'Joe is ainm dom[9]' and he kept repeating it and putting different names in instead of Joe. When he was translating things into Yoruba for me I was a little wary as I was afraid that he was going to teach me something offensive without me knowing! It's difficult at times as I want to trust him, yet I don't want to be fooled, and I know what he is like in many ways. It would be the kind of thing he would do just as a joke!

[Field notes, 29/12/03]

Although examples such as this show that the young people made efforts to retain their cultures of origin in their present lives, it was also evident that they hoped to hold on to their cultures in their future lives. The importance attached to retaining elements of their culture was clearly illustrated by the fact that many of the young people talked about passing their culture onto their children. Faced with a new and very different culture in Ireland, it was important for the participants that aspects of their previous lives would not be forgotten by future generations. One girl saw this as the main reason for holding on to her culture:

M: *Ok. So is it important for you to keep your culture and keep ...*
YP: *Mmm*
M: *Yeah? How important is it, or ...*
YP: *[pause] 'Cos I don't, like, I don't ... like I wanna grow up here. Have kids. And I want my kids to be able to know a bit about my country. So if I don't know anything how will my kids know? So. [...] For future generations here.*

Whilst emphasising the importance of their children learning English, many of the young people also planned to speak to them in their native languages. One girl, whose baby was with her during the interview, spoke in a mixture of English and Yoruba when speaking to the child. As well as passing on their language to their children, the participants also spoke of their plans to cook 'home food' for them. One boy believed that, in the future, he would make efforts to speak in his language to his children and cook his 'home food', even though his children would be *"kinda Irish"*.

From the narratives of this boy and others, it was evident that many of the participants were very proud of their countries of origin and wanted this pride to be instilled in their children as well. Again, this would provide some continuity and ensure that the past would not be forgotten, thus helping them to cope with the differences in their lives. Participants spoke of wanting their children to know their relatives and to have knowledge of their countries of origin. One boy emphasised the

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[8] The correct spelling for these different words are as following: 'Bawo ni? (How are you?), Mo wa pa (I am fine), 'Oruko mi ni Muireann' (My name is Muireann), and 'Odabo' (Goodbye).

[9] 'Joe is ainm dom' is the Irish language translation of 'Joe is my name'

importance to him of his children knowing about the history of the country in which he had been born:

> *The thing I'm pushing them, the Argentinean[10] blood is in their body, so, they have to be Argentinean. Everywhere they go, even if they born, for example, [...] if they born in Ireland, they have to say I'm from Argentina. That's what's important thing for me. Because lots of people, four thousand years ago, they die for me and my country, to I be here right now. So, that's important for me. My Grandfather is dying ... because of me. To I'm being here. So, I have to respect my Grandfather. That means they have to respect their Great-grandfather. [...] That's how I'm gonna do it. [...] You know, the most important thing for me, is they know something about my country. You know, something about the history. What's happen. You know what I mean. [...] That's all I want they do for me, you know. They want to say 'Argentina', you know. Even, everybody is like that, you know. Even if you are married and you go to France and your kids is grow up, you want your kids say I'm Irish, you know what I mean? That's normal.*

It was clear that this participant had a strong desire for his children to consider themselves to be from his country of origin. He sought to retain his ethnic identity. He emphasised the 'normality' of this desire by attempting to place me in his shoes.

Efforts to maintain continuity of culture were also evident from the desires of many of the participants to raise their children in a manner similar to how they themselves had been raised. They wanted to ensure that their children were taught the values of their country of origin, especially the value of respecting elders. Some spoke of sending their children home for periods of time to try to ensure that they would learn how to behave. Not all of the participants felt like this however. One boy felt that it was not appropriate to try to bring his children up under the norms of his culture of origin:

> *I won't bring up my child with ehh, with a culture from home. [...] Because like, the whole thing is that people, people have to move on and we have to act in the situation that we in. And like, I've seen most people from African countries trying to raise their children like in an African way and being like being polite in an African way, like. Like, they're trying but I feel that they should move on and face the situation that they're in right now. And try and teach the children, like, this is how you behave in the (?) kind of situation. Like there are some very well disciplined children in Ireland like. And like, and those children can be totally raised just like them, like. [...] There's no need for them to teach them cultural ways back in Africa.*[11]

Unlike many of his unaccompanied peers, this boy felt that African people in Ireland should *"move on"*, rather than trying to raise their children in an *"African way"*. Yet, he proceeded to emphasise

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[10] This boy was not Argentinean. In the interests of confidentiality, his true nationality is not revealed. A replacement nationality has been used in order to facilitate the reading of this quotation.

[11] Two other participants said that they did not want to tell their children about their home countries at all. One boy's reasoning for this related to the face that he had had an unhappy childhood whilst a female participant simply found it too upsetting to talk about her past.

the importance of passing on his personal history to his children, so that they would "*know him, in person*". Hence, he still planned to maintain some continuity with the past.

Apart from coping through seeking continuity of culture - both in the present and in the future - the participants also sought continuity of conversation. The young people seemed to enjoy opportunities to speak about their countries of origin, such as the opportunities that the research presented for them.[12] Frequently, young people mentioned that friends from a common cultural background gave them opportunities to talk about home. Having friends from the same country created possibilities to jointly reminisce about the life they had left behind. Such 'joint remembering' established connections between young people who, otherwise, were often feeling quite disconnected. By using the present to talk about the past, young people were able to weave some continuity into their discontinuous narratives. Thus, their identities were not entirely disjointed. One boy mimicked the type of initial conversations he often had with peers from Somalia:

> *... It's like that. You know what I'm saying, like. 'Where, where, where did you live again?' It's like he tells you the street. 'Ah, I know some people, some people ____. Do you know this guy, this guy?' 'Yeah, I know them'. It's like that, you know. So, you get along with them.*

In addition, they talked about familiar people and places in their city. The participant's narrative suggests that he had a lot in common with his Somali peers, including their respective memories of both 'extraordinary' and 'ordinary' events. They talked about people who had been killed in the war as well as their memories of playing football on the beach against their parents' wishes. These mutual experiences meant that they had *"lots to talk about":*

> ***M:*** *Do you think that you have, that you share other things, other experiences that say other, other people in the house don't ...*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah we do [...] 'did you know that one guy was, the ____ was in that street there? Did you know that some like, like friend like died in that that ___war' [...] and said that, 'yeah, yeah I heard about that'. You know. So, really is like small, small place so everybody knows each other.*
> ***M:*** *Ok, ok. So you, you talk about things to do with Somalia, about things to do with the war and ...*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. Every time. Yeah, [and] football. [...] And the places we used to play, you know, like go. You know, we have long beach and we just like used to go to the beach and stuff like that and play the football. Although, like, our parents didn't approve that [laughs]. [...] I used to sneak out with my friends. So, when, when I see someone from that place, I tell them, 'did you used to, to go there and play football?' 'Yeah, yeah, yeah'. You know.[...] So. ... Yeah, we, we have, we have lots to talk about.*

For this boy, and others, being able to share memories of a common past with young people from a similar cultural background facilitated the creation of friendships. For many of the young people, it

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[12] See chapter 3 for a further discussion of how the young people seemed to enjoy taking part in the research.

was important to have friends of their own nationality as such friends were perceived to be easier to get to know and understand. In many instances, the value of having friends of the same heritage was compared with the relative difficulty of having Irish friends. One girl talked about being friendly towards the Irish girls in her school but not having much in common with them to talk about. African girls understood her better, both on a basic level in terms of language and accent, and on a deeper level in terms of culture.[13] Because of this she felt more comfortable with African young people. The types of relationships she had with them, and her way of relating to them, represented elements of continuity in her life. On the other hand, attempting to be friendly with Irish young people represented discontinuity. She found that she had to tread *"carefully"* with them as she didn't know how to act around them:

> *You know, you don't know what to do that they would like. You know. So, it's better you keep to the ones you know (?) [laughs] [...] The way we will understand each other is not the way them girl will understand us. And besides, they are used to their own friends, you understand, yeah? When you start from childhood with somebody you will be attached to that person. ...*

Along with retaining some continuity in terms of culture and conversation, some young people sought continuity by keeping in contact with their families and with their countries of origin. A minority of the participants talked about having regular contact with family members and with friends. One boy emphasised the importance of this, as he liked to know what was happening at home. Regular telephone calls from his mother ensured that he kept in touch with family news. This meant that if he ever returned home, he would be aware of any changes in family circumstances, such as births and deaths:

> *Just, you know, my mother telling me hows _____ you go to school, how's the weather over here, I tell her how's the family, everybody is ok, nobody is die, nobody is pregnant, no baby is coming, nobody's married, you know. [laughing] You have to have news about the family. And actually, last week, my cousin she was married. And I was very very happy. So, you have to have the news. The time my mother, you know, I tell my mother, if somebody is pregnant, nobody is having a baby, or nobody is dead, my mother say 'you love if somebody is dead, do you?' [laughing]. 'No, I just want to have news.' [...] Because, far away, you have to have news, you know. For example, somebody is die, right? And you go back home and you tell his son, 'Where is your father?'. 'You don't know?'. Or for example somebody have a kid. After five years you go back, the kid here. 'Who are you?' ...*

Other participants mentioned about talking to others from their countries who lived in Ireland or reading newspapers in an effort to keep in touch with what was happening in their countries more generally. One boy told of how people sometimes tried to explain news from his country to him.

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[13] This girl, like many of the African participants had a strong African identity. Often, African participants felt that they had a lot in common with other young people from Africa, even if they were from a different country. Thus, they often perceived it to be easier to be friendly with other African young people than with Irish young people.

Often, they were not able to explain things properly, so he used the internet to read the stories in more detail. By doing so, a strong connection with home and a sense of continuity was created, as he knew that he was reading the exact same newspaper as his grandfather. Thus, the distance between them was reduced:

> *... [S]ometimes if I'm interested for the news of my country or something I go to internet shop to have a look at internet what's on in my country, you know. Because all the news is for the day, you know. [...] It's today's news, you know. You read exactly they newspaper my grandfather is reading, I'm reading it here, you know.*

In summary, faced with discontinuity and with the feeling of being different, the young people attempted to negotiate life within a new context. In doing so, they demonstrated their agency through their efforts to maintain some continuity. Having left family and friends, people from their own cultures - who shared somewhat similar backgrounds - served as beacons of familiarity. These people represented a tangible connection with their countries of origin and with the lives that they had left behind. However, not all of the participants had the benefit of these relationships. Yet even when such relationships were absent the young people still made active attempts to hold on to aspects of their past lives. In essence, it seemed that embracing opportunities for continuity and sameness in the present, and planning to maintain continuity and sameness in the future, helped the young people to cope with their multiple losses and with their very changed circumstances.

Adjusting by Learning and Changing

Seeking continuity was not the only way in which the young people coped with the discontinuity in their lives. In their efforts to hold onto their cultures of origin, their narratives did not suggest that they were rejecting Irish ways of life. Whilst most of the young people wished to retain elements of their home cultures, they also wished to adapt to their new environment. Although they viewed their relationships as very important in facilitating this process, their sense of agency allowed them to utilise these relationships to their fullest potential. Through interaction with friends and with professionals, the participants actively learnt about practical and cultural aspects of their new country, and made decisions about changing their behaviour when they perceived it to be necessary to do so. Thus, the process of resettling and integrating into Irish society was eased. Sometimes, the young people asked for or were offered pieces of information. At other times, they learnt more indirectly through interaction with people and through observation. This learning facilitated them to find a balance between their cultures of origin and the new culture in which they were living.

Many of the young people talked about their initial days in Ireland and about the difficulties and differences with which they were faced. Often, professionals played a role in helping them to adjust

during this period. In particular, duty social workers[14] whom the young people met upon arrival, explained things to them and helped to eliminate initial fears and provide some reassurance. Professionals also played key roles in organising accommodation and financial assistance for the young people upon their arrival, and organising schooling soon thereafter.

However, peers, especially those living with the young people, also played an important role in teaching the young people about practicalities and daily life. Thus, they helped them to cope with the many differences and difficulties they faced. Participants reflected back on their first few days in Ireland. Surrounded by newness and discontinuity, information from peers proved highly valuable in initial adjustment and learning. One boy, who had only recently arrived, described how he learnt from his peers about the existence of what he termed "*burger hotels*" such as McDonalds. He also began to find his way around Dublin through the help given to him by other boys in his hostel:

> ***YP:*** *Even sometimes I was lost. So, I have to learn, you know, to keep a memory of, a name, like this O'Connell St.*[15] *But somebody, two of my friends, so they tell me, this is O'Connell St. That name is O'Connell. So, this O'Connell Street you go this way. And there is cinema there. If you see cinema that's not your way, you come back.*
> ***M:*** *Yeah [laughs]*
> ***YP:*** *So, this, ehm, if you want to know you are in, in city, eh just look on the, you know, spire,*[16] *that big ...*
> ***M:*** *The spire, yeah.*
> ***YP:*** *You'll know you are in city. So, in the, in the bus, ...for the first few months, I was looking just outside, to see, to see spire. If I see Spire, so I, I ...get off the bus. The bus I didn't know they have bell. That, that bell, what's it for? So, and then one of my friends tell me, this is a bell if you want to stop the bus. If you want to show, to tell the, the driver that you want to ehh stop ...*

Peers sometimes helped newly arrived young people by providing reassurance and support. One girl had a vivid memory of crying during her first meal at the hostel. Even the meal she was given – which she later learnt was spaghetti bolognaise served with chips and mayonnaise - represented huge change in her life. She thought that the mayonnaise was ice cream and wondered if she was supposed to put it on her chips. The situation upset her, but she remembers a girl reassuring her that she was *"all right"* and that there were others from her country in the hostel:

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[14] The 'duty social worker' is the social worker who is on 'duty' on a particular day to deal with emergencies and new referrals. Most unaccompanied minors who arrive in Ireland see a duty social worker on their day of arrival. This social worker carries out an assessment of their initial needs and finds accommodation for the young person.

[15] O'Connell St. is the name of Dublin's main street.

[16] The Dublin Spire is a large pin like monument on O'Connell St. It is the tallest structure in Dublin city centre.

... [Laughing] They served me spaghetti bolognaise. I started crying. [Laughing] I started crying because like ... Ah ... I remember it. I ate, I have ate spaghetti before but usually we grate (?) it and we mix it with rice. We don't eat it on it's own like that. But to give me just like that, you know. And it's not grate. It's very long and coily. It's like ... Oh my God! Then she gave me this cream ... I think its mayonnaise, but then I didn't know the name. And she gave me chips. I love chips. I was wondering, what's ... you know the mayonnaise was in a cup in a small plate, and ... What is this? Is it an ice cream? What am I supposed to do with it? [Laughing] I was looking at, at another people eating chips with the mayonnaise. Ah ... but I was really crying. And there was this girl. She now came over and _____ 'what's wrong with you? Where are you from?' I say 'Nigeria'. 'I'm Nigerian too. You (?) are all right. ____ We are a lot of Nigerians here. You will be fine'. And she went to call about three or four girl...

As well as trying to adjust to the practicalities of daily life, with time the young people began to learn about Irish and Western youth culture. Often, they learnt by spending time with their peers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many of the young people talked about the different attitudes to having boyfriends or girlfriends in Ireland compared to in their home countries, and it was evident that they learnt about these different attitudes through their interaction with peers. They also encountered differences in fashion, in sports, and in language. Again, both professionals and peers facilitated their adjustment to these differences.

As regards fashion, although most of the young people reported that their clothes at home were similar to those they wear in Ireland, their particular style had often changed. Although peers played the pivotal role in influencing a change in style, professionals often provided practical assistance by helping them to shop for clothes when they arrived initially. One participant went shopping with his social worker. He wanted to buy an item of clothing that he had previously seen on television, but he did not know what it was called. When he spotted what he wanted, his social worker informed him that it was known as a 'hoodie'. Another boy described how, over time, and partly influenced by his friend, his sense of dress changed. Whilst he sought to incorporate his own individual taste into his dress style, thus demonstrating his sense of agency, he also wanted to ensure that he was dressing like a *"European guy"*:

YP: *And the friend I used to, to be with, I was watching the way he's dressing. ... But the way he's dressing, I keep it in my way. [...] I'm gonna watch the way he's dressing but I'm gonna add my own piece. I'm putting my own style, so ... that's how.*
M: *[...] And when you went shopping for the first time. Did you buy clothes like these [indicating the clothes he is wearing]?*
YP: *Nah. [...] Mmm... clothes like, tight, you know I mean.*
M: *Yeah, tight jeans*
YP: *Just the way, people I see people dressing like home. So I dress like them. The day is goes, I say 'Hmm [...] why am I dressing like this? It's time for me to change', So ... 'I'm in Europe now, you know I mean. I gotta be like a European guy, so, see people dressing good. I gotta dress good or something'.*
M: *Ok ... so you change...*
YP: *I change everything also.*

At times, rather than completely changing their sense of dress, participants – especially females -

attempted to carefully negotiate a style that would be in keeping with their sense of self. One girl talked about how she wore trousers under the skirt of her school uniform as she felt the skirt was too short. Then, when she reached the school she took the trousers off so as to comply with school rules. In essence, she tried to weave a delicate path between her culture of origin and her new culture. Her strategy allowed her to maintain some continuity with her life at home, whilst simultaneously adjusting to her new life.

As well as adapting to the Western aspects of Irish life, a number of the young people showed an interest in particular elements of Irish traditional culture. For instance, on one occasion whilst I was in Valley Lodge, one of the girls performed the song *Danny Boy.*[17] Also, several of the participants showed interest in Gaelic football and hurling, with some having been to see matches in Croke Park.[18] On another occasion in the hostel, one of the boys talked about Gaelic football:

> *David was wearing a Dublin GAA jersey and I remarked on it. [...] I shook my head and jokingly said that he shouldn't support Dublin.*[19] *He said that Dublin were the best team and then mentioned Kerry as well. He was trying to think of the name 'Kerry' and at first I thought he was saying 'Kilkenny' and I was saying that they didn't play football, just hurling (which he referred to as curling I think!) But then I realised he was talking about Kerry. He said that they were really good and I agreed! I asked him if he had ever been to a match and he said he had. I asked him if he played and he said no but that he would like to. He said he knew how to play but just wasn't on a team and wondered where there was a team. I said I was sure there was one in [his area] somewhere. He seemed interested in this.*
>
> [Field notes, 24/08/04]

Despite some interest in traditional Irish sports – amongst both male and female participants - most of the male participants seemed more interested in soccer than in Gaelic football. I often played soccer with them during my time in Valley Lodge. Soccer offered them some kind of continuity as it was something they had often played at home with their friends. However, influenced by their peers, many found a new identity as soccer supporters, thus again suggesting that the young people changed in order to adjust to Irish society. Frequently, the boys in the study mentioned that they began to support a particular English Premiership soccer team shortly after arriving in Ireland. Some wore the football shirts of these teams and often, when I was in Valley Lodge, the boys

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[17] *Danny Boy* is a love song and ballad, written by an Englishman in 1910, but considered to be an Irish anthem. Ironically, given that it was being sung by a young unaccompanied asylum seeker, it has been interpreted by some that the song is a message from a parent to a son, with the singer saddened that the son has left Ireland as an emigrant (www.wikipedia.com).

[18] Croke Park is the largest sports stadium in the Republic of Ireland and is the headquarters of the Gaelic Athletic Association (the GAA). The GAA is an organisation which promotes the development of Ireland's indigenous Gaelic games, Gaelic football, hurling, and handball. See www.gaa.ie for more details.

[19] The Republic of Ireland is divided into 32 regions known as 'counties', three of which are Kerry, Dublin, and Kilkenny.

gathered to watch European soccer matches that involved Premiership teams. As many of the participants had not grown up in cultures where these teams were supported, in Ireland they relied on television and on their peers to inform them about the teams. One boy, who talked about his friends in Nigeria playing the same game – soccer – as his friends in Ireland, described how he began to support Manchester United:

> ***M:*** *And when you lived at home did you know anything about Man United ....*
> ***YP:*** *No. I don't remember. I don't think so.*
> ***M:*** *No? And how did you find out about Man United?*
> ***YP:*** *Mmm ... my friends here.*
> ***M:*** *Your friends?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. They told me about the clubs and I see that they play very well so I support them.*

At times, as was described previously, the young people expressed an interest in the Irish language and enjoyed opportunities to learn words and phrases and to use them in my company. However, the key language differences they encountered involved the English language, as this was the language spoken by the majority of the Irish population. The young people made concerted efforts to learn or improve their English, despite also valuing opportunities to speak in their mother tongues. They described listening to English on the television and radio, reading in their spare time, and taking every available opportunity to speak in English. One boy talked about being friendly towards Irish young people in order to *"know much things and to really get how to speak English"*. In the case of one girl, whose English was particularly poor, it was clear that she saw the interview as an opportunity to improve her English. Despite the obvious difficulties she was having in communicating in English, and the frustration this entailed (for herself and for me) she rejected numerous offers to get an interpreter and was adamant that she wanted to speak in English.

Apart from learning to overcome language difficulties, the participants also described how, with time, they began to develop a better general understanding of Irish people and their ways. For instance, one boy learned through his own observations and through conversations with friends, that, in his opinion, Irish people *"are always very busy [and] they always have something to do"*. Professionals and foster families sometimes played an important role in helping the young people to learn about Irish people and about the dominant norms in Irish society. Frequently, these professionals and foster families were themselves Irish and so by spending time with them and by asking questions the young people gleaned a lot of understanding and information. This was particularly the case for those living with Irish families: they learnt more quickly about 'Irishness'. Others learnt from conversations with social workers or other professionals. Through these interactions, the young people developed perceptions about Irish people, specifically about how they differed from them in certain respects. One girl, who spoke about her belief in witchcraft, learnt from her social worker that most Irish people did not believe in such things:

They don't believe! And, ehm, like, the way I'm talking to Marie[20] *and she says she, she can't believe that, you know. She don't believe about that, you know ... about witch, or witch or whatever. I say 'yes, because you don't harm people in your country. People, they don't kill people, like use witch to kill people ... in your country.' That is why you can never believe. But in my country, they kill, and they will stand by their side and say "yes, I kill you". And there's nothing the government will do.*

Although the participants often learnt quickly about Irish people and about the culture in Ireland, the learning experience was not always an easy one. Being new, and lacking knowledge about living in Ireland, was often a challenging experience. One boy described being laughed at by another asylum seeker, in front of other peers, because he could not operate the coffee machine at school. As a result, although he wanted to be able to go swimming in the sea, he was hesitant to inquire about how to get to the sea, saying that he needed *"to find the right person"* to ask. He felt that it was safer to wait and learn with time, rather than to ask and risk humiliation. Similarly, other young people stated that they pretended to be knowledgeable about things like music or football teams. They were afraid that if they asked or showed their ignorance their peers would laugh at them. Therefore, in order to manage the many changes in their lives, they often relied on silent observation of those around them, thus suggesting that they often strove to be self-reliant rather than depending on others for help.

In summary, through everyday experiences and observations, and through conversations with both peers and professionals, the participants in the study began to adjust to Irish life. Learning and making changes in their behaviours represented a way of coping with the difficulties and differences in their new life. Although threads of continuity were sought and embraced by the young people, this did not mean that they held rigidly onto their past selves. By acting independently and in a self-reliant manner, the participants sought to learn about their Irish society and to fit in, rather than passively accepting their situation and clinging to their past lives. It seemed, in general, that the young people sought to find a balance between their past and present cultures, rather than simply accepting one and rejecting the other.

Adopting a Positive Outlook: Appreciating and Hoping

A third coping strategy used by the participants was that of adopting a positive outlook on their situation. Many of the young people seemed to cope with the difficulties and challenges they faced by focusing on the positive aspects of their lives. They frequently expressed appreciation for the good things in their lives in Ireland and hope for the future. Such expressions were often situated within a comparative framework, with their circumstances here being compared to what they perceived to be less favourable circumstances at home. In essence, they made meaning out of their

[20] Pseudonym for HSE/Health Board Project Worker.

current difficulties by placing them in the context of past problems and future opportunities. As was the case with Goodman's (2004) participants, hopefulness arose from hopelessness.

During my time as a social worker, I had often been stuck by the appreciation expressed by many of my clients, and by the positivity that emerged from this appreciation. During the research interviews, the young people made frequent references to their gratitude for the services they were receiving and for the opportunities they were being given in Ireland. They were grateful for their accommodation, for the money they received, and for the support provided by various different professionals. One boy, who had only recently arrived, was grateful for his accommodation and for being able to attend school:

> *Now I get the, have the, you know, room. That's eh, that's, is very, you know, is very good. I'm so glad, you know, the, the government of the Ireland, they can help (?) you know. Now I have the room I can sleep, you know. I can, I can wake up. Every time I'm going the school. I'm very happy (?) you know.*

A similar sense of appreciation was evident when, in my early days visiting Valley Lodge, I decided to buy a football for the young people. I had noticed how they seemed to do very little in the evening times, apart from watching television and doing homework:

> *As I walked up to the hostel, Bill was walking in front of me, on his way home from school I suppose, bag on his back. I crept up behind him and hit him gently on the back of the head with the football. He turned around quickly when I did so and he smiled broadly when he realised it was me. He said "did you buy that for us?" in a tone which suggested that he was very surprised and very happy. I said I had and he said "thanks". I suppose I was quite surprised that he seemed so happy about it. I had expected John to be very happy about it as he is generally very appreciative about everything and it was he who had wanted to play football in the first place. But Bill's appreciation (and the appreciation of others later) really surprised me. Maybe it is the fact that I thought of buying it and got it for them as a present. I'm not sure....*
>
> *When I got to the hostel John, Shane, and Larry also greeted me with delight when they realised I had bought the ball for them. They all seemed thrilled, saying thanks, and smiling broadly. They started playing a little bit in the hostel and I messed around a little with them for a minute or two. [...] Eventually, probably around a half hour later (around 5 or so) we went outside to play [...]It was great fun playing football. I really enjoyed it and sensed that the three boys were really enjoying it too. [...]At the end [John] thanked me and later in the evening he said "today was a good day for me because of the football". They all seemed to enjoy the game so much. It isn't surprising I suppose considering they are usually in the house for the whole evening after school.*
>
> [Field notes, 11/12/03]

The appreciation expressed for the football echoed the frequent expressions of gratitude that were evident in my conversations with the young people. Whilst there were times during the fieldwork when the young people seemed unappreciative - particularly when they complained about their situations and about the services they were receiving - I generally continued to be struck by the gratitude they expressed. The appreciation allowed the young people to be positive and to focus on

the good things in their lives.[21]

For some, it seemed that their positivity represented a way of coping with challenges - challenges as unaccompanied asylum seekers and challenges as teenagers. When the participants encountered difficulties in their lives, support from their families was not readily available. In such contexts, several of the young people expressed appreciation for the services they received and for the professionals who cared for them, especially as such services had not been available in their countries of origin. They appreciated the fact that there was someone to whom they could turn for help, even if this help could never adequately replace a parent. One girl mentioned her social worker as someone to whom she went when she needed help. She stated that her social worker *"is cares for me, if I am sick, if I have problem"*. Another girl, who mentioned that she had not known what a social worker was when she lived in Nigeria, found it *"very good"* that a social worker was available for her in Ireland:

> *It's very, very good. Very, very, good because _____ her to do something ... and ... nobody else you can tell, you can ring your social worker now "Can I see you?" And they come over whatever (?) you like, for you.*

Frequently, professionals – including carers, social workers, project workers, teachers, religious leaders, and members of voluntary organisations - were seen to provide positive direction and guidance. They were often responsible for implementing rules in schools or in accommodation settings. Although these rules were frequently unpopular with the young people, the importance of their enforcement was recognised and appreciated by some of the participants. One boy talked about the attempts of teachers and the "*social*"[22] to point him and his peers *"in the right way"*, by punishing them when they broke school rules:

> ***YP:*** *If you are not dressing in a school uniform they will detain you. And, and, like us. We have, we have like, we are bit different for them. 'Cos if we, ...*
> ***M:*** *By 'us', who do you mean by 'us'?*
> ***YP:*** *Like, ehh, a nationality ...*
> ***M:*** *[People of different nationalities]. Yeah.*
> ***YP:*** *If you behave badly in school, like, not going to school for couple of days. Not wearing eh school uniform, because they write the report in school. Teachers write the report and they send, they send it to our social. The social will cut your money, you know? To, to make you improve or, you know, to put you in the right way. 'Cos if you think about that, so you will be, like, you know, you will do the right way.*

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[21] In many respects, being positive also facilitated the process of suppressing difficult memories, thoughts, and emotions. The suppression of memories, thoughts, and emotions will be discussed later in this chapter.

[22] The young people frequently referred to their 'social'. Whilst at times, they seemed to be talking about their social worker, at other times they were referring to their Community Welfare Officer (CWOs). CWOs are in charge of the administration of community welfare services including the distribution of social welfare payments in Ireland.

Above everything else, and as discussed in chapter 4, the young people were grateful for the opportunities they were receiving in Ireland, as they saw these opportunities as facilitating them to have a *"good future"*. Again, this sense of gratitude helped the young people to remain positive despite the difficult circumstances of their Irish lives. In particular, by narrating their stories in a comparative manner – as was outlined in the previous chapter – the young people drew attention to the positive aspects of their lives in Ireland. Usually, 'thin stories' of their lives at home were described, with the participants emphasising the lack of opportunities that had been available to them. One girl stated, *"you can't get your future, nice future, in [my country]"*. Such descriptions neglected the 'thicker' aspects of their histories, including the more positive elements. However, by constructing their lives in this way, the young people were again able to suppress difficult thoughts and feelings. By creating a somewhat simplistic account of their lives, they were able to focus on the negative things about their countries of origin and on the good things about Ireland.

Given their perception that one of the good things about Ireland was that it provided them with greater opportunities, many of the young people spoke positively and hopefully about their futures. Many of their wants and desires seemed quite typical of the desires of many adolescents. Invariably, they wanted to succeed in their education, to get good jobs, to travel, to fall in love, to marry, and to have children. However, alongside their hopes and dreams as adolescents, they also had wishes relating to their circumstances as unaccompanied asylum seekers. These included hopes that they would get permission to remain in Ireland or that they would be reunited with family members. While a small number of the participants wished to return home if the situation in their countries of origin changed, the vast majority were hoping for a future in Ireland, with occasional visits to family and friends in their home countries, if possible. One participant's description of what she prayed for suggested that her hopes as a teenager and her hopes as an unaccompanied asylum seeker existed side by side:

> *I just pray for God to help me, you know? [...] Help me to ... see the right man. [...] To meet the right man. That will like, love me. Get married. Settle down. Have a nice job. Just to get my status.*[23] *You understand? Get my status. Have a nice job. Live a nice life with my family. That is all.*

Like this girl, others also created a link between their faith and their futures. Some of the participants placed their futures in God's hands. Although this could be viewed as a somewhat fatalistic approach, which suggested that the participants felt powerless, it seemed that, for many, such a belief meant that they were freed from worrying about their futures. One participant believed that God had her future planned for her and said that she was *"looking forward to enjoying [her] future"*. Another girl was adamant that *"[a bad future] can't happen"* because it was not

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[23] The participants frequently talked about 'my status', which meant 'refugee status'.

something for which she prayed. A male participant, in describing his hope to be educated, to have a job, to have children, and to be able to put food on the table, emphasised the importance of not forgetting God. Again, his future plans were connected to his faith. He did not not *"want to be a billionaire to forgo God, to forgo who [he is]"*.

Whilst having faith that God would protect them, the narratives of many of the participants suggested that a good future was something that could be obtained in Ireland through effort and hard work, rather than it being something that emerged serendipitously. One girl talked about the good future that she was hoping to have in Ireland, something which she felt was achievable if she made efforts to attain it:

> ***YP:*** *'Cos, I have, now I'm studying education. I would like to have good future and I would like to have work. Yeah, the (?) work. And I would like to have my family here. And ... if you want a good future, you can come if you try it. If you try it, you can come good future.*
> ***M:*** *Ok. If you try hard.*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. But if you sleep ...*
> ***M:*** *You won't have a good future [laughs]. Ok ok*

This belief that it was possible to create a good future for oneself was reflected in the importance the young people attached to their schooling. The participants felt that if they made efforts to succeed educationally, this would pave the way to a positive future for them. As was commented by one boy, school was seen as important *"for your future purpose"*. Another boy felt that he would have no future without an education, even though he felt school was boring:

> ***YP:*** *I say [school is] important because you won't get no future without school.*
> ***M:*** *Ok and do you think Irish students think that school is important? ... You're shaking your head. What do they think?*
> ***YP:*** *Ah, they think it's boring. And I think it's boring. But sometime. But also ... school is boring. Straight away. But, we gotta go school. Just to have good future. To have ... to be somebody. You know I mean. [...] I need to be somebody. I don't wanna be nobody.*

Thus, for this boy, school represented a means by which he could *"be somebody"*. However, although he and others viewed school as very important, it was not without its challenges, as has been discussed previously. The move to Ireland meant that many of the participants were faced with different attitudes towards education amongst their Irish peers. Although at times they talked about reprimanding their classmates and attempted to affect change on their behaviour, in general their descriptions suggested that they demonstrated a strong and independent sense of self by choosing to accept that things were different and by trying to focus on their work. For instance, when asked whether he had changed and become more like his Irish classmates since coming to Ireland, one boy's response emphasised his determination to achieve:

> *No, no. I actually I never, actually, I actually didn't change. I stayed the same and I became more focused. I became more focused because I knew what, what I was, what I came here to do. You know what I'm saying. Like, you know, I, I just, said like, I started*

doing some plans (?) and focus on those you know. Because we all, we all go to school with different ambitions and I had my ambition. So.

Therefore, rather than starting to behave like his classmates, he became more focused on his work. Again, like many of his peers, he was intent on forging a good future for himself.

To some extent, the importance of creating a good future was related to the fact that the participants were in Ireland without family members. One boy stated that he was planning ahead or *"thinking far"* as, unlike Irish young people, he did not have his parents to help him in the future. Participants were often aware that they were lucky to be getting opportunities that their family members were not getting. Missing his mother, one boy frequently used a large proportion of his weekly allowance to telephone home. When I asked him what he and his mother tended to talk about, he said that his mother often talked to him about his future and emphasised the importance of his education. Knowing that her son was finding his situation difficult, she emphasised the opportunities he was getting and the fact that he would be able to help the rest of his family:

> ***YP:*** *Ehm, [my mother] tell me, you know, that my future. You can, ehh, she,_____ And she say to me, you must to learn. You must, ehh, you know, to know how about your future, you can, you can be ... Yeah. She said to me, _____we are, we stay in Somalia. We can't do anything. But you can, but you can helping me, because I'm I'm staying in Europe, you know. Yeah, she said to me that.*
> ***M:*** *Ok. So you can help them?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. If I'm ehh, when I get you know, anything. I, I mean, the money, like this, I can, yeah, I will send her.*

Thus, this mother sought to influence her son's coping strategy. She encouraged him to appreciate what he had and to focus on his future.

Apart from showing commitment to their education, as was the case for the boy just quoted, some of the participants talked about other ways in which they attempted to influence their future circumstances. They spoke about making conscious choices to avoid alcohol and drugs, or to hold on to cultural values that would benefit them in the future. Frequently, the participants commented on what they felt was the excessive way in which many of their Irish peers consumed alcohol. The boy who had previously talked about becoming *"more focused"* in school since his arrival in Ireland, felt that such drinking was not conducive to a good or successful future:

> ***YP:*** *[When I drink] it would be just, like, one-off, one-off situation but I won't plan like, this weekend, I'm going to get drunk this weekend. Like, you know. [...].*
> ***M:*** *Yeah, Irish people do that, don't they?*
> ***YP:*** *[laughs] Yeah*
> ***M:*** *And what do you think of that?*
> ***YP:*** *I think, I think it's ridiculous. I think it's ridiculous because, like, ehm, I stay in town so like I would be, maybe around two o' clock I might come down and go to the internet. You know. Ehh, because it's cheap, it's cheap in the evening. But _____ I always see these people, right, 18 to whatever, 23. Whatever. They would be totally drunk. Everything. But, I feel like, from all that, they've no future. [...] Like, why do that like? They've, they've no future in that like. Because like, it's, because the time it start like, it seems like, it seems*

like fun. Like, ehh, a person in my church, ehh, a person in my church said, he says that what happens is that someone starts drinking at 17 and they start to drink so much it lasts until about 24, 25. The only place to (?) ____ they've done nothing with their life. They realise all the time, the time is gone.

Whilst this boy acknowledged that he sometimes drank, he found it difficult to understand why people would be *"totally drunk"*. He chose to focus on his future rather than behaving in a way that might cause him to look back in later years and realise that *"the time is gone"*.

By making concerted efforts to create a positive future for themselves – whether through study, prayer, or lifestyle choices (such as the avoidance of alcohol) - the young people's sense of hope facilitated them to cope with their difficult present life circumstances. One boy, who struggled with the uncertainty of his asylum-seeking status, described his hope that things would get better for him some day. His main coping strategy seemed to be that of adopting a positive future orientation. There were constant references to the future and to hopefulness in our conversation:

YP: *... but I'm trying to keep my head up. To keep my head up. You know, because I know things one day are gonna get better. You know I mean, so ...*
M: *You're hopeful.*
YP: *Yeah, I'm hopeful. It won't be this way every day. It won't.*

In summary, many of the participants held on to a belief that a better future was available to them in Ireland than in their home countries. Thus, they often showed gratitude for services and opportunities they received. In believing that their new lives would provide high quality education, good career prospects, and positive childhood experiences for their children, the young people were better able to cope with their many difficulties, including their loneliness and the challenges of adjusting to a new culture in an uncertain context. Appreciating what they had and hoping in the future served as powerful sources of positivity for the participants.

Suppressing Emotions and Seeking Distraction

Another coping strategy that the participants used – both consciously and unconsciously - was that of suppressing difficult thoughts and emotions. To facilitate this strategy, the young people often sought sources of distraction. From my experience of working as a social worker, I was aware that unaccompanied minors often did not want to talk about the difficult experiences of their lives. Also, some of the literature relating to refugees generally, as well as to unaccompanied minors specifically, suggested that they were often silent about their past lives (e.g. Kohli, 2005; Anderson, 2001; Papadopoulos, 1992). As mentioned previously, during my time in Valley Lodge and during the interviews, I tended to avoid initiating conversations about the participants' personal lives in their countries of origin, and instead ensured that questions about their home countries were very general. It was made clear to me that this had been a good approach, when, on one occasion in Valley Lodge, one of the residents wrote in my notebook. This boy had never previously

mentioned his parents to me.

