The Experience of Children and Young People in Long Term Foster Care

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To Mum, Miranda, Jill and Adam

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Working with children and young people engaged and has held me for most of my working life. The years spent as a carer and teacher in Careshire were the best, the most inspiring and satisfying years of all and I owe a huge debt of gratitude to people there who, for reasons of confidentiality, I cannot acknowledge openly.

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The carers who allowed me into their homes to carry out my research were generous, hospitable, patient and kindly to me. For all of them I felt respect and admiration. I had to witness some of them admit defeat as placements collapsed but none of them ever lost dignity. Placement breakdown speaks to the difficulties carers face, to their courageous idealism and enormous efforts to be agents of change in young lives.

The young people who shared their experiences with me did so out of certainty that being fostered was significant and the world needed to hear more about it. I have only been able to complete this project because each and every one of them had much that was immensely interesting and important to share. I was always aware that I would never be able to do them full justice and I have kept them waiting too long to find out what I made of them. I hope they will forgive me for that and will enjoy rediscovering themselves in remarks they made when they were younger. I hope, too, that they take pleasure in having contributed to the betterment of the service that will be provided to the next generation of young people in care. I wish them very well.

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Abstract

Many children and young people who enter foster care have experienced neglect and/or abuse. They display a very wide range of urgent needs and many record poor outcomes of foster care across various domains. Developmental harm poses significant risk for the emergence of problems across the life course, yet there is evidence that many children can still acquire adaptive coping strategies in the face of adversity. The principal aim of this study was to gain insight into the cultures and patterns of social relations that older children and young people create for themselves in foster care. A secondary aim was to make recommendations that would contribute to the literature concerning placement breakdowns and how these might be avoided.

This is a qualitative study that used semi-structured interviews, individually adapted according to the age (nine years to twenty two years) and circumstances of the different children and young people participating in the study. A semi-structured interview style aimed to stay close to the voice of the child, giving space for more extended narrative extracts that presented insights into the child's world. Analysis paid attention not just to what was said, but also how children and young people narrated their experience. The study was carried out in foster placements since foster care is a form of childhood so the home seemed the right context.

A key observation drawn from analysis of interview transcripts was the persistence of feelings of connectedness to family members, sometimes over many years of separation. I examined how children and young people in foster care perceived the material basis of care, for example mealtimes, and show these to be variously organised unintentionally to support or undermine their feelings of belonging in placement. I noted the way the children and young people were supported in their adaptation to foster care by such organisation, or were not. I observed how children and young people in foster care managed information in order to deal with conflicts arising from the relations of local authority care.

Attachment theory is drawn on to explain the central importance of family and foster family attachments and I show how people in foster care are affected by separation. The research reveals that foster care provides an important service to many of the children and young people in the study. It also reveals how the institutionalised relations of care are played out in children's accounts, indicating that the power relations of foster care, although nuanced and situated, affect both what happens to children and how they understand themselves and act. I show that without good enough, long term foster care, children and young people in foster care continue to suffer severe disadvantages and their points of view about their situations are sometimes overlooked, over-ridden or distorted. I draw on the elements of the debate about attachment and resilience across the lifespan to suggest a revision for the role of foster carers.

The thesis concludes with some general observations on the methodology and specific findings of the research. I reflect on the great difficulty I encountered in gaining access to children and young people in foster care for the purposes of this study. Firm policy recommendations cannot be made on the basis of small-scale doctoral work such as this, but nevertheless, I indicate the policy and practice relevance of my findings, to include, the centrality of separation and loss for children and young people in foster care.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

At the time I began my research, I had ten years of experience as a foster carer looking after older children and teenagers. Living in such a close, complex relationship with children and young people, displaced into my care, increased, rather than diminished the questions I had about how they experienced foster care and coped with 'substitute' relationships. Even as my time as a foster carer came to a close, I was still left with many searching questions about what it is actually like for a child or young person to enter out of home care and essentially, take up residence with strangers. Embarking on my doctoral studies, I was able to revisit these questions – a new opportunity to seek answers and engage in reflection. To the young people who participated in the research I put my question: *what is it like to live in foster care?* They gave me a range of answers:

> "Nothing really to it. It's just as if you're sleeping at somebody else's house for like years."

> "…[N]ot that much different, but it is different."

> "Er it depends who you really come and live with though. Who you live with."

> "I wasn't happy in care. I wasn't happy at all. That's why I took off."

> "Well like the carers, it's about…and all the time you, you're in a safe place."

Children and young people in foster care have different personalities and different capabilities. They respond according to their particular expectations and prior experiences. Children and young people enter care with very diverse experiences of their own parenting - sometimes difficult but interspersed with positive events, sometimes, almost inconceivably bad. Thus, children responded to my deceptively simple question as a threat, sometimes as an invitation, yet it was important to ask. Foster care is, as one commentator puts it, valuable and valued but it does not always help as much as it could. Placement

breakdowns are alarmingly common (Sinclair 2005; Biehal 2010) and the outcomes of foster care are, in many cases, the cause of concern (Wilson *et al.* 2005). Those who live in foster care have something to teach the rest of us about experiences of separation and loss that we have been fortunate to be spared until, perhaps, we are much older and better placed to deal with it. For reasons including these, it was important that the research I undertook, afforded the possibility of staying close to the voice of the child. This was perhaps, made easier for me, as the children and young people I interviewed were mainly older, and able to engage in semi-structured interviews. Seeking participation of children and young people is not only seen as good research practice where research aspires to a 'child-centred' approach, but is also central to policy and practice. For all children and young people in foster care, policy underscores the importance of their participation in decisions affecting their care (The Children Act 1989; Every Child Matters 2003; Care Matters 2006; Children and Young Person's Act, 2008, Children and Families Act 2014). However, as I show throughout this thesis, there are many challenges to seeking the voice of the child – in reality this is far harder than policy makers would have us believe.

The research took place in two different geographic locations, selected largely for pragmatic reasons and that both senior personnel in both locations agreed to support the study. I have given the two sites the fictitious names: Careshire and Fosterton. The population of Careshire is generally stable and that is also true of Fosterton, the area within which the research was conducted. Population change in Fosterton between the 2001 and 2011 census was less than half that of the country as a whole and given its rurality, the area comprised small and close-knit communities. Careshire has many such communities as well as larger towns but even for Careshire, Fosterton created a particular context for fostering. A network of carers, respite carers, social workers, leaving care workers and therapists tended to know each other and also the children and young people in foster care, hence children and young people in care were relatively visible, posing many challenges for this social group. Children and young people attended only a handful of local secondary schools. Hence, the fostering experience needs to be understood in this particular context.

15 children and young people participated in the study and were interviewed twice or three times over a period of a year. The interviews elicited over 40 hours of audio-recorded material, carried out, for the most part, in children's foster placements. It had two aims. The first, taken directly from James and Prout's innovative 1990 collection of studies in the sociology of childhood, was to make a contribution to the knowledge of the cultures and social relations that children create for themselves. This aim combined a strong assumption that the interviewees were children first and children and young people in foster care, second. That growing up in care needs to be studied as a childhood among the many different forms that the sociology of childhood postulates. A secondary aim was to make recommendations that would contribute to the literature concerning placement breakdowns and how these might be avoided. Given the unavoidably limited sample I was able to base the study on, the recommendations are tentative and my aspiration is to inform further large-scale research, rather than produce definitive recommendations.

As stated, my preference was to conduct the interviews with children, within their placements. Childhoods do not happen exclusively in a family home but, if being fostered is first of all a way of being a child, the foster home seemed a good place to start. Also, if knowledge of childhood in foster care could be gained and used to contribute in some small way to improvements in foster care outcomes, locating the study in placements was a better choice than interviewing the young people away from the scenes of their care. It would make immediately present the material and social environment the interviewees narrated. For the purposes of the secondary aim, relevant aspects of the environment under consideration might be that much easier to identify and analyse.

As well as my experience as a foster carer, I also brought to this study, a lengthy history as a secondary school teacher. It was this experience that also underscored for me, the importance of understanding the child or young person in his or her home environment. I worked in a school regularly judged outstanding by OFSTED but while many of my pupils did well and were happy, others were less so and made their dissatisfaction known. Though (or because) the problems often seemed to originate outside the school or to be matters of individual responsibility they were not always easily resolvable.

In foster care, I spent more time by far talking with and listening to the children my wife and I cared for, learning their stories, hearing their questions and especially their protests. The last could be particularly unsettling. No one was suggesting they had been put into care for any fault of their own; foster care provided a 'service', not a punishment. Nevertheless, their new situation flouted all their long held beliefs about their rights and entitlements as members of families. As one fostered person put it, "Normal families, they can talk to their Mum! [When you are in foster care you can] only see your Mum once in two months!" This statement from a child participating in the study poignantly captures the central dilemma that fostering entails - disadvantaged children are separated from parents to ensure their safety or wellbeing, but they mostly long for those same parents and thus care is not always seen as it is intended. Frequently foster care can be experienced as adding to children's difficulties, who remain conflicted in loyalties (Triseliotis 2010) and wrestle with the consequences of their early caregiver experiences. Thus, the challenge for researchers, policy makers and practitioners is to help children to adapt to the fostering environment, where their removal to out of home care is a necessity. Here I am reminded of a conversation with another of the young people taking part in the study. In a village pub where she had taken me to get away from yet another carer who was losing all patience with her, one of the children and young people in foster care I interviewed for this study told me, "At first there was bad things about coming into foster… but now I understand why I need foster care, so I love it." For this girl, she had achieved positive adaptation to her placement, and the challenge is to understand her everyday strategies of coping that enable her to overcome 'the bad things'. Thus, complacency concerning children's adaptation to care, whilst perhaps inevitable on the part of the busy practitioner, is unhelpful. If we accept that 'Foster care seems to be in general safer and less likely to produce difficult behaviour and emotional problems than the children's home environment' (Wilson *et al.* 2005:34), then the challenge is to engage closely with children's experiences to maximise the opportunity that foster care can bring for improvements in wellbeing and protection from harm.

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Theoretical framing; towards an eclectic approach

From the outset, parent-child relationships were an important theme in this research and a theoretical framework that was clearly relevant to this work was attachment theory. Widely applied in fostering, its suitability for understanding both family and family-like groups will be set out in the next chapter and some of its core ideas will inform the conclusions. However, attachment theory alone was not enough for an adequate theoretical framework. Arguably this work takes an eclectic approach, I have drawn on the disciplines of psychology and sociology to make sense of children and young people's accounts. Whilst attachment theory was useful, the sociological work of James and Prout (1990) persuaded me that treating childhood as a subject for investigation in its own right was important. In addition, that research must take appropriate account of the unequal distribution of power between children and adults. The coercive power of social workers and the delegated authority of foster carers would be missed by reference to attachment theory alone. Elements of a Foucauldian perspective, also provide a way of understanding the ability of adults to compel (creatively as well as oppressively) with the ability of young people to resist authority, understood here to include opposition in the discursive domain. Whilst I do not pretend to adopt wholesale Foucault's highly developed account of the disciplinary apparatus of surveillance, it is impossible to ignore that fact that the fostering environment is full of institutional artefacts such as reports and meetings which create and reinforce a particular institutional context, for all the informality of the family home. Thus, in this thesis I consider throughout, the institutional context, by which I mean the ways that foster care placements are characterised by regulatory structures including training for foster carers about appropriate care and conduct towards children, an apparatus of documentation of practice and reviews, arrangements to make carers accountable and the payment of fees. 'Institutionalisation' refers to the ways in which relationships directly affected by these formal requirements are often taken for granted – that is they come to be seen as necessary and expected. Thus, drawing together strands of different theoretical perspectives, whilst undoubtedly raising some questions of epistemological 'fit', enabled me to find the resources to critically engage with children and young people's accounts of the fostering experience.

A note on terminology

But who is and is not a child? As a school teacher I often put this question to classes of secondary school pupils and the responses were interesting. Some saw themselves as children and had no wish to give up the status; others were moving on. Referring to these people as children would be to disregard their self-understanding, irreconcilable with an aspiration to child centred research. At the other end of the age range in the sample it would also be misleading to refer to the nine year old (ten by the time of his third interview) in the same terms as I use to describe teenagers. Both in terms of self-understanding, then, and by using age as an objective measure it would have been misleading to locate all the children and young people (9 years to twenty two years old) who took part in the interviews in the single category 'child'. I have therefore sought to avoid misnomers by using 'children and young people' or simply 'young people' when making general references to the age range I have been concerned with.

Referring more specifically to those young people who are in care, the terms 'foster children', 'Looked After Children' and 'Children Looked After' are the terms in every day or institutional use. However, they all involve the same awkwardness of highlighting something that sets these children apart from children who are not fostered. These neologisms introduce nothing but difference into the discourse and arguably are symbols of 'othering'. Because of this, I decided to use 'children and/or young people in foster care' as my main way of referring to the category as a whole. Terms in continual use have real effects and need to be attended to. A good deal of effort will be spent exploring the borderlands between 'normal' children and young people and children and/or young people in foster care in foster care. The distinction is a contentious one and will be the object of repeated attention throughout the study.

Structure of the thesis

In the Literature Review, Chapter 2, I will give an account of those strands of the discourse of foster care that seem most interesting, useful, or influential. Psycho-analytically based theory will be contrasted with outcomes research and sociological accounts of issues of power already touched upon. Successive British Governments have shared a policy orientation provided by the notion of permanency

planning and this will be advanced before looking at some important ideas about how foster care might need to be changed to achieve the goal of permanence for more young people. The sociology of the family will be drawn upon to seek a little conceptual clarity in a social domain where conceptual confusion is an everyday struggle and links will be made between family and the, possibly, crucial development for children and young people in foster care (and other children) of a sense of self-identity.

The third chapter, on Methodology, will provide the rationale for the kind of child-centred approach used throughout the study before turning to the problems encountered in arranging to do that sort of research at all. The effect of these problems and the way the study had to be changed to deal with them will lead to a description of the way data collection was carried out and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4, the first chapter which discusses the findings from empirical data, concerns relationships with parents and siblings. Children and young people in foster care deal with separation from parents in different ways so a range of dispositions will be described. A number of my interviewees shared placements with siblings and the second half of the chapter is used to explore the dynamics of on-going sibling relationships as well as the effects of separation. The chapters that follow should really be seen as working out in more detail the implications of this one.

Chapter 5 looks at experiences connected with moving into care, focussing on the time of the move and the first days or weeks that follow. Formal and informal introductions to new carers are examined and the limits of their value explored. Some of the communication difficulties encountered at the beginning of placements lead on to discussion of resources that ease the formation of positive relationships within placements, or can worsen tensions.

Chapter 6 explores how the material and social arrangements of care relied upon by foster carers and social workers are observed and understood by the children and young people in foster care. Out of this analysis, some of the characteristics of positive foster care and social work will be offered.

Chapter 7 is primarily concerned with issues surrounding identity. The experiences of separation from birth family and adaptation to foster care explored in earlier chapters provide a framework within which the concept of identity is considered. I look at how their inter-personal strategies work to protect or assert identity in a variety of settings. This chapter includes discussion of cultural assumptions about foster care and the impact these can have on children and young people in foster care, their families and foster families.

The importance of separation is the common thread running through the study as a whole. In my conclusions I will address the child centred aim. I will draw together the many challenges faced by the young people who took part in my research and suggest what this might mean in terms of their needs. At this stage, too, I will reflect on my child-centred methodology with reference to the ways in which the language of children and young people in foster care offers possibilities and difficulties to researchers and care professionals. This will lead on to the implications my study offers for foster care and social work practice, departing from the child centred approach at that point. My suggestions will pay particular attention to the role of foster carers, undoubtedly reflecting the way my own fostering experience has influenced the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Given that there are several bodies of literature that have influenced my research, there is no ideal starting point and the order in which I shall discuss them does not reflect their relative importance. There are many ways to begin, then, and I shall take an interest in the differences between internalist and externalist accounts of foster care. The internalist writers I shall discuss are primarily interested in the subjective states of those in foster care while externalists seem to focus on the social institutions of foster care and the power they exert.   There are, as we shall see, many interactions between the two. Still, the need to understand where a research position comes from, what precursors it has had, the various and changing research traditions it relates to and why it is the preferred stance are important matters to clarify so I shall begin with a sketch of some of the significant early sources before focussing on the most recent and immediately relevant literatures feeding into the research I have carried out.

Child development perspectives on the emotional domain and some implications for foster care

First, I want to look at some of the most influential theoretical frameworks that inform the social practice of foster care. These theories may have played no direct part in shaping the ideas of the young people but they are important here because they contributed directly to my planning of the study and to the analysis of the data collected.

Attachment theory

Attachment theory provides a general theory of parent-child relationships that has contributed much to the development of thinking about long term foster care provision (Iwaniec 2006:48, Quinton *et al.* 1998:18). The original version of the theory was developed by John Bowlby whose first formulation, which I want to explore in some detail, placed over-much emphasis on the children's need for their

mothers, arguing that, 'only their mothers will do…' (Rogers in Foley *et al.* 2001:211). It is not always recognised that Bowlby himself modified his views in that respect quite early on in the development of the theory (see, for example, the preface to Vol.2 Bowlby 1998: 13). Notwithstanding this reconceptualisation, his writing persistently referred to the role of mothers. When quoting him directly I shall retain his terminology and when paraphrasing I shall add 'or other attachment figure'.

Attachment theory initially arose out of psychiatric concerns for children separated from their mothers during World War II and so issues of substitute parenting have been central from the outset. The theory is a synthesis of elements from psychoanalysis, evolutionary theory, ethology, and control theory. Its fundamental proposition is that humans have evolved patterns of behaviour, called attachment behaviour, that make it more likely that infants and children remain in proximity to their parents and so increase their chances of survival.

Attachment theories of development and psychotherapy assume attachment behaviour is developmental and transactional, arising in childhood and persisting into adulthood. The early period, especially between 6 months to around 2 or 3 years of age is particularly significant for the establishment of attachments, first with a single recognised carer and thereafter with other recognised carers. Adults preserve proximity by signalling and young children by approach. During this sensitivity period routine care is less important than the quality of interaction (Bowlby Vol 1 1998) and although interaction is increasingly initiated by the child's approach as it grows older, the type of interaction required for security is best described by reference to the quality of parenting. To develop an age appropriate level of self-reliance and degree of trust a child requires a primary carer who is, 'sensitive, accessible and responsive …accepts his behaviour and is cooperative in dealing with him…'(Bowlby Vol. 2 1998:406).

The effects of early attachments are long lasting and can affect both the child and his or her parents. Writing about maternal (or other attachment figure) behaviour antithetic to care of the infant, Bowlby tells us:

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For no other behavioural consequence, perhaps, are standards of appraisal in man more clear-cut from the start, or more environmentally stable. So stable indeed are they as a rule that for babies to love mothers and mothers to love babies is taken for granted as intrinsic to human nature. As a result, whenever during the development of some individuals these standards become markedly different from the norm, as occasionally they do, all are disposed to judge the condition as pathological.

(Bowlby Vol.1 1998:242)

Bowlby's original tight focus on maternal care is clear in this extract but it will bear repetition that he later acknowledged that anyone else might serve as an attachment figure during the sensitivity period provided they supplied the necessary frequency and quality of care (Bowlby Vol. 2 1998). That aside, since foster care is most often a provision for precisely those cases where normative expectations of parental care are departed from, the parents of fostered children are likely to have to face disapproval and perhaps other sanctions for their parenting. Evidence from children and young people in foster care will be taken into account later which supports that hypothesis. The implications this has for the young children and young people in foster care will be considered.

However, the primary aim of attachment theory is to explain the effects of attachment behaviour on the development of the child. The theory holds that attachment behaviour in human children (it is also widely found in non-human species) is a highly significant class of behaviours. In human neonates the repertoire of behaviours includes crying when the attachment figure leaves the room, greeting them on their return, following them with the eyes or crawling towards them, clinging to them when alarmed and so on (Bowlby Vol. 1 1998). When the right sort of interaction between child and attachment figure occurs 'attachment behaviour' leads to the development of 'attachments'. It may be thought that an 'attachment'

implies a secure attachment but that is not the way the concept was first articulated, nor how it has been used in this study. Nothing is being implied about the style of attachment. For example; suggesting, as I sometimes do in this study, that a young person had an attachment to an absent parent is not meant to imply that renewal of parental care would be of benefit to the young person. It only suggests that she/he is strongly disposed to seek proximity or contact. It is that underlying need that has emerged as helpful in understanding the perspectives of a number of my participants.

For Bowlby, an attachment exists, 'when a child is strongly disposed to seek proximity to and contact with a specific figure and to do so in certain situations…' (Vol. 1 1998: 371). By using the classifications of attachment styles developed by Ainsworth (Ainsworth and Bell 1970) it is also possible to distinguish between secure attachments, insecure ambivalent attachments and insecure avoidant attachments. Main and Solomon (1990) further proposed a means of identifying disorganised attachments. However, the data I obtained and, in particular, the absence of any family history or opportunities to observe parent-child interactions would make such categorisations difficult to attempt and even more difficult to defend. Accordingly, throughout this study the term 'attachment' has been used in the way originally proposed by Bowlby, to denote general dispositions.

Different experiences of attachments result in the development of internalised models (Bowlby Vol.3 1998) which allow individuals to make forecasts about the likely availability or unavailability of attachment figures. This capability is generalisable, so Bowlby contrasts the condition of an adult who has come to have, 'an almost unconscious assurance that…there are always trustworthy figures available who will come to his aid' with another who sees the world as, 'comfortless and unpredictable; and they respond either by shrinking from it or by doing battle with it' (Bowlby Vol. 2 1998).

While the models are internalised by about three years of age they are so structured that they adapt to new circumstances. Behaviour is modified to take account of discrepancies between the model and the environment. This permits Bowlby to claim that the contribution of family environment is

substantial (Bowlby Vol.2 1998) and explains the need for a substitute of a skilled carer for a lost mother (or other attachment figure). It is also clear, however, that there are severe limits to the possibilities of change to the internalised model itself. They have a degree of permanence, as the dispositions he described suggest. In later childhood and adolescence therefore, an individual's repertoire of attachment behaviour is likely to be difficult to modify. Classical attachment theory allowed only very limited space in which foster care could improve outcomes for children and young people in foster care, but some more recent studies, reviewed later in this chapter, have suggested there may be greater flexibility.

It is also important to note that attachment difficulties can be enduring but the attachment behaviours that are associated with each bond are only activated by very specific and characteristic conditions. Bowlby lists; strangeness, fatigue, anything frightening and the availability or otherwise of an attachment figure (Bowlby Vol. 3 1998) all of which are almost unavoidably implicated in removal of children from parents and entry into foster care. Children and young people in foster care, then, are vulnerable in at least two different respects; the parenting they have received will often have been such as to give rise to persisting attachment difficulties and their situation in care is such as to activate attachment behaviours. My thesis will raise questions about the part care arrangements can play in stimulating or avoiding this form of behavioural activation.

Intermediate experience

Having provided a summary overview of key tenets of attachment theory, I now turn to two prominent theorists, whose work has developed from Bowlby. Writers Winnicott and Benjamin share with Bowlby a psycho-analytic background. Besides sharing the same theoretical perspective, Winnicott and Bowlby were close associates but their personal contributions differed greatly due to Bowlby's interdisciplinarity. Bowlby's writing was systematically grounded in voluminous empirical evidence drawn from child development and ethology and theoretically shaped by control-theory as well as psychoanalysis: Winnicott wrote about (and during) his clinical practice. 'Teleological' explanation, in which the outcome of behaviour is taken to be its immediate cause, was rejected by Bowlby (Bowlby Vol.1 1998: 124) but not by

Winnicott who, for example, discusses play as the most important activity of patients who, 'want help and who are searching for the self and who are trying to find themselves in the products of their creative experiences' (Winnicott 2002: 73). In that sense, we might consider that, Winnicott's thinking is internalist and Bowlby's externalist, the significant stimuli being the parenting behaviour.

Winnicott's *'Play and Reality'* begins with discussions of two phenomena of infant life; oral stimulation with the hands and a little later fondness for dolls. He claimed a connection between the two forms of activity. Attending to experiences of infants that are neither wholly internal nor constituted by externalities - because the infants are unready at that stage to recognise objects – he postulates transitional objects 'between the thumb and the teddy' and the discussion that follows makes use of a spatial metaphor to describe largely internal phenomena. Transitional objects at first have their entire existence in an 'area of experiencing' which he terms the 'intermediate area'. It is made up of subjectivity in the results of repeated encounters with one of the, as yet unrecognised, objects of the external world (Winnicott 2002: 1/3). It is significant that the object is the mother's (or other attachment figure's) presented breast because the adult has control over the timeliness of the presentation even if the infant cannot realise it.

The (intrapsychic) intermediate area of experiencing is of the greatest importance for mental health. Winnicott puts it as being an area that is 'not challenged' by which he means that it is unobservable by others except perhaps through empathetic intuition of the 'good enough mother' (Winnicott 2007: 13). In this and other instances of Winnicott's thinking the reference to 'mother' rather than an indefinite category is essential. Winnicott argues that for a period following birth, mothers alone have a 'special ability to put herself in the place of the infant' (Winnicott 1968:45) and be able to, 'see with especial clearness certain fundamental principles of infant care' (Winnicott 1968: 10).

Being unchallenged, transitional phenomena of the intermediate area act as a 'resting place', a place where the magical omnipotence of the enjoyed thumb (me) and of the timely breast (not-me but

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also experienced as me) can persist until the mother decides it is time for her to wean the infant (Winnicott 2002:13/16). The 'not-me' dimension is mistaken for 'me' at first so the transitional object is an illusion (Winnicott 2002: 15-18) but the magic has eventually to be surrendered. It gradually gives way to a 'true object-relation' with the teddy (not-me) and transitional phenomena associated with the transitional object are transferred to the not-me object. The important thing is that something of the 'resting place' is preserved.

The intermediate area is related throughout life to the business of, 'keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (Winnicott 2002: 1-2), and it is here that we begin to see the great importance this theory might have for understanding the circumstances of children and young people in foster care. Winnicott assumes, 'that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality …' (Winnicott 2002: 18). The subjects of this study participate in this universal condition but it will be argued that their specific circumstances offer unusual difficulties in bringing internal and external realities together. Evidence will be presented that reality-acceptance is exceptionally difficult for children and young people in foster care for various reasons. First, because of the coercive use of power in imposing separation and placement moves they are often beset by unusually wide gaps in their knowledge of their own family and personal histories. Second, constraints placed on their relationships for child protection purposes place severe limits on their opportunities for renewal of important attachments which often become highly attenuated. Third, their perceptions of their present circumstances are mediated by carers and social workers obliged to withhold autobiographically crucial tracts of information altogether.

This combination of factors produces a tendency for encounters with social externalities to be experiences of repeated frustration and mystification that can be bewildering and their ability to fall back on a secure resting place may also be limited. Early attachments have in some cases been problematic. Examples will be examined of parents with addictive and/or mental health issues who were not able to

provide 'good-enough' parenting. Winnicott holds that good enough parenting at first requires the parent's adaptation to the infant to be almost exact:

> …and unless this is so it is not possible for the infant to begin to develop a capacity to experience a relationship to external reality, or even to form a conception of external reality (Winnicott 2007: 14).

Seen in this perspective, instead of having an internal 'resting place' that allows the opportunities for play, creativity and the search for self, a proportion of the children and young people in foster care have poorer mental health. They have conceptions of and relationships to external reality, but troubled ones. Those who were taken into care because of problems that arose later in their lives may be protected by early attachments that were good enough to sustain them through enforced separations and the contingencies of placement life. They may be distinguishable by their capacity for play and creativity. All may try to get on with their lives but often the acquisition of identities that correspond to complex balances of family and foster family attachments may remain fragile, subject to repeated disruptions.

The holding environment and recognition

In Benjamin's book, *'The Bonds of Love'* the primary concern is the damaging part played by rigidly structured gender roles in the creation of relationships of domination and submission. She is interested, (in a way that Winnicott is not), in mothers' identities, the different forms taken by boy-mother and girl-mother and boy-father and girl-father relationships (Benjamin 1990). Gendered behaviours were significant in the interviews carried out for this thesis but because of the nature of the evidence gathered it will not be possible to draw any very cogent conclusions as to either the developmental processes involved in creating them or as to their implications for the experience of being fostered. It will however be helpful to look at the way Benjamin builds on Winnicott's account of the neonate-parent relationship and the transitional area and draw out the implications of the transitional area.

The area is not only the child's (metaphorical, inner) space for play, creativity and fantasy. The, as yet unrecognised, independence of the mother is an element of the space, as we have seen. Under the double shelter of unchallenged concealment and that reassuring presence the infant is able to come to experience its own drives as elements of its self. More of the inter-subjective dimension of the transitional phenomena is captured in discussions of the transitional area as the, 'holding environment' (Winnicott 2007: 150, Benjamin 1990:126/7). That term draws into the frame of the development process not just the subjective experience of being handled and held, though that is the core meaning. It also signifies a combination of boundary and unbounded possibilities, 'a feeling of safety without confinement' (Benjamin 1990: 127). Within the holding environment the next stage of the child's development towards selfhood will become increasingly intersubjective. Though this account is of a very early phase of child development, a modified recapitulation of holding environmental experience will be shown below to be intimately bound up with 'good enough' foster care for older children and young people.

Recognition is the key concept in Benjamin's thinking, defined as 'that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions and actions of the self.' It, 'allows the self to realise its agency and authorship in a tangible way' (Benjamin 1990: 12). In the circumstances of very young children the person who provides them with recognition must not be so diffident and self-effacing in response to the child's demands that they are effectively obliterated as a subject. Nor is a determination to over-power the child any better. If it is the child's ego that is obliterated the lesson learned, according to Benjamin, is that there is only room for one ego in a relationship and the child must bide its time to get its ego back later, 'with a vengeance' (Benjamin 1990: 39). Again she draws on Winnicott to describe how a middle way is accomplished. In fantasy the child's other is 'always being destroyed' so that 'we know it to have survived outside.' The (m)other's task is to accept and to survive the baby's rage and continue to give recognition (Benjamin 1990: 38, 40).

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Common sense and experience dictate that recognition remains important to people throughout their lives and evidence will be provided that recognition, or the lack of it, is an issue that concerned the children and young people in foster care who took part in this study. In the developmental perspective the significance of recognition, like other experiences, appears greatest at the earliest stages of life but it remains to be considered how processes identified by Bowlby, Winnicott and Benjamin are translated into the circumstances of older, adolescent and young adult children people in foster care.

Attachment across the lifespan

The vehicle for the transmission of attachment difficulties from infancy into the lives of adults is the internalised working model of attachments and, according to this body of theoretical literature, classical attachment theory was deterministic enough to leave little prospect for foster care to act as a holding environment in which children and young people in foster care could 'unlearn' their insecure working models. Howe explains why in an interesting and helpful figure of speech, 'Internal mental models prefer to organise experience rather than be organised by it' (Howe *et al.* 1999:23) but, pursuing the figure of speech for a moment, preferences can sometimes be modified by friendly persuasion. Although late entry to a permanent placement may make a recovery harder to achieve (Biehal 2010: 18) both Howe and Schofield in separate pieces of work present evidence that in the appropriate relational setting the, 'disconfirmation of insecure working models' (Howe *et al.* 1999:293) can occur at any time across the lifespan (Howe *et al.* 1999:26).

This exciting prospect has to be treated with caution. While there is an extensive literature supporting the proposition (Broadhurst and Mason 2014:3) that the proportion of children showing resilience after neglect or abuse is relatively small - between 10% and 25% across a range of studies. The processes underlying their resilience are not yet well understood and in a recent review Cichetti commented, '…almost the entirety of resilience research has been conducted at a single-level of analysis and with a focus on psychosocial processes' (Cicchetti 2013: 414). However, Ciccheti remains positive

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about the prospects of further multi-level, long term longitudinal research in the area, envisaging, 'novel, perhaps even individualized, resilience promoting interventions for maltreated children…' (Ciccheti 2013: 417).

Howe's evidence was collected in laboratory settings using Adult Attachment Interviews. The procedure pays attention to the ways in which respondents talk about attachment-related experience to diagnose their adult security or insecurity. The evidence tended to confirm the persistence and strength of mental models (Howe *et al.* 1999), but also showed that abuse or neglect in early childhood does not always lead to attachment insecurity in adulthood (Howe *et al.* 1999). Howe attributed that finding to the impact of good quality relationships and Schofield (2002) subsequently expanded on the characteristics of good-enough relationships.

In a qualitative study of the reports of foster care leavers Schofield (2002: 265) claimed that under the right circumstances carers can provide help for people in foster care to achieve a 'cognitive shift in ideas and beliefs.' If accurate, the proposition that carers can activate attachment behaviours is a corollary of this finding. To make the desirable cognitive shift possible the care environment needs first to be of a kind that reduces anxiety. From a secure base the carers may be able to provide direct assistance to the young person's thinking about their forms of relationships. Once the internal model starts to become open to modification, attachment-related behaviour can also be. To be more precise, her description of these two stages involves an environment where, '...feelings can be named, thought about and discussed...' Once that is enabled, 'Defensive, controlling strategies of maltreated children … can move towards more balanced and flexible strategies for coping with everyday stresses at home and school that include turning to others for comfort' (Schofield 2002: 265).

Schofield's paper begins with an approving citation of a study by Lowe and Murch to the effect that there is need for, 'clear answers as to what [long-term fostering] is and positive reasons for its use' (Schofield 2002:259). Although in that paper she did not narrow her findings down to specific proposals, it

seems possible to argue, on the basis of Schofield's evidence and modelling, that the positive reason for long-term foster care is its potential as a form of 'holding environment'[1]. These findings strongly reinforce the potential attractiveness of a foster care element in permanency planning which will be discussed later.

Conceptualising foster care

Ideas about fostering presuppose ideas of children and families and of course some of these ideas are of the greatest antiquity. The complex literature on foster care has behind it many centuries of elaboration. In his very helpful paper, 'Human Rights in Light of Childhood' John Wall draws attention to what he describes as the 'largely forgotten philosophical and religious ideas' which underlie contemporary thinking about childhood (Wall 2008:524). From literature spanning the millennia from classical Greek civilisation to the Enlightenment, Wall identifies three major strands in ethical discourse of childhood which he calls 'top-down', 'developmental' and 'bottom-up' ethics. Top-down ethics are of the greatest antiquity. Broadly, top-down ethics hold that children are the playthings of instinct and that discipline and social acculturation are required for the development of the rational qualities required for 'genuine' happiness. Developmental and bottom-up ethics are later in emerging, ascribing to children respectively a blank slate of potentialities that might be tapped for the common good or bad or, turning top down ethics on its head, an inborn talent for goodness that needs protection against the corrupting tendencies of acculturation (Wall 2008). For Wall, these three ethical motifs form the sub-strata of contemporary thinking and while they are no longer likely to be found in their 'pure' forms he holds that their influences mingle in professional and academic discourses. Of particular importance for the interest in 'voice' which I explore shortly, he comments that International Children's' Rights agreements between 1924 and 1989 reveal the blending of all three perspectives (Wall 2008). Some of the play of developmental ideas in foster care should already have been made clear. At the level of individual placements we will encounter examples of the other themes being enacted in placement practices. The thesis will, for example,

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[1] The talking cure that Schofield sketches could easily elicit psychotherapeutic terminology. Describing the function as a 'holding environment' seems better suited to the family-like setting in which foster care takes place.

encompass intensive top down acculturation of children and young people in foster care and intense protectiveness of carers.

Those international agreements matter for my research because Article 12 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), building on all earlier agreements, affirmed children's right to express their views and to be heard in any judicial or administrative procedure affecting them. At first the effect of Article 12 was primarily on judicial proceedings but in time it led to much activity within social services directed at giving 'voice' to children and young people in foster care (Nybell 2013). That being said, as late as 1997 Kools could still report that 'Very few researchers have interviewed children in foster care to explore their thoughts and feelings about their status as foster children or their placement experiences' (Kools 1997:263).

Outcomes research

As an international trend, there is a genuine interest in how out-of-home care improves the lives of children and young people. In England and Wales, this has translated into a programme of work on 'outcomes'. It can be argued that both outcomes related policy and outcomes research has tended to be dominated by large scale, outcomes research programmes, where the voice of the child is questionable. Outcomes research measures how developmental processes are affected by foster care. To illustrate this influential and primarily externalising field, a three-stage investigation sometimes referred to as the York studies will be outlined. These studies are among the most comprehensive undertaken in the UK and have been very widely disseminated (Rees 2009).

