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**“Two bedrooms, two toothbrushes” : A qualitative study of  
shared care parenting.**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of**

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## Abstract

Shared care is a post-separation family living arrangement whereby the children move between the parents living in two separate houses. This custody arrangement has grown more popular in the last few decades, although little is known about a young person's perspective of living shared care. The present study examined the views of 12 young adults who had experienced shared care family life. Thematic analysis revealed five broad themes. Firstly, "*The catalyst: parental separation*" focuses on the actual separation event, what they remembered, how it was communicated and what they would advise parents contemplating separation. The second theme '*logistics: two homes, one bag*' explores practical aspects of shared care; how participants adapted to two houses and their likes and dislikes about the arrangement. The third theme explores '*relationships: many and varied*' to discuss how shared care impacted relationships with each parent; the co-parenting relationship and the complexity of introducing new members into the family. The fourth theme examines "*wellbeing changes*" including mental and emotional wellbeing as well as financial changes participants experienced. The last theme "*reflections*" uses a strength based perspective to explore positive aspects, attributes and values that the participants attributed to their shared care family life. Participants strongly identified with having two separate valid homes. They adapted easily to shared care and found it unremarkable. They sometimes found the living arrangement inconvenient and the bag or suitcase that went between the two homes was a symbolic and evocative representation of living in shared care. Participants acquired personal attributes including: resilience, independence, compassion and adaptability. They also acquired enhanced interpersonal skills through managing different networks of people. Family life was important to them and they enjoyed warm relationships with both their parents. Whilst they discarded the traditional nuclear family convention, they embraced a fluid, versatile, encompassing and relational view of family view.

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While writing the final chapter, I heard the shocking news that Kermit the frog and Miss Piggy are to part ways. Relationship separation is becoming pedestrian when puppet characters are joining the fray. If they had children I have no doubt that Kermit and Miss Piggy would consider shared care for their offspring.

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In memory of my mother, Mariett who knows all about the lovers, the dreamers, and me.

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