> *... March is the worst month of my life because my parents died in March. Sometimes I feel like I hate every thing and I feel like I hate every one in the world. I really hate any one who asks me questions about my parent coz it reminds me many things and many bad situations I've been in. I can tell someone about my parent but if I feel like telling you but you don't have to ask me ...*
>
> [Written by participant, field notes, 19/02/04]

This boy's words suggested that suppression was a strategy he used to cope with his difficult memories. He did not want to have to talk to me about his parents. Likewise, the conversations I had with other participants suggested that they wished to suppress difficult thoughts, feelings, and experiences as much as possible. Although some young people valued the opportunity to talk about their feelings and to confide in others, in general participants felt that remembering past events, thinking about present difficulties, and worrying about the future, were upsetting experiences that should be avoided, when possible. In speaking about the future, a female participant mentioned that she would not tell her daughters about her country of origin as it was simply too difficult for her to talk about it. The suggestion was that she would prefer to suppress her thoughts and emotions:

> ***YP:*** *Eh ... eh ... I not think I, I ... talk for my, for my daughters about for my country.*
> ***M:*** *Why is that?*
> ***YP:*** *[sighs]. Because is ... eh, I don't know. Is difficult for me, you know? [....] Every time you thinking this, you, you talking about this, you know, like, I, I feeling like, crazy, you know. I no like talking about this.*

Suppression was also evidenced by the fact that the participants frequently kept their feelings and worries to themselves rather than confiding in people about them. Although the participants talked about time spent with friends, they rarely mentioned seeking their confidence about personal problems. Whilst a variety of reasons accounted for the tendency of the participants not to confide – for instance, lack of trust, not wanting to seem different, and not wanting to burden other people – this tendency nevertheless led to suppression. It seemed that problems were made more real when they were talked about. Also, talking resulted in difficult emotions being brought to the fore, which the young people wanted to avoid where possible. A female participant, whose friends were all other unaccompanied young people living in her hostel, did not confide in them as she felt that they all had their own problems to deal with. This girl seemed particularly fearful about being sent back home, referring to it a number of times during the interview. Instead of confiding in people, she stayed in the hostel, prayed, and slept in order to deal with her worries. By not talking about her worries or feelings, she was suppressing them to a certain extent.

Whilst this girl, like many of her counterparts, suppressed information about her present life experiences and her future worries, others talked about hiding elements of their past circumstances from their peers. One boy stated that he did not talk to his friends about his past difficulties. Talking about it brought forth memories of *"bad days"* and made him feel *"very very sad"*.

Instead, he said that he tried to deal with his feelings by himself and spent his time with friends talking and joking instead:

> *I keep it to myself, try to handle it, _____ [...] Yeah, I'd keep it myself, to relax in bed. Think about it there. Not discuss about it. [...] Me, I don't tell no-one. Not anyone I tell my problems. Because that doesn't help me for nothing. They cannot help me, what only they say they feel sorry. [...] Me to talk about it, eh, some, often, is not good for me because if I talk it, like this, like today I will feel sometime. I used to think about it very very bad. It remind me some bad days. Yeah, it makes me very very sad. That's why I don't like to talk it often. [...]I know myself well but not always anyone (?) else. No-one knows me deeply. They know me on face. We are talking and joking, but they don't know my, they don't know my things, my own problems deeply.*

Indeed, for some of the participants, like this boy, joking seemed to represent a form of suppression and a means of coping with difficult circumstances. During my time in the hostel, the young people often joked with one another, with me, and with staff members – and frequently these jokes were about their own situations. Humour seemed to help them in their difficult circumstances, serving as a way of distracting themselves from the reality of their difficulties. A particularly humorous incident occurred in the hostel one day when one of the young people arrived back with a new hairstyle:

> *One particularly funny comment on Shane's part occurred when he asked John about his hair style saying, "are you trying to look like David Beckham?'.....he then continued: "... because dream on. He plays for Real Madrid and earns 25 million and you get €33.50".*[24] *Everyone laughed really loudly, including John, who seemed to understand.*[25] *It was good to see them laughing at their situation and the amount of money they get even though I'm sure they often complain about it.*
>
> [Field notes, 26/11/03]

This incident showed the ability of the young people to laugh about their circumstances, in this case about the small weekly allowance they receive. In essence, by using humour, the young people were able to distract themselves from the difficult nature of their circumstances.

Distraction served as a means by which the participants could suppress difficult thoughts and feelings, and was a useful method to use when suppression was proving difficult. Distraction left less time to feel lonely, to be anxious about outcomes of the asylum process, or to worry about other difficulties that the young people were experiencing in relation to their past or present lives. During my first visit to the hostel, after explaining the research to some of the young people, two girls started writing down the differences between their countries of origin and Ireland. One girl

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[24] Whilst, as stated previously, asylum seekers receive €19.10 per week, unaccompanied minors often receive a 'bus fare' that covers the cost of travel by bus to school. The total amount then adds up to €33.50.

[25] 'John' had not been in Ireland for long at this stage and had limited English.

made reference to the use of distraction to suppress feelings. She valued the *'company'* provided by project and social workers as they helped the young people to forget *'bad feelings'*:

> *...but anyway I think things will be fine if the racism stops and if all of us co-operate to be one together. Why I said it will be fine is that is not all of the white that are racism. Like the people I live with are fine and the project and social workers are fine to us, they keep us company, and make us forget out bad feelings about the country. Thanks. God bless.*
>
> [Written by participant, Field notes, 18/11/03]

As suggested by these field notes, companionship was very important for the participants. It facilitated the suppression of feelings. In essence, attempting not to spend too much time alone served as a coping and survival mechanism for the young people. A small number of the young people explicitly stated this whilst the narratives of the others suggested it. For instance, in order to distract himself and prevent himself from being alone, one male participant, who had only recently arrived in Ireland, talked about his efforts to find companionship. In attempting to make friends, he spoke to people he met on the street. He described how, on one occasion, he asked an Irish person for directions. After showing the boy where to go, the Irish person then left, without engaging in further conversation. The young person was disappointed, as he had wanted to talk to him further because he *"wanted to make more friends"*. A brief conversation with a stranger was seen as an opportunity to create a friendship. He quickly discovered that making friends in Ireland was not that simple. This differed greatly from the social interaction with which he was familiar at home, where *"you start to make friends very quickly"*. In Ireland, it was not as easy to find companionship that would reduce his sense of loneliness.

However, other participants – particularly those who had been in Ireland for a longer period of time – had established a network of friends. Often, although the young people did not seem to have close relationships with their friends, their relationships were still considered very important as they helped to reduce their sense of loneliness. One girl described her difficulty in trusting people, and said that she did not confide in her peers. Nonetheless, she felt that her friends prevented her from being lonely:

> *They are just called friends, friend because anytime I'm lonely I can stay with her just to talk. You know (?), about things. So, something like, ehm, ... what I saw today in school, ... but not my private life.*

The distraction provided by such companionship aided the suppression of thoughts. Another participant, who was due to get married shortly after the interview, talked about her tendency to think more when she was alone. During her time living in a hostel and attending school, she had always had others around her, but moving on to a new stage in her life brought with it isolation. She felt that she would not get married if she was not alone:

> *Like, I'm sorry to say, like ... the way I'm getting married now. I keep, I keep thinking about it, like. If my Aunt is [...] here or one of my sisters is [...] here. I wouldn't get*

> *married. Not because they would change my mind but because I wouldn't have think about it. I would have think I'm too young to get married. But, because ... I don't want to be alone. You know. You know the way it is like ... You don't want to be, you don't want to be on your own. [...] Like, when I came in, I was in a hostel where there are a lot of people. You know, maybe I'm being alone in my room (?) a lot but there are a lot of people around you. You go to school, there are a lot of people around you. [...] But when you are in a house or in an apartment on your own, you kind of get lonely [...] Whereas if you live in a house where there are a lot of people, you would want to consider, or confide in them or ask them but ... when you are on your own anyway, most of what you would do you would be thinking. You are ... you would be thinking lot more. And that get, being alone would get to you more. So any little opportunity you get, like that, you want to grab it and you won't let go of it. Maybe [getting married] may be the right thing at the wrong time. Or maybe it's the wrong thing altogether. But the problem is I don't want to be alone. I'm afraid of being alone. [...] So I might as well get on with it. And I know it couldn't get worse. So, you know, that's the way it is.* [Emphasis added] [26]

Essentially, being in the company of someone else provided her with distraction and was seen as a means of preventing her from thinking about her present situation and her difficult past circumstances. Whilst she felt that getting married might not be the right thing to do, her words suggested that the opportunity for companionship was one that she had to embrace. As a result, she adopted a "get on with it" approach (Whittaker et al., 2005, p. 181), accepting things as they are.

Along with spending time in the company of others, keeping busy by engaging in activities also represented a way in which the young people managed their loneliness. Such activities included studying, reading, playing sports, going to the cinema, and shopping. Frequently, when asked to talk about a 'happy time' in Ireland, participants talked about activities they had done or trips that had been organised for them. One boy mentioned playing football with his Irish friends as something that made him happy. Another boy, who attended an African church at weekends, felt that attendance at the church helped him to stop thinking about other things. Again, this activity aided the suppression of his thoughts:

> *Like, ehm, you go there and you forget about the, the thing for, eh, you forget about, what can I say? How can I say? You forget about ... I don't, you you you just feel in the church. You don't think about anything else.*

Although, like this boy, the young people generally sought their own means of distraction, professionals sometimes played a key role by organising and facilitating their involvement in different activities. In Valley Lodge, an NGO organised activities and day trips and these were highly valued by the young people, particularly during the school holidays. Such trips kept the young people occupied and provided them with much needed distraction. In other instances, social workers, project workers, and carers helped to engage young people in their local communities.

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[26] This girl's words draw attention to an important positive aspect of living in hostel accommodation, and one that is rarely, if ever, mentioned by critics of the care that unaccompanied minors receive. The young people valued the companionship that was easily available to them through the hostels

This gave the participants the opportunity to expand their networks, and provided them with more companionship and sources of distraction.

Despite the fact that suppression was often facilitated by distraction, it was not always possible to forget about difficult past experiences or current worries. In particular, the young people's circumstances as asylum seekers meant that they were often compelled to recall the difficult events of their histories, especially in their interactions with social workers, legal representatives, and immigration personnel. One boy mentioned his initial period in Ireland as a particularly challenging time for him as he was faced with recalling upsetting memories for the purpose of his asylum application:

> ***YP:*** *[T]he first time I came here, it was very very difficult. Yeah.*
> ***M:*** *What was difficult about it?*
> ***YP:*** *Difficult, like eh ... when they ask me to fill this application form to ask for asylum, it was very very difficult thing. Because some question to ask this, this to let me think about what all happened. To see all those things. It was very very difficult for me because it was new for me. I never had ... I had the bad things, like eh the torture I get, but like again these things to feel, all these things, let you remember what happened, _____ all these things, it was very very difficult at time. Very hard.*

Again, it is clear from this dialogue that the participant felt better able to cope when he suppressed difficult memories. However, his status as an asylum seeker meant that this was not always possible. For others, suppression was difficult because of the presence of intrusive thoughts. These thoughts meant that some of the participants reported difficulties in sleeping, in creating positive relationships with peers, and in studying. One girl talked about her difficulties in concentrating in school because she found herself *"thinking too much"*:

> *I feel alone. Every, Every time. Maybe you can't sleep. Now maybe you come back from school. Because, you know, for school, you not studying very good if you thinking too much. You know? Yeah. You not studying very good. Maybe teacher talking, you thinking, _____ you like this. 'oh sorry'.*

It is clear that this girl wanted to stop thinking. She wanted to suppress difficult memories and worries but her thoughts intruded, making it difficult for her to do so.

In summary, the young people sought the company of others and engaged in a variety of activities in order to manage their sense of loneliness and isolation, and in order to help them to suppress difficult or worrying thoughts, feelings, and experiences.[27] They rarely confided in others about their difficulties, particularly not in their peers. Their efforts to keep busy demonstrated their

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[27] As most of young people spent their time in the company of other unaccompanied young people who were probably experiencing a similar sense of aloneness, it is likely that the participants not only received the help of others in managing their loneliness but that they themselves also acted as valuable companions and distractions for their peers.

capacity to effect change on their own circumstances. They made concerted efforts to cope with their stressful thoughts and emotions by actively attempting to create friendships and opportunities for distraction. The participants did not come across as passive victims of their situations, but rather demonstrated a determined sense of self-reliance.

Viewing Themselves as Self-Reliant

Tied to the young people's tendency to engage in suppression and distraction, and not to confide in their peers, my conversations with the participants continuously suggested that they were individuals who acted independently and who perceived themselves to be very self-reliant. In this way, many of the participants were empowered to cope more adequately with their circumstances. Although their relationships with peers and with professionals were very important to them, the participants never came across as dependent on these relationships, as passive recipients of services, or as unassertive victims of their circumstances. Instead, they demonstrated their sense of agency by acting in a self-reliant manner. In addition, and crucially, they perceived themselves to be independent.[28]

For some of the participants, independence and self-reliance were continuous features of their lives. For those who had lived with parents in their countries of origin, their narratives of 'secret lives' suggested their struggles to create more independence for themselves, even when they lived in cultures where this was not encouraged. For others, who had been separated from their parents, there had been less choice attached to their independence. They talked about caring for themselves, escaping from dangerous situations, and attempting to better their opportunities by coming to Europe. One boy, who described himself as having experienced *"everything"* at home, said that he hadn't had anyone to take care of him. When comparing how he spent his time in Ireland to how he spent his time at home, he said, in relation to his past experiences: *"you're not spending time for, you know, like leisure. You just spend time for, to survive"*. As a result, he found that he had to *"live strong"* in order to survive at home. It was evident that he perceived himself to have been very independent, even before he came to Ireland.

Similarly, another girl related her current tendency to be self-reliant to *"the way [she grew] up"*. She talked about having made decisions by herself for quite some time. Although she went to other people to ask their opinion on decisions she made, it seemed that this was just for reassurance rather than for actual advice:

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[28] The tendency to be self-reliant arose for a variety of reasons. Whilst the absence of parents was a crucial factor, other reasons were also evident. These included the lack of sources of support in Ireland, the absence of trusting relationships, and the tendency of the young people to suppress their thoughts and emotions. Because of these and other reasons, many of the participants developed a propensity to rely on themselves rather than on people around them.

YP: *Well, like. Maybe because the way I grow up or what I seem to try to make, whatever decision I want to make, I always try to make up my mind about that decision, then go to you for support. You know? [...]Because, like, I've been left to make my decisions on my own for a long time, you know. So, I just try to rely on my own decision and then go to people for support. Like, I would go to maybe two or three people. Just to have a backing, like. In my head, oh, I have somebody that agrees with me. I wouldn't go to you for you to change my mind about that thing? You understand? I ...*
M: *You have already made up your mind...*
YP: *I already make up ... it's just like the confirmation or a support. [...] But ... nobody is self-sufficient, you know. You still be rely (?) on somebody. But, I just felt, like, if you make up your mind about whatever you want to do and you get support, people won't change your mind just like that, and later on you get confused ...*

By acknowledging that nobody was self-sufficient, this girl suggested that total self-reliance was not possible. However, like many of her counterparts, her overwhelming sense of self was of an independent and self–reliant individual, rather than as a dependent recipient of help.

Whilst the narratives of these two young people, like many of their unaccompanied peers, suggested that self-reliance has been a continuous feature of their pre and post-exile lives, for others, being self-reliant represented an element of discontinuity. Often, the young people's sense of independence developed as a result of coming to Ireland. In essence, as forced migrants living in a relatively unsupported context, independence was forced upon them. Although some of the young people only made one or two comments that suggested their sense of self-reliance, for others this was a recurring theme threaded through their narratives. This was the case for one boy, who, as previously discussed, described himself as *"overprotected"* by his mother in his country of origin as she had feared for his safety. In contrast, in Ireland he saw himself as a *"deal-with-your-own-problems guy"*. Thus, a major shift in his sense of self had occurred. Following the death of his parents, he was forced to develop a sense of self-reliance, although he did receive some help from a family friend. Upon arrival in Ireland, this independent sense of self grew. In reflecting on his situation, he said that he only sought help with problems if he could not handle a situation anymore, if the situation was *"beyond [his] strength"*. Although he missed his parents, he had developed a philosophical acceptance of his difficult situation. Despite his acknowledgment that he had little choice but to become self-reliant, there was a hint of pride in his description of his ability to take responsibility for himself and to make himself happy:

YP: *You know, you get used, as you grow up you get used to...you know...the one thing I like about Ireland, you know, the life in Ireland, is you grow up. Basically you take care of yourself and you, you have to look after yourself. Although they look after you but you, you are your own responsibility, you have to make yourself happy, you know. You can't just be sad every time because, you know, you miss your country, you have to make your life.*
M: *Ok. So that's what you like about Ireland?*
YP: *That's kind of what I like. Not what I like about Ireland but what happens in Ireland.*

The conversation with this boy was dotted with both indirect references to his independence and with more direct statements declaring his self-reliance. Like other participants, he talked about

making decisions by himself and about having developed the capacity to speak his own mind. In response to a question about how he had changed since coming to Ireland, he again made reference to the responsibility he took for himself. Although he talked about missing his parents, he coped with his circumstances by learning to live without them, rather than dwelling on the difficulty of his situation.

> *Eh, kind of, yeah. [...] You are no longer Mammy's boy, ... or Daddy's boy, you know how you grow up, you take care of yourself, you have to learn to live without your parents, you know [...] Eh, taking your own responsibilities.*

His use of the pronoun *'you'* suggested that he felt that his experience was similar to that of many of his unaccompanied counterparts.

Like this boy, the narratives of a number of the participants suggested that they had a determined sense of not needing anyone to look after them. When I asked one girl about the support with which she was provided in Ireland, she did not seem to understand what I was talking about. When I suggested that perhaps her social worker or her teachers helped her, she responded adamantly that they didn't *"cause I don't need anything"*. Similarly, one of the male participants suggested that it was not necessary for him to depend on others. He described having previously believed in people. However, he found it difficult to trust anyone any longer because he had been let down by those in whom he believed. He now coped with his circumstances by relying on himself:

> *I believed in lots, lots of people, like, you know, from social workers to people I stayed with. Friends. But most, the majority of people just let me down, like, you know. Like, like, you know, from, from coming, from depending on my parents, you know, and depending on no one, you know, you tend to, you, you tend to learn that everyone can stand up for themselves. Do you understand? When, when everyone lets you down, like, you know.*

For many, even though self-reliance had been forced upon them, and even though they missed their families, being able to be *"a little bit more independent"* was perceived as a somewhat positive aspect of their new lives. As stated previously, the participants valued their freedom. Whilst dominant discourses would suggest that unaccompanied minors are granted too much independence in their accommodation settings, many of the young people expressed a desire for even greater independence. Although they viewed themselves as largely self-reliant, many of them recognised that their sense of being independent was curtailed by their circumstances. They talked about wanting to work and live by themselves, rather than being in receipt of social welfare and living in hostels. To a large extent, it seemed that they often coped with their separation from

parents and with the difficult circumstances of their lives, by viewing themselves as self-sufficient individuals who were not in need of care and who could cope independently with their situations.[29]

In summary, the strengths and capacities of the young people were again evident in their tendency to view themselves as self-reliant. This represented another coping strategy that was utilised in order to deal with often-difficult situations. For some, self-reliance had been a continuous feature of their lives, whilst for others it was something thrust upon them since leaving home. The participants talked about taking care of themselves and of making decisions by themselves. There was evidence that they were proud of their independence and saw it in a positive light. By adopting a self-reliant self-perception, the participants became empowered and were able to develop an increased sense of control over their circumstances.

Concluding Comments

Like unaccompanied minors elsewhere, the participants of this study were faced with multiple difficulties and differences in their lives. In order to cope with these challenges, a range of strategies was adopted, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously. Although the young people obtained help from various services, the insights gleaned from my observations and my interactions with them suggested that they were not simply passive recipients of help. Instead, they actively engaged in the management of their own situations. They showed a determination to succeed, and in order to do so, they utilised their own coping strategies, rather than simply relying on support from others to help them with their difficult circumstances.

The coping strategies that were used were of a varied nature. Often, the participants managed the immense changes in their lives by seeking continuity with their prior experiences as well as adjusting to their new circumstances by learning and changing. In coping with the changes in their lives, they seemed to seek a balance between their old and new cultures, thus suggesting that they were adopting an integration acculturation strategy (Berry, 1990) and a bicultural identity (Phinney, 1990). In addition, in dealing with the many other challenges that they encountered, they used a range of emotion-focused coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Many of them adopted a positive outlook on life, emphasising the opportunities they were receiving and looking forward to a brighter future than that which would have been available to them at home. In addition, they often sought to suppress their thoughts, feelings and experiences and looked for distraction, including the companionship of others, to deal with their situations. Also, many of them adopted a self-reliant self-perception instead of viewing themselves as dependent on others for help and support. These various strategies were used, although not in a mutually exclusive manner. Often, participants

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[29] It should also be noted that the cultures of many of the participants may have promoted the development of self-reliance and independence at a young age.

utilised several strategies at once. Participants frequently shifted between strategies, coping in different ways depending on their circumstances.

Throughout this chapter the strengths of the young people are evident (Saleebey, 2001). In their efforts to maintain continuity with the past, to adjust by learning and changing, to adopt a positive outlook, and to seek distraction and engage in suppression, the young people show their abilities, capacities, and self-determination. They emerge as resourceful, agentive young people, rather than as passive victims burdened by their difficulties. To a large extent, this sense of agency and of self-reliance arises from their lack of close relationships. Although peers and professionals serve as important coping resources, the participants' accounts suggest that they do not have close, trusting relationships with those around them. In the next chapter, the young people's perspectives on trust and distrust will be explored, with particular emphasis being placed on the causes of distrust.

Chapter 6: Coping Through Distrust

Introduction

In this chapter, the young people's perspectives about issues of trust and distrust will be discussed. As was outlined in the previous chapter, the participants demonstrated a sense of agency, capacity, and self-reliance in coping with the differences and difficulties in their lives. Whilst they talked about peers and professionals helping them, frequently my conversations with them suggested that they did not have close relationships in Ireland. From insights gleaned during the participant observation phase, it seemed that distrust of others was a key reason for this. Therefore, this theme was explored further in the interviews.

To begin with, this chapter outlines how the theme of distrust emerged during the participant observation phase. The participants' understandings of trust are then discussed, within the context of the extent of trust and distrust in their lives. During the fieldwork it became increasingly apparent that many of the participants were very distrusting of both professionals and peers. In line with their understandings of trust, their descriptions suggested that they did not have confidence or belief in those around them. Whilst there were some exceptions, most of the young people were only able to trust specific people and could only trust to a certain extent. Their perceptions of the causes of this distrust are also outlined. In describing multiple interrelated causes of distrust, the participants mentioned past experiences, being accustomed to distrust, feeling distrusted by others, being unable to tell the truth, and not knowing people well. From the young people's narratives, it was clear that they did not see their distrust as a sign of pathology or victim-hood. Instead, they viewed it as a "functional" (Kohli, 2005, p. 6) and purposeful means of dealing with their changed and challenging circumstances. In essence, they coped by distrusting.

The Emergence of Trust and Distrust in Valley Lodge

From the outset of the research, the issues of trust and distrust had prominence, particularly in relation to the methodological design of the study. Within the refugee literature, frequent passing references have been made to the difficulties that refugees have in trusting people (e.g. Bertrand, 2000; Delaney, 2006; Hjern et al., 1991; Miller et al., 2004; Omidan, 2000). Several authors have discussed the issues in more depth (Daniel & Knudsen, 1995; Hynes, 2003), and have highlighted the lack of trust that refugees tend to have. From my experiences of working as a social worker with unaccompanied minors, I was aware that it was often difficult for these young people to trust social workers, project workers and other professionals. Given my practice-based knowledge, as well as knowledge obtained from the literature, I felt that, as a researcher, I needed to build relationships with the young people, in order to obtain their trust so that they might respond openly

and honestly in the interviews. Therefore, I undertook participant observation in Valley Lodge.[1]

However, with ongoing reading of the literature, and with the time spent in Valley Lodge, it became apparent that the issue of distrust constituted a more substantive issue, worthy of exploration in its own right, rather than it simply being a methodological concern. It became evident that distrust of others was something that impacted hugely on many of the young people. For instance, on one occasion in the hostel, a lengthy conversation arose with Larry and Luke about trust. They talked about not trusting people. They asked me whom I trusted and how I knew to trust them. Their suspicion of others contrasted sharply with the trust I had in people in my life:

> *They talked about not being able to trust people – to me it seemed like they are not able to trust anyone at all. Larry asked me whom do I trust: I said that I trusted my parents, and my friends, and my boyfriend ... Luke asked how I knew to trust my friends. I said that I knew I could tell them something and that they would not tell anyone else if I didn't want them to. Luke asked how I knew they wouldn't tell anyone else. I said that I just knew. I said that I supposed it was something I learnt as I grew up [....] I was amazed that things I took for granted, Larry and Luke found hard to accept.*
>
> [Field notes, 06/07/04]

Conversations such as this one suggested that many of the participants had difficulties trusting. It seemed that their distrust partly accounted for the difficulties I was having in recruiting young people to take part in the interviews. Most of those who declined to be interviewed did not give reasons for their decision. However, Sarah, with whom I often chatted, indicated that her reluctance to participate was due to her lack of trust in me. Knowing that I had friends who were social workers, she was afraid that I would tell them whatever she told me:

> *Sarah made a comment about the fact that I would tell social workers things. I said that I wouldn't and asked her why she thought this. She said that I knew them and I would be talking to them. I acknowledged this – that I know them and that I talk to them as they are my friends (she mentioned her own social worker as being my friend) - but said that I never talk about her or about things she or the others say to me and that the social workers would never talk to me about her either. I explained about confidentiality....*
>
> *[...] John got involved in the conversation and said that he trusted me and knew I wouldn't tell anyone things. I said that John had told me a lot about the reasons why he came here but that I had never said this to anyone else. John nodded in agreement. We talked as well about the fact that social workers sometimes have to tell other professionals things and that maybe this is one of the reasons people don't trust them. [...] Sarah said that people like Orla[2] didn't need to know everything that her social worker knew, but John disagreed, saying that because Orla was looking after them she needed to know what was happening in their lives. I suggested that Orla needed to know some things but perhaps not everything.I said that I knew it was hard for the young people to trust people and that this*

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[1] See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of how issues of trust and distrust influenced the design of the research and the conducting of the fieldwork.

[2] Pseudonym for staff member in Valley Lodge.

was the reason I had spent so long in Valley Lodge getting to know people. I explained that it was really important for my research that people trusted me. I think it was at this point that Sarah said that I didn't really know her – that I only knew "about one third" of her ...[3]

[Field Notes, 08/10/04]

This discussion with Sarah and with John occurred almost a year after I first met them. Sarah's belief that I only knew "*about one third*" of her, suggested that she was concealing a large part of her identity from me, despite spending significant periods of time in my company every week. Again, this conversation, and others like it, highlight the significant difficulties that the young people have in trusting those around them. This caused me, the researcher, a lot of anxiety as I constantly worried that the participants' lack of trust would have a negative affect on their ability to talk openly and honestly to me in the interviews. In order to address these issues, and given the sparse discussion of distrust in the literature on unaccompanied minors (Kohli, 2005) and the lack of research on the aetiology of trust more generally, a decision was made to have in-depth conversations about trust in the interview phase.

Trusting and Distrusting

The Extent of Distrust

From the interviews, a majority of the participants talked about having difficulties trusting. Sometimes these opinions emerged spontaneously and sometimes they emerged in response to a direct question about trust. They made initial statements such as the following:

I'm really, I'm really not good at trusting people.

It's hard to trust people.

I can't trust. Anymore. [...] I used to trust the people, like I used to think people sometimes were good. [...] But, I can't trust anyone anymore (?).

These quotations - from three different young people - suggested that it was not easy for them to trust. However, the participants could not simply be labelled as 'distrusting'. Instead, diverse perspectives and experiences were evident in their narratives, particularly when the issues were discussed in more depth. The extent to which they trusted varied.

For a very small number of participants – three in total - distrust was quite absolute. They either had a preference not to form close, trusting relationships or perceived themselves to be unable to form such relationships. They viewed people with an inherent suspicion and seemed to expect

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[3] Later this day, Sarah decided to take part in the interview, perhaps partially influenced by John, with whom she was quite friendly.

people to let them down and prove to be untrustworthy. The natural inclination of these young people seemed to be to distrust those around them, rather than attempting to trust. Two of them simply stated that they did not trust anyone in Ireland, and the conversations with them were in keeping with this assertion. A third young person talked about having trusted previously but having learnt to become self-reliant because he was afraid of being let down. He had become very suspicious of people and described his distrust in very stark terms, believing that people tended to have *"inner motives"* and were *"out to benefit"* from him:

> ***YP:*** *Because like, I believe that, there is a saying by Shakespeare, like, be the flower on top and the serpent underneath. [...] And, like, like, that's how I see most people these days, you know. And like ...*
> ***M:*** *So, that means that on the outside they seem nice but underneath they're ... ?*
> ***YP:*** *In, inside, they ... like inner motives, like, you know. [...] Inner motives. Like, they're, they're out to benefit, like, you know. You know, like, I'm, I'm not into like, believing ehh, getting support from anyone else like, you know. So.*

Although the vast majority of the young people described having problems in trusting those around them, most did not describe this absolute type of distrust. Instead, they reported trusting to a certain extent, or had trusting relationships with a small number of people, but still stated that they had difficulties trusting. It was not natural for them to simply trust someone without question. Instead, they viewed people with caution, yet with an openness to forming a trusting relationship.[4]

However, although distrust was a prominent theme in the descriptions of the participants, not all of the young people perceived themselves to have problems trusting. Five of them felt that they had no particular difficulties trusting people. This group of young people did not come across as being inherently distrustful, and their narratives did not suggest that lack of trust was a problem in their relationships. They had friends and trusted these friends, and at times described close relationships with people. With time, some who had previously distrusted, had developed the capacity to trust, thus suggesting that trust was indeed something that changed. One girl had found it difficult to trust when she initially arrived in Ireland, but had then begun to trust. At the time of interview, she no longer had those difficulties, and described herself as being *"free to say whatever is on my mind [...] unless the person is not interested in talking to me"*. Another girl had difficulties trusting when at home, but was able to trust in Ireland. She, like the first girl, mentioned being *"free with people"*. She related this sense of freedom to the cultural differences between her country of origin and Ireland:

> ***M:*** *And do you, do you find it easy to trust people in Ireland?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah [...] It's ok. It's ok to trust people. It's kind of easy. More like, reliable, you know?*

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[4] The experiences of these young people will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

M: *[...] What do you mean by reliable?*
YP: *Like, they are kind of simple. More simple in life you know? To trust, like.*
M: *Ok. More simple than at home?*
YP: *Yeah*
M: *Why? What would happen at home?*
YP: *You won't understand. Because it is, it is really different you know. Like, what we believe and what we, kind of our culture. It's kind of, really different, you know? [...] Like ... I don't. In my place, ehm, you've got all this kind of, medicine people, you know? Kind of evil people. You know?*
M: *Like, like witch, witch doctors or...?*
YP: *Yeah [laughs] So, [...] you be scared of many people. Like, you don't know who is witch doctor because they don't write it on their foreheads (?) But you know in this place it doesn't exist. So, you are already free with people, you know? [...] It's easier, you know.*

For this girl, the absence of witch doctors, or what she called *"medicine people"*, meant that, in Ireland, she no longer had difficulties trusting. In addition, she talked about it being *"really easy"* to trust social workers because *"they're like your Mum and Dad here"*. Like a small number of other participants, this girl did not perceive herself to have any difficulties trusting people in her new environment.

The Meaning of Trust

In looking at the extent of trust or distrust in the lives of the participants, the meaning of 'trust' was also explored, with the emphasis being on the perspectives of the young people. Given that the young people came from a number of different countries, it was perceived as important not to assume that their understandings of certain words and concepts were identical or the same as mine. Their descriptions of trust suggested that it was a multidimensional concept, which could be interpreted in numerous ways, with people expecting different things from trusting relationships. Trust could exist at different levels, with people trusting others to different extents. Trust could be present in some relationships but not in others. The young people gave several explanations of trust, describing it variously as being connected to honesty, truth telling, belief in others, being close to others, being able to confide, and being able to seek help. Whilst different descriptions of trust were given, some broad themes emerged which suggested that the participants' understandings of 'trust' were similar to my own, similar to a dictionary definition of 'trust', and similar to the definition provided by Flanagan (2003).[5]

Most obviously, in terms of these broad themes, the young people's narratives suggested that they understood trust to be about having confidence and belief in others. Thus, this reflected Flanagan's (2003) assertion that trust was an "act of faith" which entailed believing that others "are fair" and

[5] The Oxford English Dictionary describes trust as "confidence in or reliance on some quality or attribute of a person or thing, or the truth of a statement" www.oed.com (Accessed on 29 August 2006). Also, see Flanagan's definition in chapter 2.

"will not take advantage of us" (p. 166). One girl described having trust in someone as believing in that person and knowing that that person would not hurt you.

> ***YP:*** *The word trust is to believe of someone. To believe of someone. Not ... Believe, just putting your heart on someone, that he won't hurt you.*
> ***M:*** *Putting your heart on someone?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. Someone. That he won't hurt you.*

Arising from having confidence in someone, many of the young people talked about being able to confide in people if you trusted them. This meant that you could believe in them and that you could tell them something in confidence knowing that they *"can keep it to theirself and not tell anybody else"*. Someone whom you trusted was someone who would not "take advantage" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 166) by laughing at you or talking behind your back, if you told them a personal problem or secret. Several of the participants were of the view that if someone could be completely trusted it meant that you could tell everything to them. You could talk openly about the past, the present, and the future:

> *Trust is like ... You have, who, somebody out there who you can tell everything. It doesn't matter what is it. It's doesn't matter is your health or what. You can tell him everything. And, and a friend who you can tell, like, I did this last night, I did that. And I want today to do this. I have plan of this. You know. [...] Your dreams as well and your, whatever you want to do. Something like that. And he will tell you likewise.*

This boy, like some of his peers, seemed to have quite high expectations of 'trust'. If he could not tell everything to someone about his past, present, and future circumstances, then this meant that he did not trust that person. For this boy, it seemed that other reasons for not confiding – such as the desire to suppress difficult memories – were not relevant. In other words, if someone was trusted there would be no reason not to confide. His description also makes reference to the reciprocal nature of a trusting relationship, something which was mentioned by several other young people. Often, a truly trusting relationship was perceived as one in which reciprocity was a primary feature. As will be discussed later in this chapter, many of the participants felt that they could not have trust in people who did not trust them.

Elsewhere, honesty and truth telling were mentioned in discussions of what trust meant. People who were seen as trustworthy were perceived to be honest. These people would not lie to the young people. One girl, who had limited English, seemed to be making this point:

> ***YP:*** *If ... I trust you, you have to tell me everything about the truth (?)*
> ***M:*** *[...] Ok. So, if you trust somebody, they tell you the truth ... you know they will tell you the truth?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah*

Apart from conceptualising trust in terms of honesty and truth telling, having confidence or belief in people, and being able to confide, the descriptions of the participants suggested that they viewed trust as a fluid and changing entity. While there were exceptions – as discussed previously – for

most of the young people their sense of trust in others was not something absolute or fixed. Instead, the perception was that the extent to which someone trusted could change over time. Thus, many of the participants talked about trusting people to a certain extent and about having trust in a small number of people, whilst others were distrusted.

Difficulties Trusting: Only Trusting Certain People

Whilst the participants frequently made definitive statements of their distrust, further discussion revealed that many of them had trust in a certain person or in certain people. Although their accounts suggested that they had difficulties in trusting, they nonetheless mentioned particular individuals with whom they had developed trusting relationships. These individuals were often family members or professionals. In relation to family members, whilst several of the young people talked about trusting parents or siblings, usually these were people who were no longer readily accessible to them. However, some of the participants had been able to retain contact with family and the trust they had in them provided some continuity, even if the relationships were only available from a distance. One girl, who had telephone contact with her family, spoke about her trust in her brother, saying that, *"ever in my life the only person I ever trust is my brother"*. In such instances, this continuity of trust helped the participants to cope with the changed and challenging circumstances of their lives.

In general, however, the young people had little continuity of trust in their lives. Those whom they had trusted at home were no longer available to them in Ireland. Therefore, alone and within a very changed context, they were faced with creating new relationships and with making decisions as to who to trust. For some of the participants professionals were identified as people who could be trusted. Often, as was mentioned previously, the participants perceived their social worker or project worker to have taken on the role of their parents. One boy, who had been in Ireland for a month at the time of interview, talked about having previously trusted his parents. In his new context, in the absence of his family, he said that he trusted his project worker because *"she's like Mama"*:

> ***YP:*** *You know, like, you know, Kate.*[6] *Now, now I trust her. Because eh she's ehm, you know, every every ___ she's like Mama. I will tell her, every time if I need, I say, 'Kate I need that _____' I trust her.*
> ***M:*** *And, so, when you say you trust Kate, what does that mean?*
> ***YP:*** *That's, I mean, you know, I will talk (?)... You know, I say to you, I have trusted my parents. Now, I don't have my parents. Like, you know, my Mama, like you know like Kate. Do you know, that's... I trust her, but she's very good you know. [...] I can ask everything. Yeah.*

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[6] Pseudonym for project worker

In discussing the meaning of trust, the participants often related trust to being able to receive support, or get advice from a particular person. Professionals, particularly social workers and project workers, were often perceived to be in a position where they could help, and hence some of the participants trusted them. A male participant talked about the trust he had in his project worker, and related this to the fact that she was *"very understanding"* and *"ready to give maximum support"*. It seemed that when a young person felt that someone could give support, he or she sometimes risked trusting that person and confided in him or her. In such instances, it was deemed necessary to trust certain people, as otherwise help would not be forthcoming. Another female participants stated adamantly that she did not trust anyone. She reiterated this a few times during the interview, yet when asked whether she trusted her social worker she said – in a surprised tone of voice - that she did. She described her social worker as *"different"*, and related this to the fact that, firstly, social workers are not from her country and, secondly, that they could help her. For instance, she said, if she had a disease like Aids, her social worker could provide her with the necessary drugs. Therefore, she perceived it to be necessary to trust her social worker and to confide in her:

> ***YP:*** *Yeah, I don't trust anyone. But, the social worker is different. They are quite different. You are quite different.*[7]
> ***M:*** *Ok. Why is it quite different?*
> ***YP:*** *Because, you are different people. You are not from the same country. Because I felt, you can help me. Not that I will tell someone that just want to hear my story just to laugh me or mock me or discuss it with someone else. Do you understand?*
> ***M:*** *Yeah, yeah, yeah. So do you think it's easier then to trust Irish people? Than to trust people from [your country of origin]?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. I think. Because if I know you can't help me to solve. Maybe I have a disease in me now. A disease like Aids. God forbid ... Then, Africa, my people are here and then I will tell them that, 'oh, I have Aids. I know that they don't have the cure for me. They will just pity _____, 'oh yeah, oh she has Aids'. The next thing they will go and be discussing me outside. 'Oh, she's stupid. She has _____ there', you know. But, if I know you have the drugs. You can help me, I have to say 'yes, I have it. Help me'. I don't have to tell them. That's what I mean.*

This girl suggested that it would be essential to confide in her social worker if, hypothetically, she had Aids. On the other hand, she was afraid that people from her own country would talk about her and laugh at her if she confided in them. Thus, trusting them was an unnecessary risk to take. Distrusting was adopted as a protective strategy.