York study 1 (Sinclair *et al.* 2004a) asked why foster carers stayed and why they left the service. It was based on a postal survey of carers and social workers and though children and young people in foster care were very much in the thoughts of both the research team and participants they were not surveyed or discussed directly at this stage. York study 2 and 3, however, engaged more directly with the experiences of children and young people in foster care. In York study 2 Sinclair *et al.* (2004b) the children and young

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people in foster care who were included in the sample were those placed with carers who took part in Study 1. In study 2, postal surveys of carers and social workers were again employed but at this stage in the research programme, in addition, some of the children and young people in foster care completed questionnaires. A further 24 case studies were made, of successful and unsuccessful placements. The criteria for 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' were derived from 'pooled judgments of carers, social workers and supervising social workers' (Sinclair 2005: 152). It was not thought necessary to obtain the views of the young people on the success or otherwise of the placements they lived in, and this preference for surveying the care teams rather than the children and young people in foster care is found in many similar studies.

The findings of study 2 included interesting if vague claims that 'chemistry' was important; that some children, 'clicked' or 'fitted' with their foster families' (Sinclair 2005: 153). The importance of happiness at school for successful placements was well documented, as was the importance of continuing contact with birth families. Professional therapeutic help was found to be ineffectual, by and large. Finally it was concluded that some of the traditional 'rules of thumb' for children and families' social work - to do with the inadvisability of sibling placements or placements in families with children, or even that there should not be frequent moves (Sinclair 2005) - were not actually associated with better outcomes in many cases.

The displacement of 'traditional' generalisations by these authors' own voluminous research yielded conclusions focused on the recruitment and training of foster carers and the development of ways in which supportive intervention by social workers could be made in placements. Study 2 therefore dealt only incidentally with the ways children and young people experienced care. Care arrangements were the focus of attention and the implicit assumption was that children and young people in foster care's experiences, for all their moral significance, were system contingencies. Knowledge of care arrangements could be established by consultation with the providers. Once known, they could be better framed so that

children and young people in foster care's (unobserved) experience would advance correspondingly and outcomes be improved.

York study 3 sought to follow the sample of children and young people in foster care through the next three years of their lives to find out where they went, how they were doing and to explain the range of outcomes discovered (Sinclair 2005). Those who remained in care throughout the follow up were not consulted but instead their paths were established by surveying their carers and social workers. Only those who moved into independent living during the period were surveyed directly. So far as study 3 went, it found broad approval of foster care by comparison with other forms of care (except adoption where approval ratings were a little better) and permanence in placements appeared to be favoured. Some small groups (mothers with babies in supportive relationships or university students) did well in independent living but most care leavers exhibited a range of quite serious difficulties (Sinclair 2005). Once again, motivation and happiness at school were important and those who wanted to be in the placements allotted to them did best. However, we learn little from these studies about the nature of foster care from the point of view of the young people. The level of generalisation served administrative and policy needs and supplied some impression of the dynamics of placements but, arguably, did not appear to offer children and young people in foster care an effective voice.

Other externalist approaches

Outcomes research could not provide what it did not seek to provide in the first place. Instead it took cognisance (e.g. Sinclair 2005, Wilson *et al.* 2005) of other studies some of which attempted to engage more directly with the voices of the young children and young people in foster care. However, these too often failed to consult directly with children and young people in foster care while they were being fostered in placements. Influenced by attachment theory, they were essentially externalist, etic studies, framed by the theories of the researchers rather than by those of the subjects of study.

For example, a 1990 study, 'Joining New Families' (Quinton *et al.* 1998) investigated a sample of 84 children all at the beginning of their adoption 'career'. They were drawn from 18 local authorities in the south-east of England and interviews were conducted with the children's parents and the two social workers assigned to each child and set of parents respectively. The team sought to answer questions about the move from foster care to adoption and wanted to find out how integration was negotiated between children and their new families so that knowledge of the perspective of children and young people in foster care could and perhaps ought to have been integral to the aims. The team also wanted to understand what behavioural patterns represented the greatest challenges, how the families responded and what sorts of support social services were able to provide but in fact the experiences of the children were taken into account only by drawing on their social workers' knowledge of pre-placement, foster care and/or residential care they had been given prior to adoption; a very restricted concept of experience. Thus while the York studies largely ignored the children, Quinton *et al.* 1998 discussed them in an externalist way.

Quinton *et al.* (1998) found that all the children in the sample exhibited a 'challenging behaviour pattern' from the very beginning of their placement (Quinton *et al.* 1998:231) and their key findings concerned factors affecting disruption of placements. For the moment it will suffice to mention that their research found, 'inability to express feelings openly or appropriately, with a perceived lack of trust and lack of genuine affection by the children for their new parents' (Quinton *et al.* 1998: 233). Here perhaps is one of the reasons why studies of many kinds felt the adults rather than the children in placements should provide accounts of foster care. Since, 'most of the children were at high risk of mental health problems at the start of the placement...' (Quinton *et al.* 1998: 243) it might have seemed possible that their capacities for contributing were impaired. Remembering the tendency of developmental theory to devalue what is most distinctive of children's experience, it is nevertheless very difficult to resist the idea that many children and young people in foster care will find life a struggle. I will take the view that their (fallible) perceptions of their own difficulties may still repay very close attention, and not just on ethical grounds but in Quinton *et al.* (1998) the externalist approach is still firmly in place.

Quinton *et al.* commented that at the time of their research attachment theory was, 'being extended to the process of re-attachment in new relationships' (Quinton *et al.* 1998: 232). No doubt they had in mind the kind of research discussed above and reported by David Howe and Gillian Schofield. In another slightly earlier study of children and young people in foster care, Schofield *et al.* (2000) looked at the types of behaviour exhibited by children growing up in foster care and the boundary between externalist and internalist approaches began to be more in evidence.

Like all the other studies so far described, research by Schofield *et al.* (2007) was based primarily on a survey of carers and social workers. However, this time the children and young people in foster care and their birth parents were drawn directly into the investigation and the authors commented helpfully on the effects of that effort, particularly in terms of time spent with the children and young people in foster care which, '...gave the researchers a much stronger sense of them as people and how they related to others' (Schofield *et al.* 2000:17). The use made of the young people's point of view in this study seems to be as a reference point against which analysis of other, and more substantial evidence might be tested. Although there is clear recognition that interviewing children and young people in foster care might be worthwhile it had not, at that stage, become a separate focus for attention. The accounts of the young people that Schofield *et al.* produced are typifications, more abstract than the empirical generalisations of Quinton *et al.* but still categories to which young people may be assigned: 'open-book children', 'closed-book' children and 'rewarding children' (See Schofield *et al.* 2000: 173/188).

The descriptions of the first two categories (Schofield *et al.* 2000) are unfavourable to a more child centred approach. 'Open book children' are construed as driven by feelings, coercive and demanding and so 'reason...' presumably the reasoning of others rather than their own thinking '...is not trusted.' 'Closed book children' tend to confusion and negative thought processes coupled with distorted feeling patterns. Obviously these typifications could not be recognised by the young people as descriptions of what they thought and felt in their placements, even if the language was adjusted. Many of the traits are such that

they are not readily available to reflective self-understanding. That lack of validity at the level of meaning for the actor does not necessarily mean the theoretical accounts are invalidated. However, it does suggest there is something unexplained left over from what are, after all, theoretical constructs which might be approached by a more child-centred approach.

The theoretical frame of Schofield *et al.*'s research oriented it primarily towards the creation of typifications of forms of attachment. This aim, coupled with the study's methodology stopped it from doing more than using the insight as a methodological resource and commenting upon it in passing. However, the 'something left over' is touched on in the description of the third 'type'. 'Rewarding children' are said to be functioning successfully in various situations and sets of relationships. The authors speculate that this is possible because they are, 'likely to be children who have been able to develop strategies [of their own]' (Schofield *et al.* 2000: 187-/8). The terminology deployed here invites the question, 'rewarding for whom?' It reveals particularly clearly that the researchers' point of view is still tied to externalist orientation, but children and young people in foster care are beginning to be construed as more active agents, devising and acting upon their own strategies and this construction was soon being further developed.

Voice research

My own research involves a heavy emphasis on the internal, subjectivity of children and young people in foster care and takes an interest in both the form and content of the speech of children and young people in foster care. Though I did not employ critical discourse analysis as in Jason McKinney's (2011) work in foster homes, we can see both the possibilities and the limitations of that general approach. McKinney's starting point was that research interest in child development had been concentrated largely on development within families and there had been insufficient study of the ways in which self and identity were interconnected when children were looked after away from home. In his doctoral dissertation, McKinney began to show how filling that 'gap' would go some way to describing how children in foster

care come to suffer various, 'severe impairment[s] including unhealthy identity outcomes, poor academic achievement, early educational discontinuation, substance abuse, and even homelessness' (McKinney 2011a: 27). I concur with this point of view.

He sought to move away from the analysis of narrations purely at a content level. Rather, he was interested in following the performance features of language, examining what was said but also taking account of the way language was being used. This meant that the language examined was, 'understood to assist [ ] the child in acquiring a sense of self' (McKinney 2011b: 1218).

Examining only two placements, both of older teenage males, through selected 'snapshots of the larger interaction that were selected to portray the culmination of previous interactions' (McKinney 2011 b: 85) McKinney identifies three main discourse genres; 'you're bad,' 'boys to men' and 'learn the hard way'.

 'You're bad' arises from observation of what can follow when a bad personality is imputed in children and young people in foster care. In the instances described by McKinney, that typification comes to be resisted through the young person's self-representation as a blameless actor, a self-representation which in turn serves as a focus for contestation with the carers. 'Boys to men' involves carers' efforts to motivate children and young people in foster care through speeches transmitting cultural norms of manhood, making household chores and expectations criteria of manhood and giving them urgency (McKinney 2011 b). 'Learn the hard way' shows how a school based standard - 'good student' - can be taken over by carers into the placement. Because it had already been adopted as a familial standard in relation to the carers' son, attempts were made to divert the person in foster care towards the familial standard. In resisting that attempt the young person also rejects the school based standard and sets up his own non-academic goals of success.

To the extent that 'voice' approaches had become important under the impetus delivered by Article 12, a democratic ethos has been present in the care system for many years, but accounts like McKinney's bring together the construal of the young as active participants with the dimensions of power and resistance - dimensions largely absent from outcomes and attachment research. Because power relationships become visible when the voices of children and young people in foster care are put at the centre of analyses, it has for some been associated with critique of the institutions of foster care:

> The rising interest in children's voices draws (usually implicitly) from broad social
> and political theories [in which] the construct of 'voice' carries with it a connotation
> of dissensus and struggle. (Nybell 2013: 1228)

Nybell comments that, for those who took this position, acquiring voice was believed to increase the likelihood that disempowered groups such as these could get results shifted in the direction of their own welfare. From the outset, studies of the voice of young people were focused on marginalised groups: those who were incarcerated; victims of violence and chronic disease sufferers. In those 'voice' studies which concentrated on children and young people in foster care the first themes to be explored were turnover of work force, placement moves, gay and lesbian voices (Nybell 2013). These are areas of concern for policy makers and of ongoing debate in foster care. They either have been clearly identified in outcome studies (Ward and Skuse 2001, Wilson *et al.* 2005) or, in the case of gay and lesbian interests, were liable to be overlooked altogether. There might, then, be the possibility that a new approach through soliciting the opinions of the young people concerned could result in previously unconsidered perspectives and so there appeared to be potential for critiquing foster care institutions on the basis of youth voice.

Nybell points out two sorts of limit that need to be held in mind when expectations of critique on this basis are aroused. First, she is concerned about the constraints placed on any interactions with young people by the 'power-laden' contexts in which those interactions take place. Secondly, she points out the dangers that tokenism can be a device to legitimate adult perspectives or contain change within programs

that need to be more ambitious (Nybell 2013). A similar concern is expressed more ardently by Batsleer who writes of the 'approved questions generated by the consultations and focus groups so beloved in the neo-liberal policy tool-kit' and stemming from the 'widely discussed limitations of neoliberal accounts of voice and choice' (Batsleer 2011: 419, 432). An exploration of youth voice then needs to position itself in relation to theoretical accounts of power.

Theories of power and some implications for foster care

Foucault

Foucault argues that power is ubiquitous, though not necessarily equally distributed, challenging tendencies to see it as localised and held or possessed by certain actors. He describes the nature and forms of power as:

> …the multiplicity of force relationships immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization … [as well as] the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.

(Foucault 1998:92)

Discussion of structural, cultural and political domination is allowed for in the processes of design and crystallization but these are 'only the terminal forms that power takes' (Foucault 1998: 92) and his 'only' marks the way power, for Foucault, is dispersed unevenly but widely throughout social formations. McKinney, Nybell and others involved in researching the voice of children and young people in foster care tend always to work within this sort of dispersed model of power and I have also adopted that viewpoint. It suggests cumulative, multiple small pressures and pulls rather than simple dyadic relationships of domination.

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Foucault also saw discourse as performative and central to power, constituting the social world in various ways, and intimately related to the force relationships. Looking at the part played by discourse in foster care has to be complemented by understanding the force relationships that make up and surround placements. These might include the fact that social workers use coercive powers - increasingly, by some accounts (Jordan 1990). Foster carers possess, among others, the very significant power of deciding whether and when to bring a placement to an end. Then there is the power of children and young people in foster care to further their own concerns - usually less effectively organised into strategies but sometimes successful and usually clearly observable. The performativity of the discourse will be most clearly displayed in accounts of how children and young people in foster care take on the key terms of the social work discourse in which they find themselves, in describing themselves and, arguably, in forming their identity.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault described the development of disciplinary functions that linked together all levels of power from individual to state. He showed how a range of 'instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets' (Foucault 1991: 215/6) came to be used and were then taken over by specialised institutions, of which social work is one and family another. The institutions acted as 'centres of observation' (Foucault 1991: 212) collecting minutely detailed information about individuals. We will encounter examples of categorising and record-keeping activities of social workers being observed and recounted by children and young people in foster care who pick up and take into their own discourse the terminology used by their social workers. There are limits to this acquisition of language. Some terms are more immediately available for children and young people in foster care than others and this represents the 'edges', ill-defined and liable to move though they may be, that power actually has. The judgements made by social workers about what is and is not to be shared with carers or children and young people in foster care, what is too abstract and difficult for them, shape discourse. Yet the imitation of social work discourse that takes place when, for example, a person in foster care repeatedly talks about their 'birth mother' has further implications. Foucault claims that the saturation of the environment by

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disciplinary mechanisms does more than merely repress individuality; the individual is, 'carefully fabricated in it' (Foucault 1991: 217) or, as another commentator put it, 'institutional practices generate social identities…'(Chambon *et al.* 1999: 56).

These claims of Foucault, Chambon and others (Fairclough 1992) , that discourse is connected to self-constitution as a moral subject need to be treated with some caution in that they might be taken to mean individuals, in their social identity, are *nothing but* the result of institutional practices. In fact, in every case there is necessarily someone who has what Andrew Sayer calls a 'sentient nature'; someone who, having physical, mental, emotional characteristics and a history of their own, can 'suffer or flourish in their own way' (Sayer 2011: 5).

Sayer points out that we are 'sentient, *evaluative beings* [original emphasis]' (Sayer 2011: 1) and our evaluations tend to focus on relationships of concern to us. Sayer's 'Why Things Matter to People' opens with the statement that 'people's relation to the world is one of concern' (Sayer 2011:1), a proposition that is fundamental to my thesis. For Sayer, alternative social science accounts of how people relate to the world in terms of their preferences, their self-interest or their values are all inadequate (Sayer 2011:2). For trying to understand why people act as they do, these are vitiated concepts of motivation which obscure the connections between behaviour and events, with social relationships and, very interestingly, ignore the 'emotional force' of their concerns (Sayer 2011:2/3). The project of listening to the voices of young people in care is bound up with the effort to attend to the emotional force of their concerns as well as the substantive content of their statements.

In the early stages of developing my thesis I received a personal warning from a very experienced and well-informed professional in the field of foster care (Carolyn Taylor, personal communication) against dwelling too much on 'horror stories.' She was rightly concerned; some children and young people in foster care have passed through horrific periods in their lives (see Broadhurst *et al.* 2009*)* but that is only part of what it means to be cared for by a Local Authority. I will show that all the children and young people in

foster care taking part in my investigation have known separation and loss. Sayer further tells us that vulnerability to various kinds of loss or harm is of particular significance in driving us to reflect on how to act, 'what to do for the best' (Sayer 2011:1) and so I shall also be trying to identify the normative questions faced by my interviewees. I shall, then, be moving away from the Foucauldian tendency to produce externalised views of life.

An alternative route, combining concerns for the internal and external, was only discarded quite late in the process of designing my study. Alyson Rees has for some years been taking an interest in the functioning of foster families and the voices of children and young people in foster care have been integral to her methodology across a number of studies (Rees 2009; Rees and Pithouse 2008; Rees *et al.* 2012). Themes which emerged from my evidence were also evident to her; the importance of food and mealtimes both as 'media through which children can become known and accepted by a family, or, in some instances, perceived as different and unwelcome'. The way children structure time (Rees *et al.* 2012). The importance of clothing within placements (Rees and Pithouse 2008). In particular, there was much to say about the significance of touch and the limiting impact of related safeguarding concerns (Rees and Pithouse 2008). As a carer, I was acutely aware of those limits and they are surely a backdrop to Chapter 7 on 'Coping' although, perhaps because of the nature of the issue, it was not a theme which was at all pronounced in the data I collected.

However, the approach in those publications was designed to understand and facilitate successful fostering (Rees 2009) whereas my primary aim was to explore the experience of childhood in care. The professional interest was likely to over-shadow (James and Prout 1990) or re-frame (Butler and Williamson 1994) some of the concerns of the young people which I sought and as I shall detail in the next chapter, I concluded that I should prioritise the perspectives of the children and young people in foster care by editing out the voices of other members of placements in the first analysis.

My interest will be in how life is lived and felt. Each person in foster care has particular resistances and susceptibilities which have to be taken into account. They are agents who, each in their own degree, have a capacity for reflexivity; who act, and influence others to act, in their own interests. I will describe instances of subjectification, but the success or failure of the discipline or discursive construction will be treated as an empirical question, to be weighed in context and with an eye to the effects of previous 'rounds' of such influences.

Relationships of concern between foster carers and children and young people in foster care are also important to keep in mind. Concern is integral to the practice of foster care and will be described quite explicitly by some children and young people in foster care as among the most valued elements of their care. The needs of carers were not the focus of this study but in my visits to their homes, the intense feelings carers directed towards their foster children were often made very clearly known to me. Knowledge that is formed by and of the multiplicity of relationships taken up with foster care is, then, not analysable in terms of force relationships alone but also has to comprehend the dimensions of care and attachment which are not to be understood by *reducing* them to force relations. That having been said, by the close examination of the discourse of children and young people in foster care, and sometimes of their carers, too, it ought to be possible to gain insight into the interplay of care provision and identity formation.

Further, whenever the crystallizations of power relations at the levels of institutional practice include construals of development, the explicit and tacit assumptions must be taken as reflections of positions of power rather than as objective statements of fact. Yet if at every point foster care builds on assumptions about development this does not mean that those assumptions or foster care itself are invalid. We have only to consider what it might mean for the children and young people if there was no foster care provision at all. If all social life involves power relations, foster care demonstrates with particular clarity that power can have positive social value. And after all, Foucault opposed a merely

negative view of power and emphasised that it constructs and can produce pleasure too. We can also see this in the work of Wall (2008) and the New Sociology of Childhood (James and Prout 1991; Jenks 2005).

The New Sociology of Childhood

To the extent that developmental discourses of childhood import the working out of power relations into knowledge of foster care, it is necessary to know what effects that might have on the 'things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden…' (Foucault 1990: 100) or, more simply, on the relationships that constitute foster placements. A critique focused directly on developmental theories in the context of achieving knowledge of children was developed by a school of thought referred to by its exponents as The New Sociology of Childhood. The critique involved arguing that twentieth century scientific discourse of childhood had revolved around a hegemonic model in which children were deemed to develop through stages that were 'chronologically ordered but also hierarchically arranged along a continuum from low status, infantile, 'figurative' thought to high status, adult, 'operative' intelligence.' (Jenks 2005: 22).This was primarily a debate about the work of Piaget who had proposed a theoretical framework of developmental stages, each of which had to be experienced and passed through in a given order before the subsequent stages of development became accessible (Child 1973).

Although Foucault warned against imagining a world of discourse divided between a dominant discourse and a dominated one (Foucault 1998: 100), the introductory paper of '*Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*' (the inaugurating text of The New Sociology) claimed the position occupied by Piaget's model of child development had been a dominant one, and not just in the study of childhood; it had, 'come to dominate western thought' (James and Prout 1991: 11). Jenks was yet more impressed by its power, calling it, 'global and overwhelming'.

The Piagetian model and others influenced by it – the Parsonian model of socialization processes was held to have 'uncritically absorbed' Piagetian ideas, for example (James and Prout 1991:13) - were understood to have a number of harmful effects on the ways children and young people were viewed.

These involved assumptions about the naturalness of childhood which concealed the social processes (James and Prout 1991) that gave rise to differing versions of childhood and therefore deflected attention from the 'impact or meaning of…institutions in the lives of children' (James and Prout 1991: 14) . The language, play and interactions of children were taken to be little more than 'markers of developmental progress' so their significance for the social lives of children were systematically misunderstood (James and Prout 1991). Assumptions about the degree of dependency that was necessarily associated with biological immaturity went unquestioned (Glauser in James and Prout 1991, Solberg in James and Prout 1991). The use of the model in the research optic was held to have made of children, along with women, a 'muted' group, all but invisible in terms of anyone conducting research during the 1970s (James and Prout 1990). For example, one of the most impressive of their collected essays examining the then current state of databases across Europe concluded that, because children were subsumed under their parents in surveys, 'it is the rule that…children [are not counted]…' (Qvortrup in James and Prout 1990:85). And while the primary aim of '*Constructing and Re-constructing Childhood*' was to reconfigure research practice, the political effects of the 'hegemonic model' were a strong secondary concern insofar as it may have, 'spawned a whole series of debates and moral panics about childhood…All children who seemed to falter in the socialization process were potentially…school failures, deviants and neglected children' (Jenks 2005:62). The critique therefore offered a possible explanation for the forms of stigmatisation of children and young people in foster care that will be described in the chapters that follow.

The New Sociology has something important to offer in its concern for the study of childhood which it vigorously defended as a social domain of great interest in its own right. Its contention that the most prominent developmental theory reduces childhood to a prefiguring of adult life receives support from sources well outside the New Sociology. However, it rested too much on its attack on a single grand but narrow body of developmental theory. There are phenomenological accounts of childhood (see, for example, Nancy Mandell's brilliant study in Waksler 1991) that The New Sociology ignored altogether but which operate with implicit, minimal use of concepts of development or even none at all. Its analysis is

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weakened most, however, by its failure to take account of less rigid and deterministic developmental accounts of childhood. Specifically, the post-Freudian, psychoanalytical perspective on child development is extremely closely associated with the social work discourse of foster care but received only brief attention.[2]

The voices of the young people who took part in this study will therefore be understood as constrained and fallible but appropriate as sources of information about the conditions created by specific placements for their particular foster care.

Constructions of children's needs and development in foster care policy and practice

Permanency planning

The 'guiding metaphor' (Maluccio 1986: 4-5) of foster care provision is the concept of permanency planning. The metaphor first emerged from a US federal project, The Oregon Project, in the 1970s and according to Quinton *et al.* (Quinton *et al.*1998) its influence in the United Kingdom was at its greatest in the late 1980s but its principles hold good to the present time and, as we shall see, permanency is at the heart of the most recent guidance on care planning and review under the 1989 Children Act (HM Government March 2010: Section 2.3). This thesis will have much to say about the day-to-day negotiations of permanency at the level of placement interactions and one of my aims, to make recommendations that would help to reduce the frequency of fostering breakdowns, is directed at the continuing incidence of 'drift' in foster care that permanency sought to address, so a brief exploration of the principles is called for.

Permanency planning was never solely concerned with foster care or adoption. The preferred option for child-rearing was and continues to be the birth family or extended family network as the best way of securing the parent-child attachments necessary for physical, social, emotional, intellectual and moral development (Maluccio 1986). If that was not possible a range of alternatives were proposed

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[2] James and Prout distanced themselves from it on the limited grounds that Bowlby's early work, later corrected (Bowlby Vol. 2 1998:13), imposed culturally determined, normative patterns of early rearing (Prout and James in James and Prout 1990: 72).

including adoption, 'as the second priority' and then other carers who could be awarded legal guardianship (Maluccio 1986: 4). Foster carers are included under this third category.

The emphasis on 'planning' in 'permanency planning' reflected concern about drift in the care of children in substitute homes[3] (Narey 2007). While separated from their families, the instability of children's placements caused much anxiety in the UK as in the USA (Bullock *et al.* 1998). Care agencies were using so-called 'short-term' placements to cope with situations without apparent solutions for the longer term. Drift of this kind was seen to threaten developmental processes and thus was to be minimised by, '…carrying out, within a brief time-limited period, a set of goal-directed activities[4]…' (Maluccio *et al.* 1986: 5). The 'goal-directed' activity was to move children out of temporary care arrangements as soon as possible.

In the particular context of Maluccio's discussion the uncertainty seems to be a reference to the fact that temporary placements were not always immediately identifiable as such. He cites Pike *et al.* as observing that 'foster care may have the appearance of permanency' (Maluccio *et al.* 1986:4). What was missing was a home that was intended to last indefinitely, in which the family were committed to that child as a part of all their assumptions about the future and where the child's relationship to the other members of the family had legal standing. The thrust of permanency planning was, then, that nothing less is good enough but in practice in the UK today, permanency is an aspiration rather than a regularly achieved

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[3] Though often reported, the term 'drift' is not defined in the literature. It is, however, lampooned by Maluccio (1986) in the following piece of doggerel;
There was once a worker named Bloom
Who felt confused and mired in gloom
He tried with elan
To write a permanent plan
But couldn't say who did what to whom.

Interestingly, the subject of drift in this doggerel is the worker called Bloom, not the child for whom he was responsible. 'Drift' is not, then, something that happens to the child in care, though their development is affected by it. Rather drift is a metaphor for care provision which lack direction and purpose.

[4] This rather odd usage may reflect the influence of attachment theory. Bowlby imported the concept of goal directed activity from ethology and control theory.

standard. Elsewhere Maluccio wrote of the need for 'deliberate, purposeful, and aggressive decision-making, even in the midst of uncertain or incomplete knowledge' *(*Maluccio *et al.*1986:12).

The British permanency movement developed independently of the US, and in a direction that, since the 1970's, gave greater prominence to adoption (Biehal *et al.* 2010:10) as the key method of dealing with concerns about 'drift'. For example it is mandatory, 'that each child has a plan for permanence by the time of the second review' or about 4 months after they become Looked After (HM Government 2010: 12, 88). Very recent legislation in the field of adoption is intolerant of drift when courts wait on the outcome of rehabilitation plans before making a determination between adoption and return to a birth family. Rather than placing a child in foster first and subsequently requiring a series of complex stages leading eventually to adoption, dually qualified carers, both foster carers and potential adopters are to be found so that if the rehabilitation plan fails and adoption is decided upon there need be no disruption of attachment to the foster carers (BAAF 2013).

In Britain at the present time permanency in foster care is a practical option for a minority of children and young people in foster care. For reasons to do with policy, practice and placement breakdowns foster care usually does not provide long-term, quasi-adoptive care (Sinclair 2005). Although the vast majority of looked after children are in foster care the preferred and second priority options, family and adoption respectively are being vigorously pursued and a so far unsuccessful attempt has been made to drive down the numbers of children in care[5]. Yet, there remain, inevitably, a group for whom permanency can only mean long-term stable foster care capable of giving a sense of belonging and

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[5] In 2003 the UK government published a Green Paper, Every Child Matters and by 2006, had concluded that though more children had been adopted and there had also been improvements in the situations of care leavers, previous help had been insufficient; "[T]he life chances of many children in care remain bleak." (Care Matters 2006: Sect. 1.12/3). A linked and more narrowly focused Green Paper, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care asked whether the United Kingdom ought to place limits on the numbers of children and young people admitted into care. Following consultation the Green Paper Working Party recommended instead that a range of alternatives to care including especially adoption and Special Guardianship, be encouraged, with care resources being focused on those that would benefit most, the younger population of children in care, as a way of increasing the rate and success of returns to families and reducing the population in care in the long term (Beyond Care Matters 2007: 25). However, there were around 60,000 Looked After Children in England in 2005 (BO1/2005: Table A) and the population has grown since then. Latest figures show 67,050 looked-after children in England at 31 March 2012.

relationships with foster families that persist long after the placement comes to an end. Even if it is not as common as might be hoped, permanency in foster care does occur and there are examples of it to be considered among the young people who took part in my project[6].

The social domain and some implications for foster care

By reliance on developmental psychology, well-crafted policies can be developed but the accounts that will be given of foster care from the point of view of the children and young people in foster care use a different set of concepts and ideas. Young people in care do not talk of having 'insecure attachments'; they get upset about not being with their families. For them the strategically designed care system is an indistinct local presence called 'Social Services' that stands behind the carers they live with and is also behind the social workers who call from time to time. Their concerns are, first and foremost, relational and so the theoretical accounts that will enable sense to be made of what matters to them will have to range more widely than we have so far seen.

Knowledge reviews and the design of the care system

Recent years have seen an emphasis on the systematic or comprehensive review of relevant literature (Little 2005: Sinclair 2005). There has been an attempt to make summaries of relevant outcomes research available to policy makers, administrators and practitioners. Two notable 'knowledge reviews' issuing from the overview process and published at about the same time, will be considered next with a view to establishing the extent to which the system as a whole can be expected to provide the characteristics of positive care identified above.

The first review, Wilson *et al.*'s, (2005) '*Fostering Success*' was co-authored by Ian Sinclair who was also sole author of the other review, 'Fostering Now'. Sinclair can be taken to speak for many stakeholders[7] when he observes:

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[6]These placements are de facto adoptions or families for life in Sinclair's terminology. There are important differences from adoption, though. Foster carers are paid to foster and receive levels of support that are not available to adopters.

Troubled children need relationships with adults who are committed to them.

Foster care offers the chance of such relationships. It is a serious response to

serious problems. It is valued and valuable.

(Sinclair 2005: 122).

The basis of this carefully weighed report was a comparison of around 300 studies of children and young people cared for in the "home environment" and in foster care. The childhoods of those in care are often found to be unstable with repeated trials at home followed by re-entry to care where placement breakdowns are a "major cause" of instability (Wilson *et al.* 2005: 15-16). In care, they suffer disadvantage across physical and mental health, disability, relational confidence and educational achievement, and vulnerability to 're-abuse', (Wilson *et al.* 2005: 23-6). Once having left care a substantial minority (around 30%) are at greater risk than the rest of the population of a host of disadvantages including, for example, homelessness, unemployment, drug use, imprisonment and problems with mental health (Wilson *et al.* 2005). The review was nevertheless able to conclude that foster care was the better environment compared to home in terms of safety and psycho-social outcomes (Wilson *et al.* 2005). Foster care is, therefore, a form of provision that does improve life chances for a disadvantaged population of children and young people but which cannot be expected to achieve the same outcomes for almost a third of those fostered (Wilson *et al.* 2005).

The two knowledge reviews under consideration tend to see the difficulties of care leavers as pre-existing their being looked after rather than caused by the care system (Wilson *et al.* 2005). Sinclair's aim, therefore, in the second review is to chart the most promising strategies for further improvements and for

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[7] Not all. Some see removal of a child to care as an admission of failure. (Wilson et al.2005) But Sinclair's independent review of Department of Health studies in which the foreword was written by an official of the Department for Education and Skills was part of the overview process and related materials were accessed via Government websites.

him, 'The key weakness of foster care is…not so much what happens in foster care but what happens after it' (Sinclair 2005: 122). As a strategic judgment of the outcomes that makes sense, but in practice, what happens in foster care makes a huge difference to what happens afterwards and so his key recommendations include aims that the system should be designed to 'promote close relationships' and offer, '[A] coherent connection between what happens in foster care and what happens after it.' In fact what he wants for those who must be kept in foster care long-term is a 'form of foster care that more nearly approaches a family for life' (Sinclair 2005: 123). Schofield's (2002) hint about the positive reasons for foster care resonates strongly here. If foster care is for creating an environment in which feelings can be talked about openly in order that young children and young people in foster care can improve their strategies for dealing with stress, that requires permanency in which close relationships can grow and the foundational capabilities required for independent living gradually develop. The developmental frame for the problems being considered and solutions proposed is plain.

Families and kinship

According to Williams (2004), changes in family law in the 1960s and 1970s made divorce and separation easier and lone parenthood more common. Further legislation then recast 'men and women as parents rather than spouses' (Williams 2004:30-31) and Williams suggests a new normative model has been emerging which does not necessarily depend on marriage but in which adult workers share responsibility for the welfare of children who are not always their own joint offspring. In this model parenthood has become something people 'do' rather than something they 'are' (Williams 2004: 31-40). One of the implications of a shift from a more purely biological to a functional definition of parenthood is that the concept becomes more inclusive and foster carers, for instance, might be construed theoretically as 'parents' because they provide parenting even though there is no biological kinship and they may not have any intention of creating the family for life that Sinclair (2005) envisaged.

In the same way, if functional definitions of parental status are to be used, why should we not use functional definitions of sibling status, too? When separated parents with their offspring set up a new

household with others in similar situations, diversity of living arrangements result which Elgar and Head term 'reconstituted families'. Reconstituted families commonly contain 'full, half- and sometimes step-siblings [having] any combination of common genetic make-up' (Mullender 1999:20).

In the institutional perspective, however, while local authorities see foster carers as providing a very valuable service that offers substitute family care (Sinclair 2005, Wilson *et al.* 2005), whether departments consider foster families that contain foster children as 'families' per se, is complicated. As has already been established, permanency planning seeks first to keep children with their birth parents and the second preferred option is adoption. Only where these are unavailable might foster care be considered. Adoptive families are perceived as 'proper' families and so, too, are foster carers who obtain Special Guardianship[8] but other foster placements are regarded as stepping stones towards permanence of some kind, or independence. Without the support of legal standing, then, even long term placements – the sub-group with which I am concerned – fall a little short of being recognised as families, though individual social workers may treat them as if they were.

The way 'family' is understood by social service departments involves a powerful normativity. The family-like or family for life arrangements being sought always and only assume good enough families, certainly not dysfunctional families like the biological families from which the young people have been removed. Yet Smart cites the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern to the effect that:

> …relationships between kin, particularly in the context of Euro-American kinship, are profoundly affected by what is known about biological or genetic connection. [Strathern] argues that knowing about genetic connection is not simply a matter of information but a form of knowledge that is constitutive of relationships.

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[8] "A Special Guardianship Order gives the special guardian legal parental responsibility for the child which is expected to last until the child is 18. But, unlike Adoption Orders, these orders do not remove parental responsibility from the child's birth parents, although their ability to exercise it is extremely limited."

(Smart 2011: 550)

Independent evidence of the special cultural importance of biological relationships supports Strathern. Schofield writes about the 'disenfranchised grief' of parents whose children have been taken into care (Schofield 2011: 77) and Kosonen cites numerous studies confirming the importance of sibling relationships being continued when children are separated from their parents (Kosonen in Mullender 1999). We shall see that while many children and young people in foster care may make the most of their situations and often approach a new placement with real hope, for most of my participants, 'flesh and blood' or, 'blood family' continues to have special significance. I will show it sometimes has significance for their carers too, which then has a bearing on the nature of the relationships that develop within the placements. This culturally conditioned value accorded to 'blood' ties fits awkwardly with the way institutional normativity operates because it leads to idealisation and disregard of dysfunctionality and yet both sets of values had been very largely accepted by the young people interviewed. The same dissonance was also evident in the accounts of carers and is therefore significant for an understanding of placement life.

