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Authors	Horgan, Deirdre;Martin, Shirley;Forde, Catherine
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Children's voice in the home: a relational, generational space.

Horgan, Deirdre; Martin, Shirley; Forde, Catherine

Chapter Author 1: Horgan, Deirdre, School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, Ireland.

d.horgan@ucc.ie

Chapter Author 2: Martin, Shirley School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, Ireland.

s.martin@ucc.ie

Chapter Author 3: Forde, Catherine, School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, Ireland.

C.Forde@ucc.ie

Author/s Biographies:

Dr. Deirdre Horgan is a senior lecturer in Social Policy in the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork. Her research interests include child welfare and protection, children and young people's participation, children's research methods, and child migration. She has conducted a number of funded research projects using child participatory methods as well as reporting on Irish government consultations with children on a range of policy issues. She is co-investigator on a Horizon 2020 project IMMERSE on the socio-educational integration of migrant children in Europe.

Dr. Shirley Martin is a lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork. She has conducted a number of research projects in the area of early childhood and child and youth participation. She is the Irish Primary Investigator for a Horizon 2020 Project IMMERSE (Integration mapping of Refugee and Migrant Children in Schools in Europe).

Dr. Catherine Forde is a lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork. She teaches children and young people's rights and participation on undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. Her main publication interests are community development; state-civil society relations; and children and young people's participation. She is co-author of the book *Social Work and Community Development: A Critical Practice Perspective* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

ABSTRACT:

This chapter draws on data from a qualitative study examining the extent to which children and young people age 7 to 17 are able to participate and influence matters affecting them in their home, school, and community. It was commissioned by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in Ireland to inform the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making*, 2015–2020. Utilising Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12 of the UNCRC and Leonard's (2016) concept of generagency, this chapter will examine children and young people's everyday lives and relationships within the home and family in the context of agency and structure.

In the study, home was experienced by children generally as the setting most facilitative of their voice and participation in their everyday lives reflecting research findings that children are more likely to have their initiative and ideas encouraged in the family than in school or their wider communities (Mayall, 1994). Key areas of decision-making included everyday consumption activities such as food, clothes, and pocket money as well as temporal activities including bedtime, leisure and friends. This concurs with Bjerke (2011) that consumption of various forms is a major field of children's participation. Positive experiences of participation reported by children and young people involved facilitation by adults whom they respected and with whom they had some rapport. This locates children as relational beings, embedded in multiple overlapping inter-generational processes and highlights the interdependency between children's participation and their environment (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; Leonard 2016).

KEYWORDS:

1. Children and young people;
2. Participation;
3. Home;
4. Relational;
5. Spatial;
6. Decision-making

Main Body:

Introduction

It is in the 'less-observed private world of the family' (Alderson, 2010, p. 89) that most children experience their first involvement in decision-making. The family constitutes the basic social context for children's participation and is the sphere in which they realise a substantial part of their participatory rights and prepare or train for participation in civil society (Tomanovic, 2003). According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009, para 90), the family provides an important participatory model and is 'preparation for the child to exercise the right to be heard in wider society'. Research in geographies of childhood and youth finds that, over time, children's geographies and use of space have changed, with less use of the public space of the street and the private home increasingly becoming a child space. It identifies 'indoor' children and children of the 'backseat generation', arguing that these new types of childhood are characterised by a decrease in playing outdoors and a growth of adult supervision (Karsten, 2005; Kernan, 2010). This highlights the importance of children and young people's interactions and positioning in the home.