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[7] In talking about social workers, this girl's use of the pronoun 'you' suggested that she thought I was a social worker. This was despite the fact that I had only met the girl once before the interview. It may have been because I generally informed the participants that I had previously worked on the social work team. This was in order to be honest – as discussed in the methodology – although I always reiterated that I no longer worked in that job.

For others, the asylum process meant that it was necessary for them to talk openly to their social worker or project worker, as these professionals helped to prepare them for their asylum interview. At times, by telling social workers or project workers about their lives during the interview preparation, and by narrating details of 'extraordinary' home situations, the participants grew closer to these professionals and trusted them more. One female participant said that she trusted her social worker because *"she knows all my life"*.[8]

Although for some young people, such as those discussed above, social workers and project workers were seen as 'exceptions' who could be trusted, this was not the case for all of the participants. In many instances, social workers were strongly distrusted. As I had previously worked as a social worker, this distrust often seemed to apply to me as well. This point was made by one of the female participants. When I asked her whether she knew anyone else who would take part in the research, she talked about people being reluctant to participate. In her view, this was because I had been a social worker, and because they would continue to think of me as a social worker, or as someone who might talk to social workers about them. She implied that her peers often distrusted social workers, or, indeed, that some of them *"just hate any social worker"* for no apparent reason:

> ***YP:*** *And they find it really hard, like, to believe somebody, like to trust somebody. [...] Yeah, like because when you came in Valley Lodge we just saw you as you come because we know you are all social workers. Even the people that we stay with, like, they, they're, like, they are really, like, they talk to the social workers and everything. Anything they see on us, they would tell, they would tell the social workers. Definitely, because they are the ones that are helping us.*
> ***M:*** *[...] And were you, were you able to see my role as being different ... in any way?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. Because ... but the first thing is, because, because you've been a social worker before, ehm, the people, if you mention it to the people, like, you've been a social worker before, they will think you are still a social worker. And they'll think, like because you have many, like, you know them, better (?) like, if _____the way you say, 'you know Mary'...*
> ***M:*** *'She told me this...'*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, because...if you mention it in the beginning, that's why, when everybody's going to hate. Some people just hate any social worker. Not because of any reason, because of they are bad or something, they just hate them.*

Apart from sometimes being unable to trust social workers, as is suggested by this girl, participants also talked about distrusting other professionals. At times, they were particularly suspicious of people working for the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (known as 'Justice' by the young people). Also, several young people talked about distrust of the staff in the settings in which

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[8] Whilst the asylum process may have led to a strengthening in the relationships between social workers and clients in some instances, this may not always have been the case. For some young people, especially those who felt unable to tell their true reasons for coming to Ireland, the involvement of social workers and project workers in the asylum process is likely to have hindered the development of trusting relationships.

they were living. During the participant observation phase, I noticed that few of the young people seemed to have close relationships with staff members, although there were some notable exceptions. One boy, who lived in a children's residential home, talked about not trusting the staff *"anymore"* as they had lied to him. As a result, they had stopped *"earning"* his trust:

> *I don't believe them anymore. Everything they say to me ... [...] They told me before I moved here that at weekends they would be going on activities ... I don't trust them anymore. Most of the things they say to me turn out to be lie, turn out to be wrong. [...] If someone lie to me, they stop earning my trust or if they say something and it doesn't happen they stop earning my trust. I don't trust staff anymore. I don't trust them not even 1%. Since I moved into the house all the things they said turned out to be wrong.*

This boy made reference to why he distrusted staff members, by suggesting that they had lied to him in the past. The causes of distrust, such as this one, are discussed later in this chapter. Whatever the causes, however, it is clearly evident that whilst some of the participants trusted certain professionals, this was not always the case.

Although I had anticipated that the young people would often not trust professionals, I had thought that they would have fewer difficulties in trusting their peers. However, the participants rarely identified peer group members whom they trusted. I found this surprising, given the age of the young people, given that many of them were living with members of their peer groups, and given that the young people seemed to spend considerable periods of time in each other's company. Yet, the narratives of the young people strongly suggested that trust was not considered an essential ingredient in friendship. Many of the young people talked about their friends, but did not have full faith or trust in them. One boy talked about having many Irish friends with whom he hung around, played football, and went to discos. However, he stated that he only trusted his project worker and social worker. Another boy, whom I perceived to be very popular during my time in Valley Lodge, and who talked about trusting the staff there, nonetheless said that he did not trust his friends:

> *For example, in school I don't have any, any friends who I can trust. I talk to them. I play with them. I don't trust them.*

Similarly, a female participant talked about being able to be friendly with someone but not trusting that person. In describing her understanding of trust, she spoke hypothetically about being able to tell me everything if she trusted me. However, if she did not trust me, she could still be *"friends"* with me but conversations would be more superficial :

> *Like, if I trust you, I can tell you everything, you know. So, what happened to me in the past and what I want to do like, like tomorrow maybe. I can tell you all because I trust you. But, if I didn't trust you, I can't tell you anything. I will be like, friend with you but not telling you anything. Just like, 'oh, how are you', like that. I _____ not to tell you anything*

The words of this girl suggested that being friends with someone did not necessarily imply that the person was trusted. At times, the participants related this to the fact that friends could not help them

in the way that professionals could. Therefore, it was not considered necessary to trust them. In the absence of trusting relationships with friends, the young people frequently kept important parts of their identities to themselves, such as details of both the 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' elements of their lives at home. As a result, close relationships were often not formed. Nevertheless, the narratives of the young people suggested that these relationships were still meaningful. Friends were important in a number of different respects, as was described in the preceding chapter. Friends helped to orientate the participants into their new culture, to provide continuity with their previous lives, and to provide much needed distraction. Thus, meaningful relationships were created despite the absence of trust.

Difficulties Trusting: Only Trusting to a Certain Extent

As well as only trusting certain people, many of those who talked about having difficulties trusting, spoke about not being able to trust completely. They only trusted to a certain extent, and always seemed to be wary of people to some degree. In a discussion with one boy about my difficulties in recruiting people to take part in the research, he suggested that his peers in Valley Lodge probably only trusted me to a certain level as perhaps they were afraid that I would *"twist"* what they said to me. Another participant felt that everybody *"needs"* somebody to trust, somebody to whom secrets could be told. However, he felt that it was not possible to have complete trust, as a person could be betrayed by someone whom they had trusted.

> ***YP:*** *Everyone needs somebody else to, to say...he (?) say to trust. Yeah. Yeah. Some people trust your girlfriends. Some ____ if you married, maybe your wife. Your wife, your husband. Yeah. Sometime, everyone has one friend you tell your secret to them. But you use this word, trust, yeah, for this friend. But, yeah this (?) but ehh, but one ___but the mind can change, you know? [...] So, if we trust one, one person, so one day they (?) can betray you. Yeah. [...] Trust, is this word, ehh, I'm not going to say it's fake [laughs]. I'm not going to say it's fake but ehh, no one can trust, ehh, ... the ... ehh ...*
> ***M:*** *One hundred percent?*
> ***YP:*** *One hundred percent. Yeah. No one can trust one hundred percent.*

Yet again it is clear that distrust was 'functional' for this boy. It was a form of self-protection from hurt or betrayal. Thus, not being able to trust *"one hundred percent"* meant that many of the participants could not rely completely on other people. Often, as a result of this, they became more self-reliant. One boy, whose self-reliance was evident from his description of himself as a *"deal-with-your-own-problems guy"*, identified *"trusting"* as *"a big issue"* in his life. His narrative suggested that at home, in his country of origin, he had trusted his parents as well as friends of his family. However, in Ireland, there was nobody in whom he had complete trust:

> ***YP:*** *I mean, trusting is very, is a big issue in my life, I don't know. I just ... I trust people but I don't trust them, like, one hundred percent. I don't know. It's not that I don't trust anything but ... I don't think I have ... I don't know. I don't think I trust people.*
> ***M:*** *You don't trust them completely is it? [Participant nods] Ok. And so is there anyone in Ireland that you would trust completely?*

YP: *I don't ... no, I don't think so.*

Although for this boy, like many of his peers, it was more difficult to trust in Ireland than it had been in his country of origin, for others the opposite was the case. However, even when it was easier to trust in Ireland than it had been at home, often, complete trust was still not possible. One boy described the difficulties he had in trusting his friends within the 'extraordinary' Somali context in which he had grown up, where conflict was pervasive. In Ireland, it was easier to trust and so he was able to go out late at night with his friends without being fearful of what they might do to him. This had not been possible at home, as he had been afraid that his friends might be carrying weapons and might hurt him. Nevertheless, even though he had greater trust in people in Ireland, he said that he *"[doesn't] really put all his trust in somebody"*, thus suggesting, like many of his peers, that he only trusted people to a certain extent.

In summary, although there were a few exceptions, the insights from the participant observation and from the interviews suggested that trust in others did not come easily to the participants in this study. Even though many of the young people had friends, these friends were rarely people in whom they had complete trust. At times, professionals were trusted, often when it was believed that they could be of assistance. Whilst the young people perceived it to be desirable to be more trusting, and whilst they hoped that they would have strong trusting relationships in the future, they frequently came across as being wary of those around them. They treaded carefully with relationships. However, my discussions with them suggested that there were clear and purposeful reasons for their distrust. These reasons will now be discussed.

Causes of Distrust.

In the refugee literature, a number of reasons have been suggested for why refugees often distrust. These include experiences in their countries of origin, cultural differences, fear of 'officialdom', absence of family and community, and fear of deportation (Daniel, 1995). To my knowledge, no researchers have actually asked refugees themselves why they have difficulties trusting. Therefore, in this research, the participants' perceptions of the causes of their distrust were explored. The causes that emerged were clearly interlinked with the fact that the participants were unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

Whilst the distrust of refugees has generally been perceived as problematic and as evidence of their victim-hood or of their pathological circumstances, the narratives of the participants in this study suggest that distrusting was often a purposeful act of strength and survival. Although narratives of distrust were often tinged with sadness, many of the participants seemed to use their distrust as a means of coping with their situations. In discussing why they distrusted, they were able to articulate clear reasons. They spoke confidently and logically, thus suggesting that their reasons made sense to them. Amidst the differences and difficulties of their lives, distrust served many

purposes, protecting them from being hurt, facilitating their 'thin' asylum stories, providing continuity with the past, and allowing them to be self-reliant. I now discuss, individually, the reasons the participants gave for their distrust.

Past Experiences

Several of the young people talked about their past experiences having impacted on their ability to trust people. For some, these past experiences related to their lives at home, while for others they related to their lives in Ireland. A number of the young people talked about their past experiences in vague terms, without giving specific information or details. They didn't describe the experiences they had, and they were not asked to do so, but they still referred to their past lives as having affected their ability to trust. For instance, one girl, when talking about her distrust of white people when she first arrived in Ireland, related this distrust to her past experiences. Given that she had been *"through a lot of things"* in her life, she did not feel that she could answer all the questions being asked of her – by Social Workers and by 'Justice' - during her initial days in Ireland:

> *Yeah...for me I've been through a lot of things in my life that its very hard for me to trust, so how can I trust this person who I am just seeing for the first time.*

This girl was clearly quite wary of trusting people when she first arrived in Ireland. This wariness was evident in the accounts of many of the participants, often as a result of their past experiences. One boy, described how he only had trust in God and in his brother, and related this to the fact that only God and his brother had not done *"something bad"* to him. In distrusting, he was influenced by his brother who warned him not to trust people *"that much"*:

> *Even in my family, they do something bad to me. The only the person who doesn't do something bad to me, first is God and second is my brother. You know. That's why, my brother says, even sometimes don't trust your eyes. You see something don't trust it. Maybe, you know, your eyes have problem and that's not what exactly you see. You know what I mean? He say, trust people, but not that much. Because always people can attack behind you and they can leave you.*

Whilst this young person's description of why he distrusted was vague and did not give details of the *"bad"* experiences that caused his distrust, other young people openly described the particular experiences that had occurred in the past and which impacted on their ability to trust. Often they were 'extraordinary' events that culminated in them leaving their countries of origin. One boy said that *"the thing that makes [him] distrust a lot in his life"* is his belief that friends of his father had been responsible for his murder. As a result he did not fully trust his friends as he was afraid that they would let him down, just as his father had been let down by friends. Because of his past experiences, trust was usually not present in his friendships:

> *[T]he main thing I'm always afraid that people will always let me down, you know. Like, if you have a friend and you tell them something, they will always tell something to somebody (?). You know those kind of stuff. Like, that's why, me, I have friends but I don't have best*

friends who I would tell everything from A to Z, you know.

Whilst this boy was influenced by the fact that his father was betrayed, other young people talked about their own personal experiences of having been let down by people they trusted. These experiences contributed to their inability to have full faith in those around them. This was particularly evident when the person who hurt them was someone with whom they had a close relationship. One girl fled from her country of origin after she discovered that her life was in danger because of something her father was planning to do to her.[9] She described how, throughout her childhood, she had felt close to her father, and because of this she felt betrayed and disappointed by his actions. She wondered how she could possibly trust people if she could not even trust her parents:

> ***YP:*** *For my Dad, I seem to get, I thought I get along with him, very well. You know, so that is why it's. ... I was disappointed.*
> ***M:*** *[...] Do, do you think they are the reasons that you find it hard to trust people now?*
> ***YP:*** *It's just that like, when, when you are disappointed like ... When your parents, when you can't trust your parent, who else can you trust? That is the way then (?) if you can't trust your parents, your parents can't be faithful to you [...] it is difficult to be faithful to someone that is not your flesh and blood. You know? That is the way it was, so I just think, like, if your parents can disappoint you ...*
> ***M:*** *Then anyone can?*
> ***YP:*** *Anyone can. That is the way it is, then anyone can.*

The betrayal of this girl by her father, and the pain he had caused her, left her with little trust in those around her. Her expectations were low. Distrust clearly served a purpose for her, preventing her from being hurt or disappointed in the future:

> *I'm trying to say ... I always expect low from people. Just not to get disappointed. So, whatever they do, I say, I don't expect much anyway. You know, that is the way it is for me.*

In relation to past experiences, distrust acted as a protection mechanism for the young people. In circumstances where reliance on others led to hurt and disappointment, young people often stopped trusting or having confidence in those around them. At times, these experiences led to general distrust of people, whilst at other times, it led to distrust of particular groups within society. For instance, some of the participants said that they could not trust people of their own nationality, often because they felt that they had been betrayed by these people in the past. Again, in such instances, distrusting served as a means of preventing further pain. The participants perceived it to be better and less threatening to rely on themselves.

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[9] The details of what this girl's father had done have been omitted in the interests of confidentiality.

Being Accustomed to Distrust.

A second cause of distrust, which was related to the young people's past experiences, was the fact that some of the participants were accustomed to not trusting people. Several of the young people talked about trust in a way that suggested that distrust was a continuous feature of their lives. Quite a number of them had few, if any, trusting relationships at home. It seemed that many of the young people had grown up in a climate of distrust, in an environment where people treated each other with suspicion. This climate often existed as a result of conflict, ethnic or religious tension, or totalitarian government regimes. In essence, the young people had learnt to distrust people and had become accustomed to it as an aspect of their daily lives, and so being able to trust in Ireland was difficult for them. Therefore, they continued to distrust.

This continuity of distrust was evident in the narrative of the boy who previously talked about only having full trust in God and in his brother. He made frequent references to the distrust of the authorities in his country of origin, a country where there was a lot of resistance to the government regime. During my time in Valley Lodge he told me how people in his country always had to be careful about what they said, as they never knew who might be working secretly as a police officer. As an example, he said that sometimes taxi drivers also worked as policemen. Subsequently, during the interview, he spoke about having to be careful when talking to his mother on the telephone:

> ***YP:*** *Actually, never ever I speak on the phone about my country. What's the news in my country. Because always they listening. You don't know they listening, but they listening to you.[...]*
> ***M:*** *The authorities, is it?*
> ***YP:*** *The time you are talking, somebody is listening to you also as well. They are not talking. Your mother, me and mother, we are talking and somebody is listening what we are saying. If you say something about politic or something, _____ they keep the call in, they pull it off, or they let you go to see what's going on with you and the person who is in the country. You know. That's why I never trust nobody in my country. Even taxi driver, you know. I don't know I tell you or not. You know, taxi driver ...*
> ***M:*** *Yeah, you told me, they might be police men, yeah*
> ***YP:*** *Nobody can trust nobody in there.*

Because people could not trust each other in his country of origin, the participant became used to being suspicious of people. This lack of trust stayed with him during his time in Ireland. Distrust was a continuous feature of his social interactions. He felt that he had to get to know someone really well before he was able to begin trusting them. For this boy, distrust had been an engrained part of his everyday life at home, and so he found it difficult to change when living in a new milieu. This was also the case for some of the other young people. Often, they perceived it to be easier for their Irish peers to trust, as, in their eyes, Irish young people had not grown up in situations of conflict or under the control of a harsh government regime. Instead, the Irish had experienced a climate of freedom and rights, where it was easier to trust. In relation to this point, one boy talked about the relative ease with which Irish people began trusting each other. He gave the example of

Irish young people who would start *"going out"* very soon after they met, and who would start to trust each other and love each other very quickly. He felt that this was because they were *"happy"* and because *"nothing bad"* had happened to them in the past. In essence, he perceived them to have had fewer 'extraordinary' experiences. This contrasted sharply with the *"very long time"* it took him to trust, because of his past experiences:

> ***YP:*** *... because what happened to us in Africa its too hard to find somebody [to trust] straight away. War going on. People killing each other. It's not easy for me to trust somebody straight away. It's gonna take me a very long time ...*
> ***M:*** *And can you think of any examples of times, where you've noticed, like, Irish young people trusting people?*
> ***YP:*** *She can meet, just example, she can meet somebody, a boy, in the street, in the day, give her number and they gonna start going out in two days. You know I mean, yeah? And she gonna start saying 'I trust you', you know I mean, yeah? She, maybe they gonna go out in two, in two months, and she gonna start falling in love with, and that (?). That's what I mean. They, they are too easy to trust. I can say, all over Europe, that's the way they are. Because nothing bad happening here. They are all, they are happy.*

In contrast to the happiness that he perceived Irish people to have experienced, this boy's life had not been happy and, as a result, he had become used to distrusting people. Like many other young people, it was not possible for him to simply start trusting when he arrived in Ireland, given that he had grown up with little trust in those around him. He said that it took him a long time to trust people, and related this to *"that way I used to live"*:

> ***M:*** *And why do you think [it takes you a long time to get to trust people]?*
> ***YP:*** *Maybe because of my life. That (?) way I used to live, so ... It was too hard for me to trust somebody. I don't know what he gonna put me to, you know I mean, yeah? So I don't wanna have a bad life like I used to have, so that's why for me it's like, I gotta really know the person before tell him or tell her anything.*

Thus, in order to protect himself from having a *"bad life"*, this participant opted to continue distrusting, just as he had done at home. Hence, for him, like others, distrust of people in Ireland arose because he had become accustomed to not trusting.

Being Distrusted by Others

Whilst the move to a peaceful, democratically governed country might suggest that the participants no longer experienced a climate of distrust, this was not, in fact, the case. As asylum seekers, the young people felt that they were surrounded by distrust in Ireland too, albeit a different type of distrust. Their narratives suggested the existence of what has been called a "climate of suspicion" (Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants in Britain, 1998, p. 5) or a "culture of disbelief" (IRC, 2003, p. 1). The young people felt strongly distrusted by the Irish authorities and by the Irish public. Given that they perceived trust to be a reciprocal concept, this climate had a strong impact on their ability to trust. When others did not trust them, the young people felt unable or reluctant to trust. Thus, their ability to trust was affected by the 'climate of suspicion' that they perceived to be

surrounding them.

As the researcher, I too was aware of this 'climate'. Having previously worked as a social worker, I knew that professionals were often suspicious of the 'stories' that the young people presented. As I continued to socialise with my former colleagues during the participant observation phase, I found their distrust having an impact on me. In essence, I became entangled in this culture of suspicion and I struggled to escape from it. I found myself becoming more suspicious of the young people and anxious that they might not tell me the 'truth' about their circumstances. One night, whilst I socialised with some of the social workers, they talked about the lies being told by unaccompanied minors. Afterwards I reflected on what they had been saying and found myself feeling very disillusioned:

> *I left the evening feeling very frustrated and disillusioned about what I am doing. I felt almost stupid that I was in some way believing these young people! Will I end up just producing lies? Will the Social Work Team end up reading it and thinking it's useless information as it's all based on lies? How can I try to investigate the lies? I'm sure there are many. [...] Maybe I need to think about it more and realise how there are many lies and how I should deal with this. Should I approach some of the young people whom I know well and ask them directly about lies? If I think someone is lying should I ask them, challenge them? I don't know!*
>
> [Field notes, 07/04/04]

This frustration was heightened when, on another occasion, a professional remarked to me that Valley Lodge was *"the worst hostel for lies"*. As a result, my distrust of the young people increased.

The young people were in no way oblivious to the suspicions of professionals. Instead, they were acutely aware that professionals distrusted them. This awareness often led them to distrust professionals in return.[10] During the participant observation phase the young people frequently mentioned this distrust to me. On one occasion a girl asked me what I would have done as a social worker if I discovered that a client was lying. On another occasion a young person talked about a peer whom he believed was lying. In my conversation with Larry and Luke, Larry talked about social workers distrusting the young people:

> *Larry talked about the fact that the social workers don't trust them and so how would he trust them. He described how when he is talking to his social worker he knows that his social worker is sitting there not believing him. He knows that the social worker is thinking that he is lying. I was very struck by this description of Larry's. I nodded in agreement with the idea that when the social worker doesn't believe him how should he then believe the social worker.*
>
> [Field notes, 06/07/04]

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[10] Indeed, my distrust of the young people may have contributed to them distrusting me.

During the interviews, the participants again talked about being distrusted by the authorities. One girl described her general trust of Irish people, but her distrust of 'Justice'. She felt that giving her a negative decision on her asylum claim indicated their distrust of her. It was clearly difficult for her to trust them when this trust was not reciprocated:

> ***M:*** *And would you find it easy to trust the Department of Justice?*
> ***YP:*** *[...] I can't say because, ehm, ... because they don't trust me, they don't believe me. So, I can't believe them, again, because, ehm, ... what happened when I got this letter,*[11] *I was so surprised because, I said "No ... am I dreaming?"*
> ***M:*** *Because they didn't believe you like?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah ... So I says 'Oh my God, am I dreaming? Why all this?' you know. The letter, I know, is not dream. [Laughs] I realise it's, it's real. [...] So I don't trust them.*

Apart from feeling distrusted by the authorities, like Larry and the girl quoted above, many of the young people talked about the general Irish public not wanting black people or asylum seekers in their country. Frequently, they believed that the public thought that asylum seekers were 'bogus'. The presence of racism was mentioned by a significant number of young people, both during the participant observation and during the interviews. Some of them had personally experienced racism, usually in the form of racist insults. Others had witnessed racism or were aware of others within their circles who had experienced it. The existence of racist beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour towards asylum seekers suggested to the participants that people did not trust them. Hence, racism, and the distrust implied by it, acted as a clear barrier to creating trusting friendships with Irish peers and gave the young people a sense that they could not trust those around them and that they were not welcome in Ireland. One girl found it difficult to be friends with Irish young people partly because of her experiences of racism. She stated the following:

> *It's difficult to be friends with [Irish young people] though (?), 'cos, some of them might be racist and you want them to be your friend. But they won't be able to welcome you as a friend.*

However, the young people did not always relate their perceptions of being distrusted to issues of racism, or to issues regarding their specific status as asylum seekers. At times, when they talked about not being trusted, they did not give reasons for this distrust. Yet, in any case, being distrusted by others made it difficult for the participants to form trusting relationships. For many, it seemed that they waited for others to show trust in them, before they risked trusting. One girl, who had two friends whom she trusted, talked about not being able to trust other friends as *"they don't tell me everything"*. Similarly, a male participant talked about confiding in people who confided in him. He waited for someone to display trust in him. Then, when this trust was shown, he reciprocated by showing a similar level of trust. Interestingly, this boy made a connection between trust and

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[11] The girl is referring to a letter from the Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform indicating a negative outcome to her asylum application.

respect. He suggested that if someone trusted him enough to confide in him, he would confide in return, out of respect:

> *Because always, I am waiting for the person. If the person like me and the person who trust me, I'm gonna trust the person back. You know, always I'm like this. How much the person respects me, I'm gonna respect that person back. Back. The same. Not more. Not down. Just like that you know. How much the person respect me, I'm going to give him back, or her, exactly the same. I'm always waiting. If the person, if my friend they have a problem in the family and they come to me, you know. And they tell me, 'oh, I have this problem in my family'. I try to help him. And if I have the problem, I'm gonna tell him too. Because he's the one who come to me and tell me his problems. He trusts me, so if I don't trust him, that means I don't respect him. You know what I mean? That's it. Always, I'm like this.*

Hence, believing that trusting relationships were based on reciprocity, this boy struggled to trust people who did not show trust in him. Like many of his peers, he chose to distrust, whilst waiting to be trusted.

Inability to Tell the Truth

Not being able to tell the truth was also seen as a cause of distrust. The relationship of truth-telling to trust is complex. On the one hand lying occurs because of a lack of trust. Young people may not tell their true reasons for being in Ireland because of their distrust of people around them. They fear the repercussions of telling the truth, such as deportation or reprisals against their families in their countries of origin. On the other hand, however, distrust is caused by the truth not being told. This causality is related to the notion of trust as a reciprocal concept. If a young person is perceived to be lying or secretive about the truth, he or she will not be trusted, and so, in return, he or she will have difficulties trusting and becoming close to others. A two-way trusting relationship will not arise. Instead, a vicious cycle of distrust may emerge. Thus, the formation of close relationships may not be possible in circumstances where a young person cannot give a complete and truthful account of his or her life. During the interviews, one participant talked about having lied during the asylum process. She explained how this experience caused her to distrust:

> ***YP:*** *Anytime I would go to see my social worker I could say different things because I would forget the things that I am supposed to say and she would say I don't really understand what you are talking about.*
> ***M:*** *It didn't really make sense to her like?*
> ***YP:*** *If like, the things, [...] they are kind of like made up. Like, I would find it weird, like, telling everybody, so I think that's why [...] if I trust somebody I don't want to tell the person a lie. If I trust somebody I want to tell the person the real truth. Like, that's why I found it hard to trust people. Because if I trust you and I tell you the lie, and later you just, you find out the truth and you say, 'you are no good because you told me a lie'. [...] [I]t's not really good [...] They are going to be maybe mad or something. And if they were your friends they would say 'you've been hiding things from us'. So it's better you don't tell them ...*

Whilst it is clear that this girl's social worker did not trust in what she was being told - hence suggesting that a mutually trusting relationship could not emerge - the girl's account also alludes to

another way in which not telling the truth led to distrust. The girl talked about not wanting to lie to someone whom she trusted. She was aware that close, trusting relationships held the expectation that the truth would be told. She felt that people would think badly of her if they discovered that she had been lying. As a result, she *"found it hard to trust people"* and felt that it was simply better not to tell them her 'story'. Therefore, in her relationships she tended to be secretive and reticent, which, in turn, may have left people suspicious of her. She perceived it to be safer not to become close to someone than to take the risk that a close friend would find out about a lie.[12] Thus, because she could not tell the truth, she felt it was necessary to avoid building trusting relationships with those around her.

It is possible that this reason for not trusting was present for other young people as well, but that they felt unable to say so in the research interview, possibly as a result of their distrust of me. In circumstances where young people do not feel able to tell the truth, it is likely that they find it difficult to trust. People will become suspicious of them if they are economical with information about themselves. On their part, the young people may not invest time in developing trusting relationships, as they feel unable to give an honest account of their lives. Thus, their relationships will often be characterised by distrust, a distrust that they perceive to be purposeful given their circumstances.

Not Knowing People Well

Many of the participants attributed their distrust to the fact that they did not know people well or for a long enough period of time. People they knew in Ireland were compared to people they had known at home all their lives, such as family members and friends with whom they had grown up. Moving to Ireland meant that there was a discontinuity in their relationships. In general, the people to whom they had once been close were no longer available to them. Some of the participants had only been in Ireland for a number of weeks at the time of interview and so they had not had an opportunity to get to know anyone well. Some had been in Ireland for a number of years, but often still felt they did not know people well enough to trust them. Others, however, reported that

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[12] Elsewhere, this girl talked about wanting to be friendly with Irish people instead of people of her own nationality. She said: *"I would prefer someone I don't understand"*. In essence, my conversation with her suggested that she would rather have a superficial relationship with an Irish person whom she did not properly understand on a cultural level, than to have a deeper relationship with someone from her own country. In explaining this, she said that all she wanted was to be *"just happy"*. If she was friendly with an Irish person, her lack of understanding of him or her would mean that she would not know if the person was deceiving her. On the other hand, if she was friendly with a person of her own culture, she would properly understand the nuances of his or her behaviour, and so she felt she would be at risk of feeling hurt over things that might happen in the relationship. Her lack of trust in people meant that a superficial relationship seemed less risky.

trusting had only been an issue for them when they first arrived in Ireland. The suggestion seemed to be that, as time passed, trust developed because they grew to know people better.

Again, from discussions about not knowing people well enough to trust them, the suggestion seemed to be that trust was not an essential ingredient in friendship. A male participant, who had been in Ireland for two years at the time of interview, talked about his difficulties in trusting. His narrative suggested that he was well integrated into Irish society. His friends were mainly Irish young people. He related his difficulties in trusting them to the fact that his friends *"talk too much"*. He felt, however, that these young people probably trusted each other as they had grown up together. The implication seemed to be that if he knew his friends over a longer period of time, he would be able to trust them more easily. Similarly, a female participant, who had been in Ireland for over two years, felt that she did not trust her friends well enough to be able to talk to them when she had problems. This contrasted with her life at home, where she had been able to confide in her friends. In Ireland, she felt that she did not know her friends *"right from time"* and that she did not *"know the kind of person they are"*.

Frequently, the young people talked about their concerted efforts to get to know people properly. Whilst they often made friends quickly, 'best friends' or friends who could be trusted, usually only emerged with time. One boy talked about taking time to get to know people before deciding whom to trust. He had previously spent a number of years living on the streets in an African country before being brought to Ireland. He had learnt to become very self-reliant during his times on the streets, as he had grown up without strong attachments in his life. He talked about it taking him a long time to trust people.

> ***YP:*** *Yeah, I need time. For me I can take a long time. It doesn't matter ... it doesn't matter whether I'm die (?) without a friend or what, but I like to take time[...] to know, to get to know somebody. [...]*
> ***M:*** *And ehm, do you think, is there any reason why it takes you a long time to get to know people, or ...*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. Because I need to trust somebody. That's why.*
> ***M:*** *Ok. But do you think, is there a reason why it takes you a long time to trust people? Or do you think that's like everyone else?*
> ***YP:*** *I don't think it's like everyone else 'cos ... It's what, what, it's what's inside me and it's what I feel and it's what, is who I am.*

When I asked him who his best friends were in Ireland, he emphasised that he needed to *"study"* people before deciding on who could be his best friend:

> *Ehh, like, like now, in this situation I can't say who is my best friend, my best friend. 'cos first you have to know who is a good friend and who is a bad friend. A bad friend can be a, an African student. It can be an Irish. So, you have to first to study them. To know who is, who can be your best friend, or, you know, who you can talk ...*

Some of the participants related not knowing people to cultural differences. Several of them mentioned how it was difficult to get to know people properly when they came from a very

different religious or ethnic group. In essence, these participants felt that they lacked the necessary cultural knowledge to be able to know whom to trust and whom not to trust in the Irish context. As one girl suggested, they did not have the same *"sense"* of Irish people that they had of people of their own ethnicity. This girl talked about knowing *"how people act back home"*, but not having this knowledge in relation to Irish people. However, with time, she learnt to trust the family with whom she lived:

> *[W]e all know that people from your country, you know, you know, you have a sense, an idea of who, how people act back home. But here you don't know. So, you don't know. When you say something, you just have to watch what you say. Just be careful (?) [...] And, like, the people I stay with, I've learned to trust them 'cos I've been staying with them for ages.*

Although at times the young people found it difficult to trust people because they were of a different culture or background, in general, being of a different ethnicity or nationality was not suggested as a reason for distrusting. Several of the participants talked about the fact that sometimes they distrusted certain people of their own ethnicity or religion, and trusted certain Irish people. Often, when the young people got to know Irish people, they were able to begin to trust them with time. Living with Irish people - either in foster families or in residential homes - helped the young people to know Irish people better. One African girl felt that she was able to trust white people because she had been living with an Irish family since arriving in Ireland. Therefore, where a person was from did not influence whether or not she trusted them:

> *It doesn't matter where they're from. You just look at ... them. The way they are. The way they talk to you and ... I don't know how to explain it but you just look at the person. [...] To try to figure out whether you can trust them.*

Overall then, many of the young people found it hard to trust because they did not know people well and so could not form close relationships with them. At times, because of past experiences, the young people had difficulties trusting members of particular groups – such as people of a particular religion or nationality. However, in general, they did not generalise about their distrust. Instead, they simply stressed the importance of knowing people individually and 'figuring out' what they were like before beginning to trust them.

In summary, the multiple causes of distrust identified by the participants suggest that the aetiology of lack of trust is indeed varied (Mitchell, 1990). Past experiences, being accustomed to distrust, being distrusted by others, being unable to tell the truth, and not knowing people well, all emerged as significant causes of the young peoples' distrust of others. These reasons contribute to our understanding of why few unaccompanied minors have forged strong relationships in Ireland, often despite concerted efforts to do so. The young people's narratives also suggest that distrust served particular functions for the young people. As such, distrust was purposeful for them.

Concluding Comments

This chapter furthers our understanding of trust and distrust in the lives of refugees by going beyond the "rather bland and obvious finding that refugees ... are, on the whole, a distrusting group" (Kohli, 2004, p. 96). By discussing issues regarding trust and distrust with the young people, new insights into their circumstances and the nature of this distrust emerge. It becomes clear that, whilst the participants conceptualised trust in different ways, their understandings of the concept were broadly similar to 'Western' definitions of trust. They talked about having confidence in someone whom they trusted, and expecting him or her to be honest. Yet, whilst they seemed to consider 'trust' to be important, they did not perceive it to be an essential ingredient of friendship. Friends were often distrusted. So too were professionals. At times, when professionals were trusted, this seemed to emerge out of necessity rather than out of choice, with the young people perceiving it to be necessary to trust in order to receive help. Whilst some of the participants talked about not having difficulties trusting, these young people were the exceptions. Although distrust was rarely experienced in an absolute manner, most of the participants talked about only being able to trust certain people and only to a certain extent.

The participants described various causes of their distrust, various reasons why trust seemed to have been "placed on trial" (Daniel & Knudsen, 1995) for them. These reasons partially address the gap in our knowledge about the causes of distrust in the lives of refugees, as mentioned by Kohli (2004), as well as the gaps in our knowledge about the aetiology of distrust more generally. Some of the causes of distrust that were mentioned by the participants related to their pre-exile lives, whilst others related to their lives in Ireland. They mentioned difficult past experiences as well as experiences of being accustomed to distrust. They also described their present day experiences of not knowing people well and of feeling distrusted by those around them. In addition, for some, not being able to tell the truth led to difficulties in creating trusting relationships. These reasons were not described in a mutually exclusive manner. Instead, some of the participants mentioned several causes of their distrust rather than one particular reason.

Threaded through their narratives was the suggestion that distrust was something purposeful. Distrust helped the participants to deal with the challenges and changes with which they were faced, especially by increasing their sense of self-reliance and by minimising the risk of being hurt or betrayed. From the young people's descriptions of the causes of their distrust, it is evident that distrusting was often something that the participants decided to do, as a means of protecting themselves. Therefore, this again suggests that the participants were not simply passive victims of their circumstances. Instead, their sense of agency and capacity was clearly evident in their decisions to distrust. Through these decisions, the young people were better able to deal with their different and difficult life circumstances. Thus, distrust was another way of coping.

Yet, distrust existed within the boundaries of the human world. Whilst trusting people was usually seen to be difficult, the participants consistently talked about their trust in one particular being: God. Faced with isolation, differences, and the many other challenges of life in Ireland, God played an important part in their lives. In the absence of trusting human relationships, a close friendship with God provided the young people with continuity, comfort, and companionship. In chapter 8, the importance of God and religion in the lives of the participants is discussed. Firstly, however, chapter 7 puts the theme of religion in context by examining relevant literature.

Chapter 7: Religion and Unaccompanied Minors: A Review of Relevant Literature

Introduction

Religion is defined by Kenneth I. Pargament as "a process, a search for significance in ways related to the sacred" (1997, p. 32).[1] As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, participants in this study narrated a strong sense of trust in God, thus suggesting that the sacred played a key role in their search for significance in life. In the interviews, their religious beliefs and practices emerged as sources of immense strength, despite the fact that religion was not something I had intended to study. The flexible design of the research allowed this theme to be explored in more depth. In light of the unprecedented emergence of this theme, a review of the relevant literature was undertaken during fieldwork and following its completion.

Thus, before turning to chapter 8 where the young people's perspectives on religion will be presented, this chapter looks at pertinent literature and research related to the role of religion in the lives of unaccompanied minors. To begin with, levels of religiosity are discussed, particularly in relation to contemporary Irish society, in order to give a sense of the religious climate in which the participants were living. The chapter then outlines how the study of religion has tended to be neglected in psychology and the social sciences. From there, given that the young people in the study were all teenagers, the affect of religiosity on the lives of adolescents is outlined, in terms of its impact on health and social behaviour, and identity development. Then, because of the challenging circumstances faced by the young people, the role of religion in coping with adversity is considered, drawing mainly on the work of Pargament (1997). In the final section, the limited existing literature on religion in the lives of immigrants and refugees is reviewed. Together, these sections aim to throw light on the role that religion might play in the lives of unaccompanied minors living in Ireland, and on whether this role is likely to have a positive or negative impact on them as they negotiate the challenges and changes that they face.

The Religious Context

Before exploring the religious beliefs and practices of unaccompanied minors living in Ireland, it is important to have an understanding of the level of interest in religion within an international context and within Ireland. Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) observe that:

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[1] Although the terms religion and spirituality will be used interchangeably in this research, the differences between the two terms have frequently been highlighted. For a discussion of the definitional issues involved see Roehlkepartain et al. (2006).

> "Throughout history and across all societies, forms of spirituality have become part of human experience, and it has remained a robust force in life for both individuals and societies, despite numerous predictions of its demise" (p. 8).

Data from the *Gallup International Millennium Survey* (2000) lends evidence to this assertion. In the context of researching the importance of religion in the lives of participants from a range of different countries, the *Gallup Survey* is of particular interest. The survey was conducted in 60 countries at the eve of the new millennium. It found that the vast majority of people believed in God and considered themselves to be a part of some religion. Interesting geographical differences emerged, with the findings suggesting that people in West Africa and Latin America have a stronger faith that those living elsewhere. For instance, whilst 97 percent of West Africans said that God was very important in their personal life, only 48 percent of Europeans expressed similar sentiments. In addition, despite the evidence that most people have a belief in God, 48 percent of people living in Western Europe say they never attend church services. Again, this contrasted sharply with the West African situation, where nine out of ten respondents indicated that they go to church (Carballo, 2000).[2]

Another survey, the *World Values Survey, 1999-2001*, gives similar evidence. Of particular relevance to this current PhD study are the findings regarding Nigeria. Of the 18-24 year old Nigerians who responded to the survey, 93.4% said that religion was very important in their lives, 99.7% said that they believed in God, and 84.4% said that God was very important in their lives (Lippman & Keith, 2006).