We might, then, hold that foster carers and foster siblings are members of the families of children and young people in foster care or, alternatively, we might prefer to say that children and young people in foster care are people who have been removed from their families and placed in a family-like situation. It seems a most important distinction, if one that needs to be made placement by placement and - because placements can change unpredictably – needs to be kept under close review. What rests on it is whether at any specific time each placement is construed as a transitional period following which some form of reunification with the 'birth parents' and other family members is anticipated or whether it is to be seen as the new beginning of a 'family for life' that will parallel or exist separately from, perhaps instead of the birth family. Asking, 'what am I doing here? What's my relationship to these people?' was the most difficult dilemma for most of the young people in the placements visited, and many moments in the interviews that

took place were touched by just such uncertainties in deciding what type of situation they were in. Since, as we shall see, family membership is closely related to issues of identity the dilemma was also related to the person they *were* in whatever type of situation they were in.

Families and identity

It was mentioned above that the aim of permanency planning was, for Maluccio (1986), connected to securing the parent-child attachments necessary for physical, social, emotional, intellectual and moral development. Thoburn (1994) discusses the value of permanency in slightly different terms, considering its relationship to identity formation. That raises general questions first about the relationship between identity formation and those various developmental processes and then about what sort of process identity formation is if it is more than just the sum of those biologically-driven developmental processes. This latter is complicated yet further because 'identity' is a concept that is, in the views of some, 'driven out of its wits by over-use,' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 3). What I propose to do is for the time being to accept 'identity' as an unproblematic concept and look at the way it has been used by Thoburn (1994) and Smart (2011) because both have written about identity in ways that are of immediate relevance to foster care. In the next chapter on Methodology Brubaker and Cooper's objections will be given further attention.

For Thoburn, permanency and identity converge in the model represented in Figure 1 (Thoburn 1994: 38),

PERMANENCE
means

IDENTITY
means

Knowing about birth family

Security

Belonging

Knowing about past relationships

Family life

Fitting the present with the past

Being loved

Appropriate contact with important people from the past

Loving

Being valued as the person you *are*

SELF-ESTEEM
(The capacity to grow and make new and satisfying relationships as an adult)
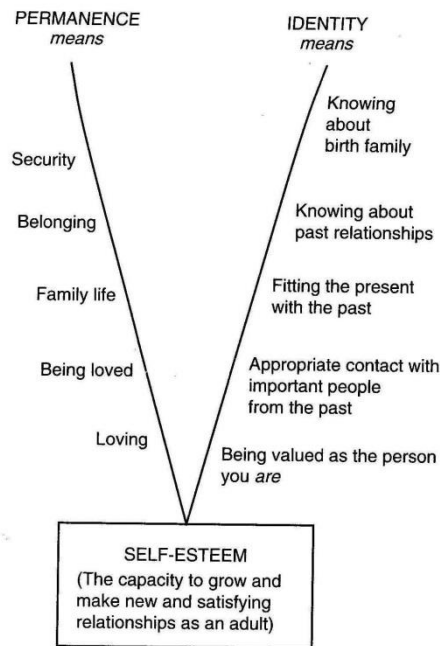
Figure 1 Thoburn's model of permanence

Contrasting with Maluccio's (1986) perspective, this model of permanence is not defined in terms of administrative action, legal standing or duration. Thoburn is emphatic that it is the 'sense of permanence which is crucial' (Thoburn 1994: 37). No doubt legal standing plays some part in providing a degree of security with which the sense of permanency can first be established. Time too must play some part if, as the linkage to permanency indicates, identity formation is a continuing process. The model is, however, a picture of related emotional states and mental activities and leads to a valued disposition, self-esteem[9]. That is, a positive evaluative stance is taken. In parallel with Smart's later study, the model places a weight on knowledge of the past.

Smart suggested that families provide, a 'specialised circle of memories' (Smart 2011:543) to their members. The circle comprises experiences of the family but also inherited memories and is specialised because it concerns a small group of people who have a continuous relation to one another over a long period and also because the memories have particular importance for the development of individuals'

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[9] The definition of self-esteem as a set of relational potentialities is rather out of keeping in a model that is otherwise entirely of subjective states.

sense of self. There is an unstated assumption that the memories are generally 'good' ones and that what is supported is a 'good' sense of self and this extends to the image of childhood Smart (2011:543) establishes when she points out that it is:

> ...(usually) in families where one develops one's first memories but it is also in the relational context of family within which one goes on collecting memories over many years.

Those memories give a person 'a sense of self which continues even though everything else changes and even becomes unrecognizable' (page 543) but the obverse also appears to be true. The optimism in all these formulations is appropriate in the practice of foster care. We saw in the earlier discussion of David Howe's work that the effects of insecure attachment are potentially reducible by appropriate care and Walker, Hill and Triseliotis (2002:10-11) introduce the concept of 'resilience' as a means of understanding how 'some young people exposed to adverse life experiences fare better than others.' All the factors associated with resilience - characteristics such as good self-esteem, having a strong, supportive relationship and positive social and educational experiences - imply the positive regard of others and a social environment in which recognition plays the part that Benjamin recommends. However, it is obviously the case that positive memories are not the most influential legacy of all childhoods. For some of the children and young people in foster care I interviewed the impact of 'bad' memories or fragmentation of memories had the opposite effect on self-understanding and resulted in a troubled sense of self.

Kools (1997:268), reporting on a study of children in residential units comments, 'Without a linkage to one's family and past, it was more difficult for the adolescent to forge an understanding of who he or she is.' Kools, like Thoburn, assigns to identity formation a part in what she terms 'future orientation' (Kools 1997: 268) and I shall be able to present too many profiles of young people who could eventually conform to this and other gloomy forecasts about the outcomes for care leavers (Wilson *et al.* 2005).

Smart's (2011:543) bracketed qualification that, '(usually)' first memories are acquired in families applies specifically to the situations of children and young people in foster care. Some of those who took part in my study had spent all or much of their childhood in foster care. It will be shown that their memories were frequently fragmented and vague, or seemingly irretrievable. In one case there was only sketchy information about the birth family. More commonly, once-important past relationships with carers were being forgotten. In several cases, contacts with wider family and with siblings were rare, diminishing or had been discontinued.

Other participants in my study, who had been taken into care later on in childhood and had been able to accumulate memories of family life might have been thought to be better placed but that did not make their adaptation to foster care necessarily easier. In some instances it seemed the stability of their placements, as well as identity, was at risk precisely because those memories and the attachments they symbolised made the conflict of loyalty all the more acute. Only in the minority of cases where placements were actually becoming families was it possible to feel that a secure sense of identity was emerging based on a clear preference for the placement over the birth family.

The findings of Thoburn, Smart and Kools all, therefore, suggest that my observations of children and young people in foster care were appropriately conceptualised in terms of identity formation.

Conclusion

Through extensive reading of the relevant literature, I have arrived at an eclectic weave of theoretical insights and conceptual frameworks that, as the following chapters illustrate, have enabled deep and critical engagement with my interaction with children and young people, and their personal accounts of foster care. Arguably, it might be safer to stay within a particular school of thought or follow more narrowly a specific cannon but my experience of the complexity of children's worlds and words suggested a more experimental approach, where different strands of theory or sociological precepts would

aid analysis. Developmental accounts of childhood, including, especially, attachment theory provide an important part of the conceptual framework for talking about relationships. However, and because childhood and youth are to be understood as *social* domains of interest, drawing on conceptual ideas from the sociology of childhood has been important. It is also the case that it is difficult to approach any analysis of foster care without considering the power relations, which whilst complicated, relations between children and carers and other professionals have a particular form, given the institutional context of foster care.

It has been argued that the guiding metaphor in the official policy and practice literature concerning foster care is permanency and its translation into concerns about permanency planning and other permanency practices. The aspiration for long-term stable foster care, a sense of belonging and relationships with foster families that persist long after the placement comes to an end provides the overall context in which placement activity is now considered and thus, such concerns are central to my analysis in this thesis. A model of good enough foster care as an environment in which feelings can be talked about and thought through so strategies for dealing with stress can be improved, will be held up against specific experiences children and young people in foster care have in their placements which is the central focus of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

My study comprised a series of informal, conversational interviews with older children and young people in their foster placements. I shall begin with an explanation of the aims of the study and show how the method was influenced by methodological alternatives considered in the early stages of the study before describing the method I eventually settled upon, its rationale and its limitations. Ethical questions that arose will be considered separately, while their effects on the method and the data will be made explicit.

Aims and research questions

As stated in the introduction to this thesis and influenced by James and Prout's innovative 1991 collection of studies in the sociology of childhood, the principal aim of the research was to make a contribution to the knowledge of the cultures and social relations that children and young people in foster care create for themselves. I wanted to identify the concerns that children and young people in foster care had about their circumstances. I was interested in their awareness of their changing circumstances and in the challenges and opportunities facing them, their carers and researchers. This aim involved a strong assumption that the interviewees were children or young people first and Looked After Children next. I sought to study growing up in care as a childhood or adolescence among many different forms postulated by the literature on family life (James and Prout 1991; Aries 1996; Williams 2004).

As stated earlier, at the time I began my research, I had ten years of experience as a foster carer looking after older children and teenagers. Having had some experience of the difficulties that could arise in communications, it was with equal hope and scepticism that I learned of a new impetus being given to the practice of listening to children in care when the UK Government Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* was launched in 2003. I was not alone in finding this a doubtful proposition. Some would claim the practice of

listening to children in general and to children in foster care in particular is well-established both in social work and related research (Holland 2009: 226) but there are other commentators who questioned its place as a programme. At around the time when I was thinking about turning my own scepticism into a research project, Michael Little of the influential Dartington Social Research Unit was warning the research community that, "The current vogue is the child's voice" (Little 2005: 15). Developing a surfing metaphor, he pointed out that knowing which wave to ride was not always obvious (Little 2005: 10).

The aims of my investigation were always psycho-social (Clarke and Hoggett 2009) as much as practice oriented and changes in UK Governmental priorities do not have the same effect on sociological aims but it is nevertheless the case that I was among those who chose to ride that particular wave. This investigation was also conceived as an exploration of the possibilities and limits of listening (Holland 2009; Bergmark and Kostenius 2009). Thus while social workers and foster carers are charged with listening as part of their contracted duties, what, under the much less congested conditions of research, could be learned from and about listening to children and young people in foster care? What, if anything, was being overlooked or misunderstood in the daily interactions of foster care?

I also formed a secondary aim, to make recommendations that would contribute to the literature about placement breakdowns. I hoped to gain insights about the factors that contributed to the disruption of fostering placements as well as the positive factors that seemed to contribute to the stability of placements and better outcomes of foster care for children and young people. I wanted to understand what made good relationships between carers and young people more likely (Fernandez and Barth 2010); what enabled and constrained young people to reflect on their situation, making it easier or more difficult for them to participate effectively in decisions affecting their own care.

In light of these aims, my key research questions are as follows:

1. How do children and young people in care understand and negotiate their situation?

2. What challenges and opportunities do they describe?

3. From the perspective of children and young people, what makes for good (or difficult) relations with carers and other significant figures, including birth or adoptive parents, siblings, carers' children, friends, teachers and social workers?

4. What recommendations might be made for policy or future research regarding foster care on the basis of this study?

Developing a Child-Centred Approach

Reflections on possible methods

Throughout the study, I aimed to take a child-centred approach. However, just exactly what or how child-centred research is undertaken is subject to considerable debate. A good starting point is to acknowledge that research undertaken by adults with and about children, must navigate a major generational divide, which child-centred research aims to bridge (Clark, 2010). Child-centred research acknowledges that children are 'complex inhabitants' of social worlds and seeks to empower children as active participants in research, valuing both the content and form of their contribution (Clark, 2010). Regarding children in foster care, such descriptions are very apt, given the particular challenges and often atypical experiences that characterise the lives of children in care. My own experience as a foster carer suggested that engaging children and young people in social research might not be straightforward, indeed I anticipated that some young people might be quite difficult to interview. However, my reading also taught me that children can be understood, where the researcher is prepared to listen closely to their particular angle on their experiences, relationships and endeavours.

In searching for a child-centred approach, I was also keen to distance myself from some of what I perceived as the unhelpful dictates of government or institutional conceptions of children's participation or voice. All too often, my experience of institutional interest in the child's voice, could be quite formulaic –

'wishes and feelings' were elicited in Looked After Children Reviews, or came to the fore when there was any question of child protection concerns. However, for the main part, social work practice existed at a considerable distance from the child's world, disconnected from the individual detail and dilemmas of the everyday world of fostering. Here, I draw a contrast between what I have seen in both formal child records and formal encounters between an often hurried and distracted practitioner and the richness and detail that has been garnered by ethnographers or other qualitative researchers engaging closely with the 'the field' (e.g. Rees, Holland and Pithouse 2012; Schofield 2012; Waksler 1991). Ultimately, my aim was to know children better, inspired by the work of such as Roger Bullock (Spencer *et al.* 1986); Butler and Williamson (1994) and Cindy Dell Clark (Clark 2010)

I cannot pretend, in this study, to have mastered methods of imaginative participatory research with children, indeed, my preference and selection of mainly older children and young people, perhaps reflects the fact that I am more comfortable with the traditional methods of research interviewing. Participatory research methods (Fargas-Malet 2010) use techniques comparable to teaching devices: for example, photographs can be used as interview stimuli (Fargas-Malet 2010:182); drawings can be used as ice-breakers (Fargas-Malet 2010:183); charts and diagrams of various kinds have been used to enable fuller expression by children (Pain and Francis 2003); written prompts such as sentence completion and unfinished stories can encourage children to see adoption as a journey (Fargas-Malet 2010: 185). The principal use of such techniques is with younger children (Fargas-Malet 2010: 178; Kay *et al.* 2003; Punch, 2002b; Sanders and Munford, 2005) who may respond only very briefly to questions which seems to them irrelevant (Morgan *et al.* 2002). Some commentators also recommend participation techniques with older children (Winter 2006). Careful, systematic use of multiple methods to collect data can improve research outcomes (Pithouse and Rees 2015). However, for both practical and personal reasons I decided to rely on the informal conversational interview as the way to elicit first-hand accounts from participants. In reflecting on whether my research then departed from a child-centred approach, my feeling was that I was not using adults as proxy informants of the child's experience. In addition, as I describe below, my aim was

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to preserve the first-hand account, its organisation and language. I aimed to ensure that the direction of informal conversational interaction resonated with topics children and young people introduced and made meaningful. All but one of the prospective interviewees were teenagers and the pilot study strongly suggested that interviews with that age group could supply valuable data about the concerns of the young people without the need for further support. Nigel Thomas (2001) holds that communicating with children is much the same as communicating with adults except that the social situation of children is different. I concluded that I could carry out my study on the assumption that my interviewees needed no special techniques in order to convey their concerns, other than they felt valued and listened to.

The interviews that I planned were to take place as far as possible at the home of the children, young people and their foster carers. In many respects this then, also placed me in the position of non-participant observer. The expressed preference by James and Prout in the *New Sociology of Childhood* was for research using ethnography because it, 'allowed children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data' (James and Prout 1990: 8) and ethnographic study was demonstrated very impressively in Waksler's (1991) collection *Studying the Social Worlds of Children.* However, I equally cannot pretend to have undertaken anything akin to a full blown ethnographic study of foster care – time and other practical constraints made this impossible, but I felt I must still acknowledge the value of detailed observation. Gaining permission for close ethnographic engagement with children is not beyond the realms of possibility – indeed this has been done successfully by Pithouse and Rees (2015), however, as I indicate below, my own experience of gaining consent for interviews alone proved onerous. I also noted findings from Nancy Mandell's fascinating study of children between 2 and 5 years of age in day care centres and classrooms. She demonstrated that both children and adults experience difficulty coming to terms with a participant observer. When she needed to make clear that, though adult, she could not be called on to do what teachers or helpers do, she did so by swinging on the swings, following the children into the sand box and hiding with them, 'At first the children giggled hilariously and the teachers followed me and stared, as if they 'knew' that adults didn't do things unless they were being 'silly', out of role.' (in

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Waksler 1991:44-5). Eventually Mandell found her least-adult role was accepted but that was in pre-school, not the pressure-cooker environment of a foster care placement. Other literature (Murray 2005, Butler and Williamson 1994) made it clear that difficulties gaining access to children and young people in foster care might well be encountered and the demands of an ethnographic study seemed likely to be too intrusive to gain permission. I found however, that even my fleeting encounters with the children's foster homes provided very useful contextual data which helped situate children and young people's interview accounts.

Staying close to children's accounts and their nuanced depictions of their social worlds is a central consideration in data collection, but also in analysis. Here, I found the distinction that anthropologists draw between emic and etic approaches very useful. The emic approach takes the point of view of the group studied, attending to their categorisation practices and forms of interpretation while the etic allows the observer to focus on what he or she regards as most important (Kottak 2006: 47). By taking a mainly emic approach I could better capture the points of view of my participants (Butler and Williamson 1998).

A further key consideration that has influenced all stages of this study is an understanding of the power dynamics between adults and children as discussed in the previous chapter. In many institutional contexts, children are obliged to follow adult rules - in schools, medical settings, public places and the like. For children in foster care, decisions that are frequently adult made, in particular those that are court-ordered, are highly consequential and can place even greater constraints on children's worlds. However, it would be short sighted to position children as passive because children are taken into public care. As a number of authors have observed, in the face of uneven relations, children display a range of responses, that include direct acts of rebelling and resistance (Leavitt, 1991; Miller and Ginsburg, 1989; Sutterby, 2005). Such acts of resistance whether overt or covert are not unusual in fostering settings. Given the complex power dynamics between children and adults that inevitably will be experienced in the research setting, qualitative research is particularly advantageous. As Clark (2010) writes:

Qualitative research leaves room to uncover unknown strands and shards of meaning, that children disclose when space and means are made for them to communicate. Contrasting qualitative approaches with quantitative ones, the latter use research designs discernibly shaped by adult study designers. Quantitative instruments have a disciplined structure that leaves less space for children's unanticipated, volunteered felt meanings. As scholars refine child-centered qualitative methods, we are increasingly able to organize inquiry around children's meanings, experiences, and worldviews. In turn, this provides child-relevant input for theorizing and understanding children's experience. (Clark, 2010)

Both discourse and conversation analysis explore language arising naturally in day-to-day communication. Again, I considered whether such detailed methods of micro-analysis would be suitable for my own work (Fairclough 2005; Hutchby and Woofit, 1998). Discourse analysis finds its data in written texts for the most part, but McKinney (2011 A and B) demonstrated that it could also be applied to understanding children or young people-foster carer conversation most effectively. He was able to find two placements that allowed him to study the development of new relationships between children and young people in foster care and foster carers. His intensive study of foster carer-child dialogue involved video and audio recorded observations and field notes of caregiver-child interactions (McKinney 2011 B: 44). His analysis was guided by themes identified from the literature on foster care to identify the, 'issues for youth regarding complexity, ethnic identity, stigma, and stability and served as a guide for identifying segments of interaction for further analysis' (McKinney 2011 B:48). Very interesting though the results of this study were, it entailed decisions that limited the degree to which the study addressed or could have addressed the concerns of the young people. Because McKinney's aim was to observe language used in everyday social interaction (McKinney 2011 A: 1218), his data was drawn from dialogues in which the role of the carer had to be given equal and sometimes more attention than that given to the young person. Since identification of what those concerns were was part of my objective I sought to determine the foci of

analysis in a different way; giving less significance to language in social interaction and focusing mainly on children and young people in foster care's accounts and narratives about social interactions in the past.

In many respects, both applied discourse and conversation analytic approaches work better with naturally occurring data. Indeed, many proponents of these micro-analytic methods draw a distinction between 'contrived' (interview) and uncontrived data, rejecting the former (Sacks 1984; Potter, 2012). For this reason, and given the reasons I outlined above regarding the likely difficulties I would encounter should I have sought access to the 'uncontrived' world of the foster home – I chose to make use of tried and tested methods of qualitative analysis that have been successfully applied to other child-centred studies (Holland 2009). A further limitation with micro-analytic approaches is that studies focus narrowly but in much detail on extended extracts of talk often from one or two participants, I was concerned that this would limit the extent to which I could draw comparisons or common themes from across interviews, as well as understanding the individual child or young person's experience.

Participatory research methods (Fargas-Malet 2010) use techniques comparable to teaching devices: for example, photographs can be used as interview stimuli (Fargas-Malet 2010:182); drawings can be used as ice-breakers (Fargas-Malet 2010:183); charts and diagrams of various kinds have been used to enable fuller expression by children (Pain and Francis 2003); written prompts such as sentence completion and unfinished stories can encourage children to see adoption as a journey (Fargas-Malet 2010: 185). The principal use of such techniques is with younger children (Fargas-Malet 2010: 178; Kay *et al.* 2003; Punch, 2002b; Sanders and Munford, 2005) who may respond only very briefly to questions which seems to them irrelevant (Morgan *et al.* 2002). Some commentators also recommend participation techniques with older children (Winter 2006). Careful, systematic use of multiple methods to collect data can improve research outcomes (Pithouse and Rees 2015). However, for both practical and methodological reasons I decided to rely primarily on a single method and to rely on the face-to-face interview situation without further supports.

All but one of the prospective interviewees were teenagers and the pilot study strongly suggested that interviews with that age group could supply valuable data about the concerns of the young people without the need for further support. As previously mentioned, Nigel Thomas (2001: 106) holds that communicating with children is much the same as communicating with adults except that the social situation of children is different. I concluded that I could carry out my study on the assumption that my interviewees needed no special prompts in order to convey their concerns. By allowing them as much control as possible over the subject matter and style of interviews it ought to be easier to discover what their capabilities were and how they might be constrained.

There was also the methodological consideration that interviews requiring interventions from me as interviewer-researcher would have increased the extent to which I guided and directed the study (Holland 2010: 362). Children and young people in foster care participating in school-based research have been reported to perceive the research as 'school work' (Kellet and Ding, 2004), and the researcher in a 'teacher' role (Goodenough *et al.* 2003; Hill, 2006). In the same school–based context there is evidence of children and young people in foster care feeling pressured to give the 'right' answers to the research questions (Punch, 2002a). This increases the likelihood that children might say what they think adults want them to say (Backett-Milburn and McKie, 1999; Clark, 2005). I was concerned to minimise the risk of subduing interviewees inadvertently (Wall 2008) and so I managed my own role in a way that was designed to impose only the most necessary obligations on the young people who agreed to be interviewed.

Methods

Qualitative Sampling and Gatekeepers

Theoretical frameworks used in the study of people in foster care are mostly qualitative (Holland 2009:228-9) aiming to 'see through the eyes' of the groups studied. My research also relies on qualitative data collected through in a series of informal interviews (Heath 2009). This study did not expect or claim to find a 'representative' sample, i.e. one that is representative of some larger population, however defined. The intensive character of the research, the time required with each child and my limited resources

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precluded any such ambitions. On top of that I had to work with what the gatekeepers could provide.

Access to a homogenous sample was approved in their research governance process but over the next

sixteen months of negotiations, it could not be realised (Murray 2005, Butler and Williamson 1994). I had

to accept that by the standards of some qualitative research the sample had its limitations but I had no

choice about that given the difficulties of access I encountered. Nevertheless, one can say that the sample

is indicative of some of the variety that is likely to be present in the population of children in foster care

(See Table 1 page 69). In accordance with intensive research, the aim was not, as in extensive research, to

produce a representative but inevitably circumscribed (Clark 2010) picture of a population, but to follow

through in depth the situation and character of a small number of individuals (Sayer 1992).

My original research proposal sought fifteen placements that involved older children aged ten years

and above at the beginning of a new placement. Limiting the number of participants to fifteen was a

decision that I took following the piloting of interviews with the Lambert brothers. My pilot study with the

Lambert brothers immediately brought home to me how time consuming the transcription and analysis of

recordings would be. Interviews usually lasted an hour or more. The sound quality of my recordings and

the relevance of much of the content seemed adequate. On the other hand, it was often necessary to

listen and re-listen to extracts in order to transcribe them accurately. Thus, I decided that a maximum of

another thirty interviews (2 with each child) would be stretching on my time and resources, but most likely

feasible.

Between November 2006 and July 2008 I sought but was not given access to children and young

people in foster care for the purposes of carrying out my planned research (Appendix 1). The initial choice

of the early phase of foster care was in response to the breakdown rate of placements within the first year

of a placement (Wilson *et al.* 2005). Since breakdowns can be explained by reference to a build-up of

events so that disruption is due more to the 'last straw' rather than some specific single cause (Aldgate and

Hawley 1986; Berridge and Cleaver 1987) the early phase of placements was particularly important to

understand. Gaining access to the situated knowledge of the children and young people in placements at that stage of their placement careers seemed to offer a potentially productive way of enriching existing knowledge. However, as explained below, the practicalities of getting a sample meant that this preference for studying children in the early phase of foster care was not achieved.

The choice of older children and young people came from a personal preference and belief that my skills were in the engagement of older children and young people. I also felt that children aged over 10 years, would be better able to direct the flow and topics of interest, than the younger age group, enabling me to realise my desire to follow the child's story. I recognised that in practice it would be impossible for me to negate the impact of my own role altogether (Groves and Magilavy 1986) and, indeed, (in practice) I was sometimes made aware that my interviewees were anxious to identify what I wanted them to talk about. It is, however, possible that this tendency would have been greater and more difficult to detect if I had sought a sample of younger children in which I would certainly have had need of a more multi-layered or creative approach (See Pithouse and Rees 2015, for example) with which I felt less skilled. My own experience as a foster carer was with older children and teenagers.

I anticipated difficulty in gaining access to children and young people in foster care (Murray 2005; Butler and Williamson 1994). The role of gatekeepers in research with people in foster care in care has been set out in considerable detail by Cathy Murray who commented:

> It is crucial to note that gatekeepers are often the gateway as well as potentially
>
> the barrier to children and young people's participation…
>
> (Murray 2005: 64/65)

She observed that it was not the children themselves who decided about participation or non-participation. Instead she listed 18 different reasons given by gatekeepers for non-participation by children

and in nearly all cases the reasons were based on judgements on behalf of the young people about what was appropriate. (Murray 2005: 60/1). Butler and Williamson concurred:

> The abiding lesson from our research is that one must anticipate substantial difficulties in securing access to groups or individual children when engaging in qualitative approaches…
>
> (Butler and Williamson 1994: 44).

My experience wholly accorded with these findings. I engaged in a prolonged period of negotiations with my 'home' Children's Services Office in the area referred to here as Fosterton (see page 83), and some of the contacts are set out in Appendix 1. The Appendix covers most of the 16 month period during which I sought access to children and young people in foster care. With hindsight, and in the light cast by Murray (2005), it seems that in Careshire at that time there was a tacit reluctance to involve children and young people in foster care in research.

When, eventually, I was granted access the sample was heterogeneous and offered on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. However, adaptation to the possibilities of that sample did not require wholesale abandonment of the original design.

Child centred orientation

The child centred orientation was present throughout the research period. The decision to take a child centred approach stemmed from the conflicted professional values in the institutions of care. While the practice of taking the child's point of view was and still is prominent in policy and carers and social workers are often individually committed to it, in many respects the focus on child-centred views is at odds with the actual practice of fostering. Official recognition of the value of consulting young people about their care is often overridden by concern with child protection. By being child centred the intention was that this tendency could be observed and its effects reflected upon. By 'child centred' I meant that I was

primarily interested in the concerns and interests brought forward by the young people, privileging them over and above the concerns and interests of other placement members or professionals.

Consistently throughout the study I sought to:

1.   Follow through in depth the situation and character of a small number of young people in foster care.

2.   Keep in mind the asymmetries of power that sometimes affect all young people in some of their relationships with adults (James and James 2004; Brannen *et al*. 1994), while remembering that at other times (Sinclair 2005; Minty and Braye 2001; Gilligan 2000) children and young people in foster care, perhaps even more than other young people might exert considerable power over their carers.

3.   Minimise my guidance of interviews.

4.   Rely on the already available cognitive and linguistic capabilities of my interviewees; recognising that these were among the capabilities and constraints which they brought to their day-to-day lives in foster care.

5.   Take a predominately emic approach to analysis during and after data collection.

Sample details

I interviewed the participants listed in the Table 1. They were interviewed at nine different placements over six to twelve months between 2008 and 2010. Eight of the placements were provided by the Local Authority and one by a private fostering agency. One placement was a specialist Local Authority placement for young mothers with babies. Carers in two placements had not fostered prior to accepting the children and young people in foster care I interviewed. Three of the placements disrupted during the series of interviews. Five of the placements had birth children living at home in addition to the children and

young people in foster care and there were unrelated children and young people being fostered in 4

placements.

Table 1: Adoptions and fostering

	Adoptive parents	Duration of Adoption	Foster carers in known placements (in order)	Adoptive/foster siblings (named if mentioned)	Status of foster placement	Duration of foster care placement
Lambert brothers			Crystal and Clifford		Temporary	2 years
			Cora and Cade	2 males	Respite> permanent	3 years
			Cynthia and Clive	Christopher	Temporary	10 months
			Caitlin and Callum	Carol and Chad	Temporary> permanent	1 year
Lilian			Carla and Curt	1 male 1 female	Permanent	Less than a year?
			Cliff and Connie	1 male 1 female	Permanent	Less than 2 years?
			Catherine		Permanent	1 year
			Carmella		Emergency	A few weeks?
Lydia			Carys and Cassius		Permanent	Not known
			Cain and Cassi		Permanent	2 years

			Carly	3 male 2 female	Temporary	Not known
			Caylee and Cal		Permanent	18 months
			Carly		Permanent	4 years
Lia			Carla and Curt	See Lilian	Permanent	Not known
			Celene		Permanent	Less than 1 year?
			Carly	See Lydia	Permanent	9 years
Leona			Channing and Chas		Permanent	2 years
			Charlene and Cameron	Charli and 2 other females	Permanent	3 years
Libby			Cherie and Chico	1 female	Permanent	2 years
Lucy			Various		Not known	
	Cheryl and Colby	9 years		2 male 1 female		
			Chessie		Not known	
			Christal		Not known	
			Christianna		Permanent	1 year
Leo			Various		Not known	
	Cleo and Conroy	Not known				
			Constance and Corbyn		Permanent	2 years

Laaiq			Constance and Corbyn		Permanent	5 years
Lanie			Various		Not known	
			Comfort and Chaney		Intermittent, alternating with birth parents?	
			Coretta and Charly	1 male	Permanent	3 years
	Names not known					
			Celene	See Lia	Not known	
			Cliff and Connie	See Lilian	Permanent	More than 1 year
Lamar			Names not known		Temporary	Not known
			Carol and Colin	Christy and 1 male	Permanent	10 years

In addition to organising interviews, I also tried and eventually obtained one evening of contact with a regional participation group for children and young people in foster care. Since I had an interest in the practical difficulties and possibilities of listening to young people in foster care I wanted to explore the effect, if any, that participation groups might have on articulateness through the opportunity to form jointly constructed concerns (Bryman 2004: 346). As with my attempts to gain access for the purposes of interviews; many requests over a long period were unsuccessful but late in the data collection period, at

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short notice, I was allowed to attend a meeting of the group. Three group members attended that evening and the material I have drawn on in this thesis was recorded after one of the children and young people in foster care was called away by an early taxi. I prepared a series of vignettes for use with the group. The vignettes were adapted from interviews and a copy can be found in Appendix 2 page 289.

The Table does not include Levi and Lisa, the two children and young people in foster care in the participation group. The circumstances of that group meeting did not provide me with sufficient detail for either child or young person in foster care.

Making contact

In close step with The British Sociological Association Standards (BSA 2002) 16-18 and 30 which respectively require informed consent (of both child and relevant adults) and child protection arrangements were supplied to the governance group.

BSA 16, 17 and 18 require freely given consent and provide the right for a subject to refuse participation and to reject the use of recording devices while BSA 30 imposes a responsibility for the researcher to ensure the information given can be understood and that the consent given is based on clear understanding. I provided the Governance Committee with samples of the information to be given to potential participants. These were approved and subsequently used to make contact.

I had been provided with a list of twenty nine possible participants. Thirteen placements showed interest and a description of the research plan (Appendix 3) was sent to the children and young people in foster care through the placement key workers. It explained that the research was to focus upon living with foster families. The children and young people in foster care were asked if they would like to discuss their thoughts and feelings about being fostered, about talking with their carers and other adults and to explain what they found helpful or unhelpful in placements.

The agreed protocol that I established with Careshire was that I would make an initial contact with the placement and then make a follow up visit. During the visits, with children and young people in foster care and carers present, I explained the purposes of the interviews and the arrangements: I made it clear that interviewees would be given control over their own participation; able to discontinue or continue without recording whenever they chose (The British Sociological Association Standards 2002: 18). Consent forms (Appendix 3 page 293) were left with the children and young people in foster care and their carers to provide a 'cooling off' period. One young person withdrew during the initial meeting and one carer eventually informed her social worker she did not want her two foster children to go any further with the interviews. In the course of interviewing, two further young people were suggested, by their carers, for inclusion, bringing the total of participants to thirteen. These late recruited children and young people in foster care had the same information about the research, its purpose and their control over participation before completing consent forms.

Impact of final sample on research plans

My eventual sample did not allow my original plans about the early phase of a foster care placement to be pursued. None of the children and young people in foster care who participated in my research were newly fostered. In fact they were at widely varying stages in their care careers. Ages ranged from ten to twenty two; one was in her first and, up to that time, only placement; others had known several or many placements; all were in placements that already had established patterns of relationships. The only obvious common feature was their status as children and young people in foster care. The idea of exploring the early phase of foster care had to be replaced with a more general interest in the variety within the sample.

Interviewing technique in detail

There was a readily identifiable approach to interviewing children and young people in foster care in the literature. The common preference was for a less structured approach that could evolve as the child's perspective became better understood (Ridge 2002: 10, Butler and Williamson 1994: x). This meant

that in the earlier phases attention was on the direct experience of hearing children's voices, an experience that was built into the later phases so that the emerging understanding of what the young people were saying could be checked and deepened. At first I used that pattern of interviewing. Themes introduced by the interviewee in the first interview were used to create a loosely structured topic schedule for the second interview (Bryman 2004:324). However, the pilot study and another series of interviews led to modifications to that aspect of the method and instead of a semi-structured second and third interview, I planned that all interviews would be of the informal, conversational type for reasons I explain below.

The interviews which informed this change in design had in common significant levels of resistance from the young people in the second interview. The forms of resistance included monosyllabic responses delivered in a dispirited tone; reflecting my questions back to me; reading aloud from my list of prepared questions ; repeatedly answering 'don't know' to even the most concrete questions of a purely factual nature. The development of a schedule of questions based on themes brought forward in the first interview to give structure to the second interview had not been helpful and following the second interview, in which it acted as a constraint rather than an enabling device, I concluded that it was a device to keep in reserve rather than to pursue as a standard strategy in each set of interviews. I made an aide memoire for each interview but only used them if a situation called for it (Bryman 2004; Zhang and Wildemuth 2009).There was then, considerable variety in the way interviews were conducted. For all the placements that followed, interviews were adapted to the specificities of each participant and their current, changing situation in order to build trust, providing attentiveness to the attitudes of the people in foster care to establish a degree of comfort (Tickle-Degnen and Rosentahl 1990: 285/6) both for myself and the children and young people in foster care in the interviewer-interviewee encounter.

While the nature of the study meant that the approach was inductive, no observation is theory or concept neutral. On the other hand, observation is not merely theory-determined either, and the study was open to ideas and information that differed from what those informing theories implied. However, my

own observations were considered in the light of certain theories, having regular reference to attachment theory (Bowlby1998; Winnicott 1998, 2002) and elements of theoretical critiques (Foucault 1991, 1998; James and Prout 1991). In effect, for most of the data collection period there was no predetermined focus. Rather there was an emergent set of issues to document.

Having relinquished semi-structured interviewing in favour of informal, conversational interviewing, the interviewer effect was potentially less; s/he is in a somewhat more reactive rather than totally-predetermined role. It could not, of course, be eliminated (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009). The role of the interviewer in an informal, conversational interview is central:

> He or she is an integral part of the research instrument, in that there are no predefined frameworks and questions that can be used to structure the inquiry. To a great extent, the success of the interview depends on the interviewer's ability to generate questions in response to the context and to move the conversation in a direction of interest to the researcher (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009:3).