Much international and Irish research to date has focused on the opportunities for children and young people's participation offered by formal structures and channels, and analysed the extent to which they interact with formal participation and decision-making structures (Martin et al, 2015). Some studies attempt to understand children and young people's participation in schools (Lundy, 2007; De Castro, 2011) as well as in community contexts (Percy-Smith and Burns, 2013). However, far less has emerged concerning the extent to which children participate or have a voice in the home (Davey et al, 2010; Sarre, 2010; Bjerke, 2011) and more generally on the more mundane everyday interactions and the routine informal and unstructured opportunities for meaningful participation in children and young people's daily lives (Horgan et al., 2017). The limited research available internationally provides evidence of a continuum of participatory experiences, from homes where power-sharing is intrinsic to family life to homes where children have little say (Davey et al, 2010). However, when compared with other sites, particularly schools, home emerges positively. For example, Mayall (1994) concludes that children were more likely to have their initiative and individual ideas encouraged in the family than in school or their wider communities. Furthermore, Bjerke (2011, 94) children experience their opportunities to participate at home as being 'fair'.

This study focuses on relational and spatial aspects of child participation within the home. It sought to investigate whether, for the children and young people involved, the home is a space where supportive, trusting family relationships can be nurtured and where independence grows with age. It furthermore outlines the views and experiences of parents with regard to children and young

people's participation in the home. The results indicate that age and issues of trust and tokenism were significant barriers in young people's participation and decision making at home. Key enablers of children and young people's participation included spaces where discussion can happen at home, good family relationships, being listened to by parents, trust and growing levels of independence with age, seeing decisions as fair and having the rationale for decisions explained to them by parents. Among suggestions for improvements the most important were designated family spaces for discussion, encouragement of active listening by parents, and promotion of explanation by adults of their decisions.

Concepts of children and young people's participation

Notwithstanding the fact that child participation is a contested concept (Horgan et al., 2017), the child participation agenda has helped to enshrine it as an essential indicator of children's well-being used internationally and has contributed to changing generational relationships encouraging greater democratization and decision-making (Bosisio and Olagnero, 2019). The child participation agenda has been influenced by the UNCRC emphasis on children as rights holders, by childhood studies perspectives on children as social actors, and by more recent conceptualizations of the spatial-relational-generational nature of children's lives (Prout, 2011; Leonard, 2016; Horgan et al., 2017).

UNCRC

The UNCRC has put children on the social and political agenda, thereby giving added impetus to theoretical debates about childhood (Thomas, 2012). Through the rights articulated in and the principles underpinning it, the UNCRC accepts children as citizens in their own right and recognises their capabilities to determine their own lives. It frames children's lives and well-being in the context of rights and requires children to be recognised as discrete social units with rights of equal value to adults including their parents (Hayes 2002). Article 12 or the 'Participation Article' is widely recognised as the basis for the child participation agenda in recent decades. It has been the catalyst for developing policy- and practice-based participatory initiatives with children internationally (Lansdown 2010; Tisdall, 2017). Although the term 'participation' itself does not appear in the text of Article 12 of the UNCRC, it is

> *widely used to describe ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes*. (UN Doc. CRC/C/CGC/12, para.2, 2009)

Leonard's (2016) concept of generagency

While the new sociology of childhood has been an important contributor to the children's rights agenda, more recently there has been a move against an over-emphasis on the notion of the child as agent, with Oswell (2013) arguing that such categorical thinking does not acknowledge the complexity of their lives. Prout (2011), similarly, contends that there is no need to arbitrarily separate children from adults, as if they were some different species of being. Rather, agency is the result of the interdependency between children's participation and their environment (Percy-Smith 2010; Tisdall 2013; Leonard 2016) of both relational constraints and interactions with adults (Baraldi and Cockburn, 2018). The shift from seeing childhood as an essentialised category towards seeing it as produced within a set of relations necessitates greater attention to childhood networks and co-constructions of intergenerational relations (Prout 2011, 1). Childhood is increasingly recognised, then, as a social and relational phenomenon (Alanen 2001) with children as context-dependent relational beings influenced by the structures and relationships in which they are embedded (Wihstutz 2011; Tisdall and Punch 2012). Central to this position is a perception of children as individuals having responsibilities, living relationally, inter-generationally, and in their communities. Such recognition of the relational nature of children's lives requires their participation to be located within a framework of intergenerational dialogue (Wyness 2012; Leonard 2016). Leonard (2016) uses the concept of 'generagency' which combines respect and recognition of children's capabilities with an awareness of power dynamics which exist in children's interactions with those around them (in this case parents) for understanding these relational processes. This perspective emphasises the interdependency between children's participation and their socio-cultural environments and lived realities (Kjørholt 2008).

Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12 of the UNCRC

Acknowledging all these influences on and understandings of children's participation, Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12 of the UNCRC, highlights the interrelated elements that contribute to effective participation. Lundy asks four key questions:

›› What spaces allow children and young people to participate?

›› Do opportunities exist for children and young people to have a voice?

›› What audience listens to the views of children and young people?

›› Can their views influence?

This model reflects the fact that all four elements – space, voice, audience and influence – are interrelated. It also illustrates that, despite the fact that decision-making processes are rarely static, Article 12 of the UNCRC has a clear sequence, the first stage of which is ensuring the child's right to express a view, followed by the child's right to have the view given due weight. While Lundy's model

was designed specifically for an examination of children's participation in the education context, it is capable of wider application to children and young people's experiences in those other contexts where they live their lives. It thus offers a model for informing understanding, developing policy and examining existing practice related to participation with children and young people in the home.

Research Methods

This chapter draws on a study commissioned by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in Ireland to inform the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015), the first such strategy in Europe (Horgan, 2017). The study examined the extent to which children and young people are able to participate and influence matters affecting them in their home, school, and community. Fieldwork was conducted in 2013 and comprised of child centred participatory research methods eliciting detailed narrative data from approximately 100 children and young people. Group interviews were conducted with 7–12 and 12–17-year-olds in urban, rural, and suburban areas across three geographic locations in Ireland. Acknowledging the relational and inter-generational nature of children's lives, 34 adult participants were interviewed comprising parents, teachers and principals, and community stakeholders. Children and young people were recruited through schools and community settings. The research team was police vetted, informed by Irish government guidance on ethical research with children (DCYA, 2012) and approval for the study was obtained from the University Social Research Ethics Committee.

The research utilised child-centred participative research methods appropriate to the children's age and understanding in order to unlock children's potential to contribute rich and useful perspectives to inform research into their lives (Tay-Lim and Lim 2013). The participatory methods designed for this study included visual ('participation tree', 'decision-making' interactive wall charts, and home, school, and community floor mats), verbal (child-friendly focus group guides), and other interactive methods (voting exercises) that helped capture their lived experiences of participation. Children's and Young People's Advisory Groups were involved in the identification of research themes, development of research materials, as well as initial analysis of raw data generated from the focus group interviews with children (Horgan, 2017).

This chapter will focus on the findings related to children and young people's participation at home. The themes explored are the types of decision-making at home, the relational dimensions of decision-making in the home; and spatial dimensions of decision-making in the home.

Children's Participation in the home: findings

The home was experienced by children and young people in this study as the setting most facilitative of their voice and participation in their everyday lives. Everyday participation opportunities were far more limited in the public spheres of school and community. There was a general sense among children and young people that they had a voice and some level of influence in the home, but an acceptance that their parents had the ultimate authority. There was also evidence of some tokenistic practices as well as limited participation at home. The key areas of decision-making included consumption activities (e.g. choice of food and clothes), use of time, leisure activities and friends. Generally, children and young people felt that it was legitimate for parents to have greater influence over certain issues, although they were more likely to negotiate these as they grew older. Key enablers of children and young people's voice in the home included spaces where discussion can happen at home; good family relationships; being listened to and encouraged by parents; trust and growing levels of independence with age; decisions being perceived as fair; and having the rationale for decisions explained to them by parents.