These findings suggest that unaccompanied minors moving from countries in West Africa to countries in Western Europe, might be faced with a very different macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), one in which religion is not of central importance. Yet, Ireland has frequently been depicted as a very religious country. Research – even in recent times - suggests that this depiction is quite accurate. In the 2002 census, 88.4% of the population recorded that they were Roman Catholic (CSO, 2004), although a significant rise in the number of Muslim and Orthodox adherents was noted, with this rise being attributed largely to increased immigration. This rise in other religions occurs alongside a decline in the role of the Catholic Church which, according to Inglis (2000) had previously operated as the "guardian angel of civil society" (p. 55). However, in recent years the rapid modernisation of Irish society has frequently been blamed for declining religiosity. Tovey & Share (2003) refer to the tendency within sociological circles to depict the development of Irish religion as a move "from a 'traditional', highly devotional society to a 'modern', increasingly

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[2] The survey also found that those with a higher level of education are less religious than people with lower educational levels. Similarly, women were found to be more religious than men and the elderly were found to be more religious than young people.

secularised one" (p. 389) but they highlight the fact that this "modernisation approach" (p. 389) may represent an oversimplification of the process.[3]

Several surveys suggest that religious faith has by no means disappeared within the Irish context, despite a decline in church attendance in recent years. Drawing on data from a variety of sources, Fahey (2002) found that between the years 1980 and 2000, weekly Mass attendance by Catholics had declined from around 87% to 63%. However, this figure is still high by European standards. Despite the "scaling down of formal religious practice, the vast majority of people continue to believe in God [and] to consider themselves religious" (Fahey, 2002, p. 46), with research suggesting a reluctance by people to declare themselves as atheists or to say that they never pray (Fahey, 2002). In a survey by Mac Gréil (1996), 85% of participants said that they felt either 'extremely' or 'somewhat' close to God. Data from the *1999-2000 European Values Survey* (EVS)[4] showed that 96% of Irish respondents expressed a belief in God. In addition, 76% of respondents indicated that they drew comfort and strength from religion, thus suggesting that religion represented a way of coping with difficult situations (Cassidy, 2002). Cassidy (2002) summarises:

> "The statistics do not say that the Irish are not religious but rather that when it comes to giving expression to their beliefs they increasingly prefer a private to a communal setting" (p. 29).

Despite popular opinion suggesting the contrary, the evidence in relation to Irish teenagers and young people suggests that religious faith is also relatively important in their lives. Although little research has looked specifically at the levels of religiosity amongst Irish adolescents, some studies have included 'young' participants, generally older teenagers and people in their early twenties. Data from the *1999-2000 EVS* showed that lower attendance at Mass was correlated with youth and urban dwelling: young people and those living in urban areas such as Dublin were less likely to attend mass (Fahey, 2002). Yet, in the same survey 54% of 18-26 year olds said that they drew comfort and strength from their religion. More recently, an Irish Times/TNS MRBI opinion poll conducted in January 2005 found that belief in God was reported to be weakest amongst the 18-24 age group (Brennock, 2005). Yet the figure for this group was still high with 78% expressing belief in God.[5] These Irish studies mirror similar research, undertaken in an American context, that has

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[3] Similarly, writing in an American context and drawing on the work of Stark & Bainbridge (1996), Hirschman (2004) asserts that "although the obituary for religion in modern societies has been written many times, there is very little support for the secularisation hypothesis that religion will disappear with modernity" (p. 1207).

[4] The European Values Survey involved face-to-face interviews with adult citizens, aged 18 or over.

[5] Some differences as regards gender and geographical location were found, with higher percentages of women and rural dwellers tending to believe. Ninety-one percent of women believed, compared to 83% of men, and 90% of rural dwellers believed compared to 85% or urban dwellers. However, no analysis of ethnic group differences was reported.

found religion to be important to adolescents. For instance, Gallup & Bezilla (1992) reported that 76% of 16-17 year old American adolescents believe in a personal God and that 74% pray at least occasionally.

Whilst most of the sparse information available about religious beliefs amongst Irish young people comes from quantitative data, one qualitative study by Tuohy & Cairns (2000) is worthy of note. The researchers looked at the religious values and attitudes of Irish young people and undertook interviews with 159 seventeen to twenty-four year olds. The project attempted to understand faith development of young people at the turn of the millennium. However, the sample of young people used was not representative of all young people, as the researchers were seeking to understand the positive dimension of religious affiliation. Therefore, they focused particularly on those who were "positively disposed" (Tuohy & Cairns, 2000, p. 20) so as to see what worked. Nevertheless, the findings give insight into the importance that some Irish young people attach to their faith. The narratives of the participants suggested that although many of them had drifted away from church affiliation, they frequently had a deep and influential relationship with God, leading the authors to comment:

> "...when adults fail to see a religious dimension in young people, or when young people themselves deny its existence, what may be missing is the external edifice of particular behaviours rather than the foundation of intrinsic values" (Tuohy & Cairns, 2000, p. 2).

In general, amongst the participants, there was "a strong reaction against the institutional model of Church" (Tuohy & Cairns, 2000, p. 58), thus suggesting a situation of "believing without belonging" as described by Davie (2000) in relation to the British context. [6]

In summary, international studies suggest that people from West Africa and Latin America have a stronger faith than those living elsewhere. However, despite increased secularisation in recent years, research indicates that almost all Irish people continue to believe in God and that a significant number engage in private prayer and rely on God for support. While younger Irish people are less religious than their older counterparts and generally do not attend religious services on a frequent basis, most still believe in God. Hence, although unaccompanied minors arriving in Ireland may encounter a religious landscape that is very different from that of their countries of origin, they are nonetheless beginning their new life in a country where, according to research

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[6] Davie (2000) reflects on the contradictions that are evident in social research data measuring religious life in modern Britain. On the one hand, the data suggests a persistence of religious beliefs in Britain and throughout Western Europe. On the other hand, research indicates an evident decline in religious orthodoxy and religious participation – although Ireland is noted as an exception in this regard. Davie describes the simultaneous persistence of beliefs and decline in religious participation as a situation of "believing without belonging" (Davie, 2000, p. 147).

evidence, "belief in God is extremely strong [...], in spite of rapid modernisation, immigration, higher standards of living and the declining influence of the Catholic Church" (Kennedy, 2005).

Religion: A Neglected Area of Study

The scholarly literature has not reflected the importance that people attach to their religious faith. Instead, there has been a tendency to neglect issues of religion and spirituality in the social sciences generally, and, more specifically, in the study of adolescence (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Benson et al., 2003; Donelson, 1999; Furrow & Wagener, 2003, Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). This tendency in academic circles has been mirrored by a propensity for professionals – such as social workers and psychologists - to disregard the spiritual aspects of people's lives. Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) attribute the "historic marginalization" of religion and spirituality in the social sciences to "the academy's biases about religion, [including] the pervasive personal rejection of religion by social scientists" (p. 3).[7] Although psychologists in the nineteenth century devoted considerable time to the study of the psychology of religion, a decline in interest occurred in the 20th century, resulting in the topic becoming "largely dormant" from about 1930 to 1960 (Donelson, 1999, p. 188). The emphasis on a scientific approach and Freud's psychoanalytic ideas resulted in the discipline distancing itself from religion, and, at times, being hostile towards it. Similarly, whilst professional social work had its roots in religion, with much of early social work practice emerging from the work of charitable religious organisations (Kearney & Skehill, 2005), Sahlein (2002) has referred to the "climate of discomfort surrounding religion in the field of social work" (p. 381). Patel et al. (1998) assert that "[t]he profession's struggle to give its activities a solid rationale has in its wake de-emphasised religion and its relevance to social work practice" (p.9). Essentially, many practitioners came to view religion and spirituality as "irrelevant, pathological or even dangerous" (Moss, 2005, p. 22).

In relation to the discipline of psychology, Donelson (1999) reported a renewed interest in religion from the 1960s. This interest has been particularly evident in areas of psychology pertaining to adolescence, and largely amongst North American researchers. In 1999, the *Journal of Adolescence*

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[7] For instance, Donelson (1999) suggests that "[p]sychologists' view of science may reflect their view of themselves, and influence their choice of what to study and how to study it" (p. 191). He cites studies by Leuba (1921, 1934), Stark (1963), and Beit-Hallahmi (1977) that show psychologists, social scientists, and academics to be less religious than most of the American population. This might mean that those most likely to study the psychology of religion are not in touch with society at large (Anderson, 1988). Also, according to Lehman and Shriver's (1968) scholarly distance hypothesis, "the extent to which an academic discipline considers religion a legitimate area of study is inversely related to the proximity of the discipline to the human beings involved in religion" (Donelson, 1999, p. 191). Therefore, physicists are expected to be more religious than social scientists, and, according to Donelson (1999), this has been found to be the case. The personal relevance hypothesis suggested by Beit-Hallahmi (1977) is related to this idea. If people do not see religion as relevant to their own lives they are not likely to see it as relevant in the lives of others.

published a special edition exploring religion in the context of adolescent development. In the *Foreword* to the edition Fowler (1999) commented on the articles included in the edition:

> "... it appears to me that the new millennium is bringing, among other things, strong evidence for the vitality and increased significance of research on adolescence, and on the central role and changing shapes of adolescent faith and religion" (p. 183).[8]

Likewise, in social work, a renewed interest in religion and spirituality has emerged - mainly in North America - leading Bullis (1996) to assert that social workers and other mental health professionals "are willing, even eager, to discuss spirituality and to apply it to social work assessments and interventions" (p. 1). As a result of this renewed interest a number of studies have addressed the religious/spiritual dimension of social work practice (e.g. Furman et al., 2004; Sheridan et al., 1992; Sheridan et al., 1994; Sheridan & Hemert, 1999). In Furman et al.'s (2004) study in the UK, the majority of social workers expressed the belief that spirituality was an integral part of being human. However, most had received little input on religious/spiritual issues in their social work training and as a whole they "appeared to be ambivalent" (Furman et al., 2004, p. 783) about the integration of religion/spirituality into social work practice. While many of the respondents were concerned about the possibility of proselytising by social workers, Furman et al. (2004) drew attention to another type of proselytisation:

> "... one that minimizes or ignores the religious and spiritual dimensions of a client's lived experience ... What is considered unethical today may be a refusal to deal with the importance of religion and spirituality in many clients' lives" (p. 788).

Similarly, Hodge (2003) criticises "advocates of a 'faithblind' profession" (p. 349).[9] Also, in developmental psychology, Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) assert that when spiritual development is marginalised by human development, "a great disservice" (p. 11) is done to young people. Indeed, studies by Canda (2002) and by Privette et al. (1994) show that clients want their personal spiritual beliefs and values "integrated into the clinical dialogue" (Hodge, 2001, p. 349).

In summary, whilst most people – both in Ireland and elsewhere – express a belief in God, both academics and practitioners in the psychology and social work arenas have often neglected the religious and spiritual aspects of people's lives. Despite this relative neglect, a body of relevant literature has emerged, albeit mainly of American origin. Literature pertaining to religion's impact

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[8] And, indeed, in the new millennium two special editions of *Applied Developmental Science* - in 2003 and in 2004 - have dealt, respectively, with the issues of identity and transcendence in adolescence and with adolescent spirituality and religiosity.

[9] Furthermore, Hemert (1994a) asserts that clients are further oppressed when their religious beliefs are treated as invisible or irrelevant. As such, she argues, this compromises the value of respect for client self-determination.

on identity, health and social behaviour will now be discussed, followed by literature about religious coping.

The Impact of Religion on Identity, Health, and Social Behaviour

Given the evidence that religion appears to be important in the lives of many people across time and place, it is pertinent to address the question of whether or not religion has a positive impact on adolescents. Is religiosity associated with good outcomes for adolescents? Or is interest in religion essentially maladaptive or even pathological? These questions will be examined by looking at religion's influence on (a) identity and (b) health and social behaviour.

Identity

Furrow et al. (2004) identify religion and spirituality as "cogent sources of developmental influence" (p. 17). One of the key developmental tasks of adolescence is the resolution of identity, which, in turn, plays a key role in promoting adolescent well-being (King & Benson, 2006). Religion has a direct influence on the identity development process, and so, through this influence, religion can contribute to well-being. Markstrom-Adams et al. (1994) offer a useful summary of the functions of religiosity in adolescent development, as identified by Erikson (1964, 1965):

> "First ... youths are attracted to ideologies, such as religion, that offer ultimate answers for the larger designs of life. Thus, accepting explanations for some of the broader issues of existence, adolescents can direct their efforts to less complex and more day-to-day issues. Second, religion and other institutions provide a historical orientation to adolescents that facilitates a confluence of individual and societal history. This process, in turn, confirms identity and enhances one's feelings of importance and purpose in life (Erikson, 1965). Third, as social groups, religions serve as buffers against alienation by promoting belongingness through the use of rites and rituals, faith, and affirmative dogma" (pp. 455-456).

Influenced by the work of Erikson, King (2003) suggests the use of a three-dimensional framework to examine religion as a context for identity development. She advocates that the ideological, the social and the spiritual contexts of religion should be considered:

> "... identity development that emerges out of the ideological, social and spiritual context embedded within religion is an identity that transcends the self and can promote a sense of commitment that not only fosters individual well-being but promotes the good of society as well" (p. 197).

- Firstly, as an ideological context, religion provides adolescents with beliefs, moral codes, and values. From these, adolescents can form a personal belief system or worldview, which represents a key element of a young person's sense of uniqueness and, hence, is an important aspect of his or her identity. This belief system can exist within a congregation where a consistent ideological framework is evident.

- Secondly, as a social context, religion provides opportunities for adolescents to live out

their ideological beliefs in their everyday behaviour, thus further enhancing their sense of uniqueness. As a social context, religion also provides opportunities to promote belongingness through the formation of trusting relationships at an intergenerational level and at a peer level, with people who share common goals, beliefs, and values. Social experiences, such as opportunities for leadership and volunteering, are also provided by the religious social context and adolescents can develop their sense of self from these (King, 2003; King & Benson, 2006; Smith, 2003a).

- Thirdly, King (2003) views religion as a spiritual context for identity development. In being concerned with the transcendent, and in assuming that there is more to life than what we can see or fully understand, religions address questions about the meaning of life (King & Benson, 2006). Within this context adolescents transcend the self in their search for meaning and belonging. This is essential for identity development. This search provides answers to the larger questions of life, and provides a sense of belonging to God and being in relationship with God. Through the spiritual context of religion, the uniqueness and inherent value of each person is recognised but the sense of belonging to a community of believers with a historic tradition is also evident. Hence, young people have a sense of "being a part of something greater than themselves" (King, 2003, p. 200).[10]

Taken together, the ideological, spiritual and social aspects of religion create a distinct environment for identity exploration and commitment. Consequently, King & Benson (2006) theorise that "religion can function as a resource in positive identity development among youth" (p. 391). Despite a dearth of research pertaining to identity and religion amongst adolescents, the findings of a number of recent studies have offered support to this theory. For instance, in a study concerning identity status, religious orientation, and prejudice amongst undergraduate students, Fulton (1997) found that intrinsic forms of religiosity were more likely to be linked with the status of identity achievement than were extrinsic forms of religiosity.[11] Elsewhere, Youniss et al. (1999) looked at religion, community service, and identity in American youth. Through their review of data from nationally representative samples in the United States, they found that:

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[10] This sense of belonging can be promoted through rituals. For instance, in the Islamic faith, 'salat' or prayer is one of the most important religious practices. By facing Mecca in prayer at five specific times of the day, Muslim all over the world experience themselves in solidarity with other Muslims (King, 2003; King & Benson, 2006).

[11] Intrinsically religious individuals are those who have internalised their religion, and who pursue it as an end in itself, rather than as a means to some other end. Extrinsically religious individuals are those who use religion as a means to some other end (Fulton, 1997, drawing on the work of Allport, 1950, 1954).

> "... many contemporary youth who take religion seriously are vibrantly engaged in their schooling, in the betterment of communities, and the development of identities which presage healthy lives" (p. 243).

The authors identify religion as one of several resources that supports the identity process, and advocate viewing religion from a developmental perspective.

Although religion offers "a potentially fertile environment to nurture [a] sense of prosocial identity" (King & Benson, 2006, p. 386), religion can also impact on identity development in a negative way (King, 2003). As has been mentioned previously, identity refers to "an individual's sense of uniqueness and belonging" (Muzi, 2000, p. 519), thus suggesting that both the self and other play a significant role in identity cohesion. While religion, at its best, can offer both of these elements, religion is not always at its best (King, 2003). For instance, at times religion can emphasise the faith community and the concept of belonging to the neglect of the individual, and at other times the individual can be emphasised to the neglect of the faith community. When either of these occurs, the balance between having a sense of uniqueness and belonging is lost, and "identity development can be thwarted" (King, 2003, p. 202).

Health and Social Behaviour

Partially arising from religion's impact on identity, religion also influences young people's health and social behaviour, and frequently in a positive way. In their review of the literature on religion in the lives of American Adolescents, Regnerus et al. (2003) suggest that "[r]eligion's relationship with health and social behavior [...] is often minimized or ignored" (p. 7).[12] Of the studies that have been conducted, some have suggested that religion has either no effect or a negative effect on the health and social behaviour of adolescents. However, a growing number of researchers have written about the positive and enabling impact of religion. Regnerus et al. (2003) point to the multiple positive effects that religious beliefs and involvement can have on American young people. Drawing on a multitude of studies, including those by Wallace & Foreman (1998), Donahue & Benson (1995), Cochran et al. (1994), and Bearman & Bruckner (2001), Regnerus et al. (2003) found that religious beliefs and involvement frequently had a positive impact on young people, particularly in the areas of physical and emotional health, education, moral development, volunteerism, delinquency, alcohol, tobacco and drug use, sex, and family well-being.[13]

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[12] Most of the literature in this area has been written by American academics and has involved American young people. This raises issues about the relevance of the findings of these studies to other cultural contexts. However, given that little non-American research is available, these studies are still of importance.

[13] In the contexts of academic discussions of the 'positive' and 'negative' effects of religion, the terms 'positive' and 'negative' are ill-defined. What one person might perceive to be a positive impact, might be considered negative by someone else. Smith (2003a) draws attention to this point, stating that the term 'pro-social' is often used to characterize the effects of religion on behaviour. He describes this term as "nebulous"

In relation to the influence of religion on the physical and emotional health of adolescents, only a very limited number of studies have been conducted. Generally, the evidence points to the positive impact - albeit sometimes modest - that religion has on long-term physical well-being. Frequently, this impact is mediated by a healthy lifestyle (Wallace & Foreman, 1998). In terms of emotional health, studies have often looked at the impact of religion on various aspects of self-concept and the results suggest that the relationship between religiosity and self-esteem, for instance, is by no means straightforward. It may be that the nature of the relationship is dependent on the type of religiosity involved. In a study by Francis et al. (2001) of 12-15 year olds in Scotland, the authors found that the relationship depended on the person's psychological understanding of God. Viewing God as loving and forgiving was associated with a more positive image of self, whilst viewing God as cruel and punishing was associated with a more negative image of self. Overall though, Bridges & Moore (2002) point to the relatively weak evidence that being religious has a positive effect on adolescents' mental health and personality. However, they suggest that there is "no indication in research studies of negative effects of religiosity on any aspects of well-being" (p.3, emphasis added).

In terms of the effect of religiosity on social behaviour, a number of studies have highlighted the modest positive role played by religion in a number of different realms (Regnerus et al., 2003). For instance, drawing on research related to adolescent drug use and adolescent sexual activity, Wallace & Foreman (1999) suggest that religion plays an important if not central role in understanding why some young people are less likely to engage in these health-compromising behaviours than others. In relation to alcohol use, Francis et al. (2005) undertook a study of 16-18 year olds in Northern Ireland. The researchers found that those who were more religious had a more prohibitive attitude towards alcohol, and that this could not be accounted for by personality differences (Francis et al., 2005). Other evidence of the positive role played by religion – this time in relation to volunteering – is found in the study by Youniss et al. (1999) (mentioned above). The authors found that young people who are religious are more likely to be involved in volunteering activities. Finally, Chandy et al. (1996) conducted research in the United States with adolescents who had a history of sexual abuse or parental alcohol misuse. They found that religiosity served as the key element of resilience, protecting adolescents from negative outcomes. Respondents who

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(p. 18), stating that it involves a normative judgement. This, he feels, is problematic, "insofar as what are considered good and bad for youth are to some degree dependent on larger moral frameworks defining what constitutes the good, the right, and the true in human life more generally" (p. 18). As an example, he discusses the tendency of religion to curb adolescent sexual activity. This may or may not be seen as something 'pro-social', depending on one's larger view of sexuality. Whilst considering this, it seems that, in the literature concerning the effects of religion on adolescents, 'positive' is interpreted in terms of drinking less, not smoking, not taking drugs, not engaging in unlawful behaviour, feeling satisfied with life, taking care of one's physical health, getting a good education, and becoming sexually active at an older age as well as having fewer sexual partners.

perceived themselves to be religious or spiritual showed lower rates of adverse outcomes such as poor school performance, suicidal behaviour and ideation, disordered eating, and drug use. In conclusion, the authors argue that a "sense of spiritual connectedness [...] may be indicative of the sense of meaning and coherence in their lives which serves as a protective factor" (Chandy et al., 1996, p. 427).

Whilst religion may frequently result in 'pro-social' behaviour, and in positive health outcomes, it should be acknowledged that religion does not always have a constructive effect on the lives of young people (Smith, 2003a). At times religion can have pathological outcomes (Wagener & Malony, 2006). In an interesting exploration of the costs and benefits of religiousness, Pargament (2002) suggests that the answer to the question of whether religion is helpful or harmful is that "it depends" (p. 169). He proceeds to argue that the efficacy of religion varies depending on a number of different factors, including the kind of religion involved. Religion that is internalised, intrinsically motivated, and based on a secure relationship with God, is positively linked to well-being. In addition, the efficacy of religion varies depending on the person, the context, and the situation, and is also influenced by the criteria of well being that are used and by the degree to which religion is integrated well into a person's life. Thus, no simplistic explanations are appropriate to discussions regarding the effects of religion.

Whether the effects of religion are positive or negative in nature, it is important to have an understanding of the mechanisms through which religion influences behaviour. Wallace & Williams (1997) view religion as a secondary socialisation influence (like peers and school) which operates either "cooperatively, interactively, or antagonistically" (p. 459) with the primary socialisation influence, the family. Frequently, religion shapes the primary socialisation of children within their families. For instance, parents may tell their children biblical stories in order to teach them a particular value. However, this influence of religion on the family also has an impact on the other secondary socialisation influences. For example, because of religion, parents may decide to send their children to a school of a particular denomination. Through such socialisation, religion has an indirect influence on various socialisation mechanisms, including social control, social support, and the formation of values and identity. In turn, these mechanisms impact on the health and social behaviour of adolescents.

The work of Smith (2003a) – again in the American context - adopts a somewhat different perspective. In looking at the mechanisms through which religion influences behaviour, and in highlighting the multidimensional nature of religion, he emphasises that the effects of religion cannot always be reduced to non-religious explanations, such as social control or ethnicity:

> "... religion exerts pro-social influences in the lives of youth not by happenstance or generic social process, but precisely as an outcome of American religions' particular

theological, moral, and spiritual commitments" (p. 20).

The author looks at "how the distinctively religious dimensions of the phenomenon 'religion' exert significant social influences" (p. 19). He believes that religion itself motivates people to act in certain ways, through three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension is the moral order that religion promotes, the second dimension includes the learned competencies that religion gives to young people, and the third dimension involves the social and organisational ties that people develop through religion.[14] [15] Although this approach still suggests that religion is influential through particular pathways, the crucial point in Smith's argument is that, primarily, religion impacts on the life choices and behaviours of adolescents because of the nature of religion itself, rather than because of secondary social processes. As Regnerus et al. (2003) state, Smith (2003a) suggests that "religious belief and experience are the stuff that prompt youth to act" (p. 45).[16] [17]

No matter what the pathways are through which religion impacts on health and social behaviour, in considering the effect of religion on adolescents it is important to take contextual and cultural circumstances into account. Frequently, American studies have highlighted the fact that evidence regarding the effects of religion can vary depending on the ethnicity of the participants. Religion has been found to have a different impact on black and on white youth. For instance, as regards sexual activity, Regnerus et al. (2003) draw on studies by Bearman & Bruckner (2001), Cooksey et al. (1996), Miller et al. (1997), Studer & Thornton (1987), and Thornton & Camburn (1989), to suggest that religion has quite a strong influence on sexual behaviour, with its influence being

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[14] Smith (2003a) suggests that, encompassed with these three dimensions, are nine specific factors that exert religious influence. They are (1) moral directives, (2) spiritual experiences, (3) role models, (4) community and leadership skills, (5) coping skills, (6) cultural capital, (7) social capital, (8) network closure, and (9) extra-community links. He concludes that "the more that these nine influences are present to youth in their religious organizations, and the more youth learn, embrace, and capitalise on these resources, the more religion will positively and constructively influence outcomes in American youth's lives" (p. 27). See Smith (2003a), Smith (2003a) and Smith (2003b) for more detailed discussions.

[15] Often, in studies that show the positive effects of religiosity on social behaviour, researchers have drawn attention to the mediating influence of peers and parents. For example, King & Furrow (2004) conducted a study of 735 urban young people in Los Angelus and drew on social capital theory to explore the influence of religion on moral outcomes. They found that "the influences of religious importance and participation on moral outcomes are mediated through trusting interaction with adults, friends, and parents who share similar views of the world" (p. 709).

[16] Drawing on the work of Smith (2003a), amongst others, King & Benson (2006) discuss how developmental resources mediate the constructive influence of religion. They describe how the conceptual frameworks of (a) developmental assets and (b) social capital have been used to understand these resources. Developmental assets are the internal and external resources that serve as the building blocks of development. They include positive values, social competencies, and positive identity, amongst other things, and religious contexts are seen to offer these assets. The social capital perspective suggests that the relationships available in religious contexts have a positive impact on young people, particularly as they are often of a trustworthy and intergenerational nature.

[17] In addition, Pargament (2002) warns against reducing religion into something exclusively psychological, social, or physical. He suggests that some of the effects of religion on well-being may be direct.

protective in nature, resulting in lower levels of sexual activity. However, the positive influence of religion on black youth is not as evident as is its influence on white youth. On average, black youth are more religious than their white counterparts, yet studies have consistently found that they become sexually active at an earlier age (Bearman & Brückner, 2001; Benson et al., 1989; Ku et al., 1993; Marsiglio & Mott, 1986).[18] Given these ethnic differences within the American context, one would expect that cross-nationally, differences would be even more obvious. However, there is a significant dearth of cross-cultural research pertaining to religion, spirituality and adolescence, as has been mentioned by numerous authors (e.g. King & Benson, 2006; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). In addition, Bridges & Moore (2002) point to the lack of research on non-Western religions, and highlight the need for studies that take ethnicity, gender and other characteristics of adolescents into account.

In summary, whilst acknowledging that religiosity can lead to negative developmental outcomes, sufficient evidence exists to suggest that it is very possible that religion – frequently mediated through different mechanisms - will have a positive impact on adolescent identity, health, and social behaviour. Bridges & Moore (2002) state:

> "Overall, research on religiosity and well-being in childhood and adolescence indicates small to moderate but generally consistent associations between religious upbringing and risk-taking and with positive social and emotional functioning" (p.5).

Similarly, Regnerus and his colleagues (2003) assert that:

> "Religion can vary in the lives of teenagers from a compulsory hour-per-week period of intense boredom to the setting that sprouts an entire network of friends to an all-encompassing lifeworld of belief, behaviors and ritual practices" (p. 47).

Whilst the evidence of the enabling influence of religion on American and other Western adolescents cannot be assumed to apply to unaccompanied minors, the research suggests that it is likely that religion will have some positive impact on the health and social behaviour of these young people. Thus, this underscores the importance of not ignoring religion as a potentially positive resource in their lives. In particular, the coping resources associated with religion may act as influentially positive mediators in promoting well being for this group of adolescents.

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[18] Mattis et al. (2006) criticise the tendency of researchers in the United States to focus on 'race' rather than on ethnicity and culture, when attending to religious and spiritual development in the lives of young people. In particular, they assert that race is not a universally meaningful social construct, with few non-Western communities using race as a way of organising the social world. Furthermore, they argue, studies that use race "[fail] to unpack the complexities associated with lumping vast and disparate groups of people under discrete racial categories that are based on similarities in phenotype (e.g. skin colour, hair texture)" (p. 285). See Mattis et al. (2006) for a further discussion of these issues, and for a general discussion of ethnicity, culture, and spiritual development.

Religion: A Coping Resource

> "The prince of darkness may be a gentleman, as we are told he is, but whatever the god of earth and heaven is, he can surely be no gentleman. His menial services are needed in the dust of our human trials, even more than his dignity is needed in the empyrean" (James, 1975, p. 40).

In the coping literature, the importance of including religion in the study of coping has been emphasised by eminent researchers such as Lazarus & Folkman (1984). Yet the potential role of religion as a coping strategy has often been ignored in studies of coping. However, in recent years, the work of Pargament and his colleagues has led to increased interest in the religious coping arena. In his book *The Psychology of Religion and Coping,* Pargament (1997) draws on his own research and on the research of others to provide an overview of the theory, research and practice involved in religious coping. Drawing on his definitions of religion and of coping, he depicts religious coping as the introduction of the sacred in an individual's search for significance during times of stress.[19] He suggests that to neglect the religious dimension of coping is to have an incomplete understanding of how a person copes with a stressful situation.[20] Central to his approach is the diversity of the religion-coping connection: "the many faces of religion in coping" (p. 163). Whilst Pargament's theory of religious coping is based predominately on research with adults, his work provides a strong theoretical base from which to examine religious coping amongst children and young people (Mahoney et al., 2006), including unaccompanied minors.

The Extent of Religious Coping

Despite the fact that research frequently ignores the role played by religion in the coping process, the existing evidence suggests that many people deal with stressful situations by turning to religion. Whilst some people never use religion as a way of coping, for others it "looms large" (Pargament, 1997, p. 137) amidst their coping resources. Predominantly, studies have concentrated on how people include religion in their efforts to cope with health-related stressors. Frequently, these studies have found that religious coping is an important resource that is used. For instance, in a qualitative UK study of 63 older people coping with chronic pain, Sofaer et al. (2005) found that praying was frequently utilised as a way of seeking comfort and consolation. Apart from its relevance to health-related stressors, research has shown that religious coping is used in other

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[19] Pargament (1997) describes religion as "the search for significance in ways related to the sacred" (p. 32) and coping as "the search for significance in times of stress" (p. 90).

[20] Pargament (1997) is careful, however, not to reduce religion simply to a matter of coping, nor to reduce coping simply to a matter of religion. Although religion and psychology start from different worldviews – psychology helps people to be more in control of their lives and religion helps people to accept what is out of their control – Pargament contends that there is a lot to be gained by the interaction of the two disciplines with one another: "The psychology of religion and coping can weave a respect for the possible together with an appreciation for the futile" (Pargament, 1997, p. 9).

situations as well. In a study by Smith et al. (2000), religious coping played an important role for people affected by a devastating flood in the Midwest of the United States, a flood in which fifty people were killed and hundreds of thousands of people lost their homes and their jobs. Elsewhere, in a study by Fabricatore et al. (2000), undergraduate students in the United States found their personal spirituality useful in coping with a variety of difficult life situations, some of which were related to school, and some of which were not. Other studies, which will be examined more closely later, have shown that immigrant groups have utilised religious coping in dealing with their stressful circumstances (e.g. Ai et al., 1999; McMichael, 2002).

Despite the prevalence of religious coping, religion is by no means always used as a way of dealing with life's trials and tribulations. Pargament (1997) addresses the question of who turns to religion in coping, in what situations, and where. By drawing on the work of Spilka et al. (1985), he contends that "religious coping is a not a random affair" (p. 143). Spilka et al. (1985) asserted that religious attributions depend on the characteristics of the person, the characteristics of the event, and the characteristics of the context surrounding the person and the event. Similarly, Pargament (1997) suggests that personal, situational, and contextual forces affect whether or not religious coping is used. Firstly, at a personal or individual level, those who are more committed to religion and more involved in it are more likely to utilise religious coping mechanisms. Also, but related to this point, marginalized groups such as black people, poorer people, the elderly, women, and those in difficult circumstances have been found to be more likely to use religious coping mechanisms (Ferraro & Koch, 1994). Secondly, as regards the situational level, Pargament contends - based on his own research and on the research of others (e.g. Pargament & Hahn, 1986; Bearon & Koenig, 1990) - that the more threatening, harmful, or serious a situation is perceived to be, the more likely a person is to utilise religious coping mechanisms. When circumstances are particularly stressful, people are more likely to turn to religion. However, Pargament (1997) highlights that for many people religion is a central part of their lives, and that religious coping is used to deal with everyday events, whether or not they constitute a crisis. Thirdly, as regards contextual forces, whilst Pargament (1997) states that religious coping is greater within certain congregations and cultures, little is known about the influence of social context on religious coping. Pargament's view is that coping is inherently embedded in culture. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's work (1979), he states that by culture he is referring to "forces that go beyond the individual's immediate microsocial system" (Pargament, 1997, p. 117). Given this understanding of coping, it is likely that religious coping is also embedded in the cultural context.

Religious Coping: Relatively Available and Relatively Compelling?

Pargament (1997) furthers our insight into why religion and coping converge by drawing on the theory of coping. He theorises that religion becomes involved in coping when, firstly, it is a

"relatively available" part of a person's orienting system and when, secondly, it is perceived to be a "relatively compelling" way of coping (p. 144). In contrast, the importance of religion in coping declines when religion is not available as a coping option to people, or when other coping resources are more available or perceived to be more compelling. When religion is more available as a coping resource, it generally constitutes an important part of a person's worldview. If religion is embedded in a person's life, then the beliefs and practices associated with it are easily accessible should a person want to use them in a time of crisis. Pargament (1997) highlights the importance of viewing availability as a relative construct, suggesting that for those with "limited means and few alternatives" – such as marginalized groups - "religion can take on even greater power as one of the few genuine resources for living" (p. 145). This is illustrated by Moore's (1992) work examining the emergence of African-American churches. The author viewed these churches as being one of the only resources available to black people as they struggled for a sense of dignity in a racist climate in the United States. Essentially, many other potential coping tools were relatively unavailable to them. Thus, personal, social, and contextual factors influence the relative availability of religion as a coping tool. It is important to highlight that religious coping does not spontaneously "come out of nowhere" (Pargament, 1997, p. 147). In general, it arises because it either was a feature of a person's orienting system in the past or is a feature in the present, or possibly both.

Why, then, do some people not use religious coping despite the relative availability of religion in their orienting system? This is where the perception of religion as a compelling means of coping becomes relevant. Pargament theorises that for religion and coping to converge, religion needs to be viewed as a relatively compelling coping mechanism. There is no point in religious coping being available if a person does not feel it is a compelling or worthwhile option. Turning to religion needs to make sense and to feel right. In this sense it is a compelling solution that has both an emotional and a cognitive component, being connected with feelings as well as beliefs (Pargament, 1997). Moreover, "it embodies both the reactive and active characters so much a part of religious experience" (Pargament, 1997, p. 150). As such, it involves choice.

Pargament furthers his theory by asserting that religion is perceived to be more compelling by those who are aware of the limitations of being human. Those most aware of these limitations are those who have integrated religion into the centre of their lives and those who are confronting the "boundary conditions of existence" (Pargament, 1997, p. 153). People are faced with 'boundary conditions' "when issues of greatest significance are confronted and challenged in ways that push people beyond their personal and social resources" (Pargament, 1997, p. 154). These situations – such as being forced to leave ones country because of persecution or being faced with a tragic and untimely death - push people to their limits. In such instances:

> "Personal, social, and technological strategies no longer provide effective solutions to critical problems, yet we continue to look for some kind of significance in life. This is the

borderline beyond which religious solutions become particularly compelling" (Pargament, 1997, p. 155).

As well as those faced with 'boundary situations', the deeply religious are also aware of the limitations of being human. Therefore, religious people also view religious coping methods as compelling. Having integrated religion into the centre of their lives, they cope through religious methods as doing so makes sense and feels right. Thus, they use religious coping to deal with most of life's challenges.

The Complexity of Religious Coping

Throughout Pargament's (1997) work religion is highlighted as "a complex multidimensional phenomenon" (p. 167), and thus the complexity of religious coping is also emphasised. Pargament refutes the many stereotypes that abound about religion. Firstly, he asserts that religious coping serves many different purposes. While some people see reduction of tension and stress as the sole purpose of religion, in reality many different "ends" of religious coping exist. Although tension reduction may be one possible end, people also search for meaning, the sacred, and a better world - amongst other things - when they turn to religion. Secondly, religion is not simply a form of denial. Reliance on religion is often viewed as evidence of a person's refusal to accept the reality of whatever stressful situation is confronting them. Although this might be true in some instances, Pargament (1997) argues that life situations can be constructed in other ways by religion as well. For instance, people may feel that religion helps them to face the reality of their situation, or that it facilitates them to reconstruct terrible situations in a positive light, without denying that a significant change has occurred.[21] Thirdly, whilst at times religiousness might represent an escapist form of coping, Pargament (1997) suggests that such a conceptualisation does not give the full picture, given that many methods of religious coping exist. Indeed, in later work, Pargament draws attention to at least 21 religious methods of coping (Pargament et al., 2000). Many of these methods were subsequently found to be used amongst children suffering from cystic fibrosis (Pendleton et al., 2002). They include making benevolent religious reappraisals (e.g. seeing a situation as part of God's plan), attributing difficulties to a punishing, vengeful deity, seeking support from members of the clergy, or becoming dissatisfied with religious leaders (Nkongho, 2006).

Arising from Pargament's contention that religiousness is not simply an escapist form of coping, Pargament et al. (1999) have distinguished between patterns of positive and negative religious coping. The pattern of positive religious coping methods is viewed as an expression of having a

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[21] In addition, religion has a role in activity constructing life experiences rather than simply being reactive to problems. For example, religions are active in sidestepping problems, by encouraging people to take certain paths in life and to avoid others, which are often labelled as 'sinful' or 'destructive'.

secure relationship with God, a sense of spirituality, and a trustworthy worldview (Pargament et al., 1999; Nkongho, 2006). It is associated with benevolent outcomes such as improved mental and physical health (e.g. Smith, Pargament, et al., 2000). It consists of religious coping methods such as "seeking spiritual support", "benevolent religious reappraisal", and "religious forgiveness" (Pargament et al., 1999, p. 711).[22] In contrast, the pattern of negative religious coping is viewed as an expression of a less secure relationship with God, a religious struggle in the search for significance, and a somewhat ominous view of the world (Pargament et al., 1999; Nkongho, 2006). It is associated with more negative outcomes such as poorer mental and physical health (e.g. Smith, Pargament, et al., 2000) and consists of religious coping methods such as "interpersonal religious discontent" and "punishing God reappraisals" (Pargament et al., 1999, p. 711).[23] Elsewhere, drawing on this work on positive and negative religious coping methods, Pargament et al. (2003) write about religious warning signs pertaining to those in crisis. They conclude their discussion by suggesting that:

> "Some expressions of religion may be red flags warning of trouble, others may be yellow flags calling for caution and further assessment, still others may be green flags indicating that religion is facilitating the process of coping" (p. 1347).