Transcription and Analysis

I needed to use transcription as a way of attuning myself to the personal voices of interviewees rather than simply as a preliminary for coding and collating the responses to more-or-less standardised questions. I therefore had to accept that the impact of theoretical generalisation would accumulate as the programme of data collection progressed. As soon as was possible after each interview I made summary notes of informal observations (O'Leary 2014) of events and comments (usually from carers but also from carers' relatives or other visitors) that had not been recorded. As I worked on transcribed recordings, these notes were integrated with the transcripts. I tried to transcribe recordings immediately after the interview so that my memory was reasonably fresh, though when interviews followed close on each other this was

not always possible[10]. I allowed the recordings to act as prompts for further observational details I had left from my notes. The observations and transcribed recordings then were used together to identify the meanings (Pithouse and Rees 2015; Shanahan 2007) and relationships (Greishaber 2004) of the interviews. This process was informed at many points by what I had learned about the characteristics of younger people as a teacher, in fostering and in my reading for this and earlier research. As the insights I gained into each interviewee fed back into later interviews, theoretical understandings had direct and indirect influence on my relationships with the children and young people in foster care.

Formal data analysis

Interviews typically generate 'accounts' and 'narratives' (Atkinson 2015:98). These terms appear throughout this thesis and therefore need clarification. My use of 'account' is intended to follow use of the term in the literature of Conversational Analysis where it denotes 'accountable action' or the ways in which actors justify, describe and explain their actions (Sacks 1964-5:37). I use 'account' to refer to the descriptions and justifications that my interviewees offered for their own conduct (Jary and Jary 2005:3). By 'narratives' I mean to refer to shared stories used to provide positive or negative models of behaviour (Jary and Jary 2005:407). All human groups 'have their narratives' (Czarniawska 2004: 1) and foster placements are no exception. I reserve 'narrative' to refer to the stories told by interviewees of placement life that show signs of having been shared: that is, 'concocted' (Czarniawska 2004: 5) in conversation with others involved in placements, whether present at the interviews or absent.

In interpreting transcripts of interviews, a coding system was used. One group of codes came from adaption of helpful ideas in a paper on identity (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Other codes reflected attachment theory (Bowlby1998; Winnicott 2002) or the critiques of power in child/adult relationships (Foucault 2002; James and Prout 1991. Yet others were emic; taken from expressions used by interviewees.

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[10] In accordance with the British Sociological Association's 2002 code of ethical practice, section 35, the recordings and transcriptions were stored under password protection on an unshared computer.

The coded extracts were condensed into the following themes

1. Separation from birth families. This theme grew out of accounts and narratives about relationships with birth families; mainly parents and siblings.

2. Settling into care. The first arrival at a new placement was often narrated in vivid detail and could readily be associated with the early period of adjustment, or maladjustment, to a foster family.

3. Signs of care. The perceptions of carers and of the care they were providing.

4. Coping strategies. Acts of resistance and rebellion have already been referred to. In addition, under this theme I include strategies of self-preservation that were not necessarily associated with conflicts.

Inevitably selective, these themes leave out much detail but preserve the concerns most readily identifiable in the data.

Finally; there was much about the circumstances of the young people that presented exceptional obstacles to understanding and interpretation, during analysis. The individuals differed greatly and for many reasons in their desire and ability to articulate their experiences. For some, memories were exceptionally fragmented. For others, the institutional constraints on care imposed limits on relationships with their carers in the interests of confidentiality and child protection (Rees and Pithouse 2012: 344). One of my interviewees spoke little English; two others had impaired speech. Importantly (also for child centred interviews) trust was not a given (Farmer 2002,2010); it needed to be built up over time and was not to be achieved merely because there was initial goodwill. These obstacles will all be evident in the data.

Practical and ethical considerations in research concerning children in foster care

All young people, and particularly children and young people in foster care, are at a vulnerable stage of their lives (Butler and Williamson 1994: 67; Pithouse and Rees 2015: 51) and ethical considerations are prominent in investigations of this group of young people (e.g. Fargas-Malet 2010; Holland 2010). In my research ethical considerations were always present and had a further, significant effect in limiting the scope of interviews Children have a powerful subjective sense of their right to privacy (Waksler 1991; Butler and Williamson 1994; Mauthner 1997) and ethnographic studies of child behaviour suggest that even very young children engage in territorial struggles to defend it (Waksler 1991:170; McLeod 2000). The sense of privacy was implicated in obstacles to listening to people in foster care and needed to be studied closely.

In the engagement of interviews I frequently had to choose between my aim as a researcher to obtain rich, relevant data and recognition that an interviewee had begun to outline a situation, often one of considerable salience in the events they were narrating, and then seemed to think better of it. The denotative difficulty centred on understanding their reasons for holding back, for resorting to a euphemism or, perhaps, for using an avoiding strategy. Developing accounts might be incompletely understood and their reasons for thinking again might be guessed at but not ascertainable without additional probing which, on the face of it, would be intrusive. Having learned from early interviews that I could not always go for a follow up question I sometimes had to choose either to steer away from emotion or do nothing but wait for the children and young people in foster care to provide a further response.

I found doing nothing unhelpful. For most of my participants, long silences were difficult to handle, especially when sensitive issues had been raised but not resolved. The following extract from an interview illustrates it clearly. It was the first interview I had conducted with Lucy, a 16 year old girl who had a long history of foster care bracketing a period of adoption. From the outset she was extremely keen to tell me about herself, including what must have been painful memories, but she balked quite unexpectedly during the much less personal discussion of her social life. The awkwardness arose when I used a phrase she did

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not understand, referring to her friends' parents as 'accommodating'. She dealt with her incomprehension with silence but, not realising exactly where the problem had arisen, I waited for her to pick up the thread wherever she chose. She remained quiet. Eventually I broke the silence with "Pause for thought" and she mirrored my comment,

> Lucy: Then there was silence.

Again, I waited for her to carry on,

> I: Hmm.

but she was not willing to leave the issue of our hiatus, needing to resolve it by giving me responsibility both for causing it and ending it,

> Lucy: Then there was silence. Then there was silence.

> I: Yeah I don't mind a bit of silence once in a while.

> Lucy: Oh I don't. I don't like silence.

The sudden cessation of talk created tension but this did not prompt further talk as frequently it can in an interview (Seidman 2006: 93). Instead, the tension became something she was willing to test. Frequently, when my interviewees paused it was, as in this case, in a context of embarrassment or uncertainty which was deepened by the absence of a response from me and the strictures of BSA 27 reminded me that reduction of their anxiety was my responsibility.

The limits of language skills, cognitive development, self-presentation and self-understandings, perceptions of me, the situation they were in now or situations they had left behind them, or other factors I knew nothing about *because* they were silent about them; all or any combination of these might be at

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stake when communication became difficult. It was often impossible until later, during the transcription process, to identify what has transpired, so while the idea of listening to their voices was also very much to do with making better sense of their hesitation and avoidance, trying to locate those silences in the context of their lives and the lives of others around them became a data analysis task as often or more often than it could be resolved during the interview itself.

An unexpected further aspect of privacy was heralded early in the pilot interviews. Ridge had been very concerned to ensure her interviews were carried out in private, linking privacy with confidentiality (Ridge 2002:9) and during the introductory meetings I had discussed this with both the children and young people in foster care and their carers. However, when first meeting Laurence his female foster carer's mother joined us during an interview. She introduced herself as "Laurence's Grandma" and then told me about Laurence's good character and personal preferences. On later reflection, this intervention had provided an opportunity to observe how adults other than carers could become important members of a placement and also to observe children and young people in foster care in their everyday relationships. While an intervention did not involve a problematic invasion of privacy, I concluded, I had good reason for tolerating outside interventions, regarding them as potentially productive.

During the entire series of interviews only two problematic interventions were encountered. The first was during an introductory meeting at which a foster carer was present at the children and young people in foster care's own request. The carer left within a moment of a comment she made and which, I believe, she had realised almost immediately was inappropriate. The second instance occurred at one point in the almost continual presence of a carer. The two children and young people in foster care being interviewed in that placement generally enjoyed her presence and frequently asked for help, advice and contributions from her. Here, too, a single inappropriate interruption prompted my concern but in that case the foster carer's settled habit of intervention together with the serious nature of the interruption called, I felt, for an immediate response from me, following which the carer left the room for a while. With

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that exception I was confident the carer's interventions had more effect on the data I was able to collect than they had on the welfare of the children and young people in foster care in her care.

Conclusion

This is a qualitative study that draws on my experience as a foster carer. I have aimed to produce a novel weave of theory and method, rather than work that is overly prescribed by a particular theoretical framework or particular social research prescription. The approach was informed by applied discourse studies, whilst not strictly being a discourse or narrative analysis in a pure sense. I have paid close attention to words in context, listening to the 'how' of what gets said; for example, comments in sequence, children's and young people's vocabulary and the way in which organizational vocabulary is adopted by them or is assimilated into their accounts of the world.

In that sense, my work is both experimental and pragmatic, drawing on relevant literature as it fits and helps to make sense of my data. It takes an inductive approach, not with a naked eye or 'empty head' but equally resisting being shackled by any methodological recipe.

The care system has become increasingly concentrated on children who enter because of abuse and neglect (Wilson *et al.* 2005: 20). Young people who have had experiences such as these may talk about them to their foster carers and social workers, who gradually develop partial understandings of the situation in their imaginations. In addition, everyday discussions of placement activities between carers and cared for are self-evidently vital parts of the development of placement relationships. The accounts and narratives of children and young people in foster care may help direct the care provided but understanding another person is at the best of times an inexact, emergent process. Therefore the methodological orientation of this study assumes that care providers draw on the accounts and narratives provided by children and young people in foster care to create mental constructs which they use to manage their caring. It focuses on how the accounts and narratives of children and young people in foster care reveal or obscure meaning.

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Chapter 4: Separation from birth families

The experience of attachment and separation for children in long term foster care is an issue of national and international interest. Consistently with this interest a key finding of my investigation, central for my principal aim of contributing to knowledge of the social relations that children and young people in foster care create for themselves, has been the salience of the parent and sibling relationships that arise from families of origin. The aim of this chapter is to explore the importance and limits of those relationships.

Because all people in foster care are separated from their parents, difficult adjustments are required of them as they enter care and continuously thereafter. Adverse circumstances with birth families may have resulted in insecure attachments and the creation of positive attachments with carers is important in placement stability (Rock *et al.* 2015). Many interviewees had limited or no contact with their birth parents, but even so, those parents figured prominently in their accounts of themselves in different but always significant ways. Starting with the varying ways the people in foster care in my study thought about their birth parents, evidence will be presented that their attachments to those parents, ambivalent and confused though they could be, often outlasted even very long periods of separation[11]. Some implications of this on-going awareness of attachment and separation for the wider social experience of the young people will be outlined and in the chapters that follow other implications of those adjustments to separation will be traced. Attachment and separation will, then, be key concepts throughout.

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[11] Thoburn's review of re-unifications of people in foster care with their families includes reports of return to birth families of between 70% and 87% of people in foster care over a maximum of 5 years in care, though a proportion of those returns were subject to quite a lot of instability (Thoburn 2009:14). Nevertheless, the context of such a high proportion of returns points not simply to care plans that envisaged returns from the outset but also to the strength of family ties. This is further evidenced by Broadhurst and Mason in their recent report, "From mothers' self report accounts of change, their commitment and sense of enduring connection to their children in care [or adopted] and desire to parent a subsequent infant were major motivational drivers." (Broadhurst and Mason 2014:1)

The principal source of data will be the interviews and so the relationships will necessarily be described in the perspective of the children and young people in foster care. Direct observation of parent-child relationships was beyond the scope of this study which was almost entirely carried out in foster placements but some of my participants were jointly fostered with siblings and so direct observation of those relationships *was* possible. Taking those observations together with their reports of siblings from whom they were separated, the second part of the chapter dealing with sibling relationships will make it possible to describe in greater detail some of the dynamics of relationships in the setting of foster care and that, in turn, will cast further light on the subjective experience of separation. In particular, the need young people have of their siblings when they are in care and the depth of concern they often feel for each other will be partly, if inadequately illustrated.

Three different perspectives on relationships with a birth parent will be examined first: vestigial relationships; relationships that have been rejected and those that are described with a continuing sense of loss. The part played by fantasy in the last perspective will be acknowledged. Then attention will turn to attachments to siblings and three sets of sibling relationships will provide case studies, followed by a brief discussion of feelings of responsibilities between siblings.

Parent-child relationships

At the time of the interviews all the interviewees were living in settings that separated them, usually by design[12], from the living arrangements of a birth parent. The shortest period that any of the interviewees had been so separated was one year[13] while the average time spent in foster care was longer than 4 years and two had been fostered for more than 10 years[14].

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[12] The exception was Laaiq Libena who had asylum in the UK because return to his family in Africa was impossible.

[13] Lucy, but her entry into foster care was just the latest experience of separation, this time from her adoptive family; she had a long history of separations as a younger child before adoption.

[14] Fuller detail of the placements reported by each interviewee can be found in Table 1 page 67.

Vestigial relationships and detachment from parents

Separation occasionally occurred in circumstances that resulted in feelings of relatedness to people who had never been met, or had been encountered only briefly in the remote past. Lawrence talked about two of these vestigial relationships. He told me, "I don't have a Dad. I don't know my Dad." Later in this chapter his similar feelings of loss about an unknown sister will be described. Similarly, Lanie had only sketchy knowledge of her oldest sister. Asked about her sisters she questioned whether I wanted to know about all of them and then explained:

> Em one's called Kerry Marie but she lives at London I think. I'm not sure. I'd never
>
> met her except when I was a little girl. Can't really remember that.

Yet this form of unknowingness was no protection against feelings of loss and guilt (Cameron and Maginn 2007). Rather, in words that construe removal into care as a form of suffering, Lanie felt that,

> when I was born it was just like downhill then we all got put into care and that so in
>
> a way I blame myself. …Everyone tells us not to…but it's hard when you know that
>
> your older sisters were like five six years older than you like like they were fine.
>
> Then when you came along…

In both those cases the absence of all but abstract knowledge had resulted from external factors but Leo also gave a strong impression of having forgotten his parent, from whom he was separated at three years of age and in his case the causes and extent of the forgetting were more complex. He presented himself as being in almost complete ignorance of his parent and, having been taken into care at three he certainly had limited memory of them. He referred to them as "the birth parents", "the birth Mum" and "birth Dad." He pointed out to me information about them from papers in his Life Story Book, but the only other information he imparted about them was that his, "birth Dad abused me. Chucked me against the wall. I was tiny. " By a combination of depersonalising labels and reference to written records

Leo enacted unknowingness so the allegation of abuse, given that context, might have been based on third party reports but there were other factors that suggested his lack of awareness of his parents was more complex than that which resulted from the vestigial relationships of Lawrence and Lanie.

He described his pattern of recollection as:

Leo: Unfortunately I've started getting flashbacks. Very unfortunately.

I: Um and erm that's a recent thing?

Leo: Well it's been going on for the last year.

I: Right I see. Ok. And and you wish they'd stop?

Leo: Well I wish some of them would stop but some of them are quite interesting to find out about.

This type of remembering is a "core symptom" of post-traumatic stress disorder (Ehlers *et al.* 2004). Other symptoms of PTSD include disassociation and emotional numbing (Chu 2011) and evidence of both of these in Leo's repertoire of responses will be examined in detail in a later chapter. So far as his relationships with his parents are concerned, while his having been taken away from them as young as three years of age makes it very likely that he had little recollection of them, his disposition would have made it more difficult for him than other interviewees to attach much significance to them. He may also have been trying to protect himself against further flashbacks and the extreme formalism of the labels he attached to them might have been expressive of rejection. Examples of formal address expressive of rejection will be discussed in a later chapter.

Reports of vestigial relationships with family members therefore varied in origin and form but were linked to powerful feelings suggesting that the self-understanding of a person in foster care usually took account of those relationships as well as other more immediate and/or supportive ones. Their self-understanding had to accommodate these near-blank slates and they could think of themselves as, among other characteristics, the person who had no father or a 'missing' sister.

Strong feelings of attachment, guilt and loss (Cameron and Maginn 2008) could also accompany recollections of relationships that lapsed because of being fostered. Although Lanie's parents "put me into care when I was seven week old" she had had contact with them in her early years. Furthermore, her first social worker, Val, (as will be detailed in the next chapter) took an unusually close interest in her and had made sure she knew a good deal about her parents' situations. Lanie could inform me that both:

> had like mental health problems and that but when my Mum was a youngster she
>
> was fostered and when she got adopted she was sexually abused by a foster
>
> parent[15]... and like she'd had a lot in the past like my Grandma and my Grandad
>
> dying and that and like the way how they died so she has got had a lot to cope with

She understood the circumstances which compelled her parents to give her up for care and "Everyone tells us not to." She seems to have tried to stay in touch but the geographical and personal distance that repeated moves had put between the family members defeated her attempts and she had come to accept loss of contact with all but one sister.

When, as was usually the case in my sample, foster care careers involved several moves the probability of developing strong new attachments capable of taking the place of primary attachments to birth parents was low. Even given the detachment from parents the situation of young people such as Leo

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[19] Memories of abuse in foster care or adoption were reported by Leo, Lydia and Lia as well (though in the last case a Local Authority investigation concluded the allegation was unfounded) as this narrative fragment of Lanie's.

and Lanie seemed precarious as a result. Such situations often arise among the general population of people in foster care and provide one reason why Ian Sinclair calls for 'the development of a form of foster care that more nearly approaches a family for life' (Sinclair 2005: 123). Now I want to introduce such a placement: the long term placement of Lydia Lawson who, at the time of the first interview, had been fostered by Carly Connel for almost ten years. Although long settled and in most ways very comfortable with Carly, Lydia had in common with the person in foster care discussed above a marked degree of detachment from her parents. However, as in Leo's case the situation was more complicated than it first appeared.

In addition to the length of her interviews there are features of Lydia's interviews that make it necessary to take a different approach from the analysis of discontinuous quotations that may have been adequate up to this point. Lydia was jointly fostered with her older sister Lia and the second in a series of four interviews was carried out jointly with the two sisters. Also, between the first interview with Lydia and the last interview with Lia the placement suddenly and dramatically changed. Later interviews in the series reflect significantly on earlier ones so it will be necessary to draw on all four interviews given. While the focus will be Lydia's relationships with her parents some discussion of Lia's very different orientation will arise. Relationships between the sisters and their carer will also be significant and therefore participation or non-participation in interviews will need to be tracked across the series. For ease of reference the various interviews are tabled below,

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4
Interviewees present	Lydia	Lydia and Lia	Lydia	Lia
Foster carer present	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Table 2 – Lawson sister interviews

Lia (22) and Lydia (16) were taken into care when Lydia was around five years old and Lia perhaps 11. Both had multiple disabilities. Lia was diabetic and acted out early abuse in ways that had been

disruptive of most peer relationships. Lydia had speech difficulties and epilepsy. Both talked about being restricted in various ways by learning difficulties. A special form of care was required to deal with their additional needs but the first sets of arrangements for each were unstable. At some point during this early period, Carly met Lia when she was asked by her then employers to act as Lia's driver between school and placement. Through Carly's initiatives, aided and abetted by the sisters over a period of years during which, as will be detailed later, other placements were created and disrupted, Carly was eventually confirmed as their joint, permanent carer. This was something of an unorthodox but very strongly integrated placement.

The original intervention in the sisters' birth family had followed abuse in which both mother and father were implicated but it was not possible to learn whether there had been any contact with parents in the early period of care. Early in interview 1 - with Carly participating throughout and often answering on Lydia's behalf - Carly mentioned Lydia's birth family in terms that emphasised how separated they were,

I: Is that your whole family that that or are there other people who you see a lot of?

Lydia: There's others, I don't see them but there's others.

I: There's others but you don't see them.

Lydia: No.

I: Ok.

Carly: Don't see her mum and dad either.

That was the only time Lydia's parents were mentioned in interview 1. When the issue was raised again by me during Interview 2 in which Lia and Lydia were interviewed together Carly warned, "Lia

doesn't like talking about her parents in front of Lydia 'cause Lydia gets a bit upset talking about her mother because she won't entertain her." This assertion that neither sister, for different reasons, wished to pursue that line of questioning, together with the acquiescence of the two sisters, reinforced my impression of a long-standing separation so far as Lydia was concerned while also indicating that things might be different in Lia's case. However, Carly's comments influenced the rest of that interview. Effectively she had ruled the issue off-limits for us and there was no other discussion of anything related to their parents in Interview 2.

Late in Interview 3 a matter relating to Lydia's parents surfaced spontaneously. Lydia was for the second time being interviewed with Carly present but not Lia who had made an allegation (subsequently found to be groundless) that Carly had attacked her. Both sisters were removed during an investigation and only Lydia returned.

Lydia had always been highly esteemed by Carly and as will be shown, during this last interview the caring role was in some aspects being reversed. Lydia was expressing a need to care for Carly which, for her part, Carly welcomed. Lydia had also become more familiar with the interview format and was talking in an increasingly expansive way about her life and feelings. Carly asked her what it was about foster care that was better than, "living in Market Hill", a euphemism for Lydia's parental home. Then for the first time, obliquely and referring to herself and Lia in the third person, Lydia referred to the experience of living with her parents, "More safer…Like they were looked after better and didn't smell or anything." Since Lydia had presented life with her parents as unsafe and smelly she intended it to be received, by Carly, as reassurance but almost immediately there was the following exchange:

I: How long does it take to feel safe in care?

Lydia: Maybe a few month.

I: Can you tell me more about that from what you can remember?

Lydia: Er because you've got to get over like your past and that and kind of get used to missing people and that.

I: Is missing people a big part of it then?

Lydia: Nah. Yeah it would be for people.

Her account of what was necessary in order to feel safe in care is expressed as if it was a rule, "…you've got to…." In that, she might have been revealing something she had concluded for herself but it might also be an account of something she had been taught at the placement and had internalised. Had she 'got' to do this because she had become resigned to separation, because it was definitely the best course or because if she didn't she might upset her carer? These interpretations are not necessarily alternatives and there are certainly grounds for taking the latter seriously as part of her meaning.

At that point Carly questioned Lydia:

Carly: Was it [difficult missing people] for you?

Lydia: Well it was back at the time.

Carly: At the time. And why do you think that was?

Lydia: Well because you were young and you lived them for years, like you knew Lia.

The questioning was aimed at establishing Lydia's disposition towards her parents early on in the placement and Lydia's use of the second person suggested she would have preferred to continue talking in a general way. That she felt put on the defensive is supported by the phrase, "like you knew Lia." As will be

clarified shortly, this was a generalising appeal to Carly to accept that the 'weakness' of missing the 'wrong' person is something that might happen to anyone.

At that point in the interview Carly told her, "Right. Stop your fidgeting" and my field notes made from memory during transcription record that, 'Lydia's hands were on the table in front of her and she was making rather agitated movements with her fingers.' It was most likely that Carly's unexpected attempt to control Lydia's movements was based on assumptions about Lydia's health. Lydia had epilepsy. From other contributions she and Lia made to the interviews it seemed clear that Carly tried to recognise warning signs before Lydia had an epileptic episode and that her finger movements were being interpreted as presaging a fresh episode. However, there is another possible interpretation of Lydia's anxious body language. Lydia had been worried by Carly's response to the oblique reference to her parents. The questioning might well have felt challenging and even disapproving. If that was the case, her agitated movements might just as easily have expressed anxiety about having said the wrong thing and upset Carly at a time when Lydia was particularly anxious *not* to upset her carer.

Throughout the third interview Lydia sided with Carly and, for Lydia, Lia did it because, "Tells lies. Tells lies." In a later chapter we will see that Lydia had her own personal history of lying which troubled her greatly and which she had worked to overcome. She was therefore expressing disapproval and concern over her sister's behaviour.

Material from interview 4 with Lia, when neither Lydia nor Carly was present to influence the presentation of material, allows us to see more of a set of behaviours that surrounded and preserved separation from birth parents by construing it within the placement as a topic of particular sensitivity. It is the first of a number of instances we shall look at in the course of the thesis of a 'family secret', an activity that serves to bond and exclude members (Smart 2011). It illustrates the ways in which children and young people in foster care may preserve a 'hidden transcript'; a discourse that 'takes place "offstage," beyond

direct observation by powerholders' (Scott 1990:6) but which they can openly recite in 'sequestered social sites' (Scott 1990: 20); in this case, an interview given with guarantees of confidentiality.

It will be recalled that Lia was older than Lydia and would therefore have lived longer with their parents, developing more memories of them. Perhaps for that reason, contact with both her parents had been a denied wish for Lia, if not for Lydia. In Interview 4 she told me, "Carly didn't like letting me have, not allowed to have mobiles in the house case I get hold of my old parents." While the comment was vague as to chronology, it was clear enough that for some time during the placement Lia had tried to have contact with her parents but it was prevented. When Lia brought about an end to the placement, however, she immediately found ways to make contact with both her parents. She got her social worker to help her make telephone contact and then arrange a meeting with her mother. Her mother supplied contact details for her father and then Lia sprang a surprise on her father turning up unannounced on her father's doorstep with dramatic effect that clearly delighted her, "Went in and my Dad collapsed on the floor…He was shocked."

She moved in with her father but, crucially, that was kept from Lydia, "'Case she takes fits." Thus while Lia pursued a course of covert and eventually overt resistance in regard to preserving/reinstating her own relations with her parents, she and Carly took the exactly same stance of anxious suppression towards Lydia, and Lia continued doing this even when the placement had ceased so far as she was concerned. It was, then, Lia and Carly's shared social practice to try to make sure that Lydia did not talk about or hear talk about her parents. That these practices had grown up makes it more likely that for Lydia, permanent avoidance of talk about her parents was a condition of good relations in the placement. If the behaviours reported here were present throughout the placement she would always have had to choose between talking about her parents and pleasing the people she most depended upon. While there is evidence that Lydia had, as Wade puts it, 'gradually found greater support and sanctuary in newer relationships with foster-carers' (Wade 2008: 46). The part played by tensions she experienced in managing a competition between attachments might have been an influence of the course she took.

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Ian Sinclair rightly observes that 'Children do not want a conflict of loyalty between their foster carers and their family….They want [their] views respected' (Sinclair 2005: 50). By this standard, Carly would seem to have failed to respect Lia's views (and Lydia's, perhaps) and at least one buried conflict over a long period was the result. It is more difficult to know how much Lydia felt a conflict of loyalties because she was the younger when she was taken into care and, early on in the placement, was prevented from exploring her feelings towards her parents. Seemingly, Lia had had more latitude, or was better able to avoid or resist the pressure. It is worth noting further that in this case, even where many background factors and perhaps genetic factors[16], too, are similar, people in foster care may react in different ways to the same situation. Finally, both sisters, in different ways, illustrate the complexity of feeling, arising from the complexities of relationships within families in regard to being separated from their parents. The dynamics of attachment and separation in Lydia's case were very strongly controlled by the relationship with her foster carer. Because they depended on how she and others chose to act and feel it is questionable whether Lydia herself knew how she felt about being separated from her parents. She presented herself, at first, as being almost completely detached from her parents. Perhaps she was, but her case illustrates how difficult it can be for an observer to be entirely confident about the further development of separation being encountered when talking to a person in foster care. If there is a temptation to think of awareness of separation as an inner condition, an element of the inter-subjective and intra-psychic, this case forces us to remember that it is also, always a social phenomenon.

Rejected parents

Ambivalence towards attenuated relationships was quite common (Cairns 2006) but if it was difficult for the people who participated in this study to make a complete break with one or both of their parents, several of them expressed the wish to do so and two seemed to have achieved it.

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[16] As has been made clear, their birth parents were seldom mentioned. It was always implied that they shared both parents but the conditions under which the interviews were carried out, strongly discouraging questions in this area, means it is impossible to be completely sure if they were full sisters.

Lamar was unique in my sample both in having accepted that his relationship with his father was at an end and in having developed an extremely close attachment to his foster carers. Exactly how these factors are connected is unclear but he did describe the last time when, five years earlier, he had seen his father:

> Summat went on I dunno why and then he wa and then we come back [home from a supervised contact]. Social services just said eh 'You can't see your Dad Dad [no] more' and we'd s'like [alright]. Didn't really bother us 'cause hardly liked him anyway.

In similar situations, as I shall show, people in foster care can and do resist such decisions and Lamar could be difficult to control in other areas of his life. His carer described him in relation to his secondary school teachers as "a force of nature." However, having been fostered since the age of 6 he was, when he accepted this decision, in a long term placement and in my sample was one of the two placements that exhibited well-developed attachments between children and young people in foster care and both carers. Though it cannot be completely certain, the probability is that his was not a case of 'adaptive preference' (Baber 2007:105) where the preference is 'deformed' by circumstances that restrict the choices available. Rather, it reflected the fact that his relationship with his father had ceased to be as important to him as his good relationships with his foster carers.

He had not rejected his mother in the same way but nevertheless placed little reliance on her:

> Lamar: I'm the second favourite eh?
>
> I: The second favourite?
>
> Lamar: I knew this was going to sound [ ] like

I: What does that mean?

Lamar: Like Luis my brother he's like he's more in touch with my Mum like

'cause he's older

I: Alright.

Lamar: and he goes and sees her more

I: Alright.

L: So like anytime she's on the phone she asks for Luis or she asks for Luis

not me eh? I'm I'm going to tell if this is true. Is that true Carol [foster carer]?

Carol: Yeah she's more in tune with Luis than you.

It is hard not to conclude that he had become attached to his carers and assimilated into their family (Cairns 2006) in a way that had otherwise happened only in Lydia's case. He had indeed found 'support and sanctuary' (Wade 2008) and that was the counterpart to the falling away of attachments to his birth parents.

Lucy had memories of both her parents but the dominant emotion she expressed in her accounts of them was anger. Her father had left home before she was born and she had met him twice in her first years. Her observation, "that's all I seen of him" was dismissive. At first, she claimed to know even less of her mother, saying, "I don't know anything about her" but it quickly became clear that this was a yet stronger form of dismissal rather than a factual statement. First, she revealed an understanding of her mother's circumstance that suggested a degree of sympathy:

> My birth Mum um she like couldn't look after me as a child she had um financial problems well I'm not sure what it was I don't know if it's financial or neglect…

Then she became angry. Recalling the day she and her sister Lesley were taken into care for the first time she told me:

> I'd er I can remember turning round and like looking at her say aren't you going to fight for us? Aren't you going to fight to keep us? She stood there. She didn't do anything she didn't say anything. She sat on the sofa and kept her mouth shut. I mean if I was her I would at least said something, fought for me kids or something do you know what I mean? Went to Court for them. Do anything to get them back. Shows how much of a scum she is and how much she really cares.

Yet even so she could not detach herself from her mother altogether (Cameron and Maginn 2008; Cairns 2002; Cairns 2006; Schofield and Beek 2009) and remained in contact through occasional letters. It is possible, then, that the rejection was another instance of an apparent break with underlying complexity. A discussion of idealisation below will suggest that her anger towards her mother and father might be partly displaced anger towards her adoptive mother.

In all these instances of awareness of separation there is ambivalence and it is not difficult to see how an experience of divided loyalties accompanies removal into foster care. Newly placed people in foster care are suddenly, profoundly dependent on foster carers and there are plenty of reasons - improvements in living conditions, new foster siblings, the opportunities for treats and experiences and so on - why people in foster care often prefer to get on with their lives rather than be preoccupied with family ties (Sinclair 2005:27). Contacts with family members, as we shall see, can have troubling impact on carers and people in foster care alike (Sen and Broadhurst 2011) and some of my interviewees provided vivid illustrations (to be examined later) of how stressful family contacts were for them. Yet separation was

never accompanied by completely settled acceptance. Even where membership of a foster family seemed most normalised there were countervailing traces of continuing interest in parents. At home with his trusted foster family, almost the first thing that Lamar told me about himself was connected with his father:

> I couldn't hardly speak properly so Carol, Carol took to took us to the speech therapies em and then like coup couple of months yearly I could speak properly so I think it's 'cause of my Dad and that really I think. 'Cause like he never paid like enough attention or summat summat like that.

Missed parents

The above examples of feelings directed towards parents who were notional figures, parents who could only be dimly recalled, rejected parents or parents who had been gradually drifting out of contact illustrate a different disposition from that to be considered next; of on-going separation from parents who were missed.

Bowlby (Vol 2. 1998:34) outlines conditions that produce 'more or less permanent detachment.' My evidence does not readily accord with this set of observations. In my sample, even where the existence of a parent was nothing more than a biological necessity they nonetheless remained an abstraction infused with personal significance. Feelings of loss among children and young people in foster care are widely reported in the literature (Cairns 2002; Cameron and Maginn 2008; Holmes and Silver; 2010; Ironside 2012). The young people in my sample who had been through a disrupted adoption before their interviews, all referred to their adoptive parents as Mum and Dad. If adoptive parents are included, the majority of my interviewees missed their parents.

If adoptive parents are included - in a child centred study the way people in foster care referred to them consistently as 'Mum' and 'Dad' argues that they must be – then the majority of my interviewees missed their parents. Even if Biehal *et al.* point out that some of the parents may not want them to return, 99

or to settle in foster care, my interviews suggest young people's 'persistent yearning' (Biehal 2010: 19) remains a potent factor.

It was, for example, noticeable that young people in foster care who missed their parents were keen to invoke 'proofs' that they continued to be important to and cared for by their birth parents. Leona's mother went with her when she was taken by taxi to meet her first foster carers so she could "…see what this [foster mother] girl was like." Libby's mother had been "…really, really upset when I had to move here" and while she had become used to it her mother still, "doesn't like the fact that I'm not living with her." After Lanie went missing from her placement, "My [adoptive] Mum was through here on Tuesday night actually crying her eyes out to Christianna [foster carer]." Lucas's mother "…basically wants us back so she's like going to Court to try to get us back to show how she can actually look after us."

These narratives demonstrate, to the interviewee and interviewer alike that parental care did not come to an end with the removal from the family (Shotton 2010). Parents were shown adhering to normative parental roles while the person in foster care could reasonably present her or himself as a valued member of the family who, for reasons that were beyond the parent's control, could not live in the family home. We shall see that a person in foster care is likely to come across stigmatising other-representations of themselves but also of their parents who can be, "utterly shunned from society[17]." If, in stark contrast, they can represent themselves as cared for by parents who want them, they have grounds for repudiating that stigmatising, if only in their internal conversation so positive representation of a parent may have important psychological value connected with self-esteem and identity. Most importantly, when a person who is Looked After continues to see him or herself as a full member of the family of origin it has many implications for placement life. It creates the possibility of those conflicts of loyalty discussed above. In so doing, it keeps open the possibility of early or medium term return to the

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[17] The quotation is taken from a transcript of a small participation group of people in foster care I met. A fuller account of that meeting will be given in a later chapter.

family and so, necessarily, of an end to the placement. It acts as a possible focus of planning for the future. Handled without skill, it may contribute to difficulties in placements (Sinclair 2005:50).

Nearly all the young people I interviewed were teenagers and since independent living becomes available to people in foster care at sixteen years it was a close enough prospect for a number of them to be thinking out plans for their future. There is research evidence that what happens to the lives of people in foster care   as they approach 16 years of age is one of the more significant factors affecting educational achievement at GCSE. Concerns about how to live in the near future may compete with concentration on exam preparation and adult oversight of educational progress may suffer because of doubts about the way responsibility for school contacts is shared between social workers and foster carers (Quinton 2004: 13; Flynn *et al.* 2004). Since happiness at school is a predictor of placement stability, obviously this is of considerable concern and is perhaps one reason why long term foster care has been something of a "Cinderella option" in comparison with adoption (Gupta 2009). For a proportion of my interviewees the relationship with parents was important enough to help focus their ambitions, a pattern of behaviour which Wade (2008) reported in up to 80% of 106 young people leaving care in seven Local Authorities in England.