Types of decision-making in the home

One of the striking findings in our study, and which is similar to that of Bjerke (2011), is that consumption is a consistent theme when children and young people talk about their voice and participation. Boys and girls in both age groups say they take part in decisions about buying and choosing clothes, food, toys, phone credit and other things for themselves. Among the 7–12 year olds, concrete everyday tasks and temporal activities such as homework, leisure activities, and the amount of time they spend playing computer or watching television and bedtime, are other examples they give of issues they discuss with parents. Cook (2013) notes that these material and concrete everyday forms of participation by children are areas much neglected in the research. Unsurprisingly and as found elsewhere (Cherney 2010), it appears that, to a larger extent, the 12–17 year olds live a more independent life from their parents, and they are more concerned about issues such as the ability to be with friends and do what they want on their own. There was some evidence of negotiation on activities such as smoking and drinking alcohol. Generally, however, the consensus was that such discussions with parents were avoided.

Decisions on consumption activities

Children and their parents identified key topics which were the focus of decision-making in the home context including food, bedtime, homework, pocket money and spending decisions. In relation to participation in food choices some children reported that they were actively involved in choosing what was purchased in the supermarket, eaten at family meals and prepared for school lunches.

Others wanted to have more input into their food choices. When children and young people were included in choosing food this was usually negotiated in a casual way with parents. In relation to questions of food and eating practices, most children and young people think it fair that they are allowed to take part in decisions about what and when to eat. In many cases, they say that there is little discussion on this as parents generally know what they like and dislike. However, some regulation from parents appears common, such as the need to eat what is considered healthy and to have a family dinner on at least some occasions during the week. Negotiation with parents highlighted how the banal affective spaces/interactions including food practices constitute adult–child intergenerational relationships and help us to examine family relationships and children's agency (Ralph 2013).

Children and young people discussed clothes and hair with parents, indicating that parents often have the final decision because of cost implications. Parents recognized that choosing clothes and hair styles was a way in which children and young people express their individuality, but also spoke of practical constraints on children's choices including time and weather conditions.

Most of the children and young people participants had to earn pocket money in exchange for doing chores around the house, 'For a job' or 'When I babysit'. Such daily life routines generate competence and reinforce the idea that everyone contributes to managing the household and thus make children self-confident about their place in intergenerational relationships (Aronsson and Cekaite 2011). Children and young people discussed the ways that pocket money allowed them to exercise agency over their consumption activities. Spending by the children was usually subject to varying conditions; for example, one child referred to restrictions from her parents that she should only buy if it's something that she was going to use. The young people in the study experienced considerable freedom in how they spent their pocket money. They referred to pocket money in terms of money for necessities such as phone credit from their parents, grandparents, or in some cases older siblings. Parents managed the distribution and conditionality of pocket money in a number of ways - some parents gave money on demand; some paid amounts into bank or credit union accounts; and others paid a set amount regularly once their children were in their teens, sometimes as a 'wage' for agreed chores performed. Parents were unanimous that phone credit was the most common financial demand followed by money for occasional trips to town. In many ways, this reflects Hill's (1992) work on children's role in the domestic economy which sees pocket money as an institution perceived by both parents and children to be as much a mechanism for transferring adult values about expenditure and saving as to giving children independent access to money.

Similarly, Furnham and Milner (2017) in their study of parents' attitudes towards pocket money and socialisation of children argue that parental involvement with financial education is suggested to result in an increased knowledge, as well as influencing the formation of attitudes towards money.

Decisions on temporal regulation

The study of temporal regulation is a useful lens through which to study the lives of young people. Sarre (2010, 64) indicates that clock, calendar, location and age were part of a matrix of factors that influenced parental temporal regulation around their children going out, curfew times, and bedtimes.

In this study, parents generally decided on bedtimes for children aged 7–12 with more discretion and flexibility enjoyed at the weekends. With the young people aged 12–17 years there appeared to be more freedom, although they acknowledged their parents concern about lack of sleep. For the parents, there was an overriding concern about children not getting enough sleep and its impact on them physically in terms of their growth and development and also in terms of lack of rest given the demands of their busy lives. Many parents struggled with a ‘sudden’ change in their children’s bedtime habits on reaching adolescence.