Therefore, overall, religious coping is neither entirely positive nor negative, although positive religious coping methods tend to be used more frequently than negative ones. We see, therefore, that religious coping is not a uniform or one-dimensional concept. People utilise religious coping methods in various different ways. How people decide to express religion in coping is influenced by individual, social, and contextual factors (Pargament, 1997). As regards situational forces, faith is capable of adapting itself to a variety of different circumstances. The situation which is encountered will effect the manner in which an individual utilises religious coping mechanisms. Culture will also have an influence. Different forms of religious coping will be seen to be both available and compelling depending on the culture from which the person comes. A particular religion will take on a different character in different cultures. Finally, individual factors will influence how religion is expressed in coping. The same situations, in the same cultures, are perceived differently by individuals because of their different orienting systems. In essence, people look at the world through different "religious glasses" (Pargament, 1997, p. 194).

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[22] 'Seeking spiritual support' might involve searching for comfort and reassurance through God's love and care. 'Benevolent religious reappraisal' might involve redefining the stressor through religion as benevolent and potentially beneficial. 'Religious forgiveness' might involve looking to religion for help in letting go of anger associated with something someone has done (Pargament et al., 1999).

[23] 'Interpersonal religious discontent' would include expressions of dissatisfaction with clergy or members of the congregation. 'Punishing God reappraisals' involve redefining a stressor as a punishment from God for one's sins (Pargament et al., 1999).

Religious Coping Amongst Young people

Although most studies of religious coping have involved adult participants, and although Pargament (1997) contends that elderly people are more likely to use religious coping than their younger counterparts, a limited number of studies have included younger participants. These studies have shown that children and adolescents use religion to deal with a variety of stressful circumstances, including coping with night-time fears (Mooney et al., 2001), residential fires (Parelkar, 2005), sexual abuse (Nkongho, 2006), and serious illnesses such as cancer and cystic fibrosis (Tebii et al., 1987; Friedman et al., 1997; Pendleton et al., 2002). For instance, Mooney et al. (2001) studied children's night-time fears and their coping responses, and found that prayer was frequently used by the 8-13 year old participants. Tebbi et al. (1987) conducted a study of adolescent cancer patients and found that the majority of the participants practised their religion. These young people found that their religion provided them with support, helped them to accept their experiences, and gave them a sense of security in the face of death. Pendleton and her colleagues (Pendleton et al., 2002, p. 2) conducted a qualitative study on the use of religious/spiritual coping by children with cystic fibrosis. Twenty-three children (aged 5-12 years) and their parents/guardians participated. The study drew attention to the wide range of religious coping strategies used by children. Eleven strategies were identified in the study, including 'belief in God's support', 'petitionary religious/spiritual coping', 'ritual response', and 'discontent with God or congregation', thus suggesting that for children, like adults, religious coping is a multidimensional concept.[24]

Overall, however, little research has looked at the use of religious coping amongst children or adolescents (Mahoney et al., 2006). Indeed, it has been commented that "the development and roles of religious/spiritual coping in children have been virtually unexplored" (Pendleton et al., 2002, p. 2). Mahoney et al. (2006) highlight the need for more in-depth research on specific ways that young people use religion to cope with stressors and on how the different religious coping strategies they use can affect psychosocial adjustment. Care must be taken not to assume that young people use the same methods of religious coping as adults.[25]

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[24] The other 7 strategies were as follows: (1) Declarative religious/spiritual coping, (2) collaborative religious/spiritual coping, (3) belief in God's intervention, (4) belief that God is irrelevant, (5) spiritual social support, (6) benevolent religious / spiritual reappraisal, (7) punishing religious/spiritual reappraisal.

[25] The lack of exploration of religious coping amongst children it not the only significant gap in the religious coping literature. A significant gap, and one related to this current PhD study, is the paucity of qualitative research, as well as the paucity of research that deals with non-Western and non-Christian populations. Research on religious coping has tended to be mainly quantitative in nature, relying mostly on measures that have been developed mainly with white, Christian, Western, populations in mind. The complexity of religious coping and the individualised ways in which people turn to religion would suggest that qualitative methods could be particularly suited to conducting research in this field. Indeed, Ganzevoort (1998a)

In summary, religion is frequently used as a coping resource in dealing with the trials and tribulations of life, either on a daily basis, or when crises arise. Specifically, religious coping is used when it is perceived as a relatively available and relatively compelling option. Influenced by personal, situational, and contextual forces, people utilise both positive and negative religious coping methods. Whilst little research has been conducted about the use of religious coping by children or adolescents, the limited available evidence suggests that religion can be an important coping resource for people of all ages. In addition, religious coping may be of particular importance to the situations of immigrants and refugees, including unaccompanied minors. It is to the literature in the immigrant/refugee fields that we now turn.

Religion in the Lives of Immigrants and Refugees

Paucity of Research

Given the use of religious coping amongst people in many sectors of society, and its prevalence as a coping strategy within marginalised groups and amongst those encountering stressful circumstances (Pargament, 1997), one might expect that faith would be of particular importance to refugee and immigrant groups, including unaccompanied minors. Beginning life in a new country, even under the best of circumstances, is considered a stressful process. For those who are forced to leave their countries of origin, the situation can be even more difficult, given the relative lack of choice involved, the pre-migration stressors that have been faced, and the often uncertain futures that are encountered. Indeed, in asserting the importance of supporting the faith of refugees, Goździak (2002) conceptualises the suffering of a refugee as "a spiritual crisis":

> "Being a refugee – the suffering in wartime, loss of homeland and family members, and the challenges (and sometimes failures) of life in a new country – is for many forced migrants, a spiritual crisis of unparalleled severity. Many of the basic spiritual needs – hope, meaning, relatedness, forgiveness or acceptance, and transcendence – are threatened in the forced migration process" (p. 144).

Yet, whilst it is clear that refugees are frequently encountering the "boundary conditions of existence" (Pargament, 1997, p. 153), little attention has been paid to the multiple potential functions that religion serves in sustaining refugees. Of the limited number of authors who have written about refugees and religion, many have pointed to the scarcity of research in this field (e.g. Ai et al., 2003; Goździak, 2002; Goździak & Shandy, 2002; McMichael, 2002). In 2002, a special

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criticises Pargament's over-reliance on quantitative research methods and suggests that "processes of signification and interpretation, studied in a field so complex and with so little sound theory available, demand an emphasis on qualitative research" (p. 261). Hence, while the existing research evidence is of importance when exploring, qualitatively, the role played by religion in the lives of African, Eastern European, and Asian unaccompanied minors – both Christian and Muslim – these methodological limitations need to be considered.

edition of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* was dedicated to the issues of religion and spirituality in forced migration. The editors of the journal, Elzbieta M. Goździak and Dianna J. Shandy, noted the difficulties they had in getting material for the journal. Many people expressed huge interest in the subject but had not conducted relevant research, and "had only anecdotal information confirming the significance of religious beliefs and practices in refugees' journeys" (Goździak & Shandy, 2002, p. 129).[26]

Of the limited research that does exist at the intersection of religion and migration, most concerns adult migrants. While these studies are relevant to our understanding of the lives of adolescents who migrate, their findings cannot automatically be generalised to the situations of adolescents given their different needs, experiences, and developmental stages. To my knowledge, no studies have looked specifically at the role of religion/spirituality in the lives of refugee young people. Whilst one study about unaccompanied minors has given detailed attention to issues of faith (Goodman, 2003), and several studies have made passing references to these issues (e.g. Stanley, 2001; Vekic, 2003; Wade et al., 2005), more frequently than not, studies have largely neglected the potential role played by religious beliefs and practices for unaccompanied minors. For instance, in Stanley's (2001) qualitative study of young separated refugees in the UK, researchers interviewed 125 young people about what the author terms "all aspects of their lives since their arrival in England" (p. 8). Yet, there are only passing references to religion and spirituality – for instance, attending a church or mosque is included in a list of social activities – with no emphasis placed on this aspect of the participants' lives.[27]

Despite the paucity of research, researchers have referred to the multitude of roles that religion and faith play in the lives of immigrants and refugees, including serving as:

> "... a source of emotional and cognitive support, a form of social and political expression and mobilization, and a vehicle of community building and group identity" (Goździak, 2002, p. 146).

Places of worship can represent centres of cultural identity, including serving as places where language and culture are preserved. They can also serve as providers of information and as network centres of economic activities that can facilitate the upward mobility of their communities

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[26] It appears that the situation has not changed considerably since 2002. A search of the Social Science Citation Index, conducted on the 23rd of August 2006, shows that articles from the special 2002 edition of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* have rarely if ever been cited. For instance, Goździak's article in the edition has only been cited twice and not in articles specifically pertaining to refugees and religion/spirituality. McMichael's article, also from the special edition has been cited three times, and again not in articles specifically about refugee and religion/spirituality.

[27] It is unclear as to whether this is because of the young people's lack of interest in such issues or whether is it because of the researchers' failure to explore these issues with them. However, religion and spirituality are not mentioned in a list of the topics covered by the interview schedule.

(Hirschman, 2004; Zhou et al., 2002). In addition, faith plays an important role in (1) providing a sense of continuity for refugee and immigrant groups and (2) providing them with comfort and emotional support. These roles are of particular relevance to the present study, given that the participants are unaccompanied minors who can rarely turn to family members for support, and given that they are teenagers seeking to establish a continuous sense of self. The relevant literature relating to these two roles will now be discussed. By necessity, the literature on which I draw largely concerns adult participants. Particular reference will be made to McMichael's (2002) study of the role of Islam in the lives of Somali refugee women, because it deals specifically with the comfort and continuity roles played by religion.

Faith: A Source of Continuity

The idea of religion providing immigrants and refugees with some continuity of culture has been identified by a number of authors (e.g. Bankston & Zhou, 1995; DeVoe, 2002; Handlin, 1973; Herberg, 1960; Hirschman, 2004; McMichael, 2002; Thompson & Gurney, 2003; Zhou et al., 2002). Discontinuity and difference are pertinent issues for immigrants and refugees, as was clearly evident in the narratives of the unaccompanied minors in this study. Amidst such discontinuity, sources of continuity are often found to play a particularly important role, given that continuity between the past, the present, and the future are viewed as crucial for an integrated sense of identity to develop (Erikson, 1968). Immigrants and refugees can hold on to religious beliefs and meaning systems even when other aspects of their lives have changed fundamentally. Relationships with God can be carried across borders in ways that other relationships cannot. In addition, familiar religious rituals can often be practiced in host countries, either privately or within places of worship. In essence, religion can provide "a sense of cultural identity and continuity to people who are struggling to make sense of new lives in a new world" (Zhou et al., 2002, p. 66).

Herberg (1960) and Handlin (1973) in their classical US-based works depicted religion as an important marker of ethnic identity for immigrants, a point which has been made more recently by Godźiak & Shandy (2002). Handlin (1973) and Herberg (1960) asserted that immigrants become more religious after arrival in the US as their religion provides them with continuity with the experiences they had prior to immigration. Handlin (1971) depicted religion as a way of life that connected the 'old world' and the 'new world' at a time of great challenge and change. In essence, religion and faith served as a bridge, as a connection to the past (Hirschman, 2004). Immigrants, including many from Ireland, "[struggled] against heavy odds to save something of the old ways" and hence, they "directed into their faith the whole weight of their longing to be connected with the past" (Handlin, 1971, p. 117). Immigrants attempted to "reconstitute religious life in America exactly as it had been at home" (Handlin, 1971, p. 138), something which proved difficult given the very different religious contexts in which they were living. However, in an effort to resist the

changes that they encountered, the faith of immigrants often grew stronger in such circumstances.

More recently, Hirschman (2004), drawing on the work of Handlin (1973) and Herberg (1960), suggested that the "certainty of religious precepts can provide an anchor as immigrants must adapt and change many other aspects of their lives and habits" (p. 1211).[28] Similarly, in Corcoran's (1993) study of the lives and experiences of illegal Irish immigrants in New York City, Irish Catholic chaplains expressed the opinion that "the church gives people an anchor to establish themselves as part of a large ethnic group in a multiethnic society" (p. 167). Religious continuity and the sense of community provided by places of worship meant that traditional cultural identities were reinforced despite multiple changes in other aspects of life (Hirschman, 2004).

In a recent study of a 'new' Nigerian Pentecostal church in Britain, Hunt & Lightly (2001) found that these churches served as "the focus of identity and the source of inspiration" (p. 110) for primarily Nigerian immigrants, many of whom were young. Attending the church, and mixing with "co-culturals" (p. 116) was a welcome change from everyday British life where they struggled to fit in. In later work, Hunt (2002) challenges the perspective that religion primarily provides the basis for black ethnic communities to come to terms with their marginalised social position or that it aids migrants "to make sense of the state of 'ethnic' minority imposed on them from outside" (p. 164). Whilst he believes that the new wave of West African churches perform some of these functions, he argues that they are not of primary importance. Instead, the churches function in a constructive way for West Africans living in the alienating environment of British society, by embracing some of the core values of western society such as materialism, success, careerism, and human potential. Drawing on Rose (1996), Hunt asserts that these environments are ones in which:

> "... innovating doctrines and a sense of collectiveity can be used both to negotiate change, and to affirm continuities with the self in biographical form. It is a novel expression of Pentecostalism which [...] provides the means for young West Africans to overcome potential disharmonies and to engender their own personal transformations" (Hunt, 2002, p. 166).

In work relating specifically to refugees, McMichael (2002) also draws attention to the theme of continuity. Her ethnographic study of Somali refugee women living in Melbourne highlights, firstly, the important function that Islam plays in providing the women with continuity in their lives, and, secondly, the emotional support they obtain from their faith.[29] In relation to the first

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[28] Hirschman sees religion as providing more than just psychosocial benefits to immigrants. He draws attention to the important role of churches and temples in sharing information with communities, thus enhancing the socio-economic opportunities of immigrants, a role which he believes Herberg (1960) and Handlin (1973) neglected.

[29] McMichael's (2002) study explored displacement, resettlement, and the emotional well-being of Somali women in Melbourne. It involved interviews with 42 Somali women as well as group discussions and participant observation.

function,[30] Islam is depicted as providing a 'home' for these women. Again, the 'anchor' image is used, although this time it is characterised as something that is movable: rather than 'home' referring to a bounded physical place, McMichael (2002) perceives it as "a mobile anchor that provides stability in the often unstable world of forced migrants and refugees" (p. 172). Home is found in the ability of the women to draw on the practices and ideologies of Islam. In turn, Islam shapes "spaces, interactions, modes of thinking, and daily activities" (McMichael, 2002, p. 172). Whilst the narratives of the participants suggested that they were a diverse group, who held different ideas about Islam and the practice of their faith, many of the women attended mosques, prayed five times a day, wore veils, and bought their meat at halal butchers. In theorising that Islam provides an "enduring 'home'" (p. 171) for Somali refugee women, the author challenges the familiar depictions of refugees as being "uprooted, as having lost connection with their culture and identity" (p. 178), as evidenced in the writings of Daniel and Knudsen (1995) and others. Instead, McMichael (2002) suggests that not all that is familiar becomes lost through displacement and resettlement:

> "Within the experience of exile, Islam is a way in which women recreate lives, homes, and community. Islam is a sustaining thread throughout women's lives and this helps to overcome the threat of discontinuity that arises with exile and displacement" (p. 178).

Whether speaking about life in Somalia or in Australia, religion comes across as playing a central role for the women, thus acting as a key continuous element of their identities. Indeed, one participant stated: *"In a sense, there are no boundaries in the world. Every place and every piece of earth belongs to Allah"* ('Hawa', cited in McMichael, 2002, p. 182).

In contrast with some research on adult immigrants and refugees, studies about adolescents do not generally make reference to faith as a source of continuity. It is unclear whether this is because it has not tended to emerge as a significant finding, or whether it is related to the fact that researchers do not explore this idea with young participants. In a notable exception, a study by Thompson & Gurney (2003) found that religion provided the participants with "a sense of continuity with familiar cultural practices" (p. 88). Their qualitative study looked at religion's role in the lives of these young people as part of a longitudinal study of 350 immigrant youth. It involved interviews with 14 to 19 year olds from China, Haiti, Central America, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. The authors depicted immigration as a potential risk and religion as a potential protector for immigrant young people. Many of the young people spoke of religious activities providing consistency and stability, as well as a sense of connection to their familial and cultural identity. Amidst their changed circumstances, and like many of their adult counterparts in similar positions,

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[30] The second function played by religion will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

these young immigrants saw religion as an integral part of their selves, as an aspect of identity that had remained with them.

Faith: Providing Comfort and Emotional Support

Partially arising from the continuity that religion provides, religion also serves as a source of comfort. When living in a new country, it is often comforting when something familiar is available. But apart from the comfort that is provided through continuity, religion also provides comfort and a sense of emotional support in its own right. Existing research has pointed to the variety of purposes that religion serves for immigrants and refugees in helping them to cope with their stressful situations. Many of these purposes are related to the comfort and emotional support that faith provides (Ai et al., 1999; Canda & Phaobtong, 1992; Goździak, 2002; Hirschman, 2004; Lewis et al., 1988; MacMulin & Loughrey, 2000; McMichael, 2002; Shandy, 2002; Smyth & Whyte, 2005; Thompson & Gurney, 2003; Whittaker, 2005). For example, apart from the potential intrinsic value of prayer and belief in God, religion helps refugees accept things the way they are (McMichael, 2002) and, related to this point, gives meaning to their suffering (Ai et al., 2003; Goodman, 2004; Goździak, 2002; Lewis et al., 1988; McMichael, 2002). Belief in God or Allah also allows people to relinquish control of situations by placing difficulties in the hands of a higher being (McMichael, 2002). Smyth & Whyte (2005) - in their study of lone refugee and asylum seeking mothers and their children in Ireland - found that mothers sought emotional support and solace from their faith. This finding mirrored the findings of McMichael (2002) in the Australian context. In addition, the literature suggests that many methods of religious coping are used in order to obtain comfort and support. These include prayer, reading the Bible or Qur'an, and seeking help or healing from religious leaders (Hussain & Cochrane, 2003; McMichael, 2002; Ruwanpura et al., 2006; Smyth & Whyte, 2005). In the context of working with Kosovar Albanian refugees Goździak (2002) found that although various method were used to attempt to preserve mental health, religious rituals seemed to have "the greatest healing power" (p. 145). In a sense, the many purposes and the many methods of religious coping identified in the immigrant/refugee literature, highlight religion as "a complex multidimensional phenomenon" (Pargament, 1997, p. 167).

This complexity associated with religion and religious coping has been emphasised in McMichael's (2002) study of Somali refugee women in Melbourne. The research underscored how Somali women drew on Islam to provide emotional support, to manage transitions, and to frame experiences of depression and loneliness. Islam provided solace and helped the women to deal with the stressful circumstances they faced throughout displacement and resettlement. They prayed and turned to the Qur'an for guidance. One participant talked about how she sought help from Allah when she was in need of something:

If I ever need anything, the first thing I do is pray. If I need a good friend, I turn to Allah

> *and I say 'Allah, I need you as a good friend'. Allah is not going to gossip about you; Allah is not going to hate you if you return over and over, asking and asking. If anything, if you ask for something, Allah would love you for it. If I am sick, if I need a special thing, if I need a simple thing, I just pray. Allah is the only one that I seek help from, the only one I can rely on.* (cited in McMichael, 2002, p. 183).

Frequently, difficult situations were comprehended as the will of Allah and so things were more easily accepted. In relation to the participants, the author states:

> "Their Islamic faith not only provided a causal framework that helps make sense of their lives, but routine practices that assist and calm them when they experience emotional distress" (McMichael, 2002, p. 186).

Although the Somali women had always relied on Allah for support, their narratives suggested that their faith in Allah became "an even more important source of strength" (McMichael, 2002, p. 183) following the eruption of violence in their countries of origin. This suggests that religious coping became increasingly important to them when they were faced with what could be seen as the "boundary conditions of existence" (Pargament, 1997, p. 153). Whilst the author highlights the individuality of the participants by acknowledging their diverse interpretations of Islam and the diverse ways in which they practiced their faith, McMichael's research showed that, overall, Islamic faith permeated the lives of these women, providing them with emotional support in circumstances that they perceived to be stressful.[31]

Few authors (including McMichael, 2002) have drawn on the wider religious coping literature in conceptualising how refugees cope with stress, thus further limiting our understanding of how refugees use religion to cope with their situations. However, an exception is a study by Ai et al. (2003), which deals with the effect of 'religious-spiritual coping' on positive attitudes of refugees. The participants were 138 adult Muslim refugees from Kosovo and Bosnia who, at the time of the study, had recently been resettled in the US. The authors drew on Pargament's (1997) distinction between positive and negative patterns of religious-spiritual coping. They found that the use of positive religious coping was directly and positively associated with optimism but not with hope, whereas negative religious coping was negatively related to hope but not to optimism. Therefore, only those participants who utilised positive religious-spiritual coping patterns were more optimistic. In contrast, those who used negative religious coping patterns showed less hope.[32] The

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[31] Underlying McMichael's discussion is a questioning of universal representations of Muslim people.

[32] The authors distinguished between optimism and hope. Optimism was "purely expectational" (Ai et al., 2003, p. 43), with people expecting that good things would be plentiful in the future. In contrast, hope also involved pathways, with people believing that the means by which positive goals could be achieved would be attainable in the future. The evidence did not suggest a reason why religiousness and positive religious coping were directed to optimism rather than hope.

authors highlight the importance of taking the religious coping resources of refugees into account, in both practice and empirical research:

> "[The study] suggests that understanding the religious tradition and its potential impact on refugees' coping will be critical to ease war-related traumatic experience and enhance their coping resources to encourage their adaptation after the crisis, and to help those who were the most affected by trauma in the war to make good spiritual coping choices" (Ai et al., 2003, p. 43).

Whilst the studies by Ai et al. (2003) and by McMichael (2002) involved mainly adult participants,[33] a small number of studies have referred to the comfort and emotional support that religion provides to adolescent immigrants and refugees. In Thompson & Gurney's (2003) study 76% of Haitian, Chinese, and Latino youth felt that religion or belief in God was important in their lives. In response to a more open ended question exploring the ways in which religion or God are important, the young people articulated an unquestioning faith in God and a strong sense that God or spiritual powers gave them help and support. In addition, religion acted as a form of behavioural control. The authors also point to the existential meaning and sense of worth provided by the young people's beliefs. Religion – and particularly the participants' relationship with God - is depicted as a means of fostering resilience:

> "Across ethnicity and gender, these teenagers who have immigrated to the United States – leaving their homes, their schools, and often their dearest friends behind – carry with them an enduring relationship with a personal God, a God who [as one young person stated] 'is everything to me … is all my support.'" (Thompson & Gurney, 2003, p. 86).

Apart from Thompson & Gurney's study, which deals with immigrant youth, a small number of studies have made reference to the comfort that religion provides to refugee young people. Although these studies did not have an explicit religious focus, researchers looking at a range of topics noted how religion serves as a source of emotional support for unaccompanied minors, and how faith mediates the way in which these young people cope with their situations. For instance, in Goodman's (2004) study of unaccompanied refugee young people from Sudan (discussed previously in chapter 2), the author found that most of the participants attributed their lives and their experiences to God's will. She found that this facilitated them to suppress their thoughts and feelings. Elsewhere, in a study of the response of UK social work services to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, Wade et al. (2005) include a brief discussion of religious practice. Interviews with young people and with their support workers suggested that attendance at places of worship provided opportunities to socialise and to obtain social support, as well as meeting the religious needs of the young people and providing a strong connection with home. Membership of churches and mosques provided the young people with "comfort and companionship" and a

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[33] The study by Ai et al. (2003) involved respondents ranging in age from 17 to 79 years, with 35.1 being the mean age for the sample.

"symbolic connection with home" (Wade et al., 2005, p. 176). Furthermore, the authors found that social work practitioners were aware of the benefits to the young people of attending religious services. They supported and facilitated this element of their lives by locating places of worship for them or providing them with Bibles or Qur'ans.

Similar findings are reported by Whittaker et al. (2005), in relation to their very small-scale study of six young Somali refugee and asylum-seeker women.[34] The participants were aged between 17 and 28 but had arrived in the UK as children. Religion was found to promote psychological well-being and to provide guidance during challenging times. In particular, and mirroring the findings of McMichael (2002), the Qur'an was relied on as a source of guidance when the participants were faced with loss and difficulties. However, the young women struggled to negotiate the differences between the teaching of their religion as outlined by the Qur'an and the Western culture in which they lived.

Like Wade et al. (2003) and Whittaker et al. (2005), researchers in Ireland generally make only passing reference to religion in the lives of unaccompanied young people. Conroy & Fitzgerald (2005) and Vekic (2003) mention briefly that unaccompanied minors attend churches or mosques, but they do not discuss this theme in depth. Rea's (2001) study found that females and participants who experienced more post-migratory problems were most likely to attend church. However, Rea was unable to state why this was the case. In addition, in the qualitative part of her study, church was identified by participants as something which made their life easier. Similarly, religious faith and places of worship were identified as sources of both practical and emotional support for unaccompanied minor mothers who participated in the study by Robins & Rylands (2004). Again, little discussion was provided.

Overall, despite the paucity of research, existing studies suggest that refugees often find comfort, emotional support, and solace in their faith. A variety of means are used to achieve these ends, including prayer, reading the Bible or Qur'an, or turning to religious leaders for support. Whilst little evidence is available pertaining to the use of religion by adolescent refugees, including those who are unaccompanied, a limited number of studies suggest that faith may also be a source of emotional support for them, thus mediating the coping process.[35]

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[34] An exception was one participant was not a refugee but was born in the UK to a refugee family.

[35] In relation to adolescent immigrants and refugees, some studies report positive outcomes associated with faith and religious participation. In a study of Vietnamese adolescents in the United States, Bankston & Zhou (1995) found that ethnic religious participation facilitated positive adaptation to American society, largely as a result of increased identification with the ethnic group. Similarly, in a study by Harker (2001), also in the United States, religious practices were found to serve as protective factors for first-generation immigrants. These, amongst other factors, enabled them to maintain higher levels of well-being as compared with their 'native-born' peers.

To summarise, relevant studies – although few in number – have strongly suggested that religion plays an important role in facilitating refugees to deal with the many stresses of their new lives. Whilst recognising that not all refugees are religious and that "there is not one monolithic interpretation of the role of religion on immigrant adaptation" (Hirschman, 2004, p. 1207), it seems that faith often acts as a source of continuity and comfort when encountering the multiple changes and challenges associated with life in exile. As Mello (1994) states, in relation to refugees in Sweden, "[w]ithout doubt religion helps the immigrant to cope with the stressors and the life changes that the situation exile/immigration implies" (p. 111).

Concluding Comments

> "No society known to anthropology or history is devoid of what reasonable observers would agree is religion, even those [which have] made deliberate attempts to extirpate it. Given the central place that religions have occupied in the thoughts and actions of men and women in all times and places, and given the amount of energy, blood, time and wealth that have been spent building temples, supporting priests, sacrificing to gods and killing infidels, it is hard to imagine that religion, (...), is not in some way indispensable to the species" (Rappaport, 1999, p. 1-2)[36]

Although the level of religiosity in society is constantly perceived to be diminishing, the research reviewed here has highlighted that religion is still a fundamentally important part of life for many people. There is little evidence to suggest that religion is dying. Indeed as the quotation above indicates, religion may actually be essential for human existence. This literature review has highlighted the potential benefits of religion to young people, in terms of its impact on health and social behaviour, on the coping process, and on identity development. In particular, faith may serve as a source of comfort, companionship, and continuity for unaccompanied minors, as is suggested by the relevant immigrant/refugee literature.

Religion has tended to be viewed by social scientists as something separate rather than as an "integral expression of human capacity and need" (Benson et al., 2003, p. 207). In this present research, however, the essential importance of religion in the lives of unaccompanied minors emerged as a striking finding. Frequently, the young people spoke spontaneously and passionately about their faith, as well as responding openly and enthusiastically to my questions. Their descriptions were such that religion could only be viewed as an 'integral' part of their lives. Given its significance for them, "a great disservice" (Roehlkepartain et al, 2006, p. 11) would be done to the young people if their faith were not highlighted in this study. Therefore, religious themes are explored in the next chapter.

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[36] Cited in Gozdziak (2002).

Chapter 8: Separated from Family, Accompanied by God

> God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"
>
> - Hebrews 13:5-6

> The merciful are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those on earth and God will show mercy to you.
>
> - The Prophet Muhammad[1]

Introduction

This chapter explores the importance of God in the lives of the unaccompanied minors who participated in this study. By exploring the young people's perceptions of their faith, the chapter describes the significant role played by God in their lives. It will begin by looking briefly at how religion unexpectedly emerged as a salient theme during my time in Valley Lodge. Then the young people's narratives are used to show how they are faced with negotiating a very different religious culture upon arriving in Ireland. From the perspectives of the young people, this culture includes a sense of indifference about God amongst their Irish-born peers. Yet, despite these cultural discontinuities, the participants viewed their faith as a centrally significant aspect of their daily lives. Their beliefs in God provided them with comfort and companionship, whilst also allowing them to maintain some continuity with the past. Hence, religious faith enabled them to cope more effectively with the challenges that they encountered.

Faith Emerging as an Important Theme

The importance of faith in God emerged, unexpectedly, as a recurring theme. From my background as a social worker, I was aware that many of the young people attended churches and mosques. Therefore, I had planned to ask them something about their faith. However, I did not set out to explore this issue in depth, as I had not realised its significance for the participants. Although, personally, I had a strong Christian faith, I had never reflected much on the importance of God in the lives of unaccompanied minors. Neither had I ever attempted to mix my own personal beliefs with my professional practice as a social worker. The religious/spiritual needs of the young people were largely ignored in my professional work, and, to my knowledge, in the work of many of my colleagues.

Whilst spending long evenings hanging around in Valley Lodge, the strong faith of the young people became increasingly apparent to me. On several occasions the young people made casual references to religion. In addition, discussions about religion and about the Bible sometimes

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[1] Both of these quotations are cited in Crawford et al. (2006).

emerged of their own accord, without me having initiated them. On my third visit to the hostel, I had dinner with Sarah. In the coming months I was to spend a lot of time with Sarah and learn that she had a very strong faith. The first indication of this was on that day when we chatted about Christmas. She told me a bit about Christmas at home and asked me about Christmas in Ireland, as this was to be her first Christmas living outside of her country of origin:

> *She asked me if it was true that buses don't run here on Christmas day. I said it was and that shops don't open either and that only a few years ago did the first shop open on Christmas day. She asked if this was because of a law and I said no that it was just because of a tradition in the country and she mentioned about Ireland being a Christian country. I mentioned how things have been changing and that Irish society is more materialistic and that I suppose this was why shops were now opening on Christmas day as people saw an opportunity to make more money and took it. [...] She mentioned how she wouldn't be able to go to church on Christmas day if there were no buses although maybe the church would provide some transport. She said that buses do run in her country on Christmas day although they are more expensive.*
>
> [Field notes, 26/11/03]

On the same evening, I approached Kate to ask her if I could talk to her about the research. She said she would be going to church but that she could meet me for a few minutes later on. Later, I again approached her:

> *Kate was just leaving to go to church. I noticed her Bible tucked under her arm. I asked her if she could just give me 5 minutes. She was in quite a rush and seemed a little reluctant to talk to me but agreed. But I went through the letter with her and explained about the research ...*
>
> [Field notes, 26/11/05]

On other occasions, young people mentioned their churches or mosques, or made reference to particular stories from of the Bible, or to rules of their religions. For example, on one occasion, when we were watching television and a pig was shown on the screen, some of the young people started talking about not being able to eat pigs in their religions. They discussed why this was the case, and made references to the Bible in the process. On another occasion, one of the girls started talking about the biblical story of the Tower of Babel[2] during a game of Jenga.[3] She and the other two young people who were playing discussed whether or not the story was from the Book of Genesis. I was amazed at their level of knowledge of the Bible.

Over time, from interactions and conversations such as these, it became obvious to me that faith in God played an important part in the everyday lives of these young people. I became more and more

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[2] Genesis (11:1-9)

[3] This game involved building a tower with blocks. It obviously reminded the girl of the story of the Tower of Babel.

interested in learning about the significance of religion for the young people. The inductive and flexible approach of the study meant that I was able to change direction and explore the theme of faith in the interview phase. From this exploration, several sub-themes emerged. The first of these – the theme of negotiating a different religious culture – is described in the next section.

Negotiating a Different Religious Culture: Discontinuity

Amidst descriptions of the 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' aspects of their home lives, the participants often spoke about religion and about the importance attached to religious faith and practice in their home cultures. Their narratives suggested that, having come to Ireland, they were faced with huge changes in terms of the religious culture in which they lived. Descriptions of the strong faith in their home countries were juxtaposed with descriptions of the lack of interest that their Irish peers had in God. Essentially, they were faced with negotiating adjustment to a very different religious culture. Again, they were confronted with discontinuity in their lives.

The Centrality of Faith in the Participants' Countries of Origin

In speaking about their countries of origin, the participants spoke about the faith people had in God, about their attendance at religious services, and about how people socialised through their religious communities. The young people depicted God and religion as central aspects of the cultures from which they had come, suggesting that religious beliefs had been embedded in their previous lives. Religion was accepted as a dominant feature of life, with most people having a strong faith in God. One Muslim boy referred to having been *"raisen"* (raised) in a culture where God is *"everything"*, and suggested that praying represented a significant part of daily life:

> *... 'cos the, the way I've seen, or like the way I've ___ I've been raisen like, God is like, everything to them. You know? Everything they have (?) in their life, from morning till evening, they just like praying to God and just like asking for help and all of that. So, every moment (?) __ God is like in their lives, so ...*

The prominence given to religion as an aspect of culture was also suggested by a Christian participant. She referred to the hope that people had in God in her country of origin and to the fact that when people received anything, their good fortune was attributed to God. This contrasted with the new culture in which she was now living, where she felt people were not as committed to their faith, and often only attended services on special religious occasions. In comparison, her perception was that *"almost everybody"* in Africa attended church regularly:

> ***YP:*** *Religions. In Africa, like, everybody is hoping in God. They just, any, like everybody almost goes to church, every Sunday. It's not like, some people here, just say, they just go on Christmas and Easter. Where at home you just go to church because when you hear somebody testifying that 'I got this', 'Oh God gave me this', 'Oh I got school fees for my children', so you just, you'd be saying, 'oh where is that God that is giving you all that?' So you go to church and the ... the pastors, oohh, they are really lively, they would tell you, like, everything where it comes from. It's not like (?), they really really tell, tell the real*

real truth or something, but they kind of encourage you....
***M:** Ok, encourage you in what way?*
***YP:** In, in, like, encourage you to pray. They like preach about the hope that you are going to get things. Yeah, they are preaching about prosperity. Yeah.*

This girl's words suggest that, in her culture, most people went to church on a Sunday, and that they believed that doing so would help them in their daily lives. Other participants made similar references to the commitment of people to their faith in their home cultures. Frequently, this was done by contrasting the religious cultures of their countries of origin with the religious culture that was evident in Ireland. Several of the young people highlighted the fact that days of worship or times of prayer in their countries of origin were different to other days or times. This highlighted just how embedded religion was in the 'ordinary' lives of the cultures from which they had come. A Muslim boy compared Sunday in Ireland to times of worship in his country of origin. His description suggested that the streets would be deserted in his home country during prayer times. This contrasted sharply with the situation in Ireland. In his opinion, the fact that Irish people did not seem to pray much was indicative of their lack of appreciation for what God had given them:

> *On Sunday morning, I wake up and go out. I see lots of people in the street. They are not praying, you know. They just go their own way. [...] They are not praying that much, you know what I mean. But the way my country, five times a day, everybody ... For example, if at this time you go in street, maybe you see only one person, you know I mean? Even the person who has, who owns their own business, they have a shop, they close the shop, they go to mosque. [...] It's just, for example, for twenty minutes in my country. But, in the here, it's only for one hour and a half, two hours, So why don't you close your shop and go to pray? Because everything you have that's what God give you, so you have to thank God. [...] They still say 'Oh thank God' but [laugh] that's different way to go to read the Bible or something like that [...] Then that's why. Here is very different to my country you know.*

Other participants gave similar comparisons, with one girl saying that Sundays in Ireland didn't *"[look] like Sunday. The Sundays you are used to, you know"*. Because religion was often given centre place in the participants' countries of origin, prayer times stood out as being different to other times of the day or week. In Ireland, this was not the case.

Whilst religious beliefs and values were generally passed on to the young people by their parents, some of the participants had different experiences. At times, when parents were not available, faith was passed on by broader society instead of by family members. One boy said that his family had not been religious. However, when he started living on the streets, after having to move away from his family, he began learning about religion. During open-air *"crusades"* that he came across as a homeless teenager, he heard preachers speaking about their religions. It seemed that these 'crusades' occurred regularly, thus implying that, even in the absence of parents and family members, this boy was surrounded by religious influence. His narrative suggested that amidst his 'extraordinary' life as a homeless teenager, attending these religious gatherings was something quite 'ordinary' that he did:

M: *So did you, who taught you how to pray? Or how did you start doing that?*
YP: *I ... I could see, ehm, like crusades in, in, on the streets, in [name of city].*
M: *Ok. Crusades? Like ...? [...]*
YP: *You know, like, ... meeting, you know, gospel meeting. [...] We call it crusade. So, I, we could go there and sit down and listen to the preacher, what he is saying. 'Cos, in [name of country] they have a lot of, religion groups. Many types. Churches and _____ So, they, they have an open air ehm, like a park. So, you find this church here, that church there, is another church there. So, you could go there and listen to different beliefs.*

Although this boy's 'extraordinary' circumstances seemed to facilitate attendance at religious events, for a small number of the young people, the opposite was the case. As was mentioned in chapter 4, at times the practice of religion was hindered by the political instability of the countries in which the young people had lived. For instance, sometimes attendance at services was not possible when fighting was occurring in local areas. One Muslim boy described only being able to attend the mosque on Fridays because of the danger of being shot on other days. When unable to attend the mosque, he adapted to the situation by praying at home instead:

M: *[...] When you were praying five times a day, did you pray in your, in your house, was it?*
YP: *Yeah. In my house. Because, you know, I can't go the mosque, really. Eh, you know, if you go the street, and ehm, if you go the street, what you call it, the gun, something is coming in, ehh, inside the gun*
M: *[...] A bullet?*
YP: *Yeah. That's ehh, some, in Somalia, every place you go, you ____ you die. [...] Yeah. That's my Daddy he can, ehh, he can't let me, I'm going outside. Yeah that's some, ehh some, we see our family too much they, they died like this. Yeah, that's, we're going me and my Daddy, you know, Friday only. The mosque.*

Hence, because his father would not allow him to go outside, he generally prayed in his own home. Thus, despite the instability surrounding this boy's family, faith continued to be a central feature of their daily lives.