Lucas was the youngest of those who talked about their future. At 13 he hoped for a Court decision that would allow him to return home. Lucy was sixteen, however, and wanted to stay in foster care for at least another year but eventually thought she would, "move out and like get a little flat somewhere like probably [ ] close to my family and Christianna [foster carer]." Libby (15) had been thinking about leaving care throughout the time in placement. At first she had wanted to live with her mother but, "I've been thinking about it a lot and that's what it's what I want to do, it's go and live with my Dad…"

In principle, these plans need not have created problems in placements and at the time of the interviews Lucy's intentions did not seem to be encountering any resistance. In the other cases a potential for conflict was evident. Lucas slipped away from his placement for unsupervised contact with his father;

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Libby had to be very diplomatic about her intentions in her carers' presence; and Lia eventually made the transition from care to her father's home in a manner that upset her carer greatly. Whether a continuing need to be closer to parents is a problem or something to be nurtured is open to question. As shown above, the open-endedness of foster care at sixteen is one of the challenges with long term foster care and if "parenthood is something parents do rather than something they are" (Williams 2004:31) then the legal ending of relationships with birth family members in adoption may rightly be seen by the planners of care the best way to create predictable, sensitive care which can lead to the "core attachment concept of felt security" (Schofield 2002:260). Yet the child-centred perspective in this study revealed young people who were holding to relationships which were less secure, often idealised and imperfectly recognised, but nonetheless highly valued. Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically permits the child's view to be set aside when parental abuse or neglect is a factor but the interviews I conducted suggested people in foster care often want the maltreatment to end, not the relationship.

Idealisation

In attachment theory, idealisation is associated with a cluster of psychological defensive phenomena that may be important in overcoming separation (Bowlby Vol.3 1998). However, when an end to separation is no longer possible persistence of those phenomena is regarded as maladaptive (Bowlby Vol.3 1998). Maladaptive cognitive responses operating outside conscious awareness lead to mistakes in the identification of the sources of distress (Bowlby Vol.3 1998). The concept of 'idealisation' is used here is to refer to instances of selective exclusion of information that may be of temporary adaptive value during temporary separation from the attachment figures of a very young child but which, if persisting into adolescent and adult life, are maladaptive (Bowlby Vol.3 1998).

In attempting to take account of the wishes of people in foster care in such a sensitive and important area of their care the effects of their earliest experiences upon them inevitably arises. How far

are they capable of making judgments about what is, and is not, in their interests? This study is grounded on a model of childhood that emphasises:

> the validity of the 'here and now' accounts of children … viewed as subjects worthy of study in their own right rather than as the focus of research within an adult-led agenda. (Winter 2006:60)

Like other researchers, I have focussed on those who are most able to articulate their views through traditional techniques (Clark and Statham 2005). Yet it is almost tautology to say that whenever intervention is necessitated by abuse or neglect the responsibility for the child's suffering is the parent's.

Attachment to the parent(s) that persist in placements does so despite that suffering and the failure or disavowal of responsibility it implies. The persistent attachment is therefore open to being explained and perhaps discounted as one effect of the suffering. An emotionally abused person in foster care who returns repeatedly to an abusive family or a sexually abused person in foster care who displays overtly sexualised behaviour may be thought to lack insight into the origins and nature of their own behaviour (Hurd *et al.* 1999: 58; Cairns and Fursland 2007). Evidence will be considered here that some distortion of viewpoint is indeed probable.

The discursive context in which such judgements have to be made by service providers is also worth considering. The therapeutic resources available to Children's Service providers, a 'daunting array of treatment and support options' (Iwaniec 2006: 159), support the notion of a 'psycho-psychiatric model of childhood' institutionalized in the first part of the twentieth century and sketched by Hendricks (in James and Prout 1990: 49-52). Within that medicalised discourse Schofield refers to two dominant theoretical frameworks in family placement research: attachment theory and resilience (Schofield 2002) and Bowlby's account of defensive exclusion within attachments (Bowlby Vol 3. 1998) points to the likelihood that idealisation of parents played a part in some if not all of the accounts of missed parents.

Defensive exclusion is a re-formulation of what psychoanalysis has traditionally referred to as repression; the systematic exclusion of significant information from further processing. When a person has suffered in the past they may 'defensively exclude' information about the origins of their suffering. This diverts their attention away from a person who was to some extent responsible (Bowlby 1998). Idealisation certainly was easy to construe in some stories I was told and examples of the way idealisation may have affected some of my interviewees will be considered next. It would, however, obviously be a mistake to reduce idealisation to nothing but pathology, for while it may become maladaptive it may also support temporary adaption during periods of particular stress. The approach taken here is to recognise idealisation as an effect of anxious attachment (as well as present in all child development, see Benjamin 1990) but to look to the specific social context of the idealising for understanding of the social experience of each person in foster care. After all, idealisation is not just the name of a psychological process. For the young person it is an attempt at making sense of fundamentally important relationships, a version of personal and family history that contributes directly to their self-understanding.

It may be recalled that when I interviewed her, Lucy had no contact with either of her birth parents for many years. Her father disappeared from the family early. Alcohol, drugs and money difficulties meant her mother had been unable to care for her. Her grandmother had been in poor health involving frequent hospital stays and Lucy and her younger sister Lesley had to fend for themselves much of the time. They spent an unspecified period in foster care and then at around eight years of age she and Lesley were adopted. Then, when Lucy was about fourteen her adoptive mother developed cancer and partly as a result, Lucy's (but not Lesley's) adoption ended with Lucy returning to foster care. She explained the adoption breakdown as follows:

> Um when it was she was ill and I'd done some stuff that like I hadn't been proud of,
>
> and more I did it the more like I made her ill. And the way she put it was that
>
> there's, well I didn't really understand it at the time because I was like thirteen or

something, I didn't know the way she said it but she said something like um,

'There's a bad egg and sh…. you'd better get rid of the bad eggs to keep the other

ones fresh' or something and so that's how I left me Mum and come into foster

care.

This narrative fragment began with a euphemism[18] "stuff that like I hadn't been proud of" that

allowed Lucy to talk briefly about her own failings without opening them up to too much scrutiny.

Something similar was achieved by her disavowal, "I was like thirteen or something, I didn't know the way

she said it." She implied that she had worked out its meaning by that time but recalling her past confusion

about its meaning allowed her to recount it while distracting from its pejorative import. By keeping its

meaning at arm's length she was perhaps trying to lessen the recalled hurt. In any case, she gave three

reasons given for the adoption breakdown; her own bad behaviour, its effect in worsening her adoptive

mother's illness and the need to remove her in case she was setting a bad example from her younger

sister. These reasons for ending the adoption combined to place the responsibility squarely onto Lucy. The

last of the three reasons came from her mother and it so clearly located the blame in Lucy that it is likely

her mother held to the other reasons, too. There is no sign that her adoptive mother acknowledged a

share of responsibility for the decision she and her husband were taking.

A little later in the interview Lucy provided a description of her adoptive mother:

I got chubby cheeks like her and she's blond hair, brown eyes and she's got an

awesome personality. She like she's a lovely person, she like cares about everyone.

She's got a big heart. She's nice but you wouldn't want to cross her, you wouldn't

want to get her mad so 'Yeah', I love my Mum to bits.

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[18] This is the second time euphemism has been encountered; Lydia's abusive parents were euphemistically signified by a place name so clearly euphemism can be a way of signifying things too difficult to be named.

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"…[Y]ou wouldn't want to cross her, you wouldn't want to get her mad" appeared at first to be balanced against the positive features but "so" made of the attribution a further reason for loving her. The quickness to anger she sometimes displayed was a sign of strength, an additional characteristic that made her lovable. Lucy's perspective on the adoption breakdown was consistent with that evaluation of her mother's anger. She presented the breakdown as justified. She herself had caused it. Her sister was better off without her as her mother had understood, and her mother's continued engagement with her after she had been returned to foster care was evidence of continuing, undeserved devotion. Unless Lucy had left out any significant elements from her account, her idealisation seems to be a comprehensive internalisation of her mother's point of view, presumably encouraged by anxiety about her mother's physical condition. Once internalised, almost any behaviour in connection with the adoption breakdown could be interpreted in line with her mother's goodness. In this case idealisation had arguably become all-embracing but none of my other interviewees were as bent on idealising their parents.

The next case shows that, even when the idealised person's character is known, idealisation can be a factor through 'some degree of amnesia' (Bowlby Vol.3 1998: 45). Lilian was sixteen when first interviewed and had been in foster care for approximately 3 years. Her family structure was complex but a family tree should make it easier to follow the network of relationships:
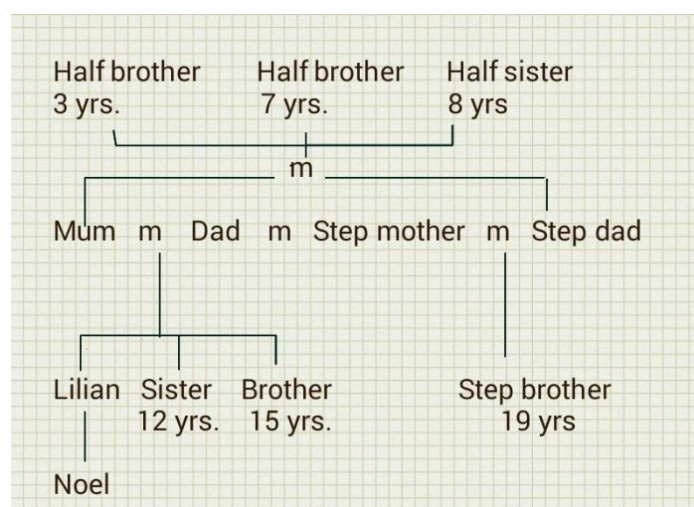

Figure 2 Lilian's family

Her family encompassed four adults; two sets of married partners who had first become friends and had then re-married within the group. Lilian was taken into care following an assault on her 12 year old sister by her step-brother. That sister, Luciana, was placed jointly with Lilian and four other siblings were placed elsewhere. Once in foster care her youngest sister, Lulu, reported that she too had been assaulted, by their step-father. Quarrels between Lilian and Luciana led to Lilian transferring to a second placement which, in turn, was terminated when Lilian became pregnant. Around the time of Noel's birth Lilian's social worker gave Lilian a full explanation of the authority's intervention in her family and what she learned led Lilian to sever contact with her mother because she seemed, to Lilian, indifferent to her husband's behaviour or, it sometimes seemed, to be actively colluding in his abuse and therefore to offer a potential risk to Noel. When she cut off her mother's contact with Noel her grandparents turned against her. She interpreted that as, "my Mum's just trying to get her own back." With this new perspective, Lilian was able to look back on her childhood and conclude that she had been "over-pressured" for child care while her mother and step-father, "weren't doing anything at all apart from just laying around and doing nowt." She therefore had a perception of her mother's faults, yet asked to describe her mother Lilian responded:

> She looks a lot like me little sister but then my boyfriend says I look a lot like her as well. She she's got a lovely personality she's a really quiet lass really really quiet. She's controlled but if she wasn't with him but I don't if she wasn't with him she wouldn't be her she'd leave she'd lead her own life. She'd be living with her Mum and Dad which would be good because that's my Nana and Granda….

Her description began in much the same way as Lucy's, by establishing a physical connectedness, in this case extending to a sister but the rest of the description was particular. Lilian's mother's quietness, doubly emphasised, made it possible for Lilian to relocate the responsibility for her mother's bad judgment to "him", the abuser.

Another point of comparison with Lucy is in the way Lilian dealt with an impulse to blame herself. Lucy, as we saw, took exclusive responsibility for the adoption breakdown but Lilian knew why she and her siblings could not return to their mother's home. Though she was struggling to deal with her new knowledge of the abuse it had answered all her questions about the original decision to take her and her siblings into care, "At first there was bad things about coming into foster… well bad things about coming into foster care but now I understand why I need foster care so I love it." Nevertheless, like Lucy, Lilian believed she was a negative influence on her younger sister. The idealisation of her mother was not straightforwardly associated with self-blame then but even though there were different objects in her idealised perceptions of her mother and her self-blame it is still possible to argue that the two dispositions are closely associated. The relationships Lilian describes with her siblings were, as we shall see, always accounted for in terms of her mother's relationships with them all. Attachment theory (Bowlby Vol. 3 1998) makes it possible to suggest how Lilian's suspicion of her mother's involvement in abuse might co-exist with idealisation of her mother: Lilian's capacity for self-reproach may have diverted anger about the treatment of her siblings away from her mother.

Lucy, seems to have been excluding feelings of anger that she might have directed against her adoptive mother by redirecting them against herself and her birth mother while Lilian distributed her anger between her mother's second husband (she no longer acknowledged him as her step-father) and herself. Bowlby (1998) says that exclusion is not always complete, however, and so sometimes elements of the excluded behaviour become visible, thus Lilian sees that, "my Mum's still with him and she doesn't think he's done wrong." The theory also explains why idealisation is accompanied by self-blame. Displacement or 'splitting' occurs when ambivalent reactions are experienced. Loving components are directed towards the attachment figure and angry components are 'not infrequently…redirected away from an attachment figure who aroused it and aimed instead at the self' and as Bowlby (1998:68) predicts, inappropriate self-criticism results. Lucy took the blame for the adoption breakdown and Lilian for verbally bullying her sister.

Bowlby provides a general account of the way idealising fantasy arises and develops that is conformable with the limited, fragmentary evidence available. However, the theoretical account relates aspects of experience that are not experienced as connected by the actors and it is as well to remember that they may not actually be connected at all. A potential benefit of a child-centred focus is that it requires us to try to understand connections that the young people may have perceived and which may account for their responses. For example, by idealising caring or gentleness the anxiety of an on-going crisis of separation may be lessened. The idealised images imply the mother cannot deliberately want to hurt her daughter. There are also possible implications for self-understanding. While self-blame is inflamed (Bowlby 1998), counterbalancing tendencies are also brought forward. To the extent that she recognises and identifies with the positive qualities of her mother the person may feel she is or has the prospect of becoming a 'good daughter' again. That may motivate and could support threatened feelings of connectedness and therefore resilience. The practice of idealising a parent helps to maintain both relationships and identity. Of course, these are just one set of possible explanations with prima facie plausibility and one would need to know more to be confident that such an interpretation applies but, if it were the case, the degree of fantasy central to the dynamic is likely to mean the longer term effects might offset any short term advantages. The application of attachment theory, then, is likely to lead to discounting of the child or young person in foster care's idealised perspective but if that is essential perhaps it needs to be done in ways that compensate for its functions. Greater realism, if it comes within reach of the children and young people in foster care is likely to be associated with yet more urgently needed support as antipathy and blame are re-focused on the original 'cause(s) of suffering.

The circumstances of people in foster care are both the same as that of other young people yet fundamentally different (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2014). One such difference is that the relationships people in foster care have with their parents involve institutional frames not present in other forms of parent-offspring relationships. In fact, the circumstances of care are the kinds of circumstances that continue to distort relationships between family members and whether a young person in care sees

their parents as 'good' *or* 'bad' there are likely to be difficulties for them in understanding their relationships with parents. These frames potentially present complex difficulties for a parent too. The social context involves cultural assumptions about the birth parents of people in foster care. A member of a local authority participation group mentioned above told me, "[T]he mother will either get slagged off. Often she'll be completely and utterly shunned from society." If, then, parents separated from their children because of neglect, abuse, family breakdown or inability to cope with the child's behaviour, continue to represent themselves as 'good parents' their children's (selective) reports of those representations are not *only* fantasy; they also tell us something that is important for us to hear. My limited evidence indirectly suggests that perceptions about parents (Cairns 2006; Biehal *et al.* 2010) could sometimes be reflections of ambivalence in the behaviour of those parents. Fantasy, then, is shared and socially performative.

Sustained attachments

It is obviously of great importance to consider, too, those cases where attachments to parents survived the separations that followed local authority or court interventions in family life and those who shared this stance towards their parents in most cases had a concealed or partly concealed determination to bring about a reunification.

The first of these cases is that of Libby, an interviewee who has been mentioned briefly but not properly introduced. She had been made a ward of court when her parents were divorced and after some time living with her mother "that just wasn't working." At around thirteen she was fostered but the attachment to both parents remained strong. She and her carer described for me one of the most dramatic events in the placement when she went into anaphylactic shock and Libby told us, "If I'm honest I actually wanted my Mum there at the time. I remember sitting here thinking I want my Mum." Throughout her two years in that placement she had close, regular contact with her mother, spending most weekends with her and she also spent some school holidays with her father. He lived at a distance but occasionally travelled to

visit her in term time. She recounted detailed memories of her relationships with her parents providing evidence that they recognised and could respond to her needs. For example she remembered, "…me and my Dad always used to go to the park and he [a favourite soft toy] would come. It's like sliding down the slide…. My Dad would meet him at the bottom." She described her father as exceptionally fit, powerful and energetic, a marathon runner who, when he wasn't sleeping was working or running while her mother did not have a "bad bone in her."

Her very sketchy explanation for being made a ward of court and later entering care created a one-sided representation of her parents. It may have indicated a lack of insight and perhaps idealisation too, but reluctance to talk about sensitive matters at an interview was also a factor. Libby was planning to be re-united with her father in due course and as I shall describe in the next chapter, this was something her carer was not very happy about. Relationships with the carer were good but, as will also be detailed, much discretion was being exercised by both carer and the person in foster care and the reiteration of her father's positive qualities needs to be seen in that context.

Libby's characteristics and care path were unusual in my sample. She was an only child, came into care quite late at 13 and had been fostered the shortest time of any, two years at the time of the interviews. Thoburn (2009) points out that the needs of children are highly variable in accordance with complex factors including the age of the children involved and reasons for entering care and observes that Court powers to require child and parent treatment plans can be effective. . So far as I have been made aware, in this regard too, Libby was the only one affected and while it is not possible to map the specific impact of this cluster of factors her continuing participation in family life – spending most weekends at her mother's home and having long holidays with her father - was the greatest of my interviewees.

The only other interviewee working towards reunification with parents as an imminent prospect was being even more secretive about her plans. Lia Lawson brought her placement with Carly to an end by making an allegation of assault against her. She then restored contact with her mother first and then her

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father after years of complete separation. In her first interview, with Carly, and Lydia present, Lia made no mention of her parents. By contrast they were mentioned sixteen times in interview 4. Lia claimed, four times, to be "much happier" in her new situation saying she had greater freedom, more attention and less boredom. That last interview focused on present relationships with her parents rather than the denied relationships with them during her years in care and it is only possible for me, then, to infer the denied from the restored relationships but there was every indication of important attachment having been blocked for about a decade. While two of the York studies (Sinclair 2005) suggested that strong evidence of abuse prior to placement pointed to better outcomes if contacts were prohibited, this example may act as a reminder that each case needs to be taken individually.

In the case of Lucas, from the details that have already been mentioned – his mother's attempts to recover custody of him and his brothers and the time when he, "sneakily went and met my Dad" - it is also clear that he remained attached to both his parents. Contact (see Cleaver 2000) with his mother was of particular concern to him and he reported asking his social worker repeatedly to increase the duration of contacts, "'cause we only have two and a half hours."

There was one case, however, in which the attitude that accompanied the sense of missing parents was one of apparent resignation. Lanie, whose relationship with her birth mother has been described as vestigial, had nevertheless preserved only feelings of concern for her mother. She knew that she had been put into care because of her parent's mental health problems but those arose because:

> [W]hen my Mum was a youngster she was fostered and when she got adopted she
> was sexually abused by a foster parent…and like she'd had a lot in the past like my
> Grandma and my Granddad dying and that and like the way how they died so she
> has got, had a lot to cope with so I don't really blame her for putting me in care…

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 requires a Pathway Plan for all young people of Lanie's age and situation. Lanie's Pathway Plan advisor asked for her to be dropped from the study when, after the

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first interview, she became pregnant and left her placement. It was not possible to learn any more about the many issues her first interview had raised and the impression this extract gives of settled resignation may be misleading. However, Lanie had spent most of her life in care, unlike Libby, Lucas and Lia all of whom entered care for the first time as older children or teenagers. Although she had had contact with her birth parents it seems that she had little sense that they might play a significant part in her future. Given the geographical and social space that separated her from her parents, the arrival of a new baby seemed unlikely to change that and might well have made it less likely.

What emerges from these various cases is the importance of attachments to parents for self-understanding. Schofield quotes Bee as believing that, 'The concept of self serves as a sort of filter for experience, shaping our choices and affecting our responses to others' (Schofield 2002:262) and the evidence collected in my interviews finds support in this notion. . In varying forms, continuing awareness of separation from parents was observable in every case and, in the circumstances of long term foster care, seemed likely to affect responses to carers and the choices the young people made as they moved towards independence.

Siblings

In the network of birth family relationships described by a sample of young people looking back on their experience of foster care (Holland and Crowley 2013), sibling relationships were the most positive. The finding (Richardson and Yates 2014) that sibling placement was an important relational mechanism underlying resilience in children and young people in foster care is consistent with Holland and Crowley's conclusions, though not all recent studies of siblings and foster care reach the same conclusion. A study of a national sample in the U.S. by Hegara and Rosentahl (2011) reported only limited significance for sibling co-placement, mainly in the area of academic achievement. In particular, the authors found that little significance was accorded to sibling relationships either by carers or children and young people in foster care in ongoing placements. This is in direct contrast to my own findings which were, as I shall show, that my interviewees were often very concerned for siblings and frequently more so than for their birth

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parents. It seems possible that differences of qualitative and quantitative methodology might in some way underlie the divergence in findings and that, as Holland and Crowley concluded, the area of sibling relationships is still 'underexplored' (Holland and Crowley 2013:63).

Twelve people in foster care contributed material that will be drawn on in this part of the chapter. To define what I mean by 'sibling' relationship I followed Elgar and Head (in Mullender 1999:20) in defining siblings as children (and later adults) with some degree of one, some, or all the following:

- common genes;

- common history, family values and culture; and

- common legal status.

Except for very brief placements this understanding of siblings pointed to inclusion of a number of foster siblings in this study. Taking account of those foster siblings, my interviewees had a total of forty-nine sibling relationships. These are set out in Appendix 4. There were a number of sibling placements. Of these, the Lambert siblings and Lawson siblings all participated in interviews. Leona, Lamar and Leo shared placements with siblings who were not, themselves, interviewed but they featured in narratives their older siblings provided. Children and young people in foster care fostered alone but having siblings from whom they were separated were Laaiq, Lanie and Lillian and each talked of their siblings in some detail. In fact only Libby, who had no siblings, did not bring up that factor. Regardless of its precise significance for social work practice, therefore, concern for siblings was something the children and young people in foster care I interviewed had in common.

My interviewees talked about half-siblings, step-siblings, foster siblings, adoptive siblings, full siblings who had been adopted, full siblings they knew about but had never met, siblings from whom they had been separated, siblings they were allowed to see only under conditions of very close surveillance as well as the siblings with whom they had lived and were still living with on an everyday basis (Mullender 1999).

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Sometimes siblings were a source of urgently needed comfort and support in the face of separation. At other times relationships were fraught with conflict, anxiety or guilt. Lilian had a step-sibling she had rejected. Sibling relations can be supportive or affected by rivalry (Sanders 2004). In the interviews and observations I was able to carry out both were apparent, sometimes almost simultaneously. Some of the sibling relations shared something of the qualities of parental relationships. They could also be ineradicable (Owusu-Bempah and Hewitt 1997; Mullender 1999). Vestigial relationships counted here, too. Even when there was only a memory of having been told about a sister, the young person was altered by that knowledge and they thought of themselves as a person who had a lost sister (Mullender 1999). The acts of intervention that separated children from their parents were not, except occasionally, aimed at dealing with concerns arising from sibling relationships so those relationships were somewhat easier to preserve and less tainted by stigma. They were therefore more readily available and helped by providing an enduring connection in the face of loss of parental company.

I will first consider sibling relationships that originated in the birth family. Only one of my interviewees was an only child and eight were jointly fostered with siblings during the interviewing period so it was often possible to observe relationships directly. In the course of a year and a half I saw crises in what had looked like happily settled sibling groups and seemingly unbreakable bonds suddenly abandoned, suggestive of the ambivalent love and hate regarded by some as characteristic of sibling relationships (Coles 2015). The lived out relationships ebbed and flowed when I went to placements to interview sibling groups. Fluctuating moods and actions were recounted in and manifested themselves during the interviews. Tempers flared up and subsided. Supportive attitudes were accompanied by trading of insults and this volatility was so familiar that interviewees could describe and joke about its rhythms. Even more than parents, then, these were relationships in processes of developmental, biographical and social change (Smith and Carlson 1997; James and James 2004; Schofield and Beek 2009) and the accounts given represent very much cross-sections through their lives at a point in time.

Sibling bonds

If it is axiomatic to point out that birth siblings are connected, the emotions and beliefs which make up a sense of connectedness are, as always, important to understand as specific lived experiences. The unique qualities of each set of relationships must be appreciated but if we begin with the Lambert brothers, the sibling group that depended most on its 'groupness' i.e. belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 20), less deeply integrated sibling groups can be viewed against that background.

Lawrence, Lee and Lucas

 Lawrence (9), Lee (12) and Lucas (13) have all been mentioned at various points above. They were interviewed in their fourth placement, provided by Callum and Caitlin Calloway, which ended just after the final interviews. At that point they were separated for the first time. Lee and Lucas were kept together but Lawrence was fostered on his own. They were the youngest of eight children by two different fathers, part of a large kin network living in a relatively small geographical area. According to the accounts they gave me, members of their family, male and female and across generations were liable to outbreaks of violence but there were no reports of the three having themselves been attacked by family members. Callum and Caitlin Calloway passed on to me their belief that there was also severe neglect and Lucas confirmed feeding and looking after his younger brothers. The combination of violence, neglect and chaotic lifestyle eventually led to complaints by neighbours and they were taken into care. They had therefore spent an unknown period fending for themselves in a turbulent home environment and a further six years sharing the experiences of foster care and this had resulted in the strong sense of groupness to be described.

Asked why he was taken into care, Lawrence explained it was because, his mother's behaviour, drinking and smoking, set "really bad habits for me Lucas and Lee." Asked why he was taken into care, Lawrence's explanation ignored neglect or violence and focused exclusively on consumption. The account is of shared experience pre-dating entry to care and afterwards. Its precocious form, reveals him aware of

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culturally important mores before his time (Gonzales 2013: 120), turning that experience into a sense of groupness. His narrative is of a group of brothers facing a common risk through time against which, he implies, they have been protected.

This sense of groupness was clearer still in Lawrence's reflection on his most recent period of respite care[19]. He told me:

> …last respite we didn't [have a good time] 'cause they looked forward to it but it
> didn't go how we planned, like it wasn't how we planned it, like it wasn't so good
> 'cause the children there didn't really like us.

Here, not only did he think of himself as part of a sibling group. He assumed others did, too. The children reacted not to the three individuals but to "us."

Lucas also had a sense that he and his brothers were supporting each other as they passed from foster placement to foster placement. He gave me two accounts of their first placement in quick succession. Both accounts revolved around the peer relationships in the placement and also took in how they were managed by the adult carers. According to the first account, the three Lambert brothers were driving with their carers and their son, Christopher, when Christopher hit Lawrence. Lucas, in solidarity with Lawrence, took physical revenge on Christopher. For this, Lucas was, "grounded for two weeks."

In that part of the account he made no mention of any sanction against Christopher. His telling of these events flowed directly into another narrative with similar themes of male bonding and conflict (Bairner 2014, Woods 2009):

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[19] The arrangements for respite care are quite important for consideration of foster care and will be dealt with closely in the next chapter. For the present all that is necessary to say about it is that it involves a brief stay in another foster placement to accommodate absences of the principal carers.

Lucas: So then I was like [ ] I'd calmed down 'cause they walked in and yeah and there was this one time where we were all playing football 'cause it was quite a big house stairs were there hallway hallway door

I: Ok.

Lucas: And like a balcony and we were playing football. Christopher [foster sibling] blasted the ball cracked a vase and we got the blame.

I: Who's we?

Lucas: Me Lawrence and Lee.

I: The three.

Lucas: Just because we were near it.

I: Right.

Lucas: But Christopher also got a lit little telling off.

His annoyance about the way blame was apportioned in these incidents marked a border between the brothers and Christopher and a commentary on how the carers, "just like they didn't treat us all fair." His acknowledgement that Christopher got "a little telling off" for cracking the vase suggests that the sense of differential treatment was not necessarily permanent and there had been scope for carers to help him over the sense of unfairness. The qualification "little", however, implies that the telling off was not fair enough; that there was a (missed) opportunity to establish equality of treatment here. As Williams (2004) noted, what children valued in their relationships with adults was an ethical component of care relating to 'fairness, care, respect and trust' (2004:51).

Certainly, when talking about other placements Lucas described relationships with other foster-siblings in much more positive terms. He and a foster-sibling, "played together for like three weeks" when they first went into care. The foster sibling's baby brother was "absolutely ace." His current foster-sibling Chad was similarly an important play-mate in the early days of the fourth placement. He gave Lucas presents on his birthday and could be included in teasing play (see below). The conflict with Christopher would not seem to be t typical of Lucas's relations with foster siblings, then.

The importance of the sibling group did not always act as a bar to other new peer group relationships but however flexible Lawrence and Lucas were in their creation and enjoyment of new relationships, the thought of their sibling group as a discrete social unit remained available to them as a way of describing and explaining events, and perceived unfairness could prompt its use. In a later chapter we will see similar behaviour from them in the context of other issues.

The bond between these boys had been influenced by the forms of masculinity available to them. There is, 'abundant evidence that masculinities are multiple, with internal complexities and even contradictions' (Connell 2015). Their concerns for each other tended to be masked by boyish, teasing denunciations which simultaneously stretched, tested and sometimes strengthened the bonds between them. Lawrence's second interview was interrupted by a perfect example of this. He had followed up the first interview by making some insightful written notes that he had with him. He could not wait to get started and when I looked as if I was settling in to a conversation with his foster carer, Caitlin, he led me away to the next room.

About twenty minutes into the interview Lucas came into the room and asked, "Can I just say Lee had some of Lawrence's jelly babies and now Chad [foster brother] is having some?" While the remark was aimed at me, on the face of it, the information was directed at Lawrence so the interruption immediately set up problems for both Lawrence and me concerning our ideas governing the interview and our ideas regarding his ownership of the jelly babies. From an adult point of view, which Lucas understood because

he had been party to pre-interview discussions, the research interview outweighed the ownership of sweets in importance so his interruption was a challenge to my standing. Nor was that the only teasing element in Lucas's interruption. He interrupted with a rhetorical request for permission to interrupt and, by using 'just', implied he regretted the request. Thus he gave formal acknowledgement[20] to my priorities as he subverted them. Formal acknowledgement of adult concerns is both a way of subverting adult expectations and defensive forethought for young people intent on backchat. If backchat elicits adult anger, as it well may (McGuiness 2007), the acknowledgement makes a defensive stance of dismayed innocence available.

At the same time, saying Chad was in the process of having some more of the jelly babies Lucas effectively called for Lawrence to take rapid preventative measures which, of course, would disturb the interview quite a lot.

Lawrence recognised and was expected to recognise Lucas's combination of polite request and subversive intent as mischievous[21] and at first he tried to rise above Lucas's mischief by making a show of indifference to the raid on his property. Referring to Chad's supposed, on-going sweet-grab he muttered, "Yeah, let him" but Lucas countered with further pressure, "And them two are having loads of [unintelligible] now Lawrence." Feigned indifference having failed to stop Lucas straight away, Lawrence's exasperation increased but he tried again to fend off the interruption by using Lucas's pretence of brotherly concern against him. He ordered Lucas to, "Get them off them then." His use of 'then' implies that the logic of Lucas's pretended position as Lawrence's protector was not consistent with his failure to take obvious, available protective action. However, since both Lawrence and Lucas knew the interruption was mischievous rather than concerned, the tone in which Lawrence spoke this second line of defence was

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[20] Formal acknowledgement of adult concerns is both a way of subverting adult expectations and defensive forethought for young people intent on backchat.

[21] Lawrence referred to his grown up brothers and a friend at school as "mischievous", using the word three times. Talking about his friend he added, "very bonkers out of his mind and friendly sometimes."

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not expressive of expectation. What it expressed was exasperation and once Lucas had made Lawrence exasperated, subversion of the interview was almost an accomplished fact because Lawrence's mood was being changed.

Lucas's next act completed his victory. He had kept concealed until this point the bag of jelly babies that remained. Striking the role of the concerned brother again, he now produced it and told us, "That's how many are left. I'll just leave those in here so they don't eat…" The physical evidence of the diminishing jelly babies proved too much for Lawrence's self-control. My notes then record, 'the next section of the tape is too chaotic to transcribe. Lawrence left the room where we were talking and there was much shouting involving the brothers and, I think, Caitlin trying to placate Lawrence'. [22]

The value of this episode of teasing to Lucas has to be addressed at two levels because he has two targets. In chronological order, his first target is me, the interviewer. His second is Lawrence. By teasing me in the way described he addressed issues of power and also tested my intentions towards him (Butler and Williamson 1994). The experience of people as multi-layered and liable to change is one that leads to testing strategies in all of us. For young people living in the unstable social world of foster care where trust may be slow to establish, such strategies have obvious utility if they are used judiciously. Minimising the risks associated with trusting can only be achieved through discovering how potential trustees react under pressure. But Lucas might have tested me by a much more direct challenge and on other occasions he did. In this instance, his choice to join the challenge to me through manipulating Lawrence probably pointed to a strategy he used in contacts with his social worker, as I shall describe shortly.

When Lawrence came back to the interview room he was upset and commented, "That's the kind of joke they have." This confirmed my own observations that teasing between the brothers was prevalent

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[22] Reading this over I think there is something inherently comic about the passage. The psychological ingenuity used by both brothers, especially Lucas, is part of the humour but another aspect altogether lies in the application of academic analysis to make that ingenuity explicit. Just as the combination of Latinate words and Anglo-Saxon words (e.g. supercilious twit) has a comic effect on the listener, so does the deployment of analytical language on the banter of youngsters. The two registers are usually entirely unconnected in discourse. Banter is rarely noticed in academic literature and analysis is a tactical disaster in bantering social groups. Bringing them together has something of the absurd about it.

and while it was sometimes a form of rough verbal play that reinforced the group's connectedness and their self-perceptions of male toughness, it could also be a source of conflict. As Lawrence put it, some of their jokes were not nice.

Teasing (Eder 1991; Maccoby 1998; Kowalski 2003) in this group had long since become a habit. However, it is important to note that the ability to provoke responses through teasing also gave Lucas some control over the sibling group's relations to the care network. My transcription notes record information given to me by Lucas's carers about chaotic meetings with the brothers' social worker, a description that was supported by the brothers' own accounts which will be documented in a further chapter. While Lucas liked his latest placement, his attitude to the care system was broadly antagonistic and continual teasing was a powerful means of resistance (Eder *et al.* 1995). That kind of resistance is difficult for the resist*ed* to control but also, potentially, for the resist*er* because it can become habitual and destabilising. Still, when a skilled teaser has good, intuitive understanding of his targets it is easy for him to ensure that foster carers, social workers or other agents of social care are met with challenging levels of playing up. Unfortunately, as we shall see later, Lucas was not sufficiently skilled at the games he played and eventually brought the placement into disarray with a verbal attack on a foster sibling that probably began as teasing.

Finally, I want to mention one element of behaviour that clashed with the tacit understanding of group-ness. Perhaps most clearly, Lee, the middle brother, made no comments about such feelings. He displayed concern about Lucas and accepted responsibility for his welfare but on the evidence he provided, was far more likely to rely on his carers than on his brothers to deal with any problems he might have. His view of his mother was also more critical than his brothers'. He described her as, "... being real stupid." Thus while there was in the brothers a sense of sibling identity there were also stresses. Nevertheless, the contrast with other groups of siblings in my sample will illustrate how relatively strong their attachments to each other had remained up to that point and, by contrast, how far the experience of foster care had

weakened family bonds, including bonds with siblings in the rest of my sample. This is a tendency that was also identified by Kosonen (in Mullender A. 1999:40) but Rushton, Dance and Mayes (in Sinclair 2005 146 found that where there were changes in placements for siblings, reunions were more common than separations. The number of individuals involved in both those studies was small; 21 in Kosonen and 8 in Rushton *et al.*

Lilian and Luciana

Lilian's once strong sense of connectedness with her siblings ceased to be a solidary resource and instead became a focus for anxiety, on-going in a way that was similar to the awareness of separation discussed in relation to parents. Lilian, the oldest, described herself as, "trying to be their Mum type of thing because Mum was never there" when they had all lived at home. Her relationship with Luciana seems to have been particularly close. It was to Lilian that Luciana first disclosed she had been raped and no doubt that was part of the thinking in placing the sisters together in the first instance. By the time she was interviewed, however, Lilian had been separated in foster care from her all siblings, had wholly lost contact with her youngest half-brother when he was adopted, was unsure of the whereabouts of her two other half-siblings. Contact with her full siblings, Luciana and Lionel, was being closely supervised. The severe limits she faced in acting upon her concerns for any of them marked her isolation from them as much as her attachment.