The children experienced more prescription in their homework routines, while the young people generally reported flexibility on when homework was completed. The increased stress at home associated with studying for state examinations was commented on by some of the young people. Controls around homework and study are an interesting and under-investigated area of parent-child relations, although Grolnick (2009) relates autonomous parenting support around homework to the development of intrinsic orientations to learning and better school performance in children. Also of relevance here is Sarres (2010) work contending that parents operate a strong moral economy of time through sequencing and temporally delimiting their children’s activities, whereby certain activities were seen as a more valuable way of spending time than others.

Decisions on leisure activities

Leisure and extra-curricular choices of the children and young people involved in this study encompassed a wide range of interests and activities mainly external to the family home including drama, dancing, attending youth clubs and non-scheduled activities like the cinema. Joining and leaving extra-curricular activities were negotiated with parents with most children stating that parents like to discuss all that was involved including cost, and the impact on other extra-curricular involvements. Parents were unequivocal about allowing their children their choice of activities. Even

when they disagreed or were disappointed by the children's decisions, there was general agreement that they would not enforce an activity against their child's wishes. Parents were generally happy that their children were involved in some leisure activity of their choice, with some pointing to a range of interests being good for their children as it exposes them to different communities of friends.

Leisure time use for adolescents in this study echoes that reported in research reviewed by De Roiste and Dinneen (2005) where the favourite independent and unstructured activities are watching television, use of the internet, talking on the phone, listening to music and reading, while the favourite activities with peers are 'hanging out', shopping and going to the cinema, and the favourite community activity was sports. These are almost universal 'entertaining' pursuits across the adolescent population. Young people reported that 'doing nothing' or 'hanging out' with their friends occupied much of their time. Rather than being seen as lost time, Abbot-Chapman and Robertson (2009) argue that this can be a strategy used by young people to maintain social relationships or to withdraw to make sense of things and to develop their own sense of identity.

Both children and young people identified television, using the internet and social media as important to their leisure and many referred to negotiations around their engagement with these media in the home as being generally unproblematic. Some of the parents were unequivocal about the need for an authoritarian style of parenting, described as high in demandingness and low in responsiveness (Harris et al. 2011), in relation to the duration of television viewing. They spoke of their role in getting children outside as otherwise they would sit all day at the television.

In relation to internet usage, young people in the study reported that they used the internet for peer communication and entertainment purposes followed by learning orientated information activities. Communication uses mainly involved sending and receiving emails, use of instant messaging, visiting a chat room, and posting photos, music or videos to share with others. They played games online against one another and this pattern of use is supported by the published literature on internet use (McAfee 2010). There was dialogue concerning the issue of monitoring and censoring the social media engagement of their children. Discussions with parents evidenced the worry, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy that their children's Internet use engendered. Their concerns were heightened by the often pronounced parent/child dichotomy of technological understanding and their own limitations in what they referred to as, 'this other world' (Urban Parent) and their children knowing 'much more about technology than we do' (Urban Parent). Furthermore, some parents

were mindful that if their children were subject to cyber bullying they would remain unaware. This situation served to accentuate the parental condition of limited control over their children's Internet use which is well documented in the literature (CyberSafe Ireland 2017).

Friends were highly valued and negotiating time spent with friends featured in the group discussions with children and young people as did the role played by friends in listening. However, some young people described parental restrictions on who they see, where they go and the time they need to return home. Parents strongly acknowledged the importance of peers to their children's lives. Drawing on their own childhood experiences they were fully aware of the potential positive and negative influences that peer pressure might have on their own children.