For many of the participants, attending religious services at home was depicted as an enjoyable activity, that people of all ages wanted to do. In particular, the Christian participants' descriptions of services suggested that they were lively and vibrant events. While praying at these services was of huge importance, they were also opportunities to socialise with friends and members of the community generally. One boy described the Adventist church he had attended in his country of origin. He was keen to emphasise that people <u>wanted</u> to go to church as it meant that they met like-minded people:

YP: *[...] But back home there was, there was lots of people. And, they had youth groups. And we used to go out every weekend. Like, you know, go to church things. And like, church, like church was, was really a big buzz you know, back home, like, you know. Everyone wanted, wanted to be, everyone wanted to be, to go to church. [...] They wanted to do this, do that. [...]*
M: *Like people of your age, like?*
YP: *Yeah. People, they just want to go to church like, you know. It's, it just, it gives us a chance to interact with the right people, you know. With the right motives. _____ So.*

The participant proceeded to describe what happened on a Sunday at church. Again, his description, like that of many of his peers, suggests a day where life centred around the church, with activities starting early in the morning and continuing throughout the day:

> *Like church at home starts at around half eight in the morning. [...]They have a service and that takes us past twelve, twelve o' clock. That would be because, from about ... ten to twelve, we have the(?) preaching and from about half eight to about nine or so we discuss with Sunday School, just we are (?) listening to the Bible. And at twelve o' clock we go to lunch until about one o'clock, half one. [...] Then from two o'clock, we divide then (?) all the, all the old people go in their own group and all the youth [...] they go into one (?) group. And what I can say is that people, like, the week before they will discuss maybe a topic, maybe on relationships and so today we discuss about relationships and dating and stuff like that. And like, you know, like, if you, if you hear someone telling you about that you say like, 'God that's boring' but like, like, the time we start speaking about it [...] like, in the group, about dating and relationships and all that kind of stuff, [...] it was actually kind of fun, like, you know. [...] And like, the afternoon just passes by and we sit in the sun talking about all this kind of stuff.*

Thus, it was evident that this boy wanted to emphasise that attending church on a Sunday was not something he found boring. Church attendance encompassed different activities, including discussing topics of relevance to young people. I clarified with him what he meant when he described church at home as *"really a big buzz"*. Did he mean that going to church was considered trendy or 'cool'?

> *Not cool. Just something reasonable to do. Like, you know, ehm, it's, the time, we need to, like, like my friends, we're, we're in the church like, [...] if we said like we're going to like Bible camp, you know, like, all our friends would be happy to go to Bible camp with us (?). Do you understand?[...] And will understand where I'm coming from. Like, if I'm talking about a relationship with (?) some people, you know like this who goes to church, they will understand. Do you understand? There is that kind of togetherness.*

Hence, participation in church-related activities was viewed as the norm rather than as unusual or strange. Going to church was *"something reasonable to do"*. This boy's description suggests that young people perceived religion to be relevant to their lives. In essence, the peer group supported a strong belief in God. People felt understood because of the common faith that they shared. Thus, a sense of *"togetherness"* emerged.

The Marginalisation of Faith in Ireland

In contrast, the narratives of many of the participants suggested that their Irish peers did not provide support for a belief in God. For many of the participants, the importance attached to faith in their home cultures contrasted sharply with what they perceived to be the lack of interest in faith within the Irish culture. Faith seemed to be a marginalised component of life for Irish people. Such perceptions developed, with time, through the participants' observations and interactions with their Irish peers, particularly in school. Many of the participants knew that an image existed of Ireland as a religious country. They were aware that their peers often went to mass or to other religious

services but felt that this happened because of pressure from parents. They were also aware that being involved in a church or in church-related activities was not viewed as something 'cool' to do. The boy quoted above who mentioned about going to a Bible camp with his peers in his country of origin, felt that this would not be done in Ireland *"because of what other people would say"*. He felt that although people believed in God in Ireland, that the belief was not "*strong*", with people tending to simply use God as *"a crutch"*. His description suggested that religion was not an accepted and embedded part of the lives of people in his new culture. This differed from his previous experiences:

> ***YP:*** *I don't believe that there is a strong belief in God here. Right. I believe like there is this, there is this, there is this thing whereby people got the belief of God. They, they believe in him but they don't really believe in him. Do you understand what I'm saying? They believe in, they, like, you know, for some people God is just a crutch. [...] Totally. People wouldn't go to Bible camp because of what other people would say.*
> ***M:*** *Ok. So, ehm, when you say that people believe but they don't really believe, do you mean that they just use God when it's useful?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. They just, they just use God when it's useful and ... like, you know like, people, but people usually say like, Ireland is very holy and Catholic country and stuff like that. But, you know, but, if, if any reasonable person looked at it and they would say, like, some of the stuff which is going on, and like, you know, besides murdering (?), it's just basic stuff, like, racism. Racism is just, it's just overboard, like, you know.*

Thus, he felt that Ireland's image as a *"very holy and Catholic country"* was inaccurate. For him, this seemed evident from the racist attitudes of Irish people and from the fact that they relied on God when it was *"useful"* for them to do so.

Similar sentiments were expressed by another participant who referred to that fact that Irish people of his age didn't seem to *"know"* God very well. In contrast, he felt that *"most of international students"* had a greater knowledge of God. He felt that this was due to the influence of religion in their countries of origin, as well as the influence of their parents:

> *I don't think even they know God. [...] I don't think they know. You tell them God, they say, what's God, you know what I mean? That's the big difference between me and them, you know. I don't think they know God.... They know but because of ... they just know because their parents say. Yeah, God. They don't know God that much. That's the big difference. But lots of international, actually not lots, most of international students, they talk about God very well. They know God very well because of the religion in their country and the way their parents talk, you know. That's the way they know.*

For this boy, like many of his peers, his sense of being different was highlighted by the fact that his strong faith in God was not shared by his Irish counterparts. He saw this as *"the big difference between me and them"*. Thus, not only was he faced with adjusting to a non-Muslim culture generally, but he simultaneously faced the challenge of feeling very different to his peers as they seemed to have little interest in God or religion.

According to many of the participants, Irish young people's lack of interest in God was also

evident from their behaviour and from their non-attendance at religious services. On one occasion I invited one of the participants, who was Catholic, to come to the church that I attended on Sunday evening. This girl had previously been to Catholic churches in Ireland and expressed her shock at the fact that no young people had been present in the congregation:

> *Elizabeth came to mass with me. As we drove there she spoke about her incredulity that when she had gone to a Catholic mass before, all those at the mass were old. There were no young people. Just herself and her Ugandan friend. As she described this I found myself wishing I had my tape recorder. She spoke in such an incredulous tone of voice. She just couldn't believe it! She said that in her country most of the people going to mass are young. It is the older people who do not go. [...] She was also shocked that [the service] only lasted half an hour. She said that it would be two hours at home...*
>
> [Field Notes, 11/12/2005]

Whilst religion had been prioritised above other aspects of life in the participants' countries of origin, this was not perceived to be the case in Ireland. During my time in Valley Lodge, one of the participants described how the length of the service in the African church she attended in Ireland had been shortened from three hours to two hours. This was because the people in the mainly African congregation were very busy. In the interview, when I discussed this with her, she suggested that these people, who would have been used to longer services in their countries of origin, had adapted to an Irish culture, where the emphasis was *"on time"*. The girl felt that church was not prioritised in Ireland, even by members of the African community. This differed from her country of origin:

> *At home, you are busy but you are not all that busy like here. And if it's things concerning church, they are busy about things for church, than the other things.*

Similarly, another boy talked about how Irish people did not think about their relationship with God or about God's creations. Instead they were focusing on having a good time and "*trying to live the moment*". Whilst, for him, religion seemed to serve as an important spiritual context in his life, through which he transcended himself and searched for meaning (King, 2003), this was not the case for his Irish counterparts:

> ***YP:*** *Just, you know, I never seen, like, people like, you know, whenever I see like, you know, like kinda religion, what do you call it, religious programmes and ____ people like, talking about life after or whatever. Everybody is like trying to live the moment. Here like. So. Even my friends, or, you know, in school, or whatever.*
> ***M:*** *They're trying ... sorry, explain again, they're trying to live the moment?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, you know. Like that (?)*
> ***M:*** *Instead of thinking of the afterlife?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. Whatever, or thinking what the, what the universe (?) is look like. What is God to you and ...All ...[...] What God is, what's he to you, you know. And like, you have to think like, sometimes, I would be like, like, thinking about how the sun shines, you know, and how the trees are ___. I feel (?) like, you know, all that, it just likes helps me like takes my stress away. But, the people ____ trying to like have good, good time, you know. ____ Just like ... Just leave me alone. [laughs] I do that as well but sometimes you have to think*

about what is the, what is the purpose of life ... "

Although this boy found it important to explore the meaning of life and his understanding of God and the universe, his Irish peers focused on enjoying themselves. Several others, like this boy, suggested that their Irish peers believed that they had better things to do rather than going to church. One girl talked about the fact that Irish young people are not *"into the culture"* as much as young people from her country and gave the fact that they *"don't care"* about going to church as an example. Instead, she believed that they were involved in *"bad things, like worldly things which the Bible tells us not to do."*

Several of the participants related non-attendance at religious services to lack of appreciation. They felt that Irish young people were not grateful for what God had given them. One boy, who lived in a residential home with Irish children, felt that this ingratitude contrasted sharply with non-Irish people who saw the importance of giving thanks to God. In terms of his own personal situation, God had provided for him at home and continued to provide for him in Ireland. Therefore, he continued appreciating:

> ***YP:*** *... I live with Irish people so I can see the kids here if they are being told to go to mass. They don't want it. You know I mean, eh? But if you gonna see a guy from outside the country, every Sunday, he's at mass. You know I mean, yeah? It's different. They like ... they like to appreciate what they get. Like. Here, people, they don't appreciate what they get from God. You know I mean, yeah?*
> ***M:*** *Ok. So ... go on, go on.*
> ***YP:*** *That's what I ... It's like, I have been in problem [...]at home. I knew God since home. I appreciate anything he gave me. Food he gave me, clothes he gave me. You know I mean, yeah? I come back here, I don't have to forget about it. You know I mean, I still have to be straight what I was, you know I mean. But here, people, they do what, what they feel like doing. They don't appreciate who gave them.*

This boy's words reflected the sentiments of many of the participants, who strongly emphasised the importance of being grateful. As was discussed previously, they often coped by adopting a positive outlook, which included being appreciative. In essence, prayer and attendance at services represented a means of expressing gratitude to God.

Negotiating the Differences in Religious Culture

It is clear that the participants were faced with negotiating a very different religious culture from the ones they were used to at home. As a result, the young people generally viewed themselves as 'different' from their Irish peers. For many, however, this sense of being different was not too problematic given that they had few Irish friends. Other unaccompanied minors with whom they were friendly did not consider it unusual to be religious. For instance, hostel residents often went to church together and open discussions regarding God and religion frequently occurred during my time in Valley Lodge.

However, for those who had Irish friends, the sense of being 'different' was of greater pertinence. In dealing with the discontinuities with which they were faced, some of these young people discussed religion with their Irish friends and attempted to share the importance of God with them. One girl, who seemed to have a very strong faith, imitated the type of conversation she had with her friends when she spoke to them about God. Her narrative suggested that her efforts were successful and that her friends became interested in God through her:

> *... some of my friends, they don't believe in God. [...] So they tell me, 'did you ever see God before?', I said 'Oh, my God, you don't have to see God before you believe in him'. [...] Ehm, even a lot of my friends, you know, they believe in God through me. [...]Like, now ..., ehm, sometimes I would tell them 'Do you need something?', they say 'yes, ok'. 'You need something? You want something? Like, you want God to do something for you? When you get to, to your house or your room, lay down on your bed. Pray to God and ask God what you need, and I promise to you before the next _____, God will do that for you.' And that is the way you believe that God is alive, is real. [...] And they said 'ok'.. Actually they, some of my friends did it, and they, they say 'Oh, my God, it's true!' You know. [...] 'And I believe you. Ok I will be worshiping God.'*

However, in attempting to influence her friends, this girl was an exception. Few of the participants talked about trying to change the attitudes of their Irish peers. Although they did not deny their religion or the fact that they practised their faith, they often simply did not discuss these issues with their Irish friends. Sometimes, when initial attempts to influence their Irish friends were unsuccessful the participants decided not to try again. One boy described how his Irish friends laughed at him when he first mentioned going to church. This boy seemed to be very integrated into Irish society, and had many Irish friends both in school and on his football team. In addition, he continued to attend an African church every Sunday and played the drums in the church band. Although I assumed that it would be hard for him to practise his faith when his peers laughed at him, he did not perceive it to be difficult. This boy's sense of agency was evident from his efforts to seek religious continuity and hold on to his faith whilst also adapting to his new situation by spending time with Irish friends:

> ***YP:*** *... they never go to church [laughs] [...] They would only laugh at me when I say 'you wanna go to church?' or something like that. No. They would probably still be like ... probably still like, sleep ins while I'm in church, like, in the morning. [...] They wake up at 12 o clock or 11. So ...*
> ***M:*** *And you're already in Church?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah*
> ***M:*** *[...] Have you ever invited them along to your church?*
> ***YP:*** *Well, I tried once but I never tried again. 'Cos I know they wouldn't probably ... they wouldn't go. [...] They were like 'Aw' ... [laughs] ... They just kind of called each other like. 'Aw Yemi[4] there wanna go to church]' [laughs]. Laughs. Do you know?*
> ***M:*** *And how do you find that? Is that hard?*
> ***YP:*** *To do what?*

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[4] Yemi is a pseudonym that I have inserted to make it easier to read this quotation.

M: *Like, to be ... to have a belief in God and to have a strong faith, when your friends think it's silly?*
YP: *I find it really easy.*

Thus, the young people often kept their religious identities separate from their Irish peers. Whilst performing 'front stage', the young people tried to depict themselves as similar to their Irish peers, not wanting to stand out as different. Although conversations about religion in Valley Lodge were common occurrences and were not viewed as strange, the young people seemed to have had few conversations about God and religion with Irish classmates and other Irish friends. In essence, the religious aspects of their identities were kept 'back stage' and were not made accessible to their Irish counterparts.

Although most of the participants talked about their Irish peers being uninterested in religion, some did not voice such opinions. Firstly, a small number of the young people felt unable to comment on the attitudes of their Irish peers to God and religion, largely due to the fact that they did not have very many friends who were Irish, or if they did, they had not spoken to them about religious beliefs. When I asked one girl about this issue, she seemed surprised by the question and responded by saying *"how would I know?"* Secondly, a minority of other participants expressed the opinion that Irish young people had strong religious beliefs. Often this was evident by the fact that they saw their Irish peers going to mass or saying prayers at the beginning of classes in school. One participant did not see much difference between the faith of Irish people and that of her African counterparts, saying: *"The people I've met, they think God is important."* However, earlier in the interview this girl had said that she had no Irish friends. Hence, her perception of the importance of God in the lives of Irish people is likely to have stemmed solely from her interaction with Irish people at her church. This may have accounted for her different perspective. Thirdly, some of the young people were careful to suggest that the attitudes of Irish young people were varied. In doing so, they mentioned particular Irish friends who were interested in God and in religion.

In summary, the participants spoke comparatively about religion in their home countries and religion in Ireland. These young people came from countries where most people had strong religious beliefs, and where going to the church or mosque was an intrinsic and enjoyable part of community life. Hence, the young people arrived in Ireland with a strong tradition of religious faith and practice, and with a world-view that held God at its centre. It seemed however, that the world, and God's place within it, was viewed differently by many Irish people, and particularly by their Irish peers. Thus, the participants had to negotiate a very different religious culture. Yet, despite being faced with this discontinuity, the participants actively used religion to provide continuity in their lives and to serve as a source of comfort and companionship amidst the challenges of life in Ireland.

Faith: Providing Comfort, Companionship, and Continuity

The young people who were interviewed, with only one exception, talked about God as a significant figure in their lives. In general, when I asked them whether or not God was important to them, my question was frequently greeted with facial expressions and tones of voice that indicated surprise, as though the young person thought I had asked a stupid question. I was often struck by the very sincere manner in which the participants described their faith and their relationship with God. It was clear that God played an immensely significant role for them. As an example, one girl described how she *"[lives] for God in every way"* and how *"the trust [she has] in God keeps [her] going in life"*.

Of all the participants, only one young person stated that God and prayer were not important in her life. This young person did not view God as having been important in her life at home, even though she had attended church on a weekly basis as she was brought there by a family member. When she attended church and Sunday school at home, she saw it as an opportunity to see her friends. In Ireland, she lived in a residential home and staff members linked her with a local Protestant church. She went to the church on a number of times, and, although she enjoyed the Sunday school, she found the service and the singing boring. She answered *"no"* when asked had God been an important part of her life at home. When I asked her if He was important in her life here she said *"[n]o, it's quite the same here"*.

Apart from this one exception, the young people's narratives highlighted the importance of God in their lives, even though some of the young people struggled with aspects of their faith. The centrality of God in their lives was evident from the fact that the participants frequently mentioned God or religion when discussing other topics and before I brought up the subject of faith. Within other conversations, young people referred to listening to religious music, reading the Qur'an or the Bible, attending church choir practice during their free time, raising their children to love God, leaving their future in God's hands, and advising newly-arrived young people to seek support from God. The young people talked about going to churches and mosques, praying, and seeking and obtaining help from God. Their accounts showed that they had strong relationships with God and were appreciative of all that He did. Frequently, amidst the difficulties and discontinuity with which they were faced, there existed a faith-based thread of continuity between their lives at home and their lives in Ireland. In addition, faith served as a source of comfort and companionship in their lives.

Faith as a Source of Comfort and Companionship

Whilst Wade et al. (2005) suggest that membership of churches and mosques provided unaccompanied young people in the UK with "comfort and companionship" (p. 176), it is argued

here that this comfort and companionship is provided by their faith generally, rather than specifically by their membership of religious institutions. For many of the participants, their faith in God and their relationships with God provided them with emotional support, reassurance, and company in their lives. Other relationships in their lives tended to be characterised by discontinuity. The people that they were close to in their countries of origin, both family members and friends, were not available to them in their new lives. As has been discussed previously, the majority of the young people reported having few close friendships or strong trusting relationships in Ireland. Most of the young people tended to be largely self-reliant rather than dependent on others for help or support. In this context, the young people identified God as the significant source of comfort and support in their lives, as well as a companion who journeyed with them. Also, attendance at religious services meant that the young people were surrounded by 'like-minded people' who provided them with companionship.

Relationships with God

The young people described different types of relationships with God. The narratives of a small number of participants suggested that their relationships with God were based on their fear of being punished by a vengeful God either in their life on earth or in the afterlife. Their expressions of faith did not suggest that they used positive religious coping methods in dealing with their stressful situations (Pargament et al., 1999). These young people were exceptions, however. In general, the participants described God as a loving and caring presence in their lives. God played many different roles for them, many of which suggested the comfort and companionship which he provided. He acted as a friend, an advisor, a confidant, a guide, and as someone who provided for them and protected them.

When asked how God was important in her life, one girl described her relationship with God in mutual terms. She liked God and she believed that God liked her. This girl, like many of the other participants, lacked strong mutual attachments in her life. Therefore, the mutuality of her relationship with God seemed to serve a particular importance. She had an opportunity to like someone and this 'liking' was reciprocated:

> *Eh [laughs] ... because [he] give me, you know, life. Yeah. I'm fine every day. I not sick. I'm fine. Yeah. Ehm ... ah. [He] like me. Yeah. And me I like my God. It's ok.*

Overall, the narratives of the participants suggested their immense trust in God. Indeed, God was often the only one in whom they had complete trust. Hence, this trust in God was perceived to be very important and very comforting for them. Frequently, references to trusting God emerged within conversations about trust or about friendships and support, rather than in specific conversations about religion. This was the case with one Muslim boy who described how, first and foremost, he always trusted God:

> *The only, only, only friend [laughs] I trusted all the time, that's God. [...] I don't have any more friends, I res_, I trusted more than God, I don't think so. You know because, always God knows more than everybody. And God's gonna help you all the time. [...]God always gonna help.*

Thus, it was possible to rely on God as he was always there and would always help. As a result, this boy trusted God *"all the time"*. Similarly, a female participant who had previously described her distrust of people, including her parents, described God as someone she trusted completely. She saw God, her creator, as a confidant. God was particularly important because she felt unable to confide in anyone else. However, she spoke about the disappointment she sometimes felt when she did not get what she had prayed for from God. In such instances, she believed she was being punished. Although this might suggest a negative or fearful type of relationship with God, she did not view it in this way. Instead, she felt that such disappointments helped her to grow stronger and to reflect on her behaviour:

> *Like, sometimes ... It's hard to say but sometimes you get disappointed, you know, but ... you get strong. Like, go back. Maybe whatever you are disappointed about is because you sinned. So you need to go back and retrace (?) it and, you know. ... Yeah, because whatever you, your problem you have, if you can't talk it with God, who else can you talk it? He's your creator. He knows it. But you just have to discuss it with him.*

Like this girl, many of the young people felt that their belief in God influenced their behaviour. Their faith helped them to treat others well and provided them with guidance as to how to behave. This seemed to hold a particular importance given the absence of parents and family members in their daily lives. One girl described her belief in the importance of God as helping her *"to cut down sin"* by ensuring that she was careful of what she said and did not hurt other people's feelings. The guidance provided by faith was somewhat reassuring for the young people as they had few people to guide them. One of the male participants referred to the important function of religion in helping people to *"do something good"*. Without faith, he believed that people just did whatever they wanted to do and did not think of others:

> *Eh, you see like, eh ... if you don't believe in something, you can never able to do something good. If you are a good believer or if you believe in something, you will try to do something positive in your life. To have pity to each other. See. But if he doesn't believe that mean you do whatever you want. You don't care. You don't mind about nothing. It's very very difficult.*

Many of the participants talked about the fact that God knew them well, and this meant that God could provide guidance. Feeling that they were 'known' by God was particularly significant and comforting for the young people, given that, frequently, they did not feel that people around them knew or understood them well. Some of the young people talked about not going to their social workers for advice, as they did not feel that their social workers knew them properly. In contrast, given their perception that God knew them best, and that God had the ability to *"do all things"*, many of the participants were content in the knowledge that God would guide them in life. One girl

described God as being able to *"make things happen"*. For her, as for many of her peers, this knowledge was reassuring, especially given the uncertainties associated with the asylum process, as well as the other difficulties connected with living alone in Ireland.

The young people drew hope from the belief that anything was possible through God, thus facilitating them to adopt a positive outlook on their situations. One girl, who had escaped from prostitution to come to Ireland, described God's role in bringing her from her country of origin to safety in Ireland, his continual role in protecting her in the present, and his ability to do everything for her in the future. God was depicted as a constant companion in her life, and His presence gave her hope:

> *Because I believe he's the one that sent the man to help me. I believe he's the one that brought me to this, eh, country, you understand? I believe he's the one that's still protecting me up till now. I believe with him everything is possible.*

Other young people also alluded to the continuous companionship provided by God. They frequently described God as someone who had helped them at home and who continued to help them in Ireland. God was described as having *"been with [them]"* or been *'there'*. One participant talked about not knowing exactly who God was. Nonetheless, he felt confident that somebody called God had helped him through difficult time and continued to be present in his life:

> *[God] is important, 'cos, ehm ... I have been through many things and here I am, I'm still, I'm still alive. So, he is very important in my life. Though I don't know him, but I know he is there. You know. I know he, there is somebody who is looking after me.*

Thus, the young people often attributed their strength and survival to God. This was clearly articulated by one boy in a casual conversation with him after the research interview. I remarked on how it must be difficult for him to talk about the 'extraordinary' events he had been through in his country of origin. In reply, he stated that *"God gave me a talent to be strong, to deal with a situation, to get adapted to things quickly"*.[5]

Seeking God's Support Through Prayer.

Arising from their relationships with God, the young people talked about seeking His support through prayer. Again, the companionship and comfort provided by God were evident in the descriptions of what the participants prayed for. Frequently, praying had been an integral part of their daily lives in their countries of origin. Given this fact, and the fact that they had a firm belief in God, praying represented both a 'relatively available' and 'relatively compelling' means of coping with their situation (Pargament, 1997). Praying fitted with the participants' worldviews, whilst also making sense and feeling right as a coping mechanism. Some of the young people

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[5] I noted this quotation in my post-interview reflection notes.

prayed at church services or during prayer times at mosques. Others engaged in private independent prayer.

For many of the young people, although their lives seemed to have changed considerably since coming to Ireland, there was some degree of continuity in what they prayed for. There was a strong connection between their main preoccupations and concerns and the prayers they offered. Their prayers reflected both the 'extraordinary' and 'ordinary' aspects of their lives. Frequently, prayers relating to 'extraordinary' situations had been offered before the young people left their countries of origin. For example, one girl prayed that she would be able to leave prostitution. However, she had also prayed for the more 'ordinary' desire of wanting *"a better life"*:

> ***M:*** *[...]And when, so when you are at home, what kind of things would you have prayed for?*
> ***YP:*** *For God to help me to live the kind of ... to, for God to help me to leave the kind of life I'm living there. Like, prostitution, I don't like it. For God to just take me out of that country. _____*
> ***M:*** *Ok. But before you went into prostitution, when you were living in the village, what would you have prayed for then?*
> ***YP:*** *I just pray for God to help me, to live a normal life. A better life.*

In Ireland, prayers for 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' aspects of her life were again offered. She prayed about love, jobs, and her 'status', as well as for the Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform, and for her family in her country of origin:

> ***YP:*** *I just pray for God to help me, you know?*
> ***M:*** *And when you say help you, help you with what?*
> ***YP:*** *Help me to ... see the right man. [...] That will like, love me. Get married. Settle down. Have a nice job. Just to get my status. You understand? Get my status. Have a nice job. Live a nice life with my family. That is all.*
> ***M:*** *Ok. And would you pray for ... other people as well? Or ...*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. I pray for the state to be ok. No, I don't want any problem to come into the country. Just I pray for the world. All the world. I pray for the government. The president. Everybody. I pray for [my social worker]. I pray for the Justice. I pray for everybody.*
> ***M:*** *[...] Ok ok. And what about, ehm ... would you say prayers now for home? For people at home?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, I would pray for my aunt. ... My brother. For God to help him. I want to see him. I would like to see him. I would just pray for him.*

Like many of the other participants, this girl's prayers reflected her existence as both an asylum seeker and an adolescent. As asylum seekers, the participants prayed for permission to stay in Ireland, for their families at home, and for the situations in their countries to improve. As adolescents, they prayed for more 'ordinary' aspects of life: for help with their exams, for people they knew who were ill, and about their futures. By praying, they were provided with some comfort, as they believed that God would listen, and that He would answer their prayers. Also, by praying they were making active attempts to change their situations, thus highlighting their sense of agency.

Descriptions of praying in relation to the asylum process were particularly prevalent. The young people frequently referred to the difficult nature of the asylum process and their worry about whether or not they would get refugee status. Many of them said that, first and foremost, they prayed for *"my status"*. Often, they talked about their full faith in God. One girl, who described God as being at the centre of her life, talked about putting everything in God's hands. She said that she prayed to God that *"if it's really meant to be, it should be"*. She seemed able to accept things more easily by believing in the will and ability of God. I spoke to another girl just a few days after she heard that her application had been rejected at the appeal stage. Despite being upset and feeling worried, her faith in God was clearly evident. She said that she would *"never forget him"* and believed that it was *"God's wish"* that she would not get refugee status:

> *Yeah, so, since, since I got the letter*[6] *I'm not feeling good, so good. [...]Ehm... so, I'm thinking, worried, and all of that, so ... but I, I trust God, and I believe in God, and God is going to bring a smile (?) for me. [...] I still believe in God. And I would never go back. I will still worship my God, because he's a real God, and I believe in Him [...]So, there's nothing that can, it can happen to me that I will never forget him. [...] So, I believe that that is God's wish that I won't get the letter.*

It was evident that she believed, like many of the young people, that God was instrumental in everything that happened to her. Although, to a certain extent, her words suggested that she believed that God controlled her life, her description was full of feelings of trust and hope in God, as opposed to feelings of resignation and helplessness. Her faith seemed to give her comfort and keep her going during a very stressful time.

However, not all of the young people had such a firm belief in God in relation to their asylum claim. At times, struggles with faith were evident. For instance, one young person talked about life not being worth living if he was deported, and said that if his asylum claim was rejected, he would kill himself. Having earlier acknowledged the importance of believing in God and in knowing who Jesus is, he revealed his struggle to have complete faith in God in relation to his status in Ireland:

> *Fortunately I believe in God. Right? But, for the real Christians, in situations like that, they believe that God will change this for them. But me, excuse me, for me, I wouldn't have much time to wait on God. Because I'm not ... I'm a Christian anyway, but [...] I'm not really a strong Christian. Because a strong Christian is supposed to be practising prayers. When I mean practising he should be praying every day. And when I mean prayer, the less he could do is thirty minutes pray. Ok. I don't do that. So, that is why I say I'm not a pure Christian, [...] So, I would, I can't wait until God to grant me a good life and such things. So I would just take off my own life, take my life at, in my own hands. [...] I believe he could do everything. But, I wouldn't have much time to wait for him to do those things.*

In summary, the importance of God in the lives of these young people is evident in their descriptions of their prayers and of their relationships with Him. The young people prayed

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[6] The participant is referring to a letter informing her of a refusal to grant her refugee status at appeal stage.

frequently and for a diverse range of things. In their descriptions of how God helped them in the past and continued to help them in the present, there was clear evidence that most of the young people had a relationship with God throughout their lifetime. Thus, in general, the importance attributed to God was a positive and continuous feature of the young people's lives. Amidst the difficulties and differences that they faced, God provided them with a continuous sense of comfort and companionship. Continuity was also provided through the religious services that they attended. This will be discussed next.

Religious Practice as a Source of Continuity

Faced with much discontinuity, faith and religious practice acted as a source of continuity in the lives of the participants. Despite the different religious culture with which they were faced, and the different attitudes of their Irish peers about faith, the participants seemed undeterred in their commitment to God. The fact that going to church was a *"reasonable"* thing to do and that it created a sense of *"togetherness"*, was something that came across clearly in their narratives. During my time in Valley Lodge, young people sometimes mentioned going to church or to the mosque when they were talking about their plans for the weekend. On one occasion, a girl who had recently arrived in Ireland asked me where she could attend a Protestant church. Although it was sometimes more difficult to be committed to their faith in Ireland, many of the participants seemed determined to continue to attend services. Frequently, the importance of their faith grew in Ireland. None of the participants reported a diminished level of faith since coming to Ireland.

Choosing and Adapting

For all of the young people who attended services, being at the church or mosque represented an opportunity to pray, as well as frequently being described as an enjoyable experience. Having regularly practised their faith in their countries of origin, attending services represented an element of continuity in their lives. However, the young people faced many challenges in practising their faith in the Irish context. It was not simply a matter of moving country and continuing to practise as before. The apparent lack of a strong religious culture in Ireland, the indifferent attitudes of Irish young people towards God and faith, being a member of a minority religion, and the absence of parents to guide and support, all challenged the young people's commitment to the practice, maintenance, and development of their faith in Ireland. The challenges were particularly apparent for the Muslim participants.

In relation to these barriers, living in a country where religion was no longer embedded in a pervasive way in the culture of the society, and living away from parents, meant that the young people had a choice about whether or not to practise their faith. At times, when talking about religious practice at home, participants referred to having had a lack of choice about attending

religious services. Cultural and parental expectations forced them to attend. However, whilst here in Ireland, there was little evidence that the participants were practising their faith because of an expectation. These young people were choosing to pray and/or to attend the church or mosque despite the absence of a cultural expectation to do so. One Muslim boy, referred to the fact that people from his country living in Ireland have a freedom to choose whether or not to pray five times a day:

> *...most of the Muslim I see in this country they are not praying that much, you know. They just come here _____ nobody tells them why are you not praying, so they stop praying. You know. [...] Because you know, the time they are in their country and they are not praying, their mother, their parents say 'go pray right now'. And I mean now, and now is start from now. You know? Like that. And they come here and nobody is telling them 'why are they not praying'? You know? 'Aye, we are landing here. What's the point in going to wash my face and my hands and my legs to go to pray?*[7] *Alright, I'm landing, I'm free now.' You know, they will be like this. But if the person is, who want to pray, I don't think they find any difficulty to pray, you know. Because still they can pray, they have the time you know. The time is not different.*

Thus, in Ireland, parents were not present to ensure that their offspring attended religious services. Yet this boy suggested that it was possible to continue practising one's faith as before, if one really wanted to do so. However, not all of the participants found this easy. A Christian girl, who had previously emphasised the importance of talking to God about her problems, acknowledged her difficulties in remaining committed to her faith in her new context:

> ***M:*** *And do you think like, as a young person, like, especially I suppose in your school, and now as well, is it kind of difficult to be, to have such faith in God in Ireland? [...]*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. Yeah, because when you are here there is that kind of influence, you know. Like, if you are not strong or you don't have people supporting you, that faith, that belief in God, it's ... you will know what is right, you will know you are supposed to believe in God, but our prayer for you ____ will get kind of ... low, like. How can I put it? Like, you won't be that strong, like you are back at home and you go to prayers and you say prayers in your own house. But, when you are here you are on your own or ... [...] You don't say the prayers, you know. And, sometimes, maybe in your mind you be feeling guilty. And sometimes you may not even feel guilty. You say, it's the environment. God knows if I'm at back at home ... You will try to make excuse. Like, if I am back I would pray, you know. That is _____*

Thus, as she felt there was nobody *"supporting"* her in her faith, this girl found that she often did not pray. She found herself blaming her environment when this happened, instead of taking responsibility.

However, despite these challenges, when confronted with the choice of changing their previous habits or continuing as they had done before, the participants usually opted for continuity. And

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[7] The participant is referring to the practice of 'ablution', which is a ritual involving the washing of the body before prayer or before touching the Qur'an.

indeed, the very fact that they were freely choosing to practise their faith, often meant that their beliefs grew stronger in the Irish context. A Muslim participant talked about his struggles to observe the religious rules of his faith in Ireland. It was easier to obey these rules at home as there was less temptation to do *'wrong'* and his Dad was there to check up on him. There were no music videos to look at and he was not permitted to go to the cinema. In essence, at home, *"there's nothing you're doing wrong"*, apart from sneaking out to play football and missing prayer times as a result, something which he described as *"normal kid stuff"*. But despite the fact that this boy's father was no longer present to reprimand, or to ensure that his son lived according to the rules of the Islamic faith, the boy continued to pray five times a day. He showed commitment to his relationship with God and a determined sense of independence:

> ***YP:*** *But now is like, you have to. You have to, is like, because you're responsible. That's why I'm praying five times a day ____*
> ***M:*** *So even though there's nobody here to tell you to do it ...*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, but I have to. Because I believe it. [...] But, that, I believe that, like, there is a communication between, between me and God, you know. Like, trying to chat (?) with God. [...] You know. That is the way. That is what I use, like, to try to talk to God. You know what I'm saying like. Try, because sometimes you need someone to talk to. And it's like, time to ____like talking to him. But, just like, it's like that, you know.*

Such commitment was also shown by another boy, who talked about his faith becoming stronger since arriving in Ireland. He grew up as a Muslim and wished to continue to be a Muslim in Ireland. His faith clearly provided continuity in terms of his sense of self. It seemed that, faced with living in a predominately Christian country, his identity as a Muslim was enhanced. It was important for him to be seen as a person who stood up for his religion:

> *I think [my faith] got stronger [since coming here]. Because I'm in a country that's a Christian country. So, more people are Christian than Muslim. And I try to stand up for myself, you know I mean, yeah? I don't have to let people let to pull me down to tell me, 'ah be Christian', you know I mean. That's why I try to stand up for myself. Nobody gonna, say "ah Anthony is just stupid guy". I want them to say that Anthony, he really appreciate who he is and he still stand up for his religion.*

Although, like these participants, the Muslim young people invariably chose to continue to practise their faith, this was not without its difficulties. For many of the Muslim young people, attendance at the mosque was difficult as they were at school on Fridays which was the main day of prayer. Some of the participants attended the mosque on Saturday or Sunday instead. Others lived in locations where there were no mosques. One such boy described an old basketball court where Muslims used to meet to pray. He attended occasionally. Participants also talked about trying to observe their religion's rules of praying five times per day. This proved difficult given that they are living in a non-Muslim society. Prayers were supposed to be said at particular times, but schooling and other aspects of Irish life meant that this was not always possible. In general, the young people attempted to continue to observe the rules but adapted them to the Irish context. They added two

prayer times together instead of praying on five separate occasions. During one interview, a Muslim boy took the prayer timetable out of his pocket. He proceeded to explain to me when he was supposed to pray and how he adapted the prayer timetable to suit his school schedule. He often had to pray after it was *'past'* the specified time. He believed that this arrangement was not ideal but that it was necessary in the circumstances:

> *If it's past, still you don't have a problem. You can pray. But you know, that's, you know, that's not good for you. That's the way*

Similarly, another boy also described how he managed to pray five times a day. At weekends, he woke early to say his morning prayers and then went back to sleep. During weekdays, he prayed at school in the middle of the day, but was unsure what way he should be facing during these prayers, as he did not know the direction of Saudi Arabia:[8]

> ***YP:*** *'Till now if I don't pray I can't go asleep that night. It's like that. If I don't pray the nine o clock or eight pm prayer that night, I can't sleep. All, you know, all of the time. Even, if I'm not going to school, Saturdays or Sundays, the time of morning prayer I just like, woke up like alarm. Even if alarm was like ablution. You know ablution? [...] It's like getting ready for the prayer. You know, kinda like, washing ____*
> ***M:*** *Oh, when you have to wash ok.*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. It's like wash your face ...*
> ***M:*** *[...] So you get up and you have to wash first of all?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah, wash. Yeah. Then I just, like, pray and go back to sleep.*
> ***M:*** *Ok. And ehm, would, so say like on a school day when you're at school, do you pray, are you able to pray at lunchtime or ...?*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. I am, but the thing is I don't know where, ...now I, I know where, you know, Saudi Arabia is, where I have to face. But in school I don't. I'm thinking of buying that thing that tells you where Saudi Arabia is like. And, you know, the time table as well for the prayer. Then, at break time it's twelve, twelve thirty, I can pray. But now, I, I think it's like, that prayer for twelve thirty, I'm going to make like, go to the, I pray at (?) three o clock, so when I come home, like, both together. At three. Something like that. But that, it shouldn't supposed to be like that ...*

At times, like many of his counterparts, he added prayer times together. However, it was clear that he was uneasy about this arrangement. Similarly, some of the Muslim participants felt that their schools should accommodate their religious practices. One boy, who had only recently arrived in Ireland at the time of the interview, struggled with the idea of adding two prayer times together. He had spoken to his mother about the issue on the phone and was thinking of speaking to his teachers about it as well:

> ***M:*** *You add [the two different times of prayer] together? Ok*
> ***YP:*** *Yeah. But ehh, but it's not good, you know. You, our religion, that is not good. But there is ehh (?), now I'm thinking, I'm talking also then to my Mom, I'm think to get*

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[8] Saudi Arabia occupies a special place in the Islamic world. It was the birthplace of Islam. Throughout the world, when Muslims pray, they turn towards Saudi Arabia. Specifically, they turn towards the sacred *Ka'abah*, which is a black cube-shaped stone in the square of the Holy Mosque in Makkah, in Saudi Arabia.

something, I will pray, you know, the school. Yeah. It's the four minute or three minute like this. You know, so it's not, it's not too much.
***M:** Ok. So you will ask them in school?*
***YP:** Yeah, I will ask. Also, I will ask, you know, every, every teacher it's Friday, that's important for me. For our religion, you know. That the Christian is going on Sunday or Saturday. [...] Is praying, you know, his church. You know, we are Friday*
***M:** Ok. So you would like to be able to go to the mosque on a Friday?*
***YP:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Friday, yeah.*

Other young people took a different approach, however. They felt that because they were in a country where they represented a religious minority, they couldn't practise their faith in the same way that they had practised it at home. One boy referred to the fact that he was attending a Christian Brothers school, and felt that he could not expect to be treated differently from his fellow pupils. Thus, he was content with adapting religious practice to his new context.