Though she expressed interest in and concern for all her siblings, the relationship with Luciana concerned her most and by following her narrative of it, its decline can be mapped. In the early days of their first placement together she tried to rely on Luciana for support:

> I thought well it's going to be great, it'll be alright 'cause me and Luciana were
>
> going to stick together and I was crying one night and I said to her I said , 'Luciana
>
> listen. Me and you are going to stick together and she's with a [?] takes after my
>
> Mum so I mean I was talking to her she was saying 'Oh Lily, don't cry, don't cry'

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But the placement soon became badly affected by tensions between the sisters. The likelihood is that, in addition to the impact their home life had had on their behaviour, membership of a family of six children had prepared them poorly for sudden, urgent and exclusive dependency on each other at a time when they had to adjust to intense disturbance in all their other attachments. Lilian talked about "smacking" Luciana who, she said, responded with verbal abuse. "It was horrible" but also "I wasn't really getting on with Carina Carter [my foster carer] neither." In less than a year the placement came to an end but the idea of keeping the sisters together in a new placement was at least considered (see also Ward and Skuse 2001).

Here for the first time we come across an issue that frequently arose; the issue of institutional constraints on placing siblings together. In the event, "it wasn't allowed 'cause there wouldn't be another place for me and my sister so - well that's what they said anyway - so she couldn't come with us…" The move to a new placement did not lead to complete separation. Though she lived ten miles from Luciana she was nearer to Lionel so contacts were relatively easy to organise but the pattern of bad quarrels next affected contacts.

She described one such quarrel in some detail, repeating the narrative across her series of interviews. The contact took place in a restaurant. Lilian, Luciana and Lionel were supervised by an unidentified adult. When she criticised Luciana's table manners:

> …my sister was eating with her mouth open and I said to her 'Don't eat with your
>
> mouth open' and she started crying. And it's just an attention 'cause my Mum's like
>
> that as well ...

Whether the expression, "an attention" is a family saying, a local figure of speech or just an instance of Lilian's own speech giving way beneath the weight to trying to explain such complicated matters, it seems to indicate that her mother sometimes sought attention by crying. Here, a method of

interpreting her mother's behaviour acts as a template for the understanding of her sister's. Recognition of family resemblances was frequently referred to in various interviews. Sometimes it was a matter of physical features but in this case the resemblance was behavioural. It must remain an open question how Lilian originally learned to interpret her mother's crying as 'just' for attention but the construal, once learned, was apparently convincing for her when applied to other cases of crying in the family.

In other ways, too, the behaviour of her parents continued to affect her relationships with her siblings. A chance encounter Luciana had with them made Lilian very anxious. She described how:

> …[M]y Mum and Mr. Taylor[23] were in Riverton and that's where my little sister lives and she was walking through the town with her friends and they were outside a café in Riverton…and she had went up over to them because they had shouted her over so she went over to them…and because she didn't know the full story she got in trouble because she doesn't know and she won't understand all of this….but he knew he shouldn't have done that, he shouldn't have been outside having a coffee in Riverton when she when he knew that she lived there know that she could walk through the town. It's deluded.

The concern she expressed here was arguably complex and deep-rooted. On the surface, she was angry with her parents for deliberately presenting themselves in a place and manner that made an encounter with Luciana more likely. It was against rules presumably put in place at the time when Luciana's placement in Riverton was first established. It seems at first glance as if Lilian wants little more than for her parents to obey the rules that Luciana was subjected to and "got told off" for. However, since her account was given after she had cut off contact with her parents and the reason for that rejection had been her fear of the threat they offered to her baby, that would probably have been a concern for her

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[23] She had taken to calling her step-father 'Mr. Taylor. This curious usage will be discussed in a later chapter.

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where Luciana was concerned. It is clear that she saw Luciana to be unaware of the serious threat her step-father posed. If, indeed, she was generalising from her fears for Noel to fears for Luciana her concerns also encompassed her brother. Going on to comment, "Luciana and Lionel still that's my brother and sister still call him Dad and she got told you shouldn't be going to see your Dad" she seems to be expressing anxiety about too much closeness of feeling for Mr. Taylor and also, perhaps, placing responsibility for that at the door of carers.

This undoubtedly involves too much supposition but, if it can be entertained for a moment, such an analysis leads to a disturbing perspective on child protection in this case. Those who have responsibility for protecting the siblings of this family from the abuse of their step-father are perceived by Lilian to be acting ineffectively; setting up rules to protect the children from the parent(s) without the warnings that would make those rules meaningful for the children. Then, when the rules are breached blaming the children not the parents. And while their carers withhold information about the abusive behaviour from the younger siblings they permit them to continue thinking of their abusing step-father in terms of family intimacy.

The complexity of explaining all of this is greater than the complexity of understanding it and so, it would follow, Lilian knows but cannot articulate what she perceives other than by narrating an encounter that encapsulates some of her concerns. This is a familiar and useful phenomenon (see Davies 2013) and, for example, is employed by users of digital media almost without limit (Pepe 2009). If all of this occurs, it is then necessary that the narrative be recognised for what it is, not just a matter of fair application of rules for children. But there's the rub. To do so must involve setting aside much that separates adults from children and stake holding citizenry from subjugated dependents. These challenges arise under conditions of heavy workloads and intense stresses (Social Work Task Force: 2009). Little wonder then if the stories are listened to but not heard.

Having begun to touch upon deep anxieties about Luciana, other grounds for concern began to occur to Lilian. Without any other prompting she mentioned that Luciana, "got a phone now and she told

me that she got it off a friend but she was getting rude text messages and pictures and that on it" and here again she gave a glimpse both of the nature of her concerns and of the limits that constrained her. "So Catherine [foster carer] phoned up the Wedgewood Centre because that's where Luciana goes." Forming an alliance with a new foster carer[24] made it possible to deal indirectly with concern about Luciana's welfare but the social and geographical distance between the two sisters continued to increase. The psycho-therapeutic services of the Centre and the recourse to them following messages on a mobile phone point to further distress for Luciana that Lilian felt she needed to respond to, but could not. From her point of view, exacerbated by ever-increasing separation, her sister, and perhaps her other siblings were extremely vulnerable and it appears that she could not feel secure in the knowledge that they were in Local Authority care. By this point, like many in foster care, she had already moved placement three times (see Ward and Skuse 2001). This no doubt added to her general sense of insecurity (Aldgate and Jones 2006) and perhaps to the fear that her siblings were being poorly protected from harm by carers who did not fully understand how to counter the dangers around them.

Along with fear of her predatory step-father and mistrust of the care system, she was aware of her own lack of control in relation to her siblings and accepted the separation from Luciana as in her sister's best interest. She felt trapped in her own damaging behaviour:

> Like I can't I couldn't just go and see Luciana and Lionel and be all normal with
>
> them. If I seen Lulu, Lenny and Lance now I wouldn't be all like, I wouldn't be just
>
> like a big sister I'd feel like their Mum if you get what I mean because I was like that
>
> at home.

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[24] Further information about Catherine Cannon will be provided in a later chapter.

Yet once distanced from her siblings she lost any means of resolving these difficulties. We shall see later that, probably as a consequence, her methods of dealing with difficulties in other relationships of crucial significance to her became dramatically counter-productive.

Lucy and Lesley

Although there are points of similarity in the situations of Lucy and Lilian, differences in the way the interviewees narrated the relationships make direct comparison difficult. Lilian talked frequently and often with emotion about the details of Luciana's life, Lucy also talked about her younger sister Lesley in affecting language but provided no detail at all about Lesley's present circumstances and made light of problems in the relationship.

Thomas (in Foley *et al.* 2001:106) comments that "children's communicative skills are often different from those of adults" and qualifies this further by acknowledgement of the importance of age, individual strengths, styles and perceptions of what is important. In this regard, there were differences between Lucy and Lilian that need to be taken into account. Both were sixteen at the time of the interviews but Lucy introduced herself by drawing comparisons between herself and 'Harry Potter', the series of books about whom were important to her. Lilian may have enjoyed reading but did not refer to this at any time; there is abundant evidence that reading can support young people in the 'loneliest' passage of coming of age (Nilsen and Donelson 2009). Lilian had rejected her parents and, as will be documented elsewhere, invited others to comment disapprovingly upon them. Lucy's idealisation of her adoptive parents was notable ; her adoptive mother, in particular, played an important part in her thoughts about her own future so here, as always, a sense of audience, manners of self-representation and representations of others will affect what is said and how it is said (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

Lucy did not show any inclination to idealise her birth mother who, on one occasion of particular anger, she referred to as "scum." Her accounts of life before she was taken into care were extremely graphic:

When I got adopted it was like just like um sitting in the court do you know what I mean like knowing I was going to have a new family like and a fresh start that was that was going through my head, 'I've got someone who cares about us and I like I don't have to worry about being safe anymore or finding my own food or living on the streets or stuff like that' …It was hell when I was little I'm not going to pretend it wasn't, it was. Yeah my Mum like spent her money on like drink and drugs and cigarettes and I didn't see her that much, it was mostly my Nana looking after us and [when] she wasn't in hospital she was out looking after us and if she wasn't there we was on the streets for the day something like, like eightish in the morning 'til like half four or something at night and my Mum come home from pubs and stuff.

During this time Lucy looked after Lesley:

I was looking after her yeah?...I carried her round the streets and stuff and every time I find something in the garbage bin I always give her the bigger half, stuff like that.

Here, unusually in my interviews, an interviewee chose to represent herself in a way which courted a negative reaction. Because she wanted to emphasise the conditions they endured at the same time as she described her caring role she brought a detail forward to shock, simultaneously revealing self- esteem (Fraser *et al.*1999) by describing herself as a devoted sister; self-sacrificing and generous. Self- esteem is, of course, critical for child development (Pithouse and Rees 2015).

Her account of a meeting with social workers who were proposing to split the sisters up and place them in foster care was more straightforwardly self-affirming. Lucy reported:

I refused. I, I wouldn't let her go … I hold her hand and I said you if you take me you have to take her too. I stood up and said it. I'm not going without her. ….'cause er when we got took away from Mum she er the social worker I can't remember social worker at the time she tried to split me and Lesley up and it wasn't happening. I'm not going to let I wasn't going to let Lesley go in a strange place on her own. It's not going to happen. …

The physical imagery of holding hands, the self-assertiveness of standing up and the protective speech that accompanied the actions set out the strength of felt connectedness. The statement was made in the past tense for the main part but there was one moment when she slipped into present continuous, beginning to warn that 'I'm not going to let ..' before checking herself. This can probably be accounted for simply by the immediacy of reliving a personally significant memory but since at the time of the interviews she was experiencing a gradual, progressive loss of her sister's company and erosion of her belief in their connectedness that element of the memory resonated with her immediate experience, too.

She talked repeatedly of loving Lesley and told me Lesley was "…only flesh and blood I got left….the only person out of my real family I keep in touch with." On the other hand she also complained that Lesley was a "Little brat," that she could, "…strangle her sometimes…" and she strongly implied that Lesley could be strong-minded to a point of aggression. A little later she told me:

I think she [Lesley] copes things …a lot better than I do. She's strong minded like my Mum. Very strong minded. She stick up for herself …. I can be like that I just choose not to be. I'm not I'm not aggressive.

These more critical statements were all set in tones of affection and seem nothing out of the ordinary. Siblings do not always get on and sibling relationships vary according to personal and social factors across a spectrum of dispositions from affection and concern to hostility and violence (see, for example, Sanders 2004: 101). But people in foster care face problems that are likely to add further strains

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to these common features. Lucy herself definitely did not want to convey that such tension as there was amounted to a serious rift between herself and Lesley but she made one observation that clearly indicated latent anxiety. Invited to agree with the suggestion that Lesley seemed attached to her she was equivocal. "Kind of. I think she is. I don't know. I just hope she loves me as much as I love her." She did not develop the comment and so the grounds of her uncertainty can only be speculated about but placing it in the context of the adoption breakdown, credible grounds can be suggested.

When they were both adoptees, Lucy and Lesley's legal and relational status in the adoptive family was the same. Then, when Lucy's adoption broke down, Lesley remained in adoption and at that point Lucy lost her legal standing as a member of the family. Since, protection of Lesley from Lucy's influence was, as mentioned earlier, part of the explanation Cheryl, her adoptive Mum, gave Lucy for the adoption breakdown, the same rationale may have been used to explain the breakdown to Lesley and the adoptive siblings. If that was the explanation that Cheryl gave them, Lucy's membership of the family changed along with her legal status and the change must have been understood by Lesley and others as a consequence of Lucy's personal characteristics among other reasons. Even if a high degree of discretion was applied, the physical removal from the family was a tangible and stigmatising representation of the loss of full family membership (see Schofield 2002). It is quite possible, then, that the move into foster care put new strains on her relationship with Lesley (and adoptive siblings) which made minor conflicts more serious which would not otherwise have been perceived as threatening to the relationship. Of course, since so much of the adoption disruption lay beyond the scope of the interviews no judgment as to the necessity of separating the sisters can be made but its likely effect is significant.

Lilian and Lucy both found themselves in new placements, separated for the first time from their younger sisters and both, although in very different ways, claimed to be reconciled to the change in the interests of their younger sister. Both interviewees described understandable, if possibly token, responses to the separation and though there were obviously important social and psychological factors affecting the different choices Lilian and Lucy made, they each described processes of internal reflection (see Archer

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2005) that were associated with sets of habitual inclinations for managing separation. Lilian remains concerned and actively worked to manage the relationship with Luciana so that she could continue to provide care and protection. From a distance, she tried to exert influence and control over Luciana or, when she felt unable to do so, got a carer to act on her behalf. Lucy denied the growing distance between herself and her sister and hoped for the best. She appeared submissive, allowing others to determine how her family relationships in general and with Lesley in particular were going to develop.

Responsibility for siblings

In the cases where there is a sense of identification with siblings and feelings of responsibility for them it suggests a relational (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) view of self. Responsibility can also involve needing the person who they are responsible for, and some of the following examples illustrate this. Younger siblings were not seen just as a burden and looking after them was not seen just as duty which had to be honoured, but these were relationships that might have been able to 'reduce the intensity of [separation]' (Bowlby 1999 Vol 1 : 290) and the older siblings certainly placed value upon them. Lydia remembered telling Lia, "you're the only one I've got in the real family." Lesley was "…only flesh and blood I [Lucy] got left….the only person out of my real family I keep in touch with." Entering care for the first time, Lilian recalled telling herself, "I thought it was going to be for ages but at least my brother and sister er at least my two sister like the two sisters together me and Luciana." It's possible that Lucas preferred to conceal his need but Lee recognised Lucas' need for company very clearly:

Lee: Lucas had his own room but he struggles to sleep and needs company.

I: Right.

Lee: He used to have his own room but now he's got my room. He struggles

real bad to get to sleep.

I: Still?

Lee: Yeah. He often bad a badly when he had his own room.

For a variety of reasons, then, interviewees reported providing basic care to their younger siblings (Kosonen 1996:274) including the preparation of food, doing washing, getting them off to school, putting them to bed at night and/or comforting them when they were upset. Three interviewees talked about very important protection they were able to provide for their younger siblings when their parents were neglectful. Lucas watched his mother's cooking and learned enough through observation to be able to "cook their teas." Lilian also cooked her siblings' breakfast and the daily routines of getting up in the morning and going to bed at night had been the concern of both Lucas and Lilian. Lucy reported scavenging for food and making sure that Lesley received most of whatever she found. She went so far as to say that "she was only three for God's sake! She couldn't like… she wouldn't have survived without… with …if I couldn't do it she'd be dead in two days."

Nearly all those interviewed were concerned for the personal happiness of those they considered their brothers or sisters. Children coming into the care system can have severe difficulties (Wilson *et al.* 2005: 14) and while that is usually discussed in terms of the challenges they pose for carers, viewed in a child centred perspective this also translates into many unhappy, anxious children and young people. So, it was in the context of talking about various sorts of trouble afflicting a brother or sister that the need to support was most often mentioned. The kinds of support provided included keeping an eye on emerging problems, telling white lies to protect a sibling against painful knowledge and sticking up for them when there was conflict involving outsiders. Two interviewees acted as advocates (Daya *et al.* 2012) for siblings and two others, when a sibling's linguistic difficulties made it necessary, became translators. Some interviewees described going to lengths to deal with things that upset their siblings. In almost every case it was older siblings, males and females alike, who reported providing these services for their younger

brothers or sisters. There was a little clear evidence of benefits being received other than evidence of felt needs being met by the company of the younger one.

Conclusion

Family relationships and the separation that characterises the lives of fostered children have provided an entry point into the subjective experience of those in foster care. These are people who have experienced the dissolution of that most taken-for-granted feature of childhood, the family unit, and have been transported into an alternative, provisional network of services and relationships, impersonal at first and in some cases, remaining so. Triseliotis (1995: 3) quotes an unnamed child participant in research in the late 1980's who defined foster care as 'Something happening to your family and you are then being looked after by another family for a short time or moved around.' For those who have experienced abuse there may be a sense of lurking danger (see Aldgate and Jones 2006) to add to dislocation. Between family and care provision they are presented with dissonant and fragmented narratives out of which they try to fashion meaning and, wholly unsurprisingly, they are sometimes confused. The effects of their early and present experiences combine to produce defensiveness and fantasy (Bullock *et al.* 1998:94) and so, for the researcher as well as the care worker, they are difficult to understand. The early life experiences can also damage them in terms of their emotional and mental development so their ability to interpret and cope with life and relationships is impaired.

At the core of Lucas' angry outburst over the confiscation of his mobile phone was outrage at the violation of a central norm of most childhoods, "Normal families, they can talk to their Mum!" Foster care placements are, in the majority of cases, founded on the setting aside of parent-child relationships at least in terms of daily living, but may also extend to the regulation of contact (Sinclair 2005) to a degree experienced by children and young people as threatening those ties which, in many other circumstances, are given very high normative value indeed. When taken, these are measures which further already difficult separations. For Lucas and others, attachment to parents goes to the heart of what foster care

means. For several in my sample it was the crucial test of sincerity and well-meaning the institution of foster care had to meet. From this small-scale study, an indicative conclusion is that provision which places a value on those attachments corresponding closely to the person in foster care's own is likely to be more successful, but seemingly high-handed placing of obstacles in the way of their preservation can undermine foster care which is of good quality and is otherwise acceptable to the young people.

Chapter 5: Settling in to care

In this chapter my aim is to explore how children and young people in foster care talked about entering care for the first time, but also moving placements where this was required. The significance of entering foster care for the first time has been much discussed in the relevant literature (Sinclair 2005; Pithouse and Rees 2015). In addition, the difficult experience of moving placements has also been discussed (Steinhauer 1991: xii; Harwin *et al.* 2001). Whilst entering foster care for the first time has been described as a very difficult and anxiety provoking experience for children, transitions between placements can also be 'fraught' (Sinclair 2005:60) with difficulty and dangers (O'Neill *et al.* 2012; Stott and Gustavsson 2009). The insights that I provide in this chapter both resonate with the extant literature but also make a modest contribution to extending our understanding of how children settle into care or cope with transition through the presentation of new empirical material and the connections I make between separation and attachment, identity formation and the language of children and young people in foster care.

The basics of attachment theory have already been used to examine attachments to birth parents in some cases of children and young people in foster care. The 'emotional presence of the birth family, even after years of separation' (Holland and Crowley 2013: 60) was confirmed in several of those cases. In this chapter attachment theory is used to help interpret some of the further effects of separation and loss. Whatever their experiences in early childhood, children and young people become temporarily separated from or endure permanent loss of their parents (Bowlby Vol. 2 1998) when they enter foster care.

The words 'separation' and 'loss' imply, as Bowlby points out, that 'the subject's attachment figure is inaccessible' (Bowlby Vol. 2 1998: 42) and that does not necessarily mean physical inaccessibility but can also involve being 'emotionally absent' (Bowlby Vol. 2 1998: 43). For the purposes of this chapter, however, attention is given only to the physical inaccessibility created by being cared for away from the birth family. Given the limits of this study, focussing on the experience of foster care rather than on birth

family relationships, it is only possible to assume that emotional accessibility and its opposite may be among the factors implicated in differences between individual interviewees' responses.

Separation from or loss of birth parents has been causally related (Personen *et al.* 2008) to a range of physical and emotional symptoms in childhood and adulthood and these symptoms can include separation anxiety, the feelings of concern and alarm elicited when there is real or threatened absence from an attachment figure (Cooklin *et al.*2014). A number of my interviewees expressed concern and alarm in connection with separation from their parents. However, separation anxiety is 'well established' as a part of all close personal relationships (Cooklin *et al.*2014) and although it is thought to be the most common source of psychological ill-health during childhood (Costello *et al.* 2011) it is not, therefore, always seriously damaging. There is, in fact, a range of possible applications of the term.

It will be convenient to make a further distinction between separation anxiety and 'trauma' as categories of analysis. Though there are wide definitions of trauma including any threats to personal integrity (Cairns and Fursland 2007) and therefore, by implication, separation anxiety can be considered traumatic. In this study, however, 'trauma' will refer only to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

There was one interviewee, Leo, who stated he experienced symptoms of PTSD, defined here as, 'events ... involving actual or perceived harm or threat to the life or physical integrity of the child or of another individual (Briggs-Gowan *et al.* 2010). The core symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks (Ehlers *et al.* 2004) and it is not necessarily associated with separation at all. Since only Leo introduced himself as a victim of violence and gave vivid accounts of flashbacks, it will be convenient to make a distinction between the types of harm.

It is against this background of concern, alarm, anxiety and sometimes ill-health that the experiences of my interviewees will be explored. Without losing sight of 'the crucial matter of resilience in childhood and its connections to social and psychological wellbeing' (Pithouse and Rees 2015: 17), the chapter seeks

to build on the warning that, '[C]hildren's sensitivity to the symbols, actions and expressions of adults, siblings and peers should not be underestimated. Children only too easily get the wrong messages' (Bullock *et al.* 1998: 96). The chapter explores the symbols, actions and expressions of foster care as they were perceived by the children and young people in foster care who participated in the study.

With the exception of Libby, who had only one placement, all my interviewees had experienced transitions between placements and it was an experience a number of them chose to tell me about, often in some detail. A minority of the sample had planned introductions (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 3.5) to new placements and these will be detailed first. They will be followed by examination of the concerns during the early days of a new placement that were most frequently aired in interviews: their experiences of first arriving at a new placement (Mitchell *et al.* 2009); the task of seeking acceptance (Sinclair 2005:50); steps in getting to know carers and their wider families and the part played by household pets and animals (Mitchell *et al.*2009). Finally the chapter will turn to the positive and negative roles of foster siblings, looking at how they were understood by the young people in care (Berridge and Cleaver 1987; Quinton *et al.* 1998).

Institutional engagement for many people in foster care began with Local Authority interventions aimed at supporting the family in order to avoid having to take the young people into care. That experience lies outside the scope of this study of long-term foster care and will be available for discussion, if at all, only as and when it was touched on by a participant. The starting point for this chapter is entry into foster care because that was often described.

The people in foster care whose experiences will be drawn on had for the most part been involved in several, in some cases many, new starts in different placements and for three there was also the experience of going from foster care into adoption and then back into foster care again. The picture that results will be complicated, and probably made even more difficult to assimilate, in that, because the interviewees were all drawn from a single social work department, social workers' and foster carers'

names crop up in relation to more than one child or young person in foster care. To simplify the reader's task some of the basic adoption and foster carer information is gathered together in Appendix 5 where an attempt has been made to represent the foster care-adoption-foster care sequences in the relevant cases.

Introductions to placements

Arrival at a placement is usually, not always, a result of social worker interventions over a period and good practice for managing these transitions requires that:

> ….arrangements should be made for at least one introductory visit to the [first or transitional] foster home by the child and parent prior to the start of the placement. Where time permits further visits lengthening in time should be made to allow carers and child to familiarise themselves and facilitate parental involvement. The child will feel most comfortable in a placement when they feel that the parent has given them permission to be there.

> (Northern County Council 2003:8).

This seems entirely appropriate. Where a child or young person is first taken into care under a care order parents share responsibility for deciding who looks after them, where they live and how they are educated (Gov.uk 2015). It is a preliminary measure to be followed up with individualised care in the foster placement but the accounts of the interviewees who talked about introductory meetings seem to suggest that it was a limited means of helping them to settle in.

One of my interviewees, Leona, reported what may have been an introduction to her first placement. Leona remembered her Mum, "came with me in the taxi to Cissie and Charlie's house 'cause

she wanted to see what this girl was like"[25]. In this single case, parental permission was reported and does appear to have been valued by the child or young person entering foster care. The placement lasted two years and when it ended, for reasons that were never made clear, Leona moved to another placement which she saw as a stable, long-term solution to her situation. The lasting effect of the parental support for initial placement is impossible to determine but there is plenty of research evidence suggesting that it may have helped. Wilson *et al.'s* wide ranging review observed:

> [P]urposeful, committed social work … promotes good contact between the birth parents, foster carers and the child, supports the foster carers and the birth parents and coordinates a multiagency approach to treatment of the child and parents before, during and after placement.
>
> (Wilson *et al.* 2005:23).

Leona aside, however, none of the other interviewees described formal introductions on first placement. Though the circumstances that led to removal from home were not always described, and were never described in great detail, whenever an account was given it was nearly always of an emergency measure. Part of the abuse in Lilian's family had come to light, posing a continuing threat to her and the other siblings. Abuse of the Lawson sisters was discovered when Lydia was hospitalised. Lucy lost the last vestiges of family care when her grandmother became ill. The Lambert brothers were causing such concern to neighbours that even an extended family composed of people who were "lethal weapons" was not enough to put neighbours off contacting social services. Leo was being violently attacked. In such circumstances the siblings in the study may have brought with them a range of emotions related to the trauma and loss they had experienced (Cameron and Maginn 2008). Yet the crisis that led up to separation in each case might have provided little scope for preliminary meetings. In most of the situations I learned

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[25] The account is ambiguous and it might be that the meeting between her mother and new foster parents took place as Leona moved in to the placement.

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about, the shock of separation was often compounded by the unprepared encounter with strangers who, themselves, had little time to make ready.

Lilian, the three Lambert brothers and Leo were all introduced to one or more carer as a prelude to placement changes and it is from that 'career' stage that I now explore aspects of the preparatory work put in to matching children and carers.

At the start of Lilian's fostering 'journey' she was removed from home and placed with her sister Luciana in the home of Carina Carter. The next two placements were with Connie and Cliff Mason and later with Catherine Cannon. Lilian's social workers appear to have carried out the minimal requirements of good practice – a single introductory meeting with Connie and, when that placement was terminated, the same with Catherine. Lilian met Connie before the move "and she was great. I thought I love this I'm really going to bond with her" yet, for reasons that will be described when I consider the different experiences of first days in placement, her enthusiasm was replaced by anxiety immediately she arrived at the placement. The value of this introduction appears to have provided a useful temporary boost to her morale while she dealt with separation from Luciana, but no more.

Her preliminary meeting with Catherine also supported her, for a little longer in that case. "I met her first and we just bonded straight away. That was it. It just felt like I'd known her for ages." Her social worker was with her for that meeting and "we went away and Shelby [social worker] said 'What do you think?' I said 'It's great. Get me moving in there very soon.' And I moved in like a couple of days later." This glowing account was given to me some weeks after the move to Catherine's and at that time things were still, apparently, going well but Lilian's optimism was short lived in that case too. It buoyed her up but as was the case with Connie and Cliff, the third placement, too, became characterised by conflicts and ended in bitter recriminations.

The Lambert brothers probably had ad hoc introductions to two of their first three placements. The account Lawrence gave of his move to a first placement had a feeling of improvisation about it. The brothers travelled from home to grandmother to collect bags of toys before being taken on to the new carers. Together with Lucas's comment that neighbours called in the social workers, the accounts appear to be of a hastily organised emergency placement (Rowe *et al.* 1989). Transition to the second placement was relatively smooth because the new carers, Emily and Steven, had been providing them with respite care for a considerable time. All parties knew each other well, there was mutual liking (Boddy 2013) and there was no need for introductory procedures. The third placement was short term and seems to have been unhappy for all concerned. The fourth placement, however, was arranged by a private sector fostering agency, Fosterwell Group, and there is evidence of more substantial arrangements for introducing the brothers to potential new carers. Lucas talked of attending a party and Lee referred to, "Fosterwell Group things" they attended yet although Lee remembered, "me and Chad used to speak to each other [at the parties]" and Lucas too, remembered seeing Chad and Cathy at an event, the connections formed at the party 'things' were limited:

> I probably knew summat. I didn't know them that much. I knew Chad ….but I don't
>
> think I saw Cat. I … or I saw Chad before at Fosterwell Group but when I came here
>
> I forgot.

The disorganisation of Lee's account makes it difficult to be clear what his experience was but it looks as if it involved relational uncertainty and confusion notwithstanding the preliminary contacts. Nor did Lucas make much of the 'party-things'. He recognised Chad and Cathy when he arrived at the placement but for him, the thing that helped was the chance to talk to Caitlin "because we were talking to her in the car" during a journey of around 50 miles. Even when considerable efforts were made, then, they seemed to be little more than a chance to screen out the poorest of matches. It was only when people in

foster care and carers began to live together that the strengths or weaknesses that were inherent in the match started to be discovered (Thomas 2001; Pithouse and Rees 2015).

Moving in

> Neither does finding a child a "nice and kind" residential, foster or adoptive home automatically resolve some of the fears and anxieties. A child's world can still be populated with apprehensions. To a child, what has happened before can also happen again. Each child of course, experiences their situation differently, but separation anxiety, sadness, guilt, fear or mistrust can impair their capacity to relate or attach to the foster family.
>
> (Triseliotis, Sellick and Short:1995:117)

Whether going into care for the first time or entering the latest of a series of placements, the initial period in a new placement is a time of anxiety for people in foster care and although some of my interviewees represented themselves as seasoned campaigners in the care system, familiarity did not always make new arrival easier to handle. Leo did not sleep the first night at his twenty-fourth placement [26]. That he had to give up his bed to his brother because Luke had been sick on his own bed only underscored the predictable distress of the experience. Luke was, "usually sick when he moves." To put this in perspective, the degree of placement instability Leo and Luke had known was at the upper end among this group of people in foster care so it is not being suggested that his account is typical but nor is it unique. Looking at a photograph of herself on the day she moved from foster care into her adoptive family Lanie recalled being sick that day. All those who described entering a new placement looked back on the experience as very difficult. The word most often used was 'hard' as in, "it's hard when you've just started"

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[26] By his count.

and what Leo's comment underlines is that people in foster care are not de-sensitised to the intense anxieties by repeat moves, a consistent theme in the messages from children and young people in foster care.

The evidence that will be considered here supports the view of Triseliotis *et al.* (1995) above that the usual efforts of social service departments to find appropriate foster homes cannot automatically resolve all the concerns the child or young person in foster care brings with them. It appears from the experiences drawn upon here that arriving in a new foster placement aggravates anxieties temporarily or, in some circumstances, more lastingly. However, Lilian's quest to, "Feel part of the family instead of just shutting us out" or, as Lia put it, to find a, "Proper home, settled in" are not impossible dreams and some interviewees (over relatively long periods) clearly felt themselves wanted in foster care. These feelings, their origins and supports will be considered next before turning attention to the many factors that made stable, long-term placements very much a minority experience among my participants.

First days in placement – separation and attachment

Lawrence Lambert remembered the very first moments and days in care as being:

> … very scary because I was living with another family and even if they were going to
>
> look after me I really was really nervous and strange…

This straightforward recollection draws into association some of the basic features of interest to attachment theory. The frightening effect of a combination of strangeness, strangers and fear is a prominent motif in Bowlby's writing.

He discusses the fear of strangers in infants at length, referring to extensive literature and research devoted to the conjunction of factors. The evidence explored in that literature is complex but the phenomenon seems to be most commonly present between 2 and 4 years when:

> [T]he more strange the surroundings and the people…the more frightened a child
>
> is likely to be and the greater will be his disturbance, both during and after the
>
> separation.
>
> (Bowlby 1998:35).

This tendency diminishes at about 5 years of age and Bowlby relates the shift away from fearful reaction to children's developing capacity for judging how present experiences are likely to affect the future (Bowlby 1998: 140-142). Resurgence of such a reaction among much older children and young people as they enter new foster placements is, therefore, possibly 'the return to juvenile behaviour by an adult when adult behaviour is thwarted,...by conflict or in some other way' (Bowlby Vol.1 1998: 102).

Interplay between fear and reflection can also be glimpsed in Lucas's generalising reminiscence:

> You want to stay in your bedroom you don't really want like to go outside with the
>
> other people. You like, 'No. Don't want to go.' And you'll be, you're bit scared but
>
> you'll think about it.

By leave of Bowlby, Lucas's retreat into privacy would seem to enable assessment of the threat and/or opportunity the situation represented, an exercise in the management of separation anxiety, but obviously full appraisal by the child or young person in foster care will not often, if ever, be quickly achieved and this situation is particularly demanding. It involves fear of being abandoned, of not being taken up by anyone. If they don't take us, who will? The tension of hiding in his room (Pithouse and Rees 2015) came not just from fear but also from the intense need of a felt sense of security that the circumstances imposed; the enormous difficulty of deciding if the inaccessibility of his birth parents, especially his mother, was a temporary separation, as he wished, or a permanent loss (Bowlby 1998).

This can also be seen from Lilian's similar but more concrete narrative. As she unpacked alone in the new bedroom of her second placement, no longer with the company and support of her sister Luciana, she was, "[D]reading going downstairs. Obviously I didn't know them as much and I didn't feel like I was at home." She eventually took the plunge and, "everything I done I was asking her like can I get a drink? Can I biscuit? Stuff like that I would ask Connie…"

It is often suggested in the literature on foster care that children and young people in foster care can be difficult or challenging for carers (eg Sinclair 2005; Quinton *et al.*1998; Walker *et al.* 2002) because they have been subject to prior trauma (Cairns and Fursland 2007:11) which necessitated their removal from home. It is impossible for me to demonstrate by data alone if the experiences of Leo, Lawrence, Lucas and Lilian were somehow related to the effects of trauma but, recalling that separation anxiety is part of all close personal relationships (Cooklin *et al.* 2014), it was a fear that many young people might experience in such a situation. Lilian did not know what the expectations were and was afraid of doing the wrong thing. Lydia also remembered being unable to predict "what they going to do. What they going to say." The two, very different people in foster care (Lilian was as bold and assertive as Lydia was mild and reliant) were both made deeply uneasy by their awareness that there was much they did not know about the ways, manners and expectation of their new placements, Such transitions are 'characterised by the need for the child to cope with a plethora of new and strange things in a very short period of time'(Reimer 2010:14). With experience we may learn to deal with being 'a stranger in a strange land' (Exodus 2:22) but it takes time. The entry into new placements is always a time of deep uncertainty about how to go on (Reimer 2010; Sinclair 2005; Schofield 2002) and needs much thought as to how its impact can be minimised.

At the same time, the effects of early abuse and neglect are important and difficulties encountered by carers in managing the behaviour of people in foster care together with the poor outcomes of care for some are obviously connected to those experiences. The position below, from Wilson *et al.*'s review of research clearly sets out the parameters of that position:

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...reasons for entry suggest that children entering the care system are likely to have severe difficulties. This prediction is born out. Usually they come from families with parents showing diverse psychopathology and multiple problems in parenting. They have usually had numerous changes of domicile or family before entering the care system. They are much more likely than the general population to have been maltreated.

(Wilson *et al.*2005:13).

Given these backgrounds it might be expected that the beginning of a placement meant the end of abuse and/or neglect and that as a result there was a sense of relief to be enjoyed. In fact, a number of interviewees pointed to substantial improvements in their situation as a result of removal from home. Lydia, directly mentioned relief from previous abuse as something she valued when she came into care. Asked what she could remember about her first carers she said they "thought about your health and safety" and added as an explanation, *"She didn't go and get smacked around or anything."* Lee found the better food a relief and liked having someone trustworthy to listen to him:

...you can tell them if something went bad and if it's serious they'll tell other peop[le]... not like their friends or anything they'll tell social services or some from Fostering Solution and they well then we'll get sorted out for you so you won't have to worry about anything else.