Relational and inter-generational dimensions of decision-making in the home

Children are embedded in multiple overlapping relational and inter-generational processes which highlights the interdependency between children's participation and their environment. Interpreting child-adult/ adult-child positioning within the home recognizes the respective roles and positions of adults and children in facilitating child participation. Family relationships were seen as key enablers of voice: "It all depends on the closeness of your family" (Rural Youth). Both listening and trust emerged as strong themes in children and young people's discussions of positive adult–child relations in the home which facilitated their participation in decision-making. The concept of fairness and compromise in the decisions made by adults which impact on children and young people emerged strongly. There seemed to be a shared understanding among young people that they have to compromise and aim to reach a consensus through discussions with parents. This was also evident in research by Bjerke (2011) which finds that knowing that their parents recognize them as persons and being able to see the situation from their parents' point of view gives young people a reasonable explanation for why they are differently treated, even if it is experienced as unfair at the time. Negotiation with parents centred on issues such as food, clothes, and use of leisure time, highlighting how the everyday affective spaces and interactions including food practices constitute adult–child intergenerational relationships and help us to examine family relationships and children's agency (Ralph 2013). Some key issues in relation to decision-making in the home emerged in the study; these will now be further discussed in light of Mannion's (2007) assertion that research on children's participation is better framed as being about child/adult relations and the need to take an approach that is sensitive to the socio-spatial aspects of the processes around children's voice and participation (or the lack of it).

Listening as an enabler of participation

Mothers in particular were described as good listeners, with considerably more interaction and negotiation reported with mothers than fathers by children and young people, across genders, and in both rural and urban sites. Conversations with fathers were often reported as being about money or sport. Similarly, mothers interviewed presented themselves as the listeners, counsellors, negotiators and final decision-makers across all aspects of daily living concerning their children while fathers were often described as playing a more peripheral but also supportive role.

The parents in this study were unanimous on the importance they afforded to listening to their children. They viewed the act of listening as a parenting tool that increased their capacity to respond to the needs of their children. Listening was also about relationship building, nurturing trust, instilling desirable values, fostering warmth, and reinforcing personal worth. Since interpersonal communication is crucial to making others aware of our needs it is reasonable to suggest that any relationship would suffer if it were compromised. Not being listened to can be related to not being heard and not being taken seriously, both disempowering experiences (Lundeby and Tossebro 2008). The parents found it difficult to identify and describe examples of when they did not listen to their children and young people. Recollections of not being listened to evoked considerable empathy and served to galvanize the resolve of the parents to avoid such memories in their children. Children and young people however described some experiences of parents not listening to them or being distracted and saw this as a barrier to their participation at home.

The children and young people sometimes reported experiencing cursory interest and tokenistic responses from parents on issues that were important to them. Consequently, they did not expect their decisions to be acted on. Some gave examples of where children are simply informed of parents' decisions. Young people expressed frustration at parents not explaining the rationale for decisions made, such as this young person who complained of curfews being set by parents without proper explanation.

There appeared to be significantly more interaction and negotiation with mothers across both age groups (7–12 years and 12–17 years), across genders and in all sites visited for this study. This may not be surprising given the findings from the national Irish longitudinal study, Growing Up in Ireland (Williams et al. 2009) that for 97% of 13-year-olds, the primary caregiver in the home was their mother while for 2% it was their father.

Trust and Fairness in Decision-Making - Autonomy, responsibility, and rules in daily life activities.

Trust was seen as an important indicator of parents' willingness to give young people more freedom in decision-making. While the young people generally felt trusted by their parents, they were unanimous that low levels of trust would present a major barrier to their voice and participation on issues of importance to them at home. Some young people discussed their frustration with parents' lack of trust in them stating that this could impede their relationship and level of honesty with their parents.

The parents reported that the greatest barriers to their children's participation remained the anxieties and stresses of parenting in a rapidly changing context. They explained that these pressures sometimes steer them towards a protective nurturing stance at the expense of promoting autonomy in their children. Some parents perceived a need to "overprotect", as they assume their children are unable to protect themselves. Unanimously, the parents viewed their children's safety as a priority and identified a number of common-place threats including cyber bullying, inappropriate TV viewing and friends.

There was a shared understanding among young people that they have to compromise and reach a consensus through discussion with their parents, in relation to things like going places with friends for the first time or expectations around when they would be home at night. Some young people felt it was fair and reasonable that with more autonomy and rights come responsibility, for example, if they are allowed to go to the cinema, they should have to take on another chore. Building trust with parents and 'building a track record' of dependability was seen by the young people in the study as an important facilitator of their participation. In particular, parents being true to their word and following through on agreements was seen as important.