Choosing a Church that Provides Continuity

In my conversations with the young people, both during the participant observation and during the interviews, references were frequently made to going to church services or to the mosque to pray. One Sunday afternoon, as I waited for a girl to finish her lunch so that I could interview her, I remarked on how the hostel was very quiet. The girl told me that the rest of the young people were at church. In particular, for many of the African participants, African churches played an important part in creating a sense of continuity.[9] These churches helped strengthen the young people's African identity by allowing them to have access to religious and other elements of their home cultures, including language, dress, and music. The styles of the services and of the worship which took place were often very similar to the styles with which they were familiar at home. Frequently, young people reported being invited to an African church by a friend in their hostel. There was a strong socialising aspect attached to going to church services in Ireland, just as there had been at home. These services provided the young people with opportunities to meet like-minded people. Through these people, companionship was provided, often with people of their own ethnicity, thus suggesting that there was some continuity in their relationships. Also, church was depicted as an enjoyable activity rather than as a chore. One boy, who was attending an African church of a different denomination to the church he had attended in his country of origin, described how he particularly liked going to church because of the pastor:

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[9] As indicated in chapter 3, thirty of the participants were African. These included twenty-two Christians and eight Muslims. Of the two who were not African, one was Muslim and one was Christian. The Christian boy had only recently arrived in Ireland at the time of the interview. He talked about the importance of God in his life. He had attended a Christian church in his country of origin, but had not yet found a church of the same denomination in Ireland. Therefore, the discussion of Christian churches centres around the twenty-two Christian African participants.

YP: *It's a good church. I like it. The most thing I like about it is the pastor. The pastor is really good. I like him. [...] He , like, he would preach and he would make jokes. You know jokes like, making an example. He would say something in Bible and try to make an example of it and make it as, as a joke. So you know, everyone would that its (?) an example he is funny. I mean he is funny.*
M: *Ok so it's easy to listen to his sermons?*
YP: *And he don't get boring, he don't get boring, you know. Some pastors when they are starting preaching, can nearly get asleep, but this one, no way.*

However, despite this boy's positive experiences, not all of the non-Nigerian participants felt completely welcome at these churches, as most of the churches were led by Nigerian pastors and had a mainly Nigerian congregation. One Eastern African girl who sang in a predominantly Nigerian church choir, described feeling isolated at church services. She explained that it was not simply about skin colour:

YP: *Like, even at the church I go to, I feel sometimes isolated. It's not all that about, like, colour or something. Even like, the new environment you enter in, like if you just come and they really don't know you, they just ignore you and they would be just....*
M: *Ok. And you don't think it's about colour? So you're saying that even though they are black as well, it still happens?*
YP: *Yeah*
M: *But what about nationality, is that a part of it?*
YP: *Yeah, if you don't speak Yoruba, they wouldn't really regard you in the society. Yeah, 'cos, when I entered that, nobody knew that I could sing. I stayed in the church for a year and I was just there. I just sang once and they told me to join their choir. I just, like I told them I want to sing a special song and they told me to join their choir. Because they, they saw it that I can sing, but like ...*

However, even though this girl did not feel entirely accepted in the 'African' church because she did not speak Yoruba, she attended the church on a regular basis and perceived it to be an important part of her life in Ireland. The vibrant service was similar to the type of service she had previously attended in her country of origin.

Some of the young people had attended churches where the congregations mainly comprised of Irish people. The young people had varying reactions to the 'Irish' churches.[10] Most of the participants found the services boring, unlike the African churches. Although Irish Catholic masses provided some continuity for Catholic participants in terms of the service structure, in general, these services were perceived to be very different to the services that the young people had attended at home. During my time in Valley Lodge, one girl, who was Catholic, said that she found mass in Ireland very boring. Therefore, she occasionally went to an African church with her friends, as even though it was not Catholic, she felt it was more similar to the services she had

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[10] Churches which are mainly made up of Irish people are referred to here as 'Irish' Churches although it is recognised that other nationalities also attend these churches. Similarly, churches which have a congregation of mainly African people are referred to as 'African' churches, even though some non-Africans may be in attendance.

attended at home. I myself observed the differences between Irish and African churches when the young people invited me to attend services with them. On different occasions, I accompanied individual young people to an Anglican multicultural service, an Irish Catholic Mass, and a Pentecostal African service. On the way to the Pentecostal service, the girl who had invited me expressed her hope that I would not get a headache, as the church would be very noisy! Following the service I reflected on the experience:

> *The service was very different. I felt very self-conscious throughout and a little insincere as well. I felt rather guilty that I was there, really as a researcher in many ways. [...]I didn't feel at home here at all. I didn't feel able to pray – they prayed so differently. The congregation was made up of all different "types" of people – young and old. There were some older people dressed in traditional African clothing. The service started with a man (I presume a pastor) getting up and walking around with a microphone praying to God and praising God. He wasn't saying a particular prayer and it seemed to me that as everyone prayed aloud with him they were all saying different things. It was hard to understand. So there was this loud kind of murmur of different voices all talking together. I didn't know what I was supposed to be saying or doing so I just kept quiet and I suppose pretended that I was praying silently – which really I wasn't! Of those I could see around me, most seemed to be praying very earnestly. [...] I remember thinking that this really was so different to an Irish service. Even though I've been at different types of services in Ireland and even though the young people have told me what the African services are like, this was more different than I could have imagined ...*
>
> [Field notes, 25/10/04]

This service was a lively, vibrant event, with the congregation singing, dancing, and clapping throughout. It was in keeping with the participants' descriptions of their churches, and was very different to traditional Irish services. One girl, who regularly attended an African church, described the Catholic Church to which she had gone on a number of occasions. Her description suggested that she did not find the priests' sermons interesting: she was unable to remember what he preached about. In contrast, she *"[took] stuff in"* when attending the African church. There seemed to be a sense of belonging and responsibility attached to her involvement in that church:

> *A Catholic church is really short. [...] And I, I, honestly speaking, truly speaking, whenever I go in there I never take what he's saying ... I can't, if you ask me now I can't even remember any of the speeches he said. So, yeah ... but back in this church you take stuff in and ... because I have a role in the church, 'cos I'm in the choir and I have to give, to show example to the people. Of the church. So.*

However, not all of the participants favoured African services over Irish services. Some of the participants chose to attend Irish churches on a regular basis. One girl sang in the choir of an Irish Catholic church. As the choir was *"on leave"* during the summer, she sometimes attended the Irish church in the morning and then went to a *"Nigerian Church"* in the afternoon. She did not describe her experiences of this church in positive terms. She disliked how the pastor preached, at length, about making financial contributions to the church and about getting refugee status in Ireland. Similarly, another girl, who was Catholic, talked about her experiences of attending both Irish

Catholic churches and African churches. Although the singing and dancing at the African Churches was something she loved and something that provided continuity with her experiences of religious services at home, she preferred to attend the Irish Catholic church. She did not like the way people prayed in the African churches. As a result, she chose to *"stick to one church"* – the Irish Catholic church:

> *That church [African church] is like ... Catholic church back home. They sing and dance and ... all ... The way, I don't like, I don't like the way they pray and all that stuff. They just, when they praying, they screaming and so, I just go like (?) a Catholic church you know how they pray very quiet. And in my own way I pray very quiet. [...] They're not screaming, praying. Just scares (?) me. Sometimes, just ... I'm sorry, but sometimes I just ___ I always feel like laughing. I don't know.[...] I don't take it seriously. ____ just ok, I say this is God's house. I have to behave, now.*

Hence, her choice of church was based on the aspect of the service that she most valued. Although attending the Irish church meant forgoing opportunities to sing and dance like she had done at home, the style of prayer at the Irish church was more in keeping with what she had been accustomed to previously. Thus, despite the service being very different because of the absence of clapping and dancing, it provided continuity in terms of the manner in which she could pray.

In summary, it was clear that faith and religious practice provided continuity in the lives of both the Muslim and Christian participants. In the absence of cultural and parental expectations, the young people sometimes found it difficult to remain committed to their faith. However, in general, they chose to pray and to attend services. Although some of the young people – in particular those who were Muslim - struggled with having to practise their faith in a different way, they generally adapted to their situation, once again demonstrating their sense of agency in the process. Overall, faith in God and religious services provided a "sustaining thread" (McMichael, 2002, p. 25) of continuity in their daily lives. This suggested that not all of what was familiar became lost through displacement and resettlement (McMichael, 2002).

Discussion and Concluding Comments

My participation and observations in Valley Lodge, along with information gleaned from the young people in the interviews, demonstrated clearly the continuous importance of God in their lives across time and culture. The participants spoke passionately about their faith and hope in God and their commitment to prayer, and their accounts suggested that their beliefs formed a significant part of their identities. As with many other aspects of their lives, most of the young people perceived themselves to be different to their Irish peers. Irish young people were seen to be uninterested in religious faith, and, frequently, this came as a shock to the participants. Irish young people were described as having little knowledge of God, a lack of appreciation for what He had given them, and little time to spend with Him. Yet, despite feeling different from their Irish peers, the participants tended to remain committed to their faith. Indeed, by practising their faith and by

feeling different, they experienced a sense of uniqueness as individuals. Simultaneously, through attending religious services with people of similar religious persuasions, the participants were able to feel a sense of belonging to their own ethnic or religious group (Muzi, 2000).

Whilst faith served multiple functions, it was particularly important in providing the young people with a sense of continuity, both in terms of culture and otherwise. For the participants in this study, the maintenance of links with their countries of origin was particularly important given that, as adolescents, they were in the process of developing their identities (Erikson, 1968). Thus, religion signified a level of continuity for these young people as they attempted to negotiate a sense of self for themselves in what was otherwise quite a discontinuous life. In essence, as McMichael (2002) found in relation to Islamic Somali women in Australia, religion provided an "enduring 'home' that [was] carried throughout displacement and resettlement" (p. 171).

Cultural continuity bore an increased significance given that these asylum seekers were not only young, but were also unaccompanied. In the absence of a strong supportive micro level context, the macro context becomes more important in developmental terms (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The participants were without their parents, and the interviews showed that their relationships with peers did not provide them with much support. In particular, they found it difficult to trust people. Therefore, faced with weak supports at the micro level, their culture became more important. As aspects of this culture, religion and God were particularly important. In the absence of parental pressure, and in the context of a very different religious environment, the participants chose to carry their faith and their trust in God across cultures into their new lives in Ireland. For most of the young people, God had been present and helpful in their lives at home and continued to be present and helpful in their lives in Ireland. In addition, by attending religious services and by praying, the young people were able to experience continuity in the practice of their faith, even if rituals sometimes had to be adapted to the new context. In essence, faith and religious practice ensured that there were threads of continuity weaved through the life narratives of the young people.

In addition, the participants' faith and their relationships with God continued to provide them with comfort and with companionship in Ireland. Confronted with multiple pre and post exile stressors, including a myriad of losses and the uncertainty of their status in Ireland, this function played by faith was particularly important. By choosing to hold on to their faith, the young people demonstrated the importance that they attached to God. Positive, supportive relationships with God gave them hope, allowed them to love and be loved, and in so doing enhanced their feelings of self worth. God provided company for them and meant that they never felt truly alone. In addition, the like-minded people whom they often met through their churches and mosques provided further companionship and comfort. Despite being faced with major adversity at a crucial time in their development, the young people emerged as extremely strong and resilient. Their hope in the future,

which to a large extent seemed to derive from their religious beliefs, played a significant part in creating their strength.

Hence, although the participants were faced with negotiating a different religious culture - thus implying that religion represented a source of discontinuity in their lives – paradoxically, their faith provided them with continuity. In addition, their faith served as a wellspring of comfort and companionship. In essence, in dealing with both the 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' circumstances of their lives, the participants used their religion as a means of coping. As a coping resource, religion was both 'relatively available' and 'relatively compelling' (Pargament, 1997). By turning to their faith, the participants were able to face the difficult and different circumstances of their lives. Whilst they were separated from family members and from childhood friends, they continued to be accompanied by God in their journeys through life.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Introduction

Heretofore, Irish people – including the young - left Ireland in their thousands to seek better opportunities in distant lands (Akenson, 1993; Corcoran, 1993; Travers, 1995). In recent years, the trend has reversed and immigrants, including asylum seekers, have begun to arrive in Ireland. Whilst groups of unaccompanied refugee children came to Ireland during the Second World War (Keogh, 1998; Molohan, 1999) it is only since the mid 1990s that children and teenagers have started to arrive independently for the purposes of seeking asylum. The recentness of this phenomenon means that, to date, little Irish research has been conducted in relation to unaccompanied minors (exceptions include Conroy & Fitzgerald, 2005; Rea, 2001; Robins & Rylands, 2004; Veale et al., 2003; Vekic, 2003; amongst others). As a result, our knowledge of the experiences of these young people is limited. Therefore, this exploratory study was conducted in the hope of increasing our general understanding of how life is encountered by unaccompanied minors who live in Ireland. Influenced by a strengths-based framework (Saleebey, 2001; 2002), the study began from a perspective that recognised the ability, agency, and capacity of these young people, whilst acknowledging the many "problems and pains" (Saleebey, 2001, p. 221) that they experience.

Key Elements of the Methodological Approach

This research was concerned with gleaning perspectives and insights from the young people who participated, and as a result a qualitative methodological approach was deemed most appropriate. In the design of the study, issues of trust and distrust were given particular consideration, and resulted in a decision to engage in participant observation in one of the hostels where unaccompanied minors live. Despite the many challenges associated with this stage of the research – as outlined in chapter 3 – my time in Valley Lodge resulted in the establishment of strong relationships with some of the young people, as well as contributing to my understanding of the social worlds of the participants and allowing my research questions to become more specific. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were also used, primarily because of their suitability to the purpose of the research and to the population under study. These interviews allowed the perspectives of the minors themselves to be prioritised. While I was preoccupied throughout the study with not harming the participants, it became apparent that many of them enjoyed the experience of being interviewed. It seemed that this was largely because their perspectives and opinions were sought, listened to, and put centre stage, and because I paid attention to conducting the interviews in a very sensitive and non-threatening manner. As such, the approach was an empowering one and was in keeping with a strengths perspective, whereby the young

people were viewed as 'experts' on their own situations.

As with any study, the methods adopted meant that the research was limited in a number of respects. Firstly, whilst the purposive sampling strategy allowed variation to be maximised (Gobo, 2004), the use of this strategy meant that the sample was not a representative one. As a result, the findings of the study cannot and should not be generalised. For instance, it is conceivable that those who participated may have been in some way different to other unaccompanied minors and especially to those who did not want to take part in the study. It is impossible to say whether or not this was the case. Secondly, differences in language and culture meant that the young people sometimes had difficulties articulating their points of view. This meant that certain things may have remained unsaid and that what was said was often difficult to understand. This may have occasionally led to misinterpretations of my conversations with them. Thirdly, my commitment to conducting ethical research meant that the insights I gleaned were restricted. For instance, my efforts to ensure confidentiality for the participants meant that certain information that they gave could not be detailed in the thesis. In particular, it was often necessary to omit contextual information such as a participant's country of origin, especially in circumstances where the young person came from a country that was not frequently represented by asylum seekers in Ireland. Fourthly, the research relied solely on the subjective perspectives of unaccompanied minors themselves, utilising qualitative techniques. It is recognised that using quantitative methods might have elicited different insights. In addition, seeking the views of relevant professionals would have led to alternative perspectives and opinions. However, a decision was made to prioritise the voices of the young people themselves in this study. At a future point it would be interesting to conduct a complimentary study exploring the same issues from other perspectives.

In my journey as a researcher, initially I set out to explore particular questions pertaining to how unaccompanied minors manage the cultural transitions and the interaction between different 'worlds' in their lives, and how they develop a sense of identity within such a context. However, the flexible and inductive nature of the study allowed me to diverge from the planned route. Instead of sticking rigidly to the original research questions I travelled in a somewhat different, albeit related, direction. Influenced by my observations and interactions in Valley Lodge, and by the responses of the participants in the initial interviews, I focused on aspects of the young people's lives that seemed particularly salient and important to <u>them</u>, thus further empowering them. From this, rich descriptions of 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' lives in their countries of origin emerged, as did descriptions of coping and surviving in Ireland, and of distrust and religious faith. The remainder of this chapter involves a discussion of these key themes, including how they related to one another. In addition, these are placed in the context of the literature that was discussed in chapters 2 and 7. In doing so, it becomes

evident that the findings fit with much of our current knowledge of unaccompanied minors, whilst also furthering our understanding by addressing significant gaps in the literature. In the discussion that follows, the key insights and propositions are italicised in order to draw particular attention to them.

Key insights from the study

Talking about the 'Ordinariness' of the Past

During my conversations with the young people, there was a common tendency for them to speak within a comparative temporal framework, as was found by Miller et al. (2002) and by McMichael & Manderson (2004) in their work with adult refugees in Chicago and Melbourne respectively. Within descriptions of the present, echoes of the past could clearly be heard, thus suggesting that aspects of the unaccompanied minors' past lives – such as relationships and culture - continued to be psychologically present despite being physically absent within the Irish context (Boss, 1999). Memories of the past were used as central reference points in their evaluation of the present. Whilst for some of the young people talking about the past was not possible, for most of those who participated it seemed to be something they enjoyed doing, even if difficult memories were sometimes suppressed. Their past lives - and particularly their 'ordinary' past experiences - were important to them, and it was clear that they appreciated the opportunities to speak about them. Although 'extraordinary' circumstances, such as conflict and persecution, poverty and lack of opportunity, were often emphasised by the young people, and contributed to a grim picture of life in their countries of origin, questions about other aspects of life elicited more positive stories. The young people's accounts indicated that they had many fond memories of their home lives, and that they held nostalgically onto these memories whilst in exile. *It was evident that the 'ordinary' memories of daily life experiences prior to exile were treasured by the young people and represented key parts of their identities and significant influences on their current lives.*

By encouraging the young people to talk about their relationships with family members and with friends, and about time spent playing, working, and learning in their countries of origin, this study partially addresses a significant gap in the literature, whereby little is known about the 'ordinary', daily lives of unaccompanied minors prior to exile (Kohli, 2004). In general, within the literature and within practice, stories of 'extraordinary' events and circumstances have dominated. As a result, there has been a tendency to see these events as representing the entirety of the experiences of unaccompanied minors, as though they never experienced the 'ordinariness' of love, laughter, and companionship or of play, work, and learning, in the way that many young people do in Ireland or in other Western countries. *This research suggests that whilst questions pertaining to pre-exile lives need to be asked in*

a very sensitive manner, it is important that researchers and practitioners do not ignore the 'ordinary' aspects of unaccompanied minors' past circumstances, including their more positive experiences. Unaccompanied minors may often want to talk about these aspects of their lives.

In addition, the descriptions that arise from discussions of 'ordinariness' further our understanding of these young people's situations in various ways. Firstly, they allow us to see unaccompanied minors not just as asylum seekers but as young people, who have experienced at least some of the 'normality' of growing up. Secondly, these discussions often allow us to identify the sources of their strength and capacity, such as cultural factors or relationships with significant people. For example, by talking to the young people about the time they spent with their parents, it frequently became apparent that much of their strength emerged from the significant attachments they had made during their childhoods. Thirdly, descriptions of 'ordinariness' further our understanding of the nature and extent of the losses and changes encountered by unaccompanied minors living in exile. For instance, when we learn about everyday, mundane aspects of relationships and life at home, such as enjoying a chat with one's parent over breakfast or sneaking out to play football with friends during prayer times, we develop an increased understanding of the nature of the discontinuity that an unaccompanied minor might experience upon arrival in Ireland. The chat is no longer available. Sneaking out is often not necessary.

Coping with Multiple Challenges

Thus, whilst the young people spoke positively about the opportunities and freedom offered by life in Ireland, and whilst many were relieved to have left situations of violence and poverty behind, their accounts suggested that they were experiencing multiple challenges and changes in their new lives. They were faced with adapting to a new culture and with feeling different from their peers. In addition, like unaccompanied minors in other studies (e.g. Hopkins & Hill, 2006; Rea, 2001; Hewitt et al, 2005; Stanley, 2001; Summerfield, 1998), they had to deal with the uncertainties of their asylum claim. However, the participants' conversations with me suggested that being alone, without family members, was the change that was most challenging for them. They felt the absence of friends and family members in a very strong way. As a result, and reflecting the findings of numerous authors in the field of refugee studies (e.g. McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Miller, 1999; Miller et al., 2002; Robins & Rylands, 2004; Vekic, 2003; Wade et al., 2005), loneliness and social isolation were prominent features of their lives. Yet, whilst these and other aspects of their experiences were difficult and different, the participants displayed enormous strength and capacity, a finding that is in keeping with the recent tendency to view refugees as 'active survivors' rather than as 'passive victims' (Rousseau & Drapeau, 2003). However, whilst referring to the resilience of refugees is a prominent feature of the contemporary refugee literature (e.g. Ahearn, 2000; Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1998; Boyden, 2003;

Kinsella, 1998; Kohli & Mather, 2003; Lynch & Cunninghame, 2000; Muecke, 1992), there is a paucity of knowledge as to the actual strategies young refugees use in the process of survival (exceptions include Goodman, 2004 and Miller et al., in press, amongst others, as discussed in chapter 2). By analysing my conversations with this study's participants, it became clear that the young people coped with their circumstances in a variety of different ways.

Within the literature on coping, Lazarus & Folkman (1984) distinguish between coping resources (such as environmental or personal assets) and coping strategies (such as emotion-focused strategies and problem-focused strategies). In addition, individual choices and possibilities are viewed as central aspects of coping (Pargament, 1997), thus suggesting that the use of particular strategies is not simply determined by factors outside an unaccompanied minor's control. Instead, as this study has shown, influenced by the coping resources available to them – such as relationships with peers and professionals and personal characteristics such as positive beliefs and determination - unaccompanied minors chose between alternative strategies. They selected the most compelling options, or those that were expected "to bring the greatest gain and the least loss of significance through the use of the fewest resources and the accumulation of the least burden" (Pargament, 1997, p. 28). As is suggested by the coping literature (e.g. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993), when faced with challenges that could be perceived as uncontrollable – such as separation from family and fear of deportation – the unaccompanied minors tended to choose emotion-focused strategies. Like the participants in Goodman's (2004) study, these strategies included suppressing difficult thoughts, emotions and memories, often through distraction. The young people also adopted a self-reliant self-perception, and it was clear that they were often very proud of their sense of independence, thus suggesting that they were empowered by it. In addition, the participants embraced a positive outlook on life, as was evident by their sense of appreciation for what they had and by the "narratives of hope" that they "crafted" (Goodman, 2004, p. 1194) in relation to the future.

Furthermore, the insights gleaned from the fieldwork suggest that the young people in this study coped with the cultural changes in their lives by trying to achieve a balance between their old and new 'worlds'. Like the young people in Miller et al.'s (in press) study, the participants "selectively [embraced] aspects of both cultures" (p. 41), rather than rejecting one in favour of the other. They maintained continuity in some realms of their lives by holding on to aspects of their cultures of origin. Simultaneously, in other realms they coped with their different circumstances by learning and by changing their behaviours and values. Thus, whilst more in-depth research is needed, it can tentatively be suggested that these participants tended to favour an integration acculturation strategy and a bicultural identity as has been theorised by Berry (1990) and Phinney (1990) respectively. In essence,

these strategies represented problem-focused forms of coping, whereby the young people attempted to change their circumstances by acting on their environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). By seeking a balance between the past and the present, the young people were better able to deal with the challenges that they encountered, including the loss of one culture and the daunting task of adjusting to a new one.

Hence, overall the young people used several different coping strategies. Whilst further research is needed into the long-term effects of these strategies, the findings are in keeping with a perspective that focuses on people's strengths. The capacities of the participants are obvious from the ways in which they dealt with the challenges and changes with which they were faced (Saleebey, 2001; 2002). *The narratives of the participants and my observations in Valley Lodge give credence to the view that, frequently, unaccompanied minors are "agentive purposeful actors"(Frydenberg, 1999, p. 23), who cope in a variety of individual ways depending on what they perceive as most appropriate to their circumstances.*

Coping through Distrust

Although many of the young people viewed themselves as self-reliant, they also acknowledged that professionals and peers played an important role in their efforts to cope. For instance, friends served as sources of distraction through the companionship they offered, hence facilitating the process of suppression. Both friends and professionals helped the young people in their initial adaptation by providing information about various aspects of Irish life. In addition, peers of the same ethnicity facilitated continuity by providing cultural and conversational links. However, although relationships with professionals and peers assisted the young people in their efforts to cope, trust was usually absent from these relationships. My own social work practice experience had highlighted distrust as a significant issue in the lives of unaccompanied minors. At the beginning, distrust was treated as a methodological matter that required attention in the design of the study. This resulted in the use of participant observation as a research method, and the prioritisation of building rapport with participants. Whilst efforts to establish trust succeeded with some of the young people, others continued to be distrustful of me, thus suggesting that trust emerged in different ways for different individuals. This, along with conversations with the young people during my time in Valley Lodge, indicated to me that the creation of trusting relationships was not something simple or something that participant observation could necessarily achieve. Therefore, I began to consider trust and distrust as more substantive issues that needed to be understood in a detailed way, rather than simplistically stating that unaccompanied minors find it hard to trust and that trust develops with time. Hence, I changed direction and explored these issues at length in the interviews.

The accounts of the participants suggested that most of them found it difficult to trust. They talked about only being able to trust certain people and only trusting to a certain extent. Their lack of trust is consistent with the literature's tendency to depict refugees as distrusting (e.g. Bertrand, 2000; Daniel & Knudsen, 1995; Delaney, 2006; Hjern et al., 1991; Miller et al., 2004; Omidan, 2000). However, to date, the reasons for this distrust have only been hypothesised. *To my knowledge, this is the first study that has elicited the perceptions of refugees themselves as to why distrust is a prominent feature of their lives.* The young people attributed their distrust to past experiences, being accustomed to distrust, being distrusted by others, being unable to tell the truth, and knowing people well. *These reasons related to the young people's past and present circumstances, and suggested that distrusting was a type of coping mechanism, rather than simply a pathological consequence of their circumstances.* The participants sought to protect themselves from hurt, and to promote their independence and their sense of self-reliance by not placing trust in those around them. Thus, in many respects distrusting, was "functional" (Kohli, 2006b, p. 712) for them. Whilst there were exceptions, most of the young people only trusted people when it was deemed necessary to do so. As such, their distrust represented evidence of agency and capacity rather than of pathology and deficit.

The insights that emerged in relation to trust also throw light on the nature of the loneliness that unaccompanied minors face. Many studies have referred to the social isolation and loneliness of these young people, with the implication often being that unaccompanied minors lack friends and companionship (e.g. Wade et al., 2005). However, this study suggests that these young people are not always lonely as a result of having few friends or little company. As has previously been stated, peers and professionals are frequently present in their lives and facilitate their coping and adaptation process. These individuals provide nurturant, instrumental, and social companionship support (Cutrona, 2000; Cohen & Wills, 1985) and are often viewed as friends. Why then do the young people still seem to be lonely? Apart from the obvious answer that they miss their families and childhood friends, the findings also suggest that the absence of trust in their relationships contributes to their sense of loneliness. The narratives indicate that the participants often do not see trust as an essential element of friendship, despite the common tendency to equate friendship with trust (e.g. Mitchell, 1990; Smith, Cowie, & Blades, 2003). Difficulties in trusting largely account for the lack of strong relationships in their lives. *Whilst relationships were still perceived to be meaningful even in the absence of trust, the loneliness of the participants often arose from the quality of their relationships, including the lack of trust, rather than from the absence of relationships per se.*

Although this research furthers our insight into the nature of the relationships in the lives of unaccompanied minors and into the reasons for their distrust, further research is again needed. Most

importantly, research needs to explore whether distrusting leads to positive or negative outcomes in the longer term and whether the ability of unaccompanied minors to trust changes with time. Also, in order to further the current debates about integration and interculturalism, researchers need to examine the difficulties that Irish people may have in trusting refugees and other immigrant groups.

Coping Through Faith

And yet, although loneliness was evident in the lives of many of these young people, most of them never felt completely alone. This was because of their relationships with God. Initially, reflecting the broader tendency of researchers to neglect the religious aspects of adolescents' lives (Donelson, 1999; Bridges & Moore, 2002; Benson et al., 2003; Furrow & Wagener, 2003, Roehlkepartain et al., 2006), I had anticipated that I would make only passing reference to the faith of the participants, just as most other researchers have done when writing about unaccompanied minors (e.g. Stanley, 2001; Vekic, 2003; Wade et al., 2005). However, when faith emerged as a strong and recurring theme, initially during the participant observation and then during the first interviews, the flexible design of the study allowed further exploration of this aspect of the young people's lives. As a result, and reflecting the prominent position that the young people gave to faith in my conversations with them, the religious faith of the participants evolved into a major part of the study. This aspect of the study is particularly important given that various researchers have pointed to the dearth of research pertaining to the faith of asylum seekers and refugees generally (Ai et al., 2003; Goździak, 2002; Goździak & Shandy, 2002; McMichael, 2002). Even less is known about the faith of unaccompanied minors.

Despite the different circumstances in which the young people grew up and their varied situations in Ireland, one thing emerged as common to all but one of the participants: *Religion was depicted as an important aspect of their lives.* Faith-related themes were woven through their conversations. Unsolicited references to God and to religious practice arose frequently. The participants' descriptions suggested that faith – whether Islamic or Christian - performed multiple functions in their lives. In an Ireland where they felt that faith was not important to their Irish peers, attending churches and mosques provided the young people with comfort and companionship through interaction with 'like-minded people'. However, this comfort and companionship was not only provided by membership of religious institutions, as has been suggested by Wade et al. (2005). It was also provided through the young people's very personal relationships with God. In the absence of other close relationships, God was particularly important to them. They spoke passionately about trusting and loving God, about relying on Him for guidance and support, and about His continuous presence in their lives. Indeed, the study's findings suggest that the continuity provided by faith was of particular significance to the young people. Reflecting the view of Handlin (1971) in relation to Irish and other immigrants in the United

States, religion served as a bridge between the old and new 'worlds' of the unaccompanied minors, not only in terms of their relationships with God, but also in terms of their religious practice. Religion and trust in God had usually been dominant features of life in their countries of origin. When they moved away from these countries, they were able to carry faith and its associated rituals with them, across borders and into their new lives. In doing so they sometimes faced barriers because of the different religious culture in which they now lived. However, in general they negotiated these barriers and continued to practice their faith. Amidst multiple changes in their lives, faith was something that remained relatively unchanged. It helped the young people to overcome the threat of discontinuity that arose from their exile, just as Islam has been found to help Somali refugee women in Melbourne (McMichael, 2002) and Catholicism has helped illegal Irish immigrants in New York city (Corcoran, 1993).

Although this study serves as a valuable addition to the very small body of research that exists about religion in the lives of refugees, further research is certainly warranted. At the moment such research is at an embryonic stage and a myriad of questions remain unexplored. Research needs to be conducted in relation to diverse groups of refugees, whether the diversity is in terms of age, nationality, religious denomination, immigration status, or other factors. In addition, the refugee studies field can benefit from drawing on religious theories from other disciplines such as the psychology of religion (e.g. Pargament, 1997), as has been done in this study. Finally, it would be very valuable to explore whether or not professionals, including social workers, give consideration to religion in their work with refugees, or in their work with other client groups.

Drawing the Key Themes Together

Apart from providing the unaccompanied minors with comfort, companionship, and continuity, the importance of religion was also evident by the fact that faith was interlinked with the other key findings, namely the findings in relation to the young people's 'ordinary', past lives and the findings in relation to their coping strategies, including distrust. Firstly, descriptions of the young people's 'ordinary' lives prior to exile included frequent references to God and to religion. Like other aspects of their lives, these were discussed within a comparative discourse. The narratives suggested that religion was embedded within the cultural contexts of the participants' home countries. In contrast, it was the perception of the young people that within the Irish culture – and particularly within the Irish youth culture – faith was not important. As a result, the participants often felt different from their Irish peers. Thus, a changed religious milieu accounted for some of the cultural discontinuities that the young people faced upon arrival in Ireland.

Secondly, although faith in God was utilised as a coping strategy in and of itself, this faith was also significantly linked with the other coping strategies. Arising from their 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' past and present circumstances (the outer blue ring in *Figure 4*), the young people were faced with multiple challenges. They dealt with these by adopting various coping strategies, abbreviated in the *active survival circle* as faith, adaptation, positivity, suppression, self-reliance, continuity, and distrust.[1] These strategies were influenced by their past and present situations. This is illustrated by the double-ended white arrows in the circle, which suggest that there was constant interaction between the wider contexts of the participants' lives and the coping strategies that they used. Hence, the past and the present influenced their choice of particular coping strategies. In turn, the strategies that were chosen influenced the past and the present by effecting how the young people dealt with the challenges associated with these two parts of their lives.

Yet, religious coping ('faith') emerged as the most commonly used coping strategy, and has thus been placed in the centre of the model. In addition, practicing their religion and having a strong belief in God facilitated the young people in using the other strategies. This is depicted by the dotted lines linking faith with the other strategies, which suggest that whilst the other coping strategies were frequently used independently of faith, they were nonetheless often closely linked with it. For instance, religion provided the participants with a means of distraction and of companionship, hence facilitating the process of suppression. It allowed the young people to feel independent and self-reliant, as their confidence in God meant that they did not feel the need to rely on other people for help. Linked with this, the participants' trust in God minimised the need to trust those around them. In terms of coping with acculturation, religion provided continuity for the young people – continuity in terms of their relationships with God and their religious practice. However, it also served as a medium through which the young people could adapt by learning and changing. For instance, whilst they held on to their beliefs, their religious practice and ideas about faith sometimes changed in order to accommodate their new environment. Finally, faith facilitated the adoption of a positive attitude, as many of the participants expressed hope in a future directed by God.

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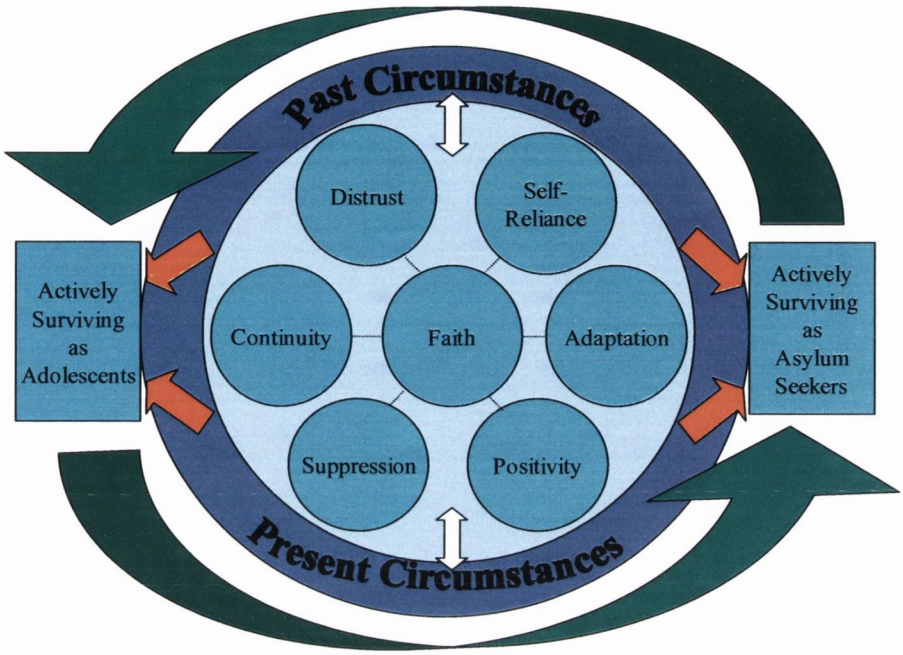
[1] Each of these strategies has been mentioned earlier in this chapter under the heading 'coping with multiple challenges' and has been discussed at length in chapter 5.

Figure 4: The Active Survival Circle



Thus, in the context of having grown up in religious societies, of facing multiple challenges arising from their past and present circumstances, and of lacking trusting relationships with those around them, religion served as both a 'relatively compelling' and a 'relatively available' coping resource (Pargament, 1997). As a result, and because of the multiple purposes that it served, religious coping was used frequently by the young people in dealing with the difficulties and vicissitudes of their lives. For most of them, religion held a central purpose in their lives and was strongly connected with the other ways in which they coped.

In addition, *Figure 4* suggests that the young people responded actively rather than passively to their situations. The coping strategies that they used were purposefully chosen as they were deemed the most compelling options available in their circumstances. By choosing between different coping strategies – as was discussed earlier – the young people showed that they were actively engaged in surviving the challenging circumstances that they faced. They demonstrate their sense of agency, and emerge as 'active survivors', both as adolescents and as asylum seekers. However, their survival as adolescents and their survival as asylum seekers are not distinct processes. Instead, the outer green arrows suggest that their experiences as adolescents influence their experiences as asylum seekers, and vice versa. Hence, there is constant and recurring interaction between these interrelated aspects of their identities.