Individual characteristics or circumstances probably help explain why others did not voice similar thoughts when giving accounts of their experiences of entering care. Leo was unable to remember the early days of care at all. His recollections of abuse may have been reconstructed or have been remembered when, as a teenager, his flashbacks began (see also Saul *et al.* 2008). The sources of his memories of abuse were never identified during the interviews. The intervention of a failed adoption meant that Lucy talked

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mainly about re-entry to foster care. Enduring attachments to birth parents discussed in the previous chapter might also have played a part in obscuring some of the immediate benefits of being looked after and the best example of this in my sample is that of Lilian who did not know why she had been removed into care until sometime after the event and at first had refused to accept that it had been necessary for her or her siblings.

Reception, vulnerability and uncertainty

Moving on to the early period of care after the move has been accomplished, Lee told me that carers were, "very kind to you" at first but, "when you start living there they not that kind to you...You realise it to get much strict on you. But if you behave how they want you to behave they'll be nicer with you." This contains several points of interest. Lee's carers recognised the difficulties he faced at first and responded with kindness. However, their attitudes then became less flexible, presumably in response to behaviours they found difficult to handle or accept (see Rock *et al.* 2013). Eventually he appears to have discovered that conformity to the carers' expectations would lead to recovery of some of the kindness that had been withdrawn[27].

Negotiation of what is acceptable behaviour can, then, become established quite early on. This is an intentionally noticeable form of interaction. The carers change in order to change the behaviour of their foster children (Morgan 1996, 2011). Perhaps any relationships can be manipulative in this sense without being oppressive and it is not suggested that either Lee's carers or Lee were behaving badly but in Lee's formulation, "very kind to you...but not that kind to you" there is a suggestion that the carers lost some credibility with him through the variability of their kindness. The encounter between strangers in a new foster placement will often lead to negotiations of this sort, and it is therefore highly relevant to the business of settling in, or not settling in. A consistent message from the children and young people was

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[27] There is a little independent evidence from one of his older brother's interviews that Lee acted on his insight. "Caitlin's always pestering us If you can't tidy your room that means we're struggling , we might you might not be able to stay here. Then Lee goes 'Oh I'm smarty I'll do everything right'."

that where carers demonstrated clearly and repeatedly acceptance to the child or young person in their care advantages accrued to both carers and the children and young people in foster care. Withdrawal of approval (Shaffer 2009; Cameron and Maginn 2008) in an environment which is 'not safe' for carers (Cairns and Fursland 2007: 37) is likely to be a risky strategy for placement stability.

What factors lessened or increased the effects of uncertainty in the early days of a placement? In a minority of cases the child or young person in foster care's own physical condition played a part in making things more difficult. Lydia had migraines that made coming into care for the first time "dead hard." She was enuretic, too, and eventually she encountered a placement where this was particularly resented (see Buehler *et al.* 2003). She was, at that time, still placed apart from her sister and, isolated with her carers, she tried to deal with their complaints by telling what she called lies. "Think I was telling lies at the time... Telling lies. Yeah yeah, sometimes wet the bed without knowing. I used to. Then they'd blame it on me but I didn't know." Her speech difficulties almost certainly played a part, too, though she did not refer to them specifically at that point in the interview. In the event, that placement quickly failed.

Lamar, too, "couldn't speak properly" when he first came to what was to be his successful long term placement, but for him, "Luis me brother ...he used like translates us." While the value of support from a sibling has already been discussed, the contrast between these two cases obviously has a bearing on that discussion. Unlike Lamar and Luis, Lydia and Lia were kept separate because there were fears about the relationship between them. Ultimately, though, they went on to share a placement for many years without cause for concern. Hindsight and research (Berridge and Cleaver 1987; Mullender 1999; Hegar 2005) suggest that it could have gone far easier for Lydia in the early days of foster care if they had never been separated at all.

Personality-based factors persisted across a series of placements. Lee described himself as "very shy" in the first few days of care and shyness was a problem for him still, six years later when he and his brothers began first to be fostered by Callum and Caitlin. For Lilian the problems were not shyness but

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quarrelsomeness. The effect of conflict in placement has been well documented (Mariscal *et al.* 2015). In this study the quarrels between Lilian and her sister Luciana have already been described in detail. She also became enmeshed in distressing conflicts with Connie, Cliff and their children in the second placement and she quarrelled with her third carer, Catherine[28].

Alongside troublesome emotions were troublesome thoughts, so troublesome to Lee that he had decided, "Just don't think about it really because it'll make you more upset and more scared." For others it was not always possible to control their thoughts. Lucy found it hard to, "keep in mind that I wasn't like going home." Lilian still held out the hope that she would eventually go back to her mother but the thought that foster care was going to be "for ages" really upset her.

In summary, children and young people in foster care entering a new placement were more or less vulnerable and most of the sources of their vulnerability were personal to them: physical, cognitive, social and/or emotional. These vulnerabilities have direct bearing on self-understanding (Kitzinger 1995; Chambers *et al.* 2008) including effects on maturity levels, independence, and value system (Mariscal *et al.* 2015)

How foster carers helped

The social context within which people in foster care have to work at these problems has already been described to some extent but it has so far appeared as a particular circumstance of the child or young person in foster care. It is, of course, also a circumstance of the carers and their families and understanding of how social construction of placements (see Daniel 2011) works will be increased by documenting carers'

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[28] Interestingly her accounts of quarrelling with Luciana and Catherine both involved making a distinction about the roles of Mothers and Daughter. She felt she could not be normal with Luciana or her brother Lionel because, "I wouldn't be just like a big sister I'd feel like their Mum" and she described the early difficulties with Catherine as, "I moved in and two week after we was arguing [?] and stuff. Arguing and I was saying to my boyfriend I was saying I'm never going to find anybody like I [?] with that I'm going to be a part of the family. Because I don't feel like I will because me and Catherine are more like sisters. We argue loads not like mother and daughter. "

responses to the newcomer. From the unstructured child centred interviews, it will not be possible to map out authentically how the caring families reacted because what was provided were one-sided perspectives without much contextualising explanation. Lilian was an exception in this respect and the information she provides about her reception in two placements will be helpful. Lilian was introduced to Connie two weeks before starting the placement , "and she was great. I thought I love this. I'm really going to bond with her" but the enthusiasm that followed the introduction immediately disappeared to be replaced by Lilian's uncertainty on the first day in placement.

Comparing Connie's manner with her next carer, Catherine, Lilian told me:

> It was always sharp and strict with Connie it was never a Lil sweetheart can you come and do this, can you do that it's but it is with Catherine. It was just like Lilian with Connie, just proper shout at us but I know when Catherine is in a mood with us she'll like Lily. But it's never Lilian or owt 'cause I don't go by that name any more it's either Lil when I've done something right or Lily if I've done something wrong.

So when Lilian began asking Connie for biscuits, Connie's response as Lilian recounted was simultaneously inclusive and correcting, "'you know Lilian you don't have to ask us'" and that unintended ambivalence may have undermined its intention. Lilian not only learned something of how she was to go on in future but also that Connie had noticed her lack of social ease, was concerned about it and saw the solution as a change in Lilian's behaviour. The fact that, so much later, she remembered Connie's reaction suggests that she worried at the time they had not got off to the best of starts.

Finch (2008: 714) observes:

> ...[F]amily relationships have to be 'displayed' as well as done. They need to be seen, experienced and understood by relevant others as 'family-like' relationships. Display is the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute 'doing family things' and thereby confirm that these relationships are 'family' relationships.

By using her modified or unmodified name and by modulating tone of voice (Gray *et al.* 2011) it seems that Lilian's carers were able to display subtle distinctions surrounding foster placement relationships. Though I should reiterate that the eventual outcome of Lilian's placement with Catherine confirms they are not any guarantee of permanency, tone of voice and naming strategies seem to be more effective ways to communicate regard, both positive and negative, than verbal instruction.

The list of desirable characteristics can be supplemented by the evidence supplied by an interviewee whose interviews have not previously been mentioned and who was the only participant in the study who was not a White UK citizen (Owen and Statham 2009). Laaiq Libena entered the UK illegally having first crossed Northern Africa and Western Europe alone as a young teenager (Groark *et al.* 2011). When he was eventually taken into UK Local Authority care he was fostered with Constance and Corbyn who also looked after Leo. The cultural differences between Laaiq and the other interviewees impede some simple juxtapositioning of his experiences of care with theirs. However, since the focus here is upon the way carers are seen to react to a new arrival it seems reasonable to suggest that, culturally conditioned though his perceptions of the carers were, to the extent that he is reporting their behaviour as well as interpreting it his insight will warrant attention.

Laaiq's recollections add 'smiling' to the list of useful communication skills by carers (see also Mandell 2008). Having entered the country illegally, he was held in a police cell until Corbyn and Constance came to collect him. He could not speak any English, they spoke no Tigre and so they managed with sign

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language. Laaiq had been deeply affected by his extraordinary experiences and with such limited communication possible his situation was potentially far more difficult than that of Lilian. However, he remembered thinking they were a "happy family when I meet them first" and that was because, "they were happy family with the smile face and I said oh they look happy and they're good family." This individual reaction, to imagine that happiness and family 'health' can be identified from smiles, may be thought naïve. However, the naivety is apparently common to youngsters in difficult circumstances. Butler and Williamson's study for the NSPCC of children who were worried and suffering harm indicated that "…[S]omeone who smiled a lot, had a sense of humour…." was more likely to be given trust by the children and young people (Butler and Williamson 1994: 33). It very much appears then that it is not so much what carers say that puts a new child or young person in foster care at ease, it is the way that they say it.

Appropriate and timely action can also convey strongly supportive messages. Lilian spoke, more than once, about her wish to find a family. Not feeling part of Connie's family, for example, was the main reason she gave for her unhappiness there. Whether by luck or judgement, then, Catherine Cannon's decision very early on in Lilian's third placement to take Lilian with her on a visit to friends in Ireland was exactly what Lilian wanted. "I felt like I was part of the family 'cause I was going away and that with them."

Carers' wider families

On my visits to carry out the interviews I encountered relatives and family friends that typically populate the placement experience (see Biehal *et al.* 2010; Christiansen *et al.* 2013; Boddy 2013; Howe *et al.* 1999; Farmer 2010), I also met people in foster care on respite visits or in temporary placements but all lay beyond the scope of the informed consent I obtained at each placement so I made no attempt to talk to them beyond the usual introductions. The last two categories were only rarely, and then briefly, mentioned in interviews but the wider families of foster carers drew a little more extended discussion that, despite the brevity of the material, helps to tease out further some of the complexity of attachment formation in placements.

In one case, that of the Lambert brothers carers' parents, Callum's lived at a considerable distance from the placement and made a single, memorable visit over a Christmas period when the placement was new. Caitlin's parents lived in the same town, were regular visitors and so had more interaction with the child or young person in foster care. The contrasts in the relationships obviously reflected frequency of contacts but other factors were also significant.

Callum's mother was invisible in the accounts given but Lawrence and Lucas both enjoyed the unruly behaviour of his father. The family likeness between Callum's swearing and that of his father has already been mentioned. This 'roughness' of manner meant that he could be quickly included in teasing. The father slept late on Christmas Day and delayed the opening of presents so, "we kept on shouting him and shouting at him and I [Lawrence] just went, 'Bah humbug' and he finally got out of bed when all the Christmas presents were nearly gone."

I learned nothing about Caitlin's father but her mother, Norma, came into the room where Lawrence and I were recording his second interview and introduced herself as:

GM: I'm Grandma,

I: Scuse me a minute. Hullo Grandma.

GM: so Lawrence's acquired a grandma. He's been such a good boy. He does
some work for me on a Saturday.

Awareness of separation is an essential context within which Norma's comment must be considered. Labelling Lawrence as a 'good boy' might indicate that her intention is to reassure Lawrence about the security of his place in the family. However, Lawrence had other grandmas. He had visited his "Nan's" to collect his bags of toy cars on the day when he was on his way into care for the first time. Later in the

second interview he referred to, "lots more like aunties and grandmas" but it was probably the same 'Nan' that he was referring to when, describing a Christmas visit, he recalled:

> …then we went to the family centre…where Nan and Grandad couldn't because our Nan's really ill…and she can't really move she's got tubes…in her nose…she's in a wheel chair and last time I saw my Nan she had well not grey hair…she had dark hair…but that was like six years ago no not six like three.

It appears from this that he is using 'grandma' and 'grandmas' as a common noun and 'Nan' as a proper noun. In fact, when asked if he considered her a grandma he commented that, "I don't call her Grandma I call her Louise." Though the question was leading there is corroboration in that he had called her by that name before her intervention and when returning to her part in his life during the third interview he again referred to her as Louise.

There have already been many examples of names and titles (see also Finch 2008) being used by people in foster care to represent gradations of relatedness with the various people in their lives, and this is another. Here it seems that continuing awareness of primary attachments affect the way a child or young person in foster care responds to the offer of a new attachment. So while Callum's father inadvertently achieved acceptance at the level of teasing play, Lawrence tolerated Norma's considered approach but did not fully accept it.

Catherine Cannon, who was Lilian's third carer, also had parents and other family members living close at hand. It will be recalled that Lilian like other children in foster care had a desire to feel "part of a family" (see Biehal et al. 2010; Christiansen et al. 2013) and at the beginning of her first interview and, consistent with that desire she stated:

> L: I moved in Halloween and met all the family. That was a good opportunity to meet all the family because we had a Halloween party.

I: So what family have you got round here?

L: I got um the twins, Catherine's sister […] if you were going to the shop that way, that's […] that's one of the twins. And then I've got Carolyn that lives as if you were going out of Moor End. And then I've got […] that lives on Cass Drive near the park down there and then I've got […] and […] that lives up Green Lonning.

Lilian did not display the reluctance Lawrence exhibited in using foster family names for Catherine's parents but then she elaborated:

I go to Carolyn's 'cause I'm like kind of closest to her out of them all apart from Catherine. And then I'll go round to hers have a chat with her go and see so she can see Noel [Lilian's baby] and then I see Suzanne sometimes if she comes round for her eggs and that's about it really don't hardly.

This comment suggests that the relationship to these new foster relatives was of some significance to her. If new attachments between people in foster care and foster carers can be difficult, those with members of the wider family look all the more tenuous. Certainly, in both the placements discussed here the tensions that developed led, within a year, to placement breakdown and attachments to the wider family did nothing to prevent that.

Household pets and animals

Features of the fostering environment that always seemed to be helpful were pets and animals (Burgon 2014). We shall see, later, that boys and girls tended to bond differently with carers but there appeared to be no gender differences in the responses to pets and animals. Asked what life was like in the placement, Leona told me that, "I can get on well with the dogs as well [as my foster siblings]." Lamar remembered "first time I came here. Erm that's a hard un. Oh we used to have a dog Samson" and Lucy

remembered a "massive field at the back of the house and she had like chickens and stuff and it was really funny watch her trying to catch the chickens and putting them in a hut." In addition to the right caring demeanour, then, Interesting diversions and activities were helpful. They took the pressure off the one-to-one relationship with the carer, and allowed the child or young person in foster care to focus on something that wasn't judging them, and just get on with being a kid. Pets are especially good for giving them a response without judgement. The early days of a placement are usually (in)tense with anxiety on all sides about getting the relationship off to a good start, coupled with the carer's possible concerns about the child being 'difficult', so either giving the child nice things to do with little supervision or doing things like feeding the chickens or walking the dogs with the child or young person in foster care helped a lot. It reduced self-consciousness whereas having little or nothing to contribute to the placement increased it.

Foster 'siblings'?

In the relatively limited research into sibling relationships, rivalry (Forbes 2005; Volling *et al.* 2002), support (Voorpostel *et al.* 2007; Todd *et al.* 2013) or a mixture of both (Branje, *et al.* 2004) has been noted. The forms taken by relationships between the birth children of foster carers and the children or young people who are introduced into their homes for foster care are further complicated. While in some cases a form of 'surrogate sibling' relationship (Pithouse and Rees 2015: 173) may arise it is one in which the 'backstage' (Punch 2004, 2008) of family life associated with sibling relationships, the freedom to be 'who you want to be', can be lacking. Rees and Pithouse (2015) report that some of the birth children they interviewed were not able to relax fully when fostered children or young people were around. Thus, from the interviews carried out in my study it appeared that real benefits could come from having foster siblings but there was also more scope for conflict. Dealing with the positive side first, Leona was very involved with one of her foster sisters:

…there's like there's like lots of girls in the house like I get on well with them and there's one girl that I really get on with and that's Charlene's real daughter. She'll she's called Cilla and she's like she's like really nice….she talks to me like loads.

Here, in addition to the warmth of friendship there is a bridge to family membership, strengthening a sense of belonging. Leona preserves a distinction between herself and the 'real daughter' but at twelve years old and having been at the placement for three years, she felt able to predict quite confidently that she would be staying in the placement until she was 18.

Unfortunately, promising new relationships with foster siblings did not always prove enduring. Schofield (2002) describes the taking on of family culture that occurs in development of a secure base and the Lambert brothers were evidently free to play[29] and explore in the Calloway placement, which Beek and Schofield (2004) relate to the receding of anxiety. Lee spent most of his leisure time with his foster brother Chad, kicking a ball around, taking the family dog for a walk or going to the shops with other friends. The opportunity to play football with Chad was an important way to combat his shyness when he first moved in. The significance of football for male bonding and notions of masculinity is widely reported (See, for example, Bairner 2014 and Woods 2009).

All the brothers talked frequently about Chad's friendliness. Lawrence named one of his favourite cars 'Chad' and described, "really friendly people especially Caitlin, Callum and Cat and Chad and they share stuff which um that we don't have and they share stuff of theirs." Lucas had had a Christmas gift from Chad of a toy gun to add to his collection and talked in high excitement about a video he had made of Lawrence and Chad sliding down the stairs on a big pillow. Yet even when integration seemed strong there

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[29] While there is much discussion of the importance of toys for children in general, the great difficulty in finding any literature on the importance of toys to children in foster care comes as something of a surprise.

remained potential for disruption of the placement if conflicts between the interests of the child or young person in foster care and birth children should emerge. Although there is a 'generally favourable picture' (Sinclair 2005:77) of relationships between birth and foster children, the age of the children, their characteristics and the reaction of the foster carers are important factors (Sinclair 2005). When problems arise they can be destabilising and may result in disruption of placements. In the Lambert case the placement was eventually terminated when Callum and Caitlin were persuaded that their own son was suffering unduly from the effects of their fostering.

Conflict with foster 'siblings'

Lucas might have anticipated that their carers would eventually place Chad's interests above his on the basis of past experience. In Chapter 4 pages 117-8 two incidents were described in which Lucas felt the then carers favoured their son Christopher over him and his brothers and Lucas had observed,

Lucas: But then again he is their son so.

I: That makes a difference you think?

Lucas: Mm.

I: Tell me why?

Lucas: Just his son it's like stick up for him.

While he resented the unfairness with which he and his brothers were treated he understood that their primary loyalty lay to their son and he approved of this as consonant with his own feelings towards his birth family. It will be helpful to examine how he could come to hold what is, at least in potential, an ambivalent position.

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He was applying a distinction made by other interviewees, differentiating between foster and "real" family members. Just as Leona referred to Charlene's "real daughter…called Cilla", Lucy talked about her carer, Christianna's "real daughters" and her own adopted Mother's "real kids." Lanie distinguished between her "real Mum and Dad" and her adopted parents. Lilian distinguished a respite carer's adopted son from her "real daughter called Kelly." At the very start of her first interview I asked Lilian to help me construct a family tree and she immediately asked me, "Do you mean like foster family or real family?" Even Lydia momentarily forgot herself and told how, "I said to Lia as well I said you're the only one I've got in the real family" before correcting herself quickly, adding, "apart from Carly's family."

These distinctions were not generally accompanied by expressions of annoyance, but they may have carried that implication in at least one other case. Lilian complained, "I remember thinking I didn't get much attention; everything was revolved around [my carers' son and daughter]."

Nutt (2006: 22) observes that:

> Foster care can be seen to be a contradictory activity in which separation of genetic
> kinship from mothering and being motherly inevitably gives rise to emotional and
> practical problems.

On the other hand, birth children of foster carers are often called upon to make very considerable sacrifices (Twigg and Swan 2007; Pithouse and Rees 2015) and can feel their parents focus more on children or young people fostered with their family (Hojer *et al.* 2013)

If Lucas is right the 'real/fostered-or-adopted' distinction can be attributed to carers as well. Lucas implies they act on the belief that their 'real kid' is entitled to protection over and above the protection given to people in foster care. Attributing the concept to carers seems a reasonable extension of its range of use given that the distinction between birth family members and other people is widely made (Goodsell *et al.* 2015). Thus, if the carers hold to such a view then, presumably, their 'real kid' does too. While carers

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act out their values in individually specific ways and this particular aspect of family life will create more difficulties in some settings than in others where it may be quite inconsequential, the implication is that people in foster care entering placements where there are children have to find ways of understanding the relationships that are initiated within a culturally important, pre-existent framework of privileged protection of carers' own children. This is, however, an area that clearly calls for much more investigation.

Conclusion

Planned introductions to first placements were not usually described at all and may not have taken place due to the crisis that preceded taking into care. In the one case where it was described it was apparently neutral or positive in its effect. Introductions to second or subsequent placements appear to have raised hopes in children and young people in foster care but in themselves, to have had little lasting effect.

A consistent message from the children and young people in foster care was that new arrival at second and subsequent placements was very difficult. Separation anxiety seems to have been a persistent problem for most of the children and young people interviewed. During the early days in first or subsequent placements children and young people in foster care described receiving support of various kinds. Warmth of voice and disposition, inclusion in meals and holidays and readiness to tolerate teasing were mentioned but without a consistent pattern emerging. However, the children and young people in foster care frequently referred to or enacted naming strategies that signalled warmth or coolness of relationships and there were also a number of them who valued the presence of animals in or around placements.

Finally, the frequently reported ambivalence of relationships between children and young people in foster care and the birth children of carers (Forbes 2005; Volling *et al*. 2002; Voorpostel *et al*. 2007; Todd *et al*. 2013; Branje, *et al*. 2004) resonates with the messages I received during interviews.

Chapter 6: Signs of care

Introduction

In Chapter 5 a picture began to emerge of some of the difficulties experienced by children and young people in foster care on first entry to care and when making a fresh start in a second or subsequent placement. This Chapter will aim to build on that, first by expanding the view to include the day-by-day basics of care, both good and bad, and second, by advancing my primary aim of understanding better what they take as signs or indications of being cared for (well) and the social relations that children and young people in foster care create for themselves while they are in care.

Aiming to understand better the cultures and social relations that children and young people in foster care create for themselves involves treating children and young people as having personal agency, defined as a level of self-direction, a capacity for bearing responsibility for decisions affecting their life course (Côté and Schwartz, 2002; Schwartz, Coté, and Arnett, 2005). Perhaps more than some other young people, children and young people in foster care have constraints placed upon their self-direction, but my data shows that they seek to act agentially while in care.

In this chapter the accounts and narratives of the young people I interviewed will be used to illustrate some of their experiences of everyday caring. Tangible sources of identity (Lee and Berrick 2014) such as accommodation, food, clothing and money, all of which generally provide access to membership of social groups (Côté, 1997; Côté and Levine, 2002) will be examined first in the specific social context of foster care. Then, building on previous chapters, further attention will be given to relationships with carers including, at this point, respite carers. Each social domain will be considered as a source of signs of care that my interviewees noticed, remembered and recounted. For the purposes of analysis the accounts of signs of care will be treated as elements of the 'learning process through which the continuous sense of self develops' (Archer 2005: 122) and, specifically, through which those children and young people in foster

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care sought to explain their situations and themselves. But first it is necessary to comment on the concept of 'identity'.

Identity

In this chapter, 'identity' will become a key concept and so some digression will be necessary to provide a definition of the term. In the late 1960's Erikson (1968) observed, 'The more one writes about … [identity], the more the word becomes a term for something as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive' (1968: 9). His psycho-analytical position included mistrust of social scientists who, he believed, made 'identity' and its related terms, 'fit whatever measurable item they are investigating' (Erikson 1968: 16). Thirty years later, Brubaker and Cooper (2000:1) postulated that 'the social sciences and humanities had been theoretically hampered by the word "identity"'. What concerned them was, in effect, much the same indeterminacy that Erikson had celebrated but for Brubaker and Cooper (2000:2) laxity in the concept's range of applications was self-defeating:

> Conceptualizing all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences
> of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-
> identifications in the idiom of 'identity'' saddles us with a blunt, flat,
> undifferentiated vocabulary.

They nevertheless acknowledged (2000) that, `'identity' is a key term in the vernacular idiom of contemporary politics. In fact, 'identity' has had continuing relevancy in the management of foster care (Hiles *et al.* 2014). Literature in the area continues to make nuanced but regular and substantial use of the concept (Pithouse and Rees 2015; Hiles *et al*. 2014; Schofield *et al*. 2011; Sinclair 2005; Kools 1997).

As a category of analysis the concept now has forms of definition and structure that can be drawn upon even if they do not answer criticisms of 'identitarian' claim-making' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 3). The word 'identity' can refer to the ways in which an individual defines her/himself (Schwartz 2006), and is

defined by others. Individuals do so not *de novo* but with existing socially-available materials – images, descriptions, roles, and role-models, so identities are always not merely individual but also social; identities are always in relation to others (Sayer 2011). Individuals embark on 'deliberative' (Archer 2005) quests for social identity to secure various sorts of positions (familial, institutional and voluntary) in conformity with individual constellations of ultimate concerns (Archer 2005), but their success in doing so always depends on how others regard them and relate to them. There are commonly tensions between how one wants to be, and how one is allowed to be by others; how they want to narrate their lives and whether others accept their accounts. So identity is often a matter of contestation (Sayer 2011), and as we shall see, this is particularly likely to be the case for children and young people in foster care.

Lee and Duer (2014) divide the sources of identity in two; the tangible and the intangible. Tangible sources of identity, including clothes, personal possessions and other 'socially visible' items (Lee and Duer 2014: 79) affect integration into social groups and institutions and have already been mentioned. Intangible sources have been yet more significant for my study. These are 'internal assets' and include, 'self-direction' mentioned above (Lee and Duer 2014: 79). Because such capabilities have a bearing on the transition to independence after foster care, consideration of identity is currently one of the 'key components' in planning for care leavers (Hiles *et al.* 2013: 2060).

Foster carers and signs of care

Because foster care is family-like or may even be designed to develop into a replacement family (Sinclair 2005), overlapping ideas about parenthood and parenting serve as a common point of reference between carers and people in foster care that is less developed or lacking altogether when people in foster care first find themselves assigned a social worker. Also, unlike social work, fostering is an around the clock activity that inevitably connects people in the immediate, practical events of daily life. While at times foster care can be relatively impersonal and formal, relationships between carers and cared for are, much more usually, spontaneous and personal, like the relationships in less institutionalised families. Yet it

cannot help but be thought-provoking for the child to acquire new sets of people who have, or have a share in responsibilities for caring for them (Williams 2004), perhaps several times over the course of a few years. Their care careers give people in foster care an unusual perspective on the care they receive. While children may often compare their own parents with their friends' parents, they rarely have the 'opportunity' of living with friends serially for months or years, and would probably not choose to do so for long, however delightful the prospect might sometimes seem. A capacity for making comparisons about the people who are looking after them from the different manners in which they give care is a thing that arises directly out of the exceptional circumstances of foster care.

The material basics of foster care are accommodation, food, clothing and a budget and these essentials will be discussed in turn, to be followed by examination of the emotional support foster carers provided.

Providing accommodation

The feelings of fear, hardship and strangeness that people in foster care experience when they first arrive at a new foster placement are already familiar (Triseliotis *et al*. 1995; Sinclair 2005) but it is worth looking briefly at Lucy's account of her first arrival at the house where she gave her interviews because it offers a tiny glimpse of how architecture and the way a house is being used in those first moments of encounter can add to anxieties. Lucy arrived, memorably, on Halloween:

> …and everyone was dressed up. I was like sitting in the hallway like this, 'Where do
>
> I go now?' 'cause it was a big house, I was just in the hallway with my suitcase. I did
>
> no' say a word I went, Christianna came up to us,'Hiya.' 'Hi.' That's she got a peep
>
> out of us and that was it.

Self-understanding can be informed by movement in and around the home (Christensen 2000). My two visits to that Victorian town house had shown me that though it was often easy to feel there was no-

one else in the house, at times it became very busy. It held two other foster children in addition to three generations of the foster family and there were other members of the family living close at hand. The preparations for Halloween would have been exciting, especially for the grandchildren. Like Lilian, Lucy could not feel sure how she was to behave in order to fit in and finding herself waiting in the long hall while everyone else was busy with preparations would increase those feelings of arrival on the doorstep of strangers.

There was, however, plenty of evidence that my participants sooner or later came to identify closely enough with their surroundings to feel, literally, at home. Leona talked of having, "people sleeping at our house". Lanie remembered how other children in the neighbourhood of one of her early placements, "used to come round to mine". Lawrence could talk of foster children having, "foster Mums and Dads to go to home to". Lucas described how, two weeks before the end of a placement, social workers, "came to my house" to see how he liked the new plan. Even when he described the time of conflict in the foster placement he most disliked, in fact, Lucas still referred to it as "home."

This resilience (see Pithouse and Rees 2015) suggests a capacity for making the best of foster care and getting on with life and perhaps where a relatively low number of placement moves are made that is the case. For example, Leona, who had had two foster placements, had transferred her feelings of belonging quite substantially from her mother to her foster carers. She obviously relished the considerable material and social advantages Charlene and Cameron's placement offered her, talking of holidays with friends of the family, their sauna, their garden hot tub and so on. At 12 years of age she intended to stay with them until she was 18. By comparison she talked of visits to her mother in a distanced way as, "Er we [Leona and her younger sister Lacey] go to her house and have dinner." It appeared that she saw her mother as often as she wished and, while it was difficult to be sure because of her reluctance to talk about this area of her life, was able to balance a daily life that revolved around her placement very comfortably with looser birth family ties. A mark of how completely she had assimilated their household into her self-

understanding came when I began a question with, "When you go home…." It was immediately countered with, "What do you mean 'go home?'"

At the other extreme, the disposition I encountered towards having had many homes involved confusion, lack of belonging and, in Lanie's case, indifference. She kept a tally of places she had lived. Some of these had been with a pair of carers who moved frequently and took her with them but nevertheless, the tally was, "It's like twenty four houses that I've lived in." (see also Unrau *et al.* 2011) So large a number of places meant they blurred together but in fact it was the transience of relationships associated with changing houses that was expressed. When she talked of, "living at that house…whosever house it was" it was her disinterest in the people that gives the statement its poignancy.

She was the only one of my interviewees who had been fostered since birth, albeit with a period of adoption, but Leo had entered foster care at 3. He, too, had the greatest difficulty remembering the places he had lived and the people he had lived with, even with the help of his Life Story Book (Cook-Cottone and Meredith 2007; Shotton 2013) open in front of him. He told the story of his care career before he too was adopted almost entirely by guess work and generalisations: "…have to lived in there"; "had sort of different foster carers"; "…loads of foster parents. …Can't even remember them." This was in sharp contrast with the physical environment of his birth parents' home which, either through long laid down memory or recent, vivid flashback (Ehlers *et al.*2004), he could describe in detail:

> …when I was about two I was in er our birth parents' house. Grey walls. Two floors.
>
> Sitting; living room. Had widow, red curtains. Just to the left of the window was
>
> corner where the TV sat. Other side of the room was a table, five chairs, pine sofa
>
> pointing towards the TV and two two bin bags in the corner…full of toys.

Another example of the complex links that can exist between accommodation and relationships was provided by Libby, who explained:

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> …me and my Mum had separate like different houses to move to each time, like we
>
> had several different houses to move into before we actually settled in one. It's like
>
> in between there. I didn't mind the moving because some of the houses I didn't like
>
> that we were staying.

What the contrast between Leona on the one hand and Lanie and Leo on the other suggests is that the physical location of care is of secondary importance. It can support self-understanding if it is linked to stable relationships while frequent change results in disorientation. Eventually, however adaptable the young people are and however readily they identify their present accommodation as home, the failure to form attachments and the substitution of a series of transient relationships produced, in some, indifference to surroundings that may be labelled 'mine' or 'our house' or 'home' as a kind of shorthand, but which come to have no enduring significance at all.

Food and mealtimes

From the pilot study on, it was always likely that social practices of giving and eating food were profoundly significant. As a result it was a theme that featured in the pre-planning of interviews and direct questions were sometimes put to children or young people in foster care. The area of social practices surrounding food sharing created a range of different meanings for my interviewees, as for us all. Shared meals were social encounters in which values and emotions played a part (Rees *et al*. 2012) so when the topic of food often came up in interviews it was typically in the process of describing feelings of belonging and the quality of the care received.

Food played an important part in integrating people in foster care with their new foster families during the early days of adoption or fostering. Lilian's awkwardness around Connie on that first day contrasted with her feeling of acceptance by Catherine and her family on an early trip to Ireland when she was made to feel part of the family by going out for meals with them. In Lilian's case those feelings were all too short lived but they can be much more enduring. Lucy looked back on first being adopted and

suggested that how she learned baking from her new adoptive mother might account for her choice of college course almost nine years later. By doing that she was not simply attesting to her adoptive mother's importance when the adoption was new. The connection she made between settling in to the new family through a comfortably diverting activity and much later going off to college was also a way of affirming the continuing importance of a relationship which was no longer as close but which she was extremely anxious to preserve.

Lanie demonstrated that even where relationships are strained a meal can re-integrate, helping to mark the return to a reasonably sustainable daily routine after a crisis by signifying the resumption of normal life. As Pithouse and Rees (2015: 126) observe:

> There is an emotional 'warmth' to food that can signify responsive parenting and reinforce a sense of care and belonging.

Having run away from a placement for three days, Lanie described a reception that mixed initial 'coolness' with the emotional warmth of a meal:

> … Connie [foster carer] was in so I got in went upstairs put my pyjamas on got a bollocking off Connie [laughs] and then the police came and then I had my tea and then I went to bed about quarter to seven 'cause I was that tired.

Mealtimes demonstrating the equality or inequality of relationships in placements will be looked at in greater detail. Neglect was part of the reason for the Lambert brothers being taken into care and Lucas reported frequently taking responsibility for feeding his younger brothers,

> Lucas: When we were living with my Mum I used to look after them both.
>
> I: What did that involve?

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Lucas: I used to like cook their teas sometimes and that and send them to bed.

I: Who taught you how to do all that?

Lucas: No one really I just did it. My Mum sometimes went out and got drunk so

I had

I: Sorry Lucas I can't really hear you. Your Mum

Lucas: My Mum sometimes went out and got drunk so I like [ ]

I: So what sort of things would you make?

Lucas: Beans on toast and like some things on toast.

He also talked of reversing the normative parent-child relationship by providing food for his mother on her birthday.

On this evidence it is arguable that Lucas associated food provision with caring (Ashley *et al*. 2004), an association that was underscored when, in the third interview, he was asked about a Court application his mother was making to have him and his brothers returned to her.

Lucas: Well our Mum basically wants us back so she's like going to Court to try

to get us back to show how she can actually look after us, that's all.

I: Right and that takes me straight on to to my next question which is in

your opinion could she look after you now?

Lucas: Mmm yeah. How she acts at er meetings and stuff yeah.

I: Say again.

Lucas: Yeah I think she could like when she comes to contacts she's like good

'cause she always like makes us sandwiches and stuff [ ].

While Lucas carried primary responsibility for his brothers they were, of course, also directly affected by the neglect. Having been in several placements before I met and interviewed them, the Lambert brothers were able to draw comparisons. They could tolerate the 'wrong' type of food, exotic and risible, from well-liked carers. Emily and Stephen first had the three boys on a respite basis and eventually became their permanent carers. Nonetheless, Lucas recollected their offering of faggots:

Right er and were our what we having for tea today and faggot so was like, 'Stop taking the mick! What we having?' She's like, Faggots.'… He bought them out I was like, 'They're dumplings' and he goes 'They're faggots. That's what the name are. Faggots.' 'Dumplings. The same thing.' I thought he was calling me faggot….