Respondents in Sarre (2010) also displayed an instrumental approach to trust: they understood that sticking to the rules increased their parents' trust in them and so brought greater freedoms but breaking such trust can bring greater infringements on their time, and can slow down the progress towards greater autonomy over time. Warming (2013) examining the impact of trust dynamics in shaping children's participation, citizenship and well-being argues that this is underexplored in research. This study found that trust was an issue of huge significance for young people in enabling them to negotiate with parents and gain more autonomy.

Parents emphasized the need to exercise fairness that is consistent and undiscriminating, though at times this was difficult to achieve.

There was evidence of some negotiation in the home around smoking and alcohol consumption activities with parents informing young people of the consequences. Young people acknowledged that there were situations when parents may know better, particularly where they may have already lived through the experience. They generally acknowledged their parents' authority and greater experience to inform decisions on alcohol and smoking. The young people accepted that their requests will sometimes be refused by parents. However, in some cases there was an element of secrecy attached to some of the young people's smoking and drinking behaviour. Overall, the level of transparency and direct discussion with parents about alcohol use and smoking activities varied. Of importance to the young people participants was to feel respected by their parents.

Age and maturity were seen by parents and children as important to increasing the participatory entitlement of children and young people in family decision-making. Parents tended to have established routines for children around food, bath and bed-time but the structure and timing of these routines were subject to greater negotiation as the children became older. Decision-making with their older children included where to live after a parent's divorce, whether to attend mass or not, where to go on holiday, and choosing their own friends. The young people identified key points in their increased autonomy and participation in decision making as the movement from primary to secondary school and again at Transition year (when they are 15 or 16 years old and moving from Junior to Senior cycle at second-level). Both points were characterised by a growth in maturity and ability to make decisions as well as increased respect from adults.

This is supported by the data in Davey's study which suggests that as children grow older they are more likely to have a greater say in decisions that are made at home, although the extent to which children's views influence the outcome of a decision is said to be mediated by the degree to which parents concur with their views (Davey 2010). Sarre (2010) similarly indicates that by the age of 16, the processes of experience, negotiation and perhaps attrition appear to lead to a change in family ordering and in temporal regulation. This study identified that adolescence with its reconfiguration of family order sees children begin to negotiate more autonomy, often in the face of parental reluctance or opposition and, similar to the views of the young people, parents identified this as happening after they transitioned from primary to secondary school. Cherney's (2010) review of research support's the young people's views that as children grow older they begin to assert self-determination and control over multifaceted issues as well as personal domains (Ruck et al. 1998) and that the development of autonomy is shaped to a large extent by adolescents' own efforts, with increasing age, to construct an expanded personal sphere of decision-making, often in the face of parental reluctance or opposition (Helwig 2006).

The negotiated character of family relationships is well established in the literature which examines fluidity and change as integral features of family life (Neale and Flowerdew, 2007). The manner in which children construct their knowledge and reasoning about rights arises not only from maturational factors, but also from differential social experiences and interactions pertinent to the different domains or types of rights under consideration (Cherney 2010).

Parenting socially competent, independent, autonomous children

Questions of fulfilling strongly held ideals of parental responsibility, achieving 'good enough' parenting and upholding fair consistent parenting were raised in the parent discussions. Their narrative alluded to a considerable investment of emotional labour in their parenting, including having to deal with recurrent feelings of guilt, the worry of uncertainty, and the pressure to be ever-prepared and vigilant. There was reference to the energy levels that parenting within a participative negotiating family environment requires. It is suggested that there is a determining relationship between the promotion of a culture of children's rights as set out in Article 12 (United Nations 1989) and a contemporary emphasis on parenting socially competent, independent, autonomous children. This is underpinned by a view of children that recognizes their capacity to understand, act and participate (Prout 2011). From this stand-point the authority of parents is embedded in a rights-based democratic frame, extending benefits for children, parents and society.