Whilst *Figure 4* goes some way towards illuminating what is often happening for unaccompanied minors, it is not being proposed as a completed explanatory framework. It is a tentative offering, which depicts the coping strategies that were evident in this study. It suggests the possible centrality of faith in the lives of many unaccompanied minors and the likelihood that 'active survival' will be evident in the ways they deal with the challenges they face. However, it is recognised that the situations of these young people are complex and changing, as is illustrated by the many arrows in the diagram which suggest continuous movement and interaction between different aspects of their lives. Hence, their circumstances should not be described in a simplistic way, and the *active survival circle* should not be interpreted as such. For instance, whilst the participants encountered many challenges, neither their past nor present experiences can be depicted as uniformly bleak nor bright. In the young people's descriptions, accounts of good times and bad times, of sadness and of happiness were evident. Consequently, the complexities and nuances of their lives always need to be taken into consideration and highlighted, as has been done throughout this study. In addition, each of the thirty-two participants was interviewed at a particular point in his or her own development, at a particular point in his or her adjustment to Irish society, and at a particular point in Ireland's immigration history. Further follow-up research is needed so as to see whether the *active survival circle* continues to be of relevance to these young people's lives and to the lives of other young people who follow in their footsteps.

Also, whilst this study suggests that professionals should pay attention to the 'ordinary' lives of unaccompanied minors, to their coping strategies, to their difficulties in trusting, and to their religious faith, *the study also shows that attention needs to be paid to difference and to individuality.* The *active survival circle* does not purport to represent conclusively the lives of either the participants in this study, or of unaccompanied minors generally. Within all of the insights that emerged, diversity of opinion and of experience were evident. Therefore, just as the experiences of unaccompanied minors are complex and changing, they are also individual and idiosyncratic. Every effort had been made not to suggest that the prevalent themes are relevant to all unaccompanied minors, or, indeed, to all of the participants in this study. A relatively small number of unaccompanied minors were involved in this study. Rather than attempting to generalise, this research has highlighted a variety of perspectives within the main themes. This was facilitated by the qualitative design of the study, which allowed me to draw attention to 'deviant cases' (Becker, 1998). Some of the young people did not talk about positive, 'ordinary' experiences in their countries of origin. Some of the young people did not have difficulties trusting those around them. One young person stated that faith was not an important aspect of her life. Such examples – which have been discussed in the relevant findings chapters - highlight the importance of not generalising about unaccompanied minors. The commitment to the uniqueness and individuality of unaccompanied minors within this study is in keeping with the value base

underpinning the strengths perspective (Fast & Chapin, 2002).

Concluding Reflections

My observations and the young people's descriptions leave us with greater insight into the lives of many unaccompanied minors. My emphasis in this study was on the strengths perspective and on acknowledging that unaccompanied minors, like other refugees, tend to be able to "manage well enough in the aftermath of their experience" (Ahearn, 2000, p. 236). Arising from this perspective, I have highlighted the young people's ability, agency, and capacity. Whilst the participants expressed different opinions and responded in a variety of ways to their circumstances, my conversations with them suggested that, overall, they are tackling challenges and embracing opportunities. *Although the experiences of unaccompanied minors are embedded in a rich socio-cultural context, the young people emerge as social actors who actively deal with the difficulties and discontinuities with which they are faced. Their lives are by no means easy, but they do not sit passively by and allow their circumstances to control and confine them.* Instead, arising from their purposeful use of various coping strategies, and the particularly important role played by faith, the participants emerge not as vulnerable, passive victims but as vibrant young people who are resiliently and actively surviving their circumstances. These insights highlight their resourcefulness and their inherent capacity to successfully negotiate changed contexts and challenging circumstances in Ireland.

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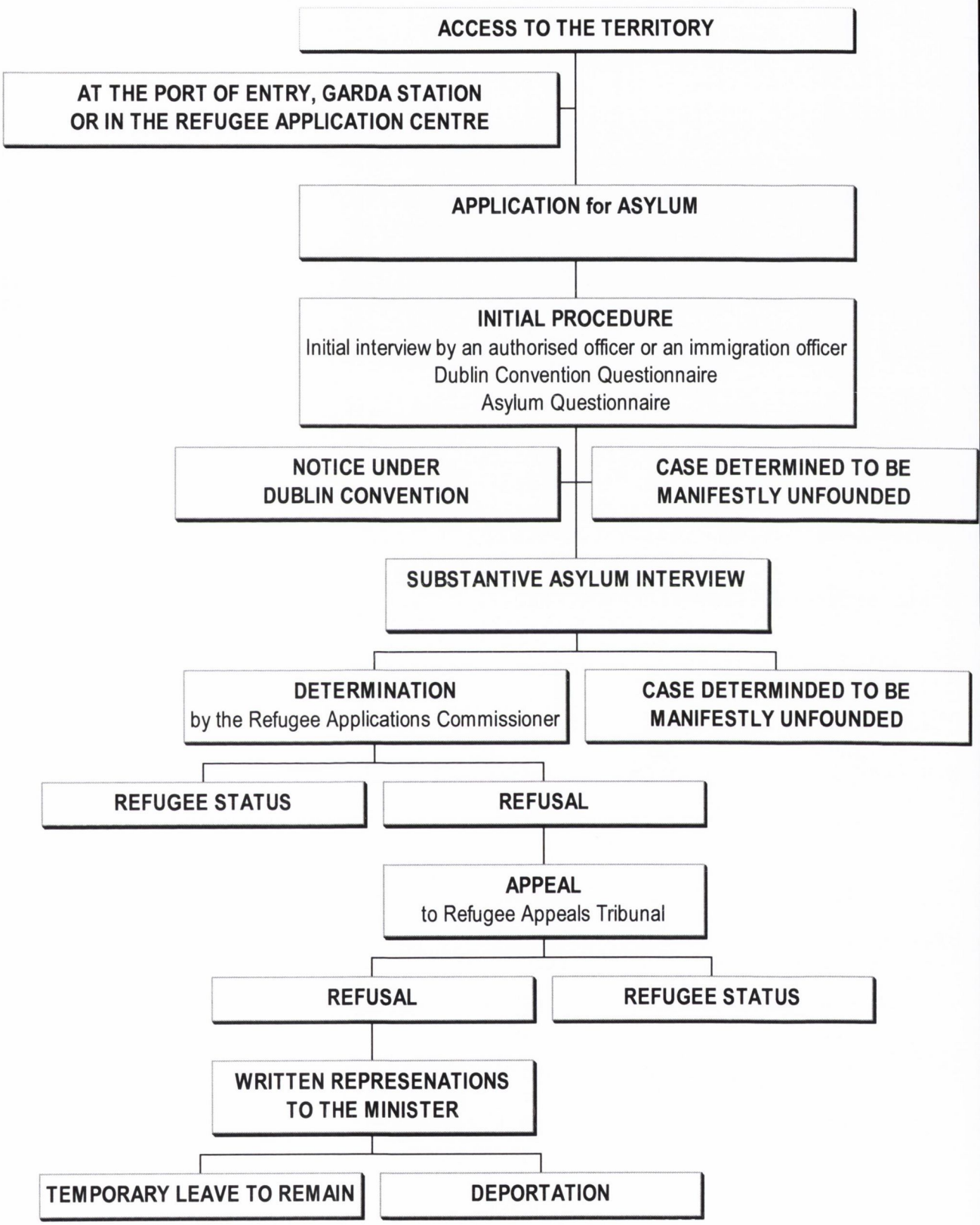
Appendix 1: Guide to the Asylum Determination Procedure

Guide to the asylum determination procedure under the Refugee Act 1996



Source: Veale et al., 2003 (Reproduced with permission)

Appendix 2: Letter of Agreement

Letter of Agreement between the East Coast Area Health Board and the Children's Research Centre

Research re: The experiences of separated children seeking asylum in Ireland

This is an agreement between the Children's Research Centre and the East Coast Area Health Board in relation to research being carried out by Muireann Ní Raghallaigh (research student) on the experience of separated children seeking asylum in Ireland.

Aims of the research: This study aims to understand the experiences of separated children seeking asylum in Ireland, and will focus on issues concerning their identity. The researcher will engage in participant observation with the young people living in [name of hostel and location] and will also use other methods of data collection, possibly including focus groups and interviews. The researcher may also wish to interview Social Workers and Project Workers working with separated children.

Project Team: The project team will be comprised of Professor Robbie Gilligan, Associate Director of the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin and Muireann Ní Raghallaigh, research student, Trinity College Dublin.

Funding: The research is being funded by the National Children's Office, Dublin.

Timetable: The fieldwork stage of the research will begin in November '03, lasting for approximately 9 months. The thesis based on the research is due for submission in April '05. Should a report be published, the East Coast Area Health Board (ECAHB) will be given a copy of the publication before it is released to the general public.

Consent: The ECAHB consents for the researcher (Muireann Ní Raghallaigh) to engage in regular participant observation in [name of hostel] beginning in November 2003 for a period of approximately 9 months. The researcher will obtain the written consent of the young people living in the hostel before she begins participant observation. If she receives the consent of two thirds or more of the residents, the observation will take place. Data will not be collected in relation to any young people who live in the hostel but who have not consented to taking part in the research. The researcher will inform new residents of the research and will offer them the opportunity to give consent. She will obtain further written consent of any young people who agree to participate in individual interviews or in focus groups. She will seek the consent of [name of principal social worker], ECAHB, or her nominee, in relation to each of these young people individually, before the interviews or focus groups begin.

Ethics: The researcher will undertake to adhere to the guidelines for good practice developed by the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin.

Anonymity: Every effort will be made by both the East Coast Area Health Board and the researcher to protect the anonymity of the participants and the identity of the hostel in which the research is being conducted.

Role of the researcher and confidentiality:

- The researcher is to have a research focus. The researcher's responsibilities towards the young people are solely in relation to her role as researcher. She does not have general responsibilities for the care of the young people or to report information she finds out about them back to the Health Board. She is not to serve as a monitor or adviser in relation to the management of the unit.
- The relationship between the researcher and the young people is a confidential one. However, if the researcher has specific concerns about individual young people, the concerns will be discussed with her supervisor and a decision as to what to do will be made in the context of the *Children First* Guidelines. If the young person is believed to be at risk

of harm, the researcher will speak to the young person about this before informing the relevant Health Board representative.

Reporting of concerns regarding the research: Should any issues of concern arise regarding the research these will be brought to the attention of the group consisting of [name] (General Manager, ECAHB), [name] (Principal Social Worker, ECAHB), [name] (Director of Child Care, ECAHB), Robbie Gilligan (Associate Director of the Children's Research Centre), [name] (Director of the Children's Research Centre) and Muireann Ní Raghallaigh (Research Student) who will discuss and attempt to resolve them. Should the resolution of these difficulties not prove possible, an agreed third party will be asked to intervene.

Progress reports: The researcher will inform the Health Board of her progress in relation to the research on a regular basis.

Dissemination: The researcher will give a public lecture, which will be organised in conjunction with the National Children's Office, when the research is completed. She may also write journal articles and conference papers based on the research.

Authorship: Muireann Ní Raghallaigh will be the author of the thesis.

Signed:

_____	_____
[Name] Gen. Manager, ECAHB	[Name] P. Social Worker, ECAHB
_____	_____
[Name] Director of Child Care ECAHB	Robbie Gilligan Supervisor
_____	_____
Muireann Ní Raghallaigh Research Student	[Name] Director, Children's Research Centre

Appendix 3: Consent Forms

Consent Form for Young People

I _____ agree that Muireann can spend time in Valley Lodge between now and June 2004 as a part of her research. Muireann is trying to find out more about what it is like for young people who come to Ireland alone.

I understand that Muireann will be spending time with us and will sometimes want to write down things she sees and things she hears. She might write them down when she is in the hostel or after she leaves. It is o.k. with me if she writes down things I do or say. Sometimes Muireann might want to tape conversations we are having and this is o.k. with me too. I can stop the tape recorder at any time if I want to.

I know that if there is something I don't want to talk to Muireann about that is fine. If I have any problems with what Muireann is doing I can talk to her about these problems. Muireann will listen to what I say and we will try to sort out the problem together. I also know that I can change my mind about taking part in the research at any time.

I understand that sometimes Muireann will discuss her research with other people (for example with other students, with her supervisor and with other researchers). This is explained at the back of this page. When she does this she will not tell these people the name of the hostel or my name.

Muireann will not discuss personal things I tell her with other people in Valley Lodge

However, if something I say or do makes Muireann worried about my safety or about someone else's safety, she might then have to talk to an adult who is responsible for me about what I said. In this case she will have to give my name. Muireann will discuss this with me before she talks to someone else.

Muireann will be writing up a project about what she finds out from spending time with us and talking to us. In University this project is called a *thesis*. When she writes this she will not have my name in it or the name of the hostel.

Signed:

_____ _____

Young Person Researcher

Date: _____

Researcher: Muireann Ní Raghallaigh – M.Litt Candidate, Children's Research Centre, Trinity College. Ph: XXX

Supervisor: Prof. Robbie Gilligan – Department of Social Studies, Trinity College. Ph: XXX

Date of Document: 2-Dec-03

(Back of consent form)

What will happen to the information that Muireann collects about you?

When Muireann is doing the research, it is helpful for her to talk to other people about what she is doing. These people include adult asylum seekers or refugees, other researchers, and people working with young people. When Muireann discusses the research with other people **she will not be telling them your name or the name of the hostel**. She will talk about "some of the young people" or about "one girl/boy" rather than talking about [name of young person]. This will help to make sure that the people she talks to don't know exactly who she is talking about. It is her job to make sure that your identity cannot be recognised if she writes or talks about you.

While Muireann is doing the research, she has a supervisor in Trinity. His name is Robbie Gilligan. During the research she will be discussing what she is doing with Robbie and she will be telling him what happens. However, **she will not be telling Robbie who said the different things and so he will not know who you are**.

When Muireann has finished collecting information from you she will be writing a project on what she has learnt. In University this is called a *thesis*. In this thesis she will not be writing your name or the name of your hostel. Instead she will use code names. She will make sure, as far as is possible, that anyone reading the thesis will not recognise you from what she has written. A copy of the thesis will be kept in the library in Trinity and will be available for people both in Ireland and in other countries to read. You will be given a copy of the thesis also, if you would like to have it.

Sometimes a thesis is published and made into a book.

If something you say or do makes Muireann worried about you or about someone else, she may have to talk to an adult who is responsible for you about it. If this happens Muireann will have to give your name but she will discuss it with you first. The person she will talk to will probably be [name of staff member] or your Social Worker. **This is the only time that Muireann will give your name when she talks to someone else about what you say.**

Interview Consent Form

I, _____ agree to talk to Muireann Ní Raghallaigh as part of her research on the experiences of young people who arrive unaccompanied in Ireland.

I understand that:

The conversation I have with Muireann is confidential and is for the purpose of Muireann's research. If Muireann is discussing the conversation with anyone else (e.g. her supervisor, other students etc) she will not mention my name. However, if Muireann is worried about my safety or someone else's safety because of something I say she may have to tell someone else. She will discuss this with me first.

Muireann is writing a thesis based on the conversations she has with young people, including me. However, if she uses information I give her she will change my name so that my identity is protected.

I will only talk about what I want to talk about. If there are some questions which I would prefer not to answer that is fine.

I can choose to stop talking to Muireann at any stage – I don't have to wait until she says she is finished.

Muireann will tape the conversation we have so that she can remember more clearly what is said. Muireann will keep the tape safely and will destroy it when it is no longer needed. Only Muireann will listen to the tape.

Signed: _____ **(Young Person)**

_____ **(Researcher)**

Date: _____

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

This research is about what it is like for unaccompanied minors to live in Ireland. It's about how you adjust to life here given that you have come from a different country and how you feel about that change. It is not about why you came here (although if you want to tell me about that, that is fine – it might be helpful for me to understand your background). The information you give me is confidential – I do not work for other agencies (social workers, justice etc) and none of the information you give me will be passed on to them except if you tell me something that makes me believe you or someone else is in danger. If you see me writing things down its just to remind myself of other questions I need to ask you.

Section 1: Life-History Question

- I have some questions to ask you in a while but first I'd like to ask you about your life history. Can you think about how you would tell the story of your life? I'd like you to tell me the story of your life, your life history. Just tell me your own life story, whatever way you want to tell it. That might seem hard, but take your time and tell it to me whatever way you want to.

Section 2: Daily life Question (DLQ)

- I want to talk to you about everyday life here in Ireland. So can you tell me how you spent yesterday?

Depending on how comfortable the young person seems with talking about life at home, ask follow up questions on how this daily routine differs from the routine at home.

- Is what you have told me about what you do every day like what you used to do every day at home? Can you tell me about what you used to do every day at home?

Section 3: Themes

School

- What was it like starting school here?
- So, can you tell me about going to school here? What is it like for you?

  Probe: Adjustment, getting used to school system here, expectations

- How do you find the teachers? And the students? Is the relationship between students and teachers different here to what it is at home? If so, in what way?
- Do you get a lot of homework to do? Are you able to get help from anyone with your homework?
- Have you done exams here? How did you find them?
- I suppose I imagine that school here is very different to school in your country, but maybe I'm wrong. What do you think?
- Are there things you like about school here? Are there things you don't like?
- Were there things you liked about school at home? Were there things you didn't like?

- Do you have any particularly nice memories of school at home that you would like to tell me about?
- Is school important to you? Why / why not? Do you have any ambitions about school and education?

Free time and hobbies

- Tell me about your spare time, how you spend your time after school and at weekends?
- Who is this time spent with? *Probe: nationality of people*
- Tell me a little bit about your hobbies.
- Do you listen to music? What kind?
- Do you read? Tell me about what you like to read?
- What about sports? What sports do you like to play or watch? Do you know anything about Irish sports? Are there any _____ sports or games?
- Do you think you are like Irish young people in the way you spend your free time or do you think you are different?
- Is the way you spend your free time here any different to the way you used to spend your free time at home?
- If you were still living in your country now, how do you think you would be spending your free time?

Friends

- Can you tell me a little bit about the people you are friendly with here in Ireland? Who they are, how you got to know them etc? *Probe: Nationality etc*
- What about the friends you had at home? Can you tell me about them?
- Do you think your friends at home would get on with your friends here? Are they similar or very different?
- If you were able to go back home, and everything was safe for you, what do you think your friends would think of you now? Do you think they would see a lot of changes in you?

Irish young people

- Are any of your friends Irish? (Is it easy to get to know Irish people?)
- Tell me what you think of Irish young people. *Probe: The things they do, the way they dress, their relationships with their parents / teachers etc.* Are they similar to or different from you and young people from your country?
- What do you think Irish young people think of you and people from your country?
- Do you think you would be a very different person if you had been born in Ireland and were brought up here? For instance if your parents had moved here and given birth to you here?

Girlfriends / Boyfriends

- Have you had any girlfriends / boyfriends here in Ireland?
- Would there be much difference between going out with someone here in Ireland and going out with someone if you were living at home?

Fashion / Youth Culture

- How do you like to spend the money you get each week?
- Do you like clothes? Tell me about the types of clothes you like to wear?
- If you think about the clothes you had when you lived at home and the clothes you have now, have they changed much in style since you moved here? If you were living at home now do you think you would be wearing the same type of clothes?
- What about hairstyles? Do you wear your hair differently here to how you would wear it if you lived at home?
- If hair / clothes have changed, why do you think this has happened?

Supports and Trust

- Can you tell me who you think knows you best in the world?
- Can you tell me what person you feel closest to?
- Tell me about the people who support or help you here in Ireland? How did you meet these people? In what way do they help you?
- What do you think the word 'trust' means? Like, if you trust someone, what does that mean?
- If you had a personal problem or difficulty that you needed to talk to someone about, who would you choose to speak to?
- Would you say that these are people whom you trust? Is it important to you to have a person you can trust? Why? / Why not? Is it easy for you to trust people? How do you decide who you can trust? What things make it difficult for you to trust people?
- Do you think other people trust you? What about Irish people, do they trust you?
- And when you lived at home who did you trust / who did you feel able to turn to for help? Was it difficult to trust people at home too?
- Have you ever felt that people don't trust you here in Ireland? That people don't believe you? If so, what has this experience been like for you?

Religion

- Are religion and prayer important to you? (If so), in what way?
- Can you tell me about some of the things you would pray for here in Ireland?
- Do you attend church here in Ireland? What church do you attend (African or Irish?)? Why do you go to this particular church? How do you find the church you go to here?
- Would you go alone to church or with friends? Is religion something that is important to your friends? Is it something you would talk about together? Do you think praying and

going to church is considered 'cool' here in Ireland? What about when you were at home?

- Was religion an important part of your life at home? (If so), tell me about that? Was the church you attended like the churches in Ireland?
- What kind of things would you have prayed for when you lived at home?

Special Occasions

- Have you celebrated any special occasions (such as birthdays or religious occasions) whilst in Ireland? Can you tell me about how you celebrated these events?
- What about Christmas? How did you celebrate Christmas in Ireland?
- Have you heard of St. Patrick's day? Did you celebrate it?
- What kind of special occasions are celebrated in your country? How did you celebrate these occasions? Do you still celebrate them now? What would happen on Christmas day at home?

Accomodation, food and eating

- Can you tell me about where you are living here in Ireland? How do you find it living there?
- Do you know what happens to young people in your country who cannot live with their parents? Where do they live? Who looks after them etc?
- What is it like living without your parents? What is it like not having your parents telling you what you can and cannot do?
- What kind of food do you eat here in Ireland? What do you think of the food? Do you eat alone or with others?
- Is the food like the food you would eat if you were at home? Is there anything about food and eating that you miss from home?

Section 4: Early Years

Growing up / Family

- I'm just going to ask you some questions about growing up in _____ now, if that's ok. So, can you tell me a little bit about the area you grew up in? *Probe: compare to Ireland, size, people, ethnic groups, neighbours, rural / urban*
- So, did you like growing up in this area? Why? / Why not?
- Did you live with your family when you were at home? If it isn't too hard for you can you tell me a little bit about your family? *Probe: members of family, occupation etc.*
- Did you think your parents were strict when you were growing up? (if yes), In what way?
- Of all your family members, who do you miss the most? Why?
- Can you tell me about any particularly happy memories you have of life at home? *Probe: special occasions etc.*

Section 5: General

Perception of their country

- Looking back on your country now from Ireland, what do you think of it?
- Do you feel proud of your country? Why / In what way?
- What do you miss most from your country? Is there anything that you don't miss?
- What do you think Irish people think of your country?

Contact with Home

- Do you have contact with family / friends from your country? If yes, what type of contact do you have? If no, is there a reason for not keeping in contact?
- Do you keep in touch with what is happening in your country? If so, how do you do this? What kind of things do you like to know about / wonder about? *Probe: Music, sports, politics, local events, about people etc*
- What about things that are happening in Ireland, like things that are in the news.....are you interested in these things?

Perception of Ireland

- So before you left your country to come to Europe, had you ever heard been out of your country before? Had you ever heard of Ireland? What did you know or think about Ireland or Europe? Where did you learn this from?
- What things did you notice first when you arrived in Europe?
- And now, what do you think of Ireland now?

Adjustment

- Do you feel you have adjusted to life in Ireland? Has this been difficult or easy?
- Can you tell me about a time when things have been good for you here in Ireland?
- Can you tell me about a time when things were not good for you?
- Do you feel that you belong in Ireland now? *Probe: Attachment, Feeling at home.*

Future

- We all have different idea about the future. What do you think would be a good future for you, a future you would like to happen?
- Would you like to have children?
- If your children were born in Ireland, do you think you would tell them a lot about your country? If it was possible, would you prefer them to grow up in Ireland or in your country? Would you like them to visit your country and to learn about it? Would you speak to them in your language or in English?
- A lot of people worry about their future. What would be a bad future for you, or one that you would not like to happen?

- What do you think might help you to have a good future?

General Questions

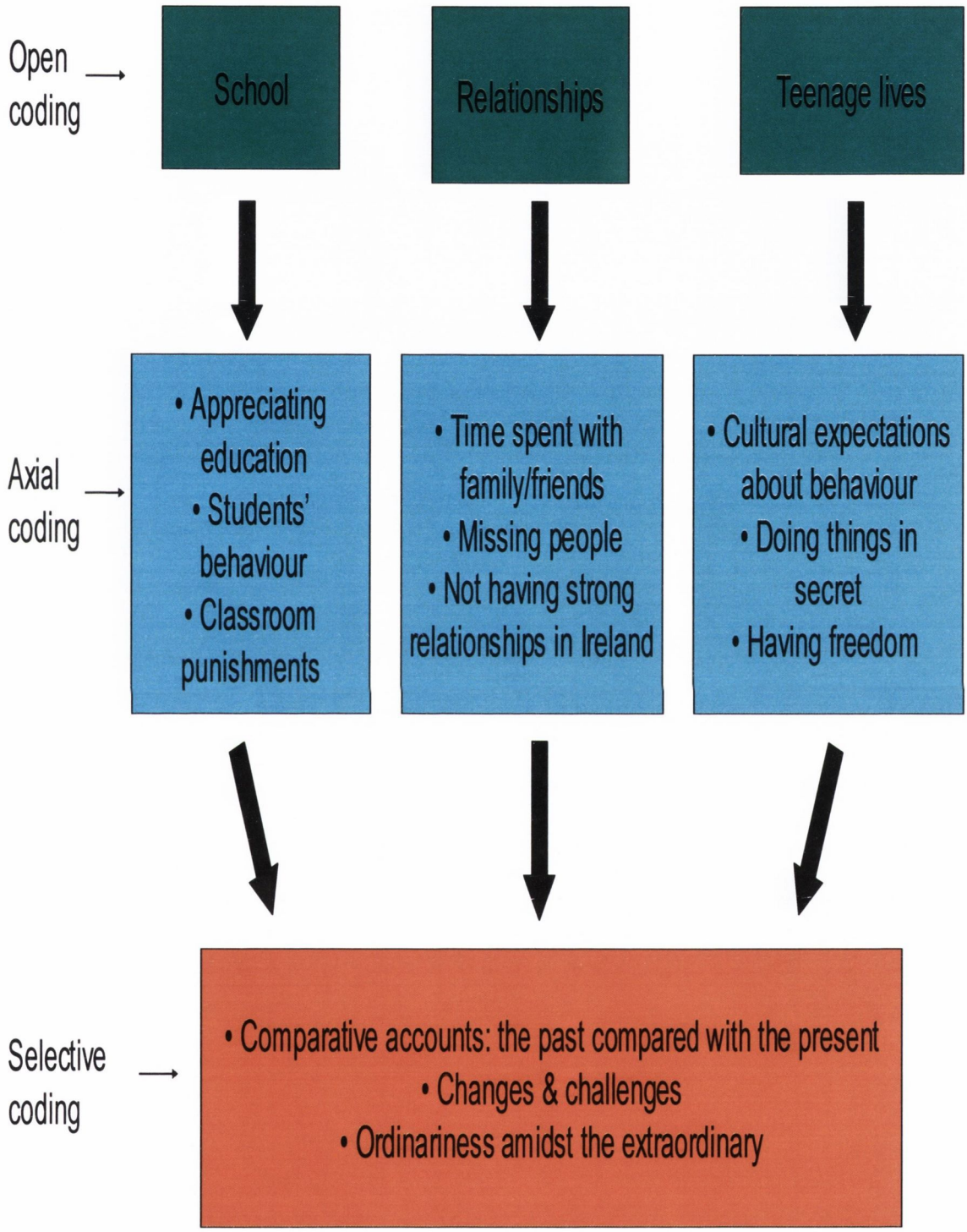
- If a person from where you come from was coming to Ireland, what would you tell him or her about here to prepare them for what its like? What advise would you give?
- Other than what we have already spoken about, are there any others ways in which Ireland is very different to your country?
- We've spoken a lot about differences. But what about similarities? Are the two countries similar in a lot of ways?
- Do you think that your decision to leave your country and come to Ireland was the right one?
- Can you tell me what it would be like for you to return to your country now?
- If you were asked to write down on a piece of paper who you are and a little bit about yourself to describe you, what would you write? Take a minute to think about it.

Advise the Study

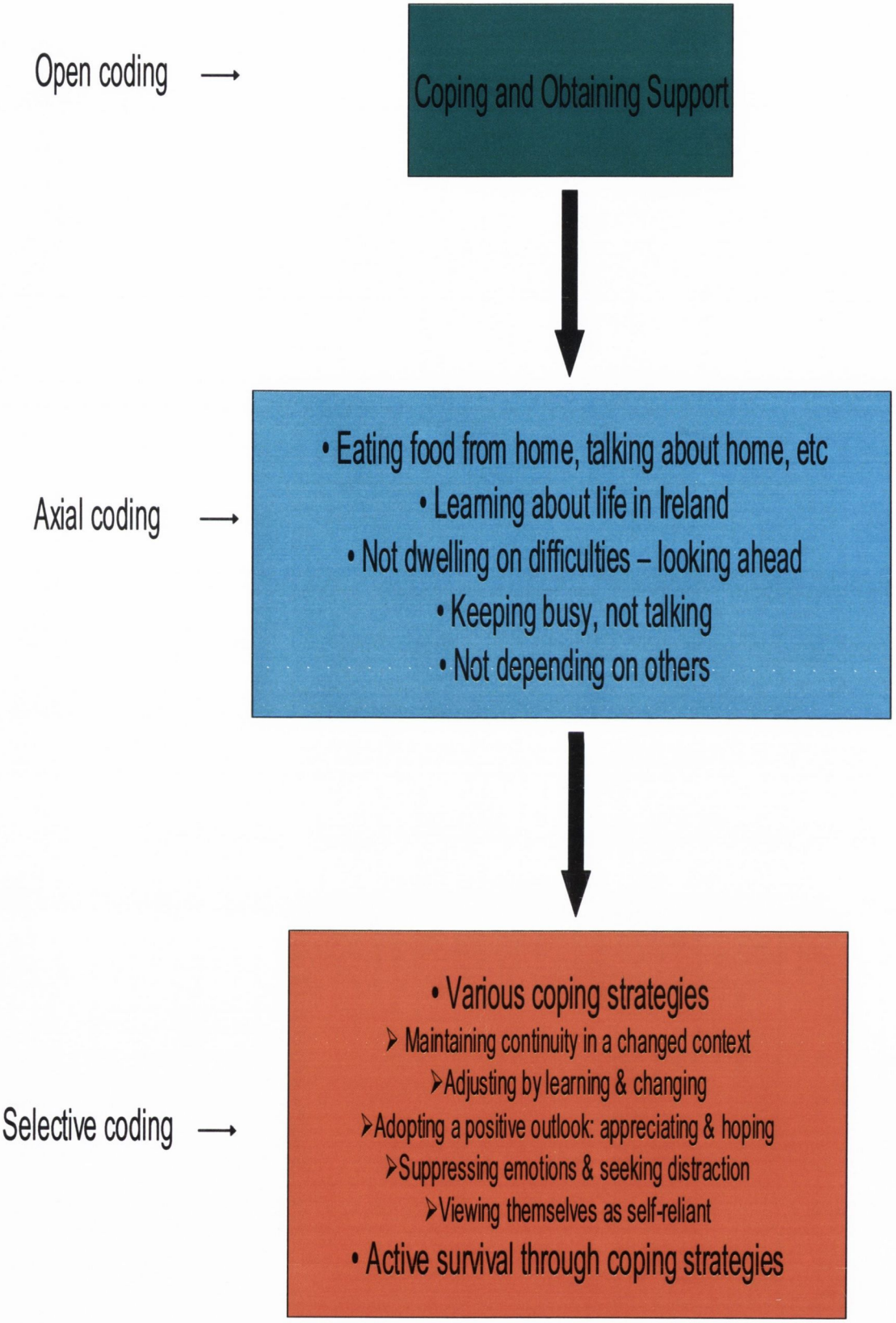
- Over the next few months, I will be talking to other young people about the research. Do you think there are any other questions I should ask or anything I should do differently?
- Do you know of anybody else who you think might be interested in taking part?
- Ok, we are finished now. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that you feel would be helpful for me? Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix 5: Examples of open, axial, and selective coding

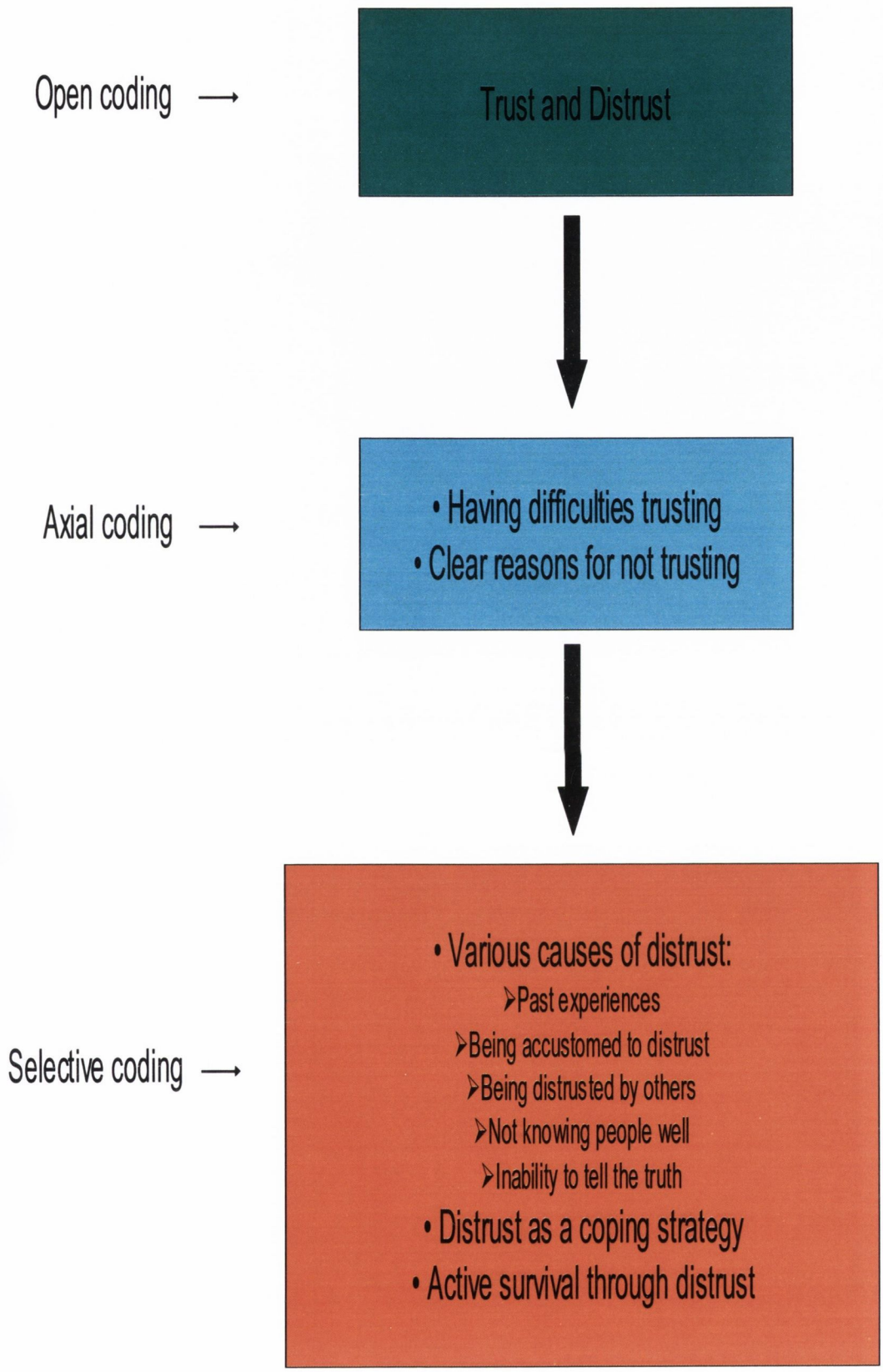
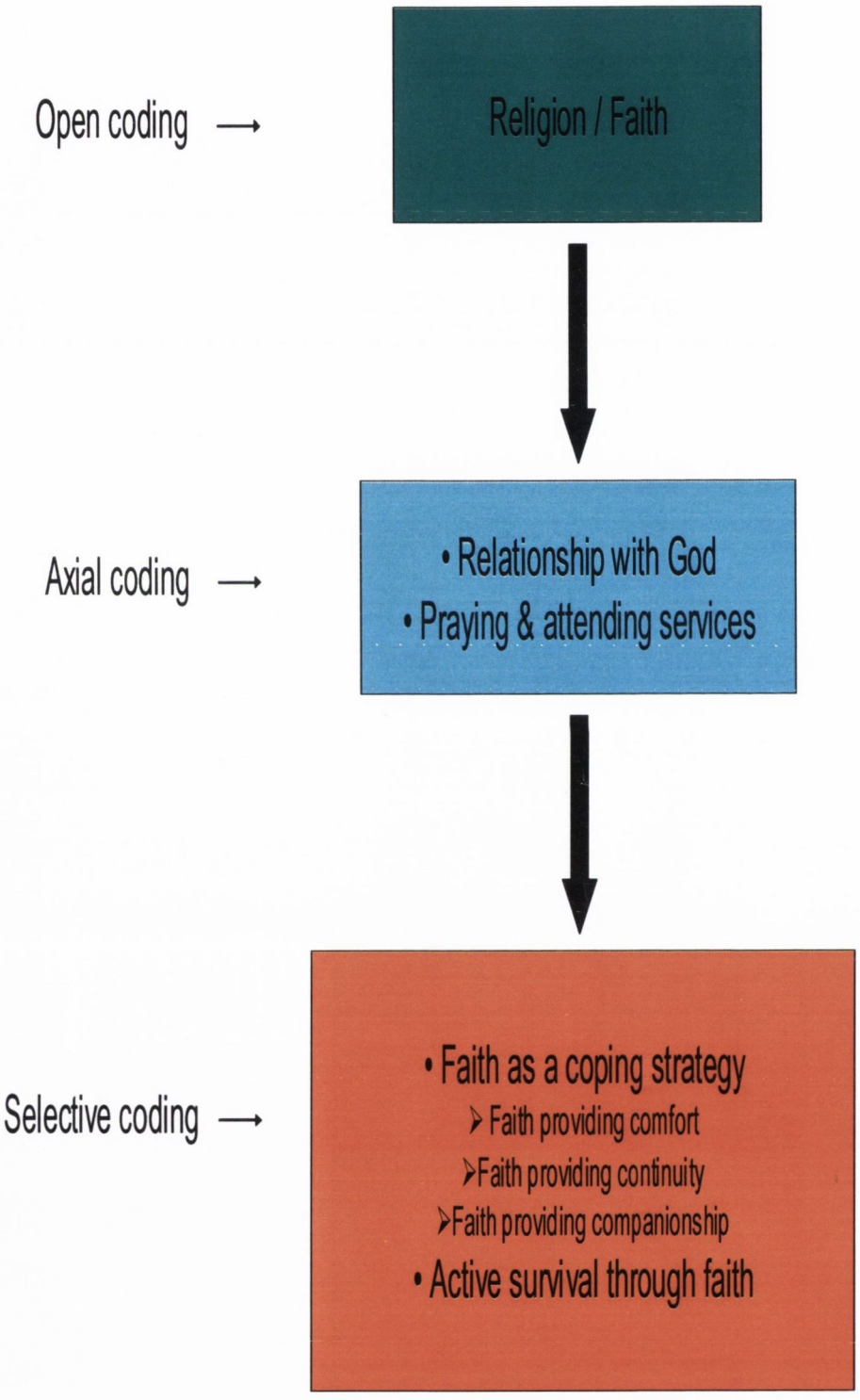
Coding: Example 1



Coding: Example 2



Coding: Example 3



Coding:Example 4