Spatial dimensions of decision-making in the home

Discussion and participation in decision-making took place in the mundane everyday family spaces, primarily at dinner and while watching television in the evenings, but also on the way to and from school and travelling in the car, emphasising the significance of routes and journeys in children's everyday life. This finding echoes Kernan's (2010) that the journeys between school settings and home or local parks and other public places were significant sites for children's everyday play-life outdoors. We would contend that this also holds true for children and young people's opportunities for communication and voice. Kernan (2010) argues that the 'new' geography of children has much to offer an understanding of childhood and youth in contemporary urban societies by placing to the fore considerations of children's experience of space and place in the context of belonging and participation.

Young people, recognised the value of shared family time for having conversations and planning. This could happen at any time of day, including morning and evening, and in many locations such as

journeys the car, in the kitchen or living room. Dinner emerged as important, despite the growing flexibility of family food practices and individualised eating habits referred to by Ralph (2013). Participants spoke of time

Although they valued family time, children and young people nonetheless spoke of needing one-to-one time alone with a parent because family discussions were often dominated by younger or older siblings.

The idea that bedrooms offer children and young people the opportunity to control their own space was evident in our study where a number of the children (aged 7–12) in particular reported that decorating their bedroom was important. There was discussion in some interview groups about how bedrooms offered children and young people the opportunity to control their own space.

The changing character and increasing importance of indoor space at home as a place for children and young people is demonstrated by Karsten (2005) who explores children and young people's references to their bedrooms as places which offer an escape from parental control and the adult gaze. This idea of a 'space of one's own' and its role in developing children and young people's citizenship is explored by James (2004) who similarly discusses the importance of the bedroom as a leisure site for adolescent girls in Western Australia. These girls rated the bedroom as the recreational space where they felt least self-conscious and chose to be most often.

Conclusion

To conclude, this research adds to the limited empirical evidence on the nature and extent of children's participation in the home and identifies the home as a space conducive to children and young people's participation. The home, particularly when compared to school and community settings was experienced by children and young people as the setting most facilitative of their voice and participation in their everyday lives. The findings throughout demonstrate the 'processes of protection and enablement, connectedness and autonomy that are the heartbeat of everyday family life, particularly in adolescence' (Sarre, 2010, 72).

Our findings also reflect the relational, inter-generational and spatial contexts within which children experience participation in the home and the centrality of their relationships with their parents in their participatory experiences. For example, building of trust through communication and information sharing with parents and developing a track record of dependability were seen by the young people as really important facilitators of their participation. Other key enablers included

spaces where discussion can happen at home. While, generally, they felt they had a voice and some level of influence, there was also evidence of tokenistic practices as well as limited participation at home. Most children and young people accepted the authority of adults regarding decision making, although they were more likely to negotiate the adult/child power difference as they grew older. They recommended that parents provide definite times and spaces for discussion, and that parents actively listen to and explain the rationale for decisions to children and young people in order to create an atmosphere conducive to participation.

This study found that parenting style underpinned and generally shaped the degree of parental listening, the type of decisions their children participated in, and the degree of negotiation. Furthermore, it was their own childhood experiences that influenced and motivated adults parenting style. Significant challenges for parents included the rapidly changing socio-cultural context and pressures of managing expectations that were not modelled during their own childhood. There was anxiety and a desire to protect their children from the risks presented by social media echoing Lansdown (2010) that there is a continual tension between protection and participation rights of children. Ultimately, the parents indicated that they generally had the final say. Overall the parents attempted to respond to and manage their children's individual agency against a range of societal and self-evaluated parameters associated with responsible parenting. These findings confirm previous research on children's experiences of participation and decision making within the family, presenting a generally positive picture where the home and the family are places for negotiations, and highlighting the need for attention to spatial and relational dimensions of children and young people's participation. Parenting appears to be evolving and showing a greater openness to children's voice whereby the authority of parents is embedded in a rights-based democratic frame, extending benefits for children, parents and society.

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