By contrast, mealtimes with the Calloways were viewed with unqualified admiration by all three brothers, both for style and choice. Lee told me, "I like the pasta… I like the salad bar" and when asked what made a good foster carer Lawrence confirmed it was, "…they give you the food that you want…" (see also Brannen *et al*. 1994; Pithouse and Rees 2015). He worked hard to express his admiration for their Malteser cake, "Like icing what tastes chocolate and like a spice then a Malteser on the top. Was such a good idea, Maltesers!" However, it was the range and quality of their meal times with the Calloways that most impressed them, "They put like loads of different types of foods on the table for us you can just tuck in to what you want."

Lee explicitly linked this technique with equality, "They're all equal and uh make you the food that you like." Here the often studied significance for young people of fairness (Crossland and Dunlap 2015; Priest *et al*. 2014; Paulus *et al*. 2013; Renno *et al.* 2015) is apparent. Lucas clarified the way it worked:

They'll cook some stuff and just put it on the meal table. If you don't want that you

leave it and put other stuff on your plat. It's like a little buffet…There's always

something that I like at least one thing.

In a household comprising two adults and five children – and more when friends or family dropped

in - a flexible approach that set no strict rules but invited experimenting with new foods and recognised

and accommodated differing preferences was, for these boys, quite inspirational. It was an approach that

contributed to Callum and Caitlin's very considerable influence over the brothers, as will be made clearer

later. For the moment, I want to focus on the way it also contrasted with their previous placement with

Cynthia, Charles and their son Christopher.

Of that placement, Lucas said Cynthia was, "Really strict. Oh, God!....Could hit her!" and his use of

the present tense suggested that a year later the intensity of his irritation with her had not abated.

Because of her demands on him to keep his room tidy he, "couldn't stand her, hardly ever spoke to her. …

No I did talk to her but I hardly ever, I just stayed up in my room" (Brannen *et al*. 1994). Although the

placement lasted ten months he described Cynthia and her husband as, "only respite" and it was, in fact, a

temporary stop gap that almost certainly lasted as long as it did because the Local Authority had difficulty

finding a placement that would keep the three together[30]. Structural constraints on the Local Authority

(Wilson *et al.* 2005); personal antipathies with carers (Denuwelaere 2007) and conflicts with Christopher,

which have already been described, all combined to make the placement difficult and the difficulties

became particularly visible for Lucas at meal times (Pithouse and Rees 2015). He described how:

Cynthia [foster carer] I hated her. 'cause eat their meals separate. We'd have ours

and then they'd go and have theirs……Er well like er I remember this one day when

I came back from football us three me Lawrence and Lee[brothers] had to eat tea

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[30] The Calloway were an out-of-county placement found through a private fostering agency.

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and after that we had like beans on toast then them two and son her son had fish and chips I didn't like that.

At first there seems to be hyperbole here. He alleged they habitually ate their meals separately before checking himself and acknowledging that he was actually narrating a single occasion. However, the sequence of interviews suggests that it was not an isolated occurrence. On a separate occasion, talking about Cynthia's husband Clive who "would go to darts" Lucas added, "Cynthia I hated her. 'cause eat their meals separate. We'd have ours and then they'd go and have theirs." Speculatively, it seems most likely that tensions in the placement were dealt with by attempted avoidance. If meal times were being disrupted, perhaps by disputes between the brothers and Christopher, separating the 'real' family from the person in foster care might have seemed an easy way to get a quiet life and if the temporary placement then lasted much longer than expected the practice could have become a chronic source of tension. It certainly bothered Lucas as much as The Calloway arrangements relaxed and supported him.

It is possible that in fact Lucas may have completely misinterpreted the way Cynthia arranged their meals. Writing about the rules of 'commensality' (eating together), William Beeman (in Szatrowski 2014: 39) comments that young people often receive training in table manners and 'may not be admitted to adult company until they are competent…' However, even if he misjudged the situation, it would seem to be arranged in a way that lent itself to that misinterpretation.

So meal times can play an important part in the development and maintenance of relationships or in undermining them. They structure the day, bringing different members of the household together (or not) and they signify care (or its deficiency). The confidence and support (or struggle) of caring relationships are (re)enacted at every meal. Of course, the significance the young people attach to such daily practices varies according to their past history in birth families and previous placements. They react

differently to the same practice, some seeing it as normal[31], others as problematic but what these examples strongly indicate is that mealtimes have always to be seen as potential occasions through which people in foster care learn to trust or mistrust. Food and mealtimes in placements are very significant.

Clothing

No direct questions were put about clothes. Instead, it was an aspect of care that was frequently brought forward by interviewees. Indeed, so matter-of-fact, in passing, were the accounts and narratives that patterns of concern connected with clothing did not emerge until the interviewing had come to an end. It then became clear that clothing played a role in accounts of relationships and, further, that with a single brief exception all accounts volunteered about clothes came from female interviewees. All the girls in the sample talked about clothes. Some of them also talked about accessories and make-up. None of the males raised matters of clothing or accessories at all[32]. As we shall see, this gender difference is associated with different ways of relating to carers and others (Gilligan 2012; Piper *et al*. 2006), providing girls with a means of bonding to female carers not available to the boys. This is especially significant in that clothing and particularly make-up are associated with intimacy, in a way that is not the case for conventionally masculine concerns. This gender difference in ways of the children and young people related to carers also reflects the fact that the main carer was usually female (Gilligan 2012), a fact easily overlooked by the use of the gender-neutral term foster carer.

'That clothing is linked to identity construction and maintenance is itself nothing new.' (Gibson 2013: 1). Taking an interest in clothes is manifestly to do with self-presentation but in fact only Lucy and Leona expressed concern about their self-presentation, making remarks about self-image (Farineau *et al*. 2013). Instead, during interviews messages about clothes from the children and young people in foster care arose in the course of talking about relationships involved in their development of a sense of identity,

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[31] Lucas' brothers made no mention of Cynthia's separating them.

[32] Presumably the fact that they were being interviewed by another male affected what they responded to and how.

'constitutive of who the child and [foster] parent are' (Sayer 2011: 83). In narrating the kinds of relationships they had, the provision, cleaning and organisation of clothes was as central to some interviewees' concept of care as the provision of food was to others.

At its simplest, clothing gave shared shopping expeditions a focus and helped to create or sustain social bonds. Several interviewees described shopping (see also Pithouse and Rees 2015; Nordenfors 2015) with friends , siblings or carers. However, it was also a way of enacting and celebrating the caring relationship. I asked Lucy how she first got to know her foster carer, Christianna and she told me:

> …well at first like I wasn't too sure that well 'cause I didn't know her I wasn't too
>
> sure that I was going to trust her do you know, like get to know her that easily like,
>
> but as I got to know her I start telling her things and like telling her all my problems.
>
> 'cause now I can trust her now, telling my problems and we 's.. we like bond a lot
>
> more than I did when I first come here and um we go out shopping and stuff stuff
>
> like that and bond.

Lucy could be very angry about her mother's failures, as we saw above, but she also knew that financial problems (English 2015) had meant, "there wasn't any food in the house, there wasn't any um I didn't have any clothes." Too many other experiences in care and adoption had intervened to claim a direct connection between that early neglect and the experience of "girly shops" shared with Christianna. The real test of trust was presumably Christianna's response to "problems" rather than the alleviation of remembered neglect. Nevertheless, her direct association of clothes shopping with the process of trust building supports the claim that clothes act as one of the signifiers of care.

For Lydia and her carer Carly clothes shopping was a regular experience, described in a rehearsed, orchestrated form that celebrated their co-achievement of familial status,

Carly: We shop til we drop don't we lass?

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Lydia: Yes. Get bargains.

Carly: We get bargains.

Lilian gave no account of shopping with Connie who, she complained, had insufficient time for her. However, when she described the end of the placement the things she recalled feeling sorry about were, first, their attempt at forming a relationship, "I was sad to go from them because they'd taken us on…" and in addition the fact that "they'd given us this, bought us clothes…" Ironing clothes was one of the things she said "a Mum would do" and so it is tempting to suggest that clothing was symbolic of her quest for a family but much more information would be needed to draw any firm conclusions about that. The symbolic value of clothing is very clear in more general terms, though, and its particular significance for female children and young people in foster care would accord with the heavy emphasis placed on clothing styles in the lives of young females generally and for children (Monnot 2010) and young adults too (Vincent and Braun 2010).

Looking to parents for clothing is characteristic of family life in general, no doubt, but in Leona's accounts of wheedling items of footwear or jewellery from her mother we can see particularly clearly that such purchases might have a different sort of significance for young people living with foster carers who need to assure themselves that family ties are still to be relied upon. For Lia, where her clothes were kept was indicative of having, finally, a "proper home." Describing the arrival at her father's house putting an end to ten years of separation she emphasised the permanence of the reunion by telling me, "…he got my blood stuff [she is diabetic]. Everything. He's got all my clothes back and all." This handing over of health equipment and clothing made concrete the transfer of her care from the Local Authority, back to the family from which she had been removed.

Money

It is possible that Lilian had less to thank Connie and Cliff for than she believed. Though carers may use their own money to buy clothes for children or young people fostered with them, provision of clothing, like the provision of much else in foster care is mainly funded by the basic allowance carers are paid by the Local Authority (Gov.UK 1997) and the role played by this budget will be considered next. People in foster care, like many other children and young people, have relatively little direct experience of owning money or property (Pfeg 2015) but the topic nevertheless arose quite often and when it did money and material gifts symbolised for some interviewees the strength or weakness of key relationships.

For each person in foster care, carers receive regular payments from their local authority and in addition to maintenance allowances these include amounts identified as pocket money which they are required to pass on to the young person. They are allowed to withhold pocket money in certain situations[33] but I did not encounter a single instance of the sanction being imposed. Because pocket money is a formal requirement, that, together with what might be reluctance on the part of social workers and carers to apply the sanction, meant that for my sample pocket money was an entirely unproblematic area of placement daily life. People in foster care do not seem to have any difficulty accepting the pocket money in the same way as their peers outside the care system. The implications of the source of money are visible in a comment made during the focus group and, at first sight, seem to hint at awareness of great institutional power. In the focus group, discussion of a case of confiscation elicited the suggestion that, "You should save up and pay for your own then they can't do it off you." Here is a perception that what is funded by the care system remains potentially the property of the agencies while personal property has to be created by saving, at which point they hope money gifts from the care agencies become irrevocable.

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[33] When the need for some form of sanction has been identified and agreed with the social worker, such methods should be limited to: withdrawal of part of pocket money - usually to pay for wilful damage… *A Guide to Foster Care* County Council Children's Services

All people invest values and social relations into money (Zelizer 1993). Calling a payment 'pocket money' is an example of this and it implies a sum given to a young person for discretionary spending. That discretion has similar limits outside fostering. Families also retain a degree of power over pocket money (Otto 1995). Nor is it at all obvious that the impersonal 'they' who cannot 'do it off you' are being given any special significance because 'they' are a foster carer or social worker rather than a parent and it is probably safer to treat this as a reference to the discretionary power parents or, in this case, carers, exercise over pocket money (Otto 1995; PR Newswire 2013). We have, then, a view of the practice of pocket money that incorporates both a taken for granted assumption, borne out by experience, that pocket money can be counted upon and a cautious awareness of the potentially interventionist power of the adult world in general.

With a single exception, the interviewees talked only in passing about money or possessions in relation to commodities – in discussions of the price of clothes or purchases of sweets and games. Instead, they referred to money more frequently and at greater length as a dimension of relationships. Libby had been told by her father not to worry about money if she returned to live with him. Lanie described stealing money and then returning it, and her regret for the damage it did to her adoptive family. Lia described how friends chipped in to cover her transport costs when she set out to go back to her father. Lilian described refusing money offered by an abusive and despised step-brother but accepting gifts from her boyfriend and his family. Money and possessions were, just as food and clothing, more important to my interviewees as a medium of relationships than in terms of what they provide.

A relational interest in money (Lennartson 2010; Leopold and Raab 2011) can be seen in Leona's hope, voiced in her first interview, to become a financially strong adult, giving money to "sad people in my family", a sentiment she denied having voiced in her next interview. The difficulty she had in recognising her own earlier account of her hope may be hypothesised as an instance of a general tendency for children and young people in foster care to face the challenge of balancing a 'true' self with a public self (Upshur

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and Demick 2014). Leaving to one side the many difficulties raised by the idea of a 'true self' that is also dynamic, continually evolving (McKinney 2014) and relational (Sayer 2011); in Upshur and Demick's theory, the 'public self' is shaped by public myths (McKinney 2014). Those myths create unease about the existence of the practices of foster care (and adoption); about carers, birth parents and about the children and young people in foster care. They are said to be directly associated with and contrasted to myths concerning the primacy of genetic connections (Smart 2011) and upbringing within a nuclear family (McKinney 2014).

Cross-interview changes in outlook on the theme of money also occurred in the second and third interviews with Lucas. In the second interview he said he hoped to live as a tax paying citizen but in the third interview he said he entertained being "rich and famous" only when, "I'm being like in a baby mood." In his angry moods, he said, "I think I'll be an old tramp that sits on the end of a road." Here, again, it seems possible to hypothesise an 'association between the stigma of foster care and an imposed self' (McKinney 2014: 85).

By his own account, ideas about failure, homelessness and destitution form part of Lucas' inner speech, along with thoughts of fame and wealth. If these are the ideas that steer him (Archer 2007) in his day-to-day experiences of foster care they might maintain any emotional or behavioural difficulties he brought with him into the care system, delaying the development of new attachments (Rutter and Taylor 2002). Lucas was alone in expressing such grave pessimism though there is research evidence about the outcomes of care that makes his gloominess plausible. Wilson *et* al. 2005 report that those who graduate from care into independent living, 'typically … face difficulties over loneliness, unemployment, debt, and generally settling down – a generalisation that holds for both the US and the UK.' (Wilson *et al*. 2005:17/18).

Two main points are identifiable here. The predictability of pocket money was a rare constant in the lives of the children and young people in foster care but while it may help a little to legitimate the

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interactions they had with carers and social workers, its purchasing power, or the limits of it, was not a message that they wanted to provide. It was the relational aspects of money and possessions that they chose to bring forward during interviews.

We have seen, then, that the material foundations of foster care were given importance as signs of their care. Anxieties about their origins and about the way these were being perceived by members of society in general were sometimes expressed together with unease about self-identity when talking about such matters during the interviews.

Respite care

'Respite care' (Rowe *et al*. 1989) is the name given to temporary arrangements for care of people in foster care when foster carers are unavailable or need a break. Most foster carers are also respite carers and carers support one another in sometimes close-knit networks of familiars. My interviewees nearly always referred to respite being used to cover holidays but there was also mention of respite to cover work arrangements and placement emergencies.

Respite care differs from the previous resources discussed in that it is available primarily for the benefit of carers (Eaton 2008) and therefore indirectly for the children and young people in foster care. This is reflected in research literature where respite care is generally investigated from the perspective of the parents or carers (Eaton 2008; Macdonald and Callery 2008; Doig *et al*. 2009) Further, requests for respite can sometimes be unavailable (MacDonald and Callery 2008) hence it is a less predictable form of provision. Its unpredictability, together with the way it changes the routine daily life of children and young people in foster care placements made it a particularly equivocal source of child centred messages about care. The absence of a child-centred perspective in the literature on this topic means my comments about the messages given to me by the children and young people in foster care cannot be placed in context, indicating a need for further child centred study.

Feelings about respite varied widely. Lilian was scathing about the way respite was sometimes used by Connie:

Oh 'you going into respite this weekend this week 'cause I'm at work or I'm going

to holidays.' Something like that. I didn't like that 'cause I just felt like shipped

away… Didn't like the fact that I was getting shipped off all the time.

The repetition of the metaphor, 'shipped' implied that she felt herself treated as an insentient package. Combined with the off-hand tone of the interjection "Oh", she saw a lack of care in respite arrangements. Lawrence, on the other hand, usually liked going to respite carers. For him it was an opportunity for experiencing "a lot of good foster parents."

It is difficult to see why foster carers would need or indeed would be given respite care in order to go to work since they are contracted to provide foster care but, of course, they need breaks or holidays and it is possible to imagine circumstances in which people in foster care cannot or do not want to be included[34]. However, there is obviously a danger of perception that carers needed a break *from* the person in foster care and that perception would be more likely if birth children were included in the holiday. Lucas was put in respite, "whenever they [Cristen and Cecil] were going on holiday….."

In chapter seven on coping skills some evidence will show that people in foster care can seek to become expert in the minutiae of the local care network and perhaps we can catch a glimpse of a process that leads them to such institutionalisation. Lawrence was still sensitive enough to form attachments and regret them ending. He described a settling in period of, "about the first week" during which you get to know respite carers:

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[34] For example; where care is shared, parental consent might be withheld. Also in those circumstances which Wilson et *al.* euphemistically describe as carers and children or young people "getting the worst of each other."

…but second week, the last day you've got to say goodbye. It's really hard saying

goodbye to the people that you've known for a long time and it's really hard to say

goodbye to people that you've seen two weeks.

Lucas, though, talked of people who were, "only respite" and turned the adjective into a common

noun at one point, reducing his temporary carers to a function, "They were a respite - Craig and Cherry."

Thus the workings of the system can become a medium through which children and young people in foster

care learn to take an objective, disembodied perspective that resembles that of case workers (Hardesty

2015).

Carers' stress

By this point it will be clear that the possibilities for young peoples' unhappiness to affect

placement stability are great. People in foster care are separated from parents and often siblings too; for

long periods they are denied contact with them except, perhaps, under strict and sometimes intrusive

controls. They may be stigmatised by peers and neighbours and have the problems that come with stigma,

of managing their self-understanding and self-representation in a range of social settings within and

outside the placements. They may have to contend with rivals in the form of birth children of carers with

whom they cannot, and do not expect to be able to, compete for their carers' affection and concern. They

will, inescapably, have to tolerate feelings of insecurity in newly developing attachments. All these

challenges arise out of the social arrangements of care and to them need to be added the damaging effects

of earlier physical, sexual and/or emotional trauma.

When placements become tense and difficult to manage as they must be, given the background

and circumstances of many young people (Simkiss *et al.* 2013; Fallesen 2014), my interviewees reported

responding in ways that were sure to cause carers' concern. Lilian, Leo and Lanie in turn recounted:

No but I just did not give anything at all, I just did not care. I was drinking, stopping

out late. Doesn't sound very nice but having sex as well but because because I

didn't care any more.

And from that I just started changing. Don't know why. Sort of like running away.

Being hospitalised for drinking too much. Being mouthy to [my carer] Constance.

When I say running away I actually mean not coming back for ages. Police having to

bring me back.

I started knocking about with people that I shouldn't have been knocking about

with like not from [the town where I was at secondary school], from Northerton

and that and then I started to get myself into bother with the police...and then they

asked us if I wanted to go through to Northerton so I said yeah...being drunk not

realising what I was doing and then they came through to pick me up and then we

went through there and then I stopped there til Wednesday came home on

Wednesday.

The response of carers to such pressures is crucially important in resolving or deepening crises and

although Lawrence did not explain what the circumstances were, he described vividly the kind of behaviour

he and the other people in foster care might have observed in carers under stress. He described how foster

carers could become, "disturbing sometimes because you get angry with the children" and this could lead

to "like if you want to do it but something's holding you back like the scene of you getting so angry you hit

them." Insights of this kind from a nine year old show how closely some children and young people in

foster care may observe their carers. All placements will pass through periods of greater and lesser tension

but inconsistent, sometimes frustrated and angry carers who are unable to overcome their own distress

cannot help but communicate it to people in foster care. If they seek relief in respite care we have already

seen how that can be interpreted.

Carers' characteristics

'Long-term foster carers identify themselves as parental figures to the children rather than paid carers within the system' (Blythe *et al.* 2012:92) and that emphasis on personal motivation seems to be shared by the children and young people in foster care I interviewed. From the observations of my participants it is not what carers do that matters so much as the personal qualities of their overall approach. Carers need the capacity to enjoy fostering, to continue to like the company of these young people and, if that is lost in a phase of disturbance, to recover their balance quickly.

At the beginning of his second interview Lawrence Lambert met me with a notebook in which he had written down some ideas about foster care he had prepared for the occasion. He was excited about trying out different narratives, enjoying the power of narration, of having an angle on things. He hurried me away from his carer, Caitlin, so that we could get down to the business of recording and explained, "I wrote in [the notebook] like so it can give you ideas in your book."

His comments were a little ambiguous but though I expected a personal angle on being fostered, what he wanted to tell me about was the motivation of fostering adults (see also Oke *et al*. 2011; De Maeyer *et al*. 2014). His perspective was very different from that explored in the literature:

> …[P]eople shouldn't be scared when they're gonna go to foster well well because
>
> you don't just because you don't know anybody else doesn't mean that stops them
>
> from doing the thing that they want to do if they want to foster they want to foster
>
> if they want to build they want to build but talking about fost um like I'm fostered
>
> by Caitlin and Callum and that's their hobby and like that is and that's theirs.

First, who were the people he referred to? Since they were "gonna go to foster" they were new recruits to foster caring. Then, imagining what they think (see also Ironside 2012 for details of the metacognitive skills foster carers sometimes need) Lawrence saw them as not knowing "anyone else". The

context of his remark made the reference to fear of the strangers apply to the strangers they were about to take into their homes. Although the new carers might be afraid, he explained, they shouldn't be. Then, shifting from the recommendation "should" to, "doesn't mean that stops them", he said they would nevertheless go on to become foster carers. This drive of theirs is what he sought to elucidate.

Lawrence next emphasised their intrinsic motivation. Following directly from the overcoming of fear, "...if they want to foster they want to foster". With that assertion he made a basic drive the explanation for their overcoming their fear and their fostering.

At that point he appeared to diverge slightly to describe fostering as a work-like activity. The parallel structures of the two sentences - "[I]f they want to foster, they want to foster. If they want to build, they want to build." - created an analogical relationship between fostering and building. Exactly what the analogy conveyed to him is difficult to determine. It might have been that he wanted to express something about either the creativity or the arbitrariness of the decision to foster (see Volpone *et al*. 2013 for a discussion of hobby-jobs). Building for its own sake might have been a way of approving the choice to create something solid and enduring or it might have been a way of expressing how unaccountable the decision was because they didn't have to foster, they might have done something else instead. If the latter interpretation was at all present in the analogy for him, an implication of it might have been that, in fact, that the decision to foster could be readily reversed.

He concluded with the surprising but intriguing observation that fostering was their hobby. 'Hobby-jobs' are associated by psychologists with both intrinsic motivation and 'burnout' (Volpone *et al*, 2013:656) but in studies of children (Chaplin and John 2005; Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012) hobbies correlated with their reported experience of happiness. That suggests the overall interpretation of Lawrence's account should be positive, in line with his assertion that new foster carers should not be scared. The remarks sought to centralise the carers' powerful motivation.

For Lawrence, Callum and Caitlin were "brilliant." He had had other carers he liked too but they "didn't get that serious about it…but this [placement] is brilliant. I like this one…" Here again he is the seasoned campaigner, able to compare and pronounce on placements but he lived in the present. "Brilliant" though it was, he understood it may not be his last.

For Lawrence, a brilliant carer was one who combined care with self-realisation, for whom fostering was a source of fulfilment and personal development (Denuwelaere and Bracke 2007; Gilligan 2012).Of course to be cared for by such a person is different from being cared for by a person who may be conscientious but is attracted by financial rewards (Randle *et al.*2014; Wilson *et al.* 2005; Tapsfield 2007). Good fostering was more than just a job to Lawrence's way of thinking which is why he introduced the issue in the first place. There was something that had struck him about the fact that people, strangers, would foster him. Self realisation was his explanation and seeing it in that perspective helps to explain the way the whole quotation concludes in – for Lawrence – a satisfying resolution that whatever the hobby is, "…that's theirs." They are the kind of people who find self-realisation (Denuwelaere and Bracke 2007; Gilligan 2012) in fostering.

It is possible to catch a glimpse of the same intrinsic motivation at work in a section of dialogue between Lamar and his carer, Carol Charlton during his second interview. In this quote, the carer takes the lead in representing herself and others, including Lamar,

Carol: Wherever we go we've got to be kicked off places, ent we Lamar?

Lamar: Mm

Carol: And we can go Muncaster [castle and visitor centre] and come out at

eight o'clock.

Lamar: W went down to Blackpool came back two o'clock in the morning. That's

that's the thing what that's what we like.

Carol: Yeah we most often stop until the place is shut.

Lamar: And then

Carol: Don't we

Lamar: and then we end up going around town getting something to eat until all

big cars are like gone

The discussion might have been a reference either to the two of them or to them as part of a larger group including other foster family members. They certainly construed Lamar and Carol as peers. By referring to what 'we' do they represented themselves as the kinds of people who do things together and carry on doing so for many hours. This reported capacity for enthusiastic enjoyment in each other's company showed a high positive value being placed on times together by both Lamar and Carol. This piece of dialogue is, then, concerned with forms of self-realisation that arose within their relationship. In this case self-realisation was experienced not by the carer alone but also by the young person in foster care.

It appears, then, that carers' dispositions can ease the strains of a placement. The message from these children and young people in foster care was that intrinsic motivation and a capacity for sharing fun and enjoyment were greatly valued in foster carers.

Help from carers

Practical help was provided in many ways and of course this too provided signs of care that could be valued by children and young people in foster care. The provision of accommodation, food, clothing and pocket money are forms of help that have already been discussed. The advocacy, emotional support and

guidance provided by foster carers and social workers will be examined in the next chapter. Here, I want to look at practical help given to Lucas Lambert by his carers, Caitlin and Callum. Although the placement was eventually disrupted, the positive qualities of the relationship (Pelech *et al*. 2013) between carers and the children and young people they fostered offer an illustration of the way practical help may contribute to the stability of a placement (O'Neill *et al*. 2012)

Lucas was a poor sleeper. It may be remembered that he had to move in to Lee's room because he needed the security of company at night or else, "every minute when I'm not asleep, open my eyes just to see that nobody's there." This fear was difficult for him to deal with and he went on to explain, "I hate the dark. I absolutely hate it." Nonetheless, some time after moving to the new placement he took up a paper round and as winter took hold, "when it was dark the other day…I had to go so Callum said he'll go to work and I'll just walk with him." This entailed a start for both of them at between six thirty and seven o'clock in the morning and the morning in question was a Sunday. While Callum, who owned a catering business, seems to have told Lucas he would do that "just to cope for Monday"*,* Lucas knew that it was unusual for a weekend and by linking his fear of the dark (see also Bowlby Vol. 2 1998; Ishikawa *et al*. 2014; Lewis *et al*. 2015) to the offer of Callum's company he showed that he understood it was (also) an aspect of Callum's concern for him (Sinclair 2005; Christiansen 2013).

Callum and Caitlin offered the brothers many valuable supports. They were enthusiastic carers who were willing to act on concerns about his fears, who provided varied food, whose children made congenial foster siblings, and whose large circle of friends and relatives readily accepted the brothers. In all three of his interviews Lucas showed signs of developing attachment to Callum. Callum helped him make a model gun; they joined a karate club together and of Callum partnered him in a karate competition. These and his enjoyment of Callum's swearing were gendered activities which reinforced Lucas's habitual representation of himself as tough and aggressive. Callum also offered less gendered contributions to Lucas's care. Over and above the approved pocket money allowance he gave Lucas gifts of money and a diary. This is one of

only a handful of examples of male bonding with a foster carer through shared masculine activities that featured in my data.

The house, while not large, was comfortable and full of interesting corners. Caitlin and Callum taught them to respect 'The Golden Line', understood by all members of the placement to mark off the entrance lobby and kitchen-diner from the rest of the house, and where shoes could not be worn. The stairs could be used for exciting play. There was a cosy TV room with a stove. Significantly, because they offered the advantages they did, these carers could intervene in Lucas's life in ways which may have prompted resistance in a less favoured placement.

During his second interview Lucas mentioned to me that he had recently lost his mobile phone. We talked about the ways he used the phone (see also Wilson 2015; Livingstone and Smith 2014) to text friends at his old school and it was also at this stage that he informed me that Callum occasionally gave him extra money so he could keep his call credit topped up. Then he gave his first account of the way the phone was lost. "It was on charge overnight …and it just wasn't there in the morning so… I reckon Caitlin and Callum put it somewhere but they say they didn't." Prompted to explore this a little more he said he didn't think they would do that, "unless they want to search my phone…. they might do it if they wanted to search my phone but they have no need to search my phone…so I just reckon I've lost it."

His second account of the loss given during the third interview was different. By that time he knew the whereabouts of the phone, "Caitlin and Callum have it…Social services, Fosterwell Group said I can't have it cause I was contacting my Mum." This time he also added,

I remember walking back from karate and Callum's going, 'Remember that phone?' and I was going he was going [ ] 'I have to take it off you' and I was like 'No way. No.' Got home searched my room go 'Where's my phone Callum?' He goes [ ] so he already beat me to it. I don't get how

because he didn't have it when I went to karate Caitlin must have picked it up. Caitlin probably picked it up. It was on the bedroom floor.

These two accounts are completely inconsistent and in order to understand some of what is going on it is necessary to compare them and the immediate contexts surrounding them.

Both accounts connect the loss with Caitlin and Callum but the first account did not refer to social services or Fosterwell Group while the second account did. The emotional tone of the first account was relaxed; the carers may have taken it and, indeed, may not have been candid but since he had nothing to conceal that would justify such measures he preferred to think it was lost through his own carelessness and that did not concern him very much at all. Asked at that time how important the phone was to him he explained, "I run with my phone if it's there."

The second account was different.

> I: One of the other things we were talking about was your lost mobile you lost a mobile phone.
>
> Lucas: No em Caitlin and Callum have it.
>
> I: Oh they do?
>
> Lucas: Social services Fosterwell Group said I can't have it 'cause I was contacting my Mum.
>
> I: How do you feel about that?
>
> Lucas: I think its balls. Total balls. You expecting me to say more?
>
> I: I'd like you to.

Lucas: Normal families they can talk to their Mum. I think's absolute balls you can only see your Mum once in two months. All crap.

The inconsistency between the two accounts is still puzzling but what is clear is that at some point between the two interviews Lucas had learned more about the disappearance of the phone which meant he no longer calmly accepted the phone was lost. It had been confiscated and he felt angry about that, just as he felt angry (as other fostered children do) about restrictions on family contact (see Schofield *et al.* 2011; Farmer 2010; Farmer 2006) and more generally about being separated from his mother. His anger was still not directed against the carers, though. Social Services and/or Fosterwell Group were blamed because they were responsible for a pattern of separation established long before he first came to the new placement. The disappearance of the phone was added to the list of his grievances against them.

In both accounts, then, he found ways to deflect blame from the carers. He showed no such reluctance to turn his anger away from Cynthia when she discriminated against him and his brothers at meal time. When she and her husband tried to prevent him from contacting his father he went "sneakily" to set up and keep a meeting. Yet when, for a similar reason, Caitlin and Callum took his phone away Lucas remained well-disposed to them. He was a year or so older and his age might have been a factor in improved anger management. Those new attachments to Caitlin and Callum were already being undermined by the emotional wear and tear the placement was putting on his foster siblings Carol and Chad and that might be a part of an explanation for his willingness to turn a blind eye to the carers' part in the confiscation. However, it is also clear that the contributions and commitment to the brothers' care made by these latest carers had given him a degree of attachment to them that led him to make allowances for their perceived failings, just as he excused the failings of his mother. It also pointed to a desire to find somebody who was honest in their dealings with him. For Lucas, carers who were consistent in that respect won authority which was easier to accept.

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Conclusion

The basic services, material and social, provided to children and young people by foster care are the immediate framework within which the relationships between foster carers and children and young people in foster care arise and are developed. This chapter has been based upon accounts of significant relationships with foster families articulated by children and young people in foster care in the process of describing houses, meals, clothes, money and respite care. I have suggested that the relationships tended to be of primary interest to the children and young people in foster care in their interviews and that the services being provided, though very significant, were treated as of relatively less significance than relationships; that what was provided in terms of care was less important than how it was provided – whether with warmth and fun. The personal qualities of carers have also been considered. Sometimes for better, sometimes for worse, they were signs of great importance to the children and young people.

I have explored the reflexive responses of the children and young people in foster care to some of the perceived signs of care, considering how they may have had consequences for placement stability, for better or worse. I have shown that in some cases the self-understanding (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) of children and young people in foster care, as well as the self-understanding of their carers (Rocco-Briggs 2008), was undermined or enhanced by the way services were provided. Since self-understanding is regularly connected with identity development in the relevant literature (Pithouse and Rees 2015; Hiles *et al.* 2014; Schofield *et al*. 2011; Sinclair 2005; Kools 1997) it would be prudent to prepare for the transition out of care and into independent living (Lee and Duer 2014) by ensuring that care is managed to maximise the possibility of positive effects for the identity development. While this study does not permit generalisation I have provided specific examples of provision and dispositions that children and young people in foster care felt to be helpful in that respect.

Chapter 7: Coping strategies

Previous chapters have established that separation from family and the arrangements for providing care affected the self-understanding of the children and young people in foster care who participated in interviews and that self-understanding has a bearing on the development of identity (Schwartz 2006). As we have argued, the concept of 'identity' involves relational, always contested self-definitions (Sayer 2011). That being the case, accounts and narratives of placement interactions may shed light on the development of self-understandings of children and young people in foster care. Some accounts and narratives that seem to bear most directly on self-understanding will form the matter of this chapter.

We have seen that the material and social frameworks of care are the immediate setting for identity development. The relationships that are created and developed within foster care placements also have a discursive element and these need to be considered further. They are related to other settings and other discourses (Fairclough 2005) of foster care. Legal and medical discourses of foster care (James and Prout 1990) were occasionally touched on by the children and young people interviewed but their primary concerns, as has been shown, were relational. The discourses they referred to most frequently were among those that inform understanding of family life in general and foster care in particular.

First I shall examine the examples they recounted of both public and professional discourses of foster care. It will be discovered that some of those who have contact with foster care placements, whether because of their occupation (Teachers), peers with whom there were informal social contacts or simply impersonal 'someone' or 'they', were represented by several interviewees as having naïve and unpromising ideas about what it is like. I shall provide evidence that public and professional perceptions of foster care as a disciplinary system may sometimes involve assumptions of foster care as an almost prison-like institution for the containment of children and young people construed ambivalently as 'disreputable victims'.

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Then I shall show how the self-presentational strategies of children and young people in foster care sometimes closely respond to the misperceptions they have of others. Linked closely to self-understanding and self-representation, verbal practices that preserve privacy or control over the sharing of personal information will be examined in their discursive context. Next I shall look at the purposeful use of names to signal inclusion or exclusion in relationships. Lastly, story telling will be discussed and the part sometimes played by shared story telling in relationships between carers, their networks and the children and young people in foster care will be illustrated. This final section will draw as much on attachment theory as upon notions of self-representation and identity development.

Ideas about foster care

One of my foster children told me that on the day she was taken away from her parents and driven by her social worker to my home where she was to live she had an image of a huge, dark man waiting at the door for her. Her sister, who remained with their parents, asked her in their first telephone call if there were bars on the windows. Young people are not alone in having such ideas about foster care. Children and young people in care can feel stigmatised in the 'difficult arena' of school (Wilson *et al*. 2005: 48) and, according to Lamar, teachers also mistake the nature of foster care. Lamar told me that:

> Most teachers try to do it [treat children and young people in foster care
>
> differently] 'cause like they know you're fostered and they know you've got social
>
> worker and if they phone your social worker you [sic] think 'Oh they're going to get
>
> into more trouble'.

An instance that he described in detail followed a quite serious classroom misdemeanour. A senior member of staff told him, "I'll be phoning your social worker" which Lamar understood as a threat, an attempt to double the punishment and he responded accordingly:

> Miss that is your blackmail all the time, phone phoning me social worker. You think
>
> that you think that gets to me don't you? She said, 'Yeah well it should'. I said,

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'Well tough luck it doesn't. You can try to phone me social worker. Doesn't bother

us.'

However faithfully Lamar reported the incident and however widespread the practice may or may not

have been in his or other schools, a general point – that being fostered marks out a young person as

different from their peers – receives much corroboration from other participants in my study. Ambivalent

or more wholly negative perceptions of children and young people in foster care are commonplace

(Pithouse and Rees 2015; Sinclair 2005, Walker-Gleaves and Walker 2008; Mitchell *et al*. 2015).   They are

often acted upon in inappropriate ways (Walker-Gleaves and Walker 2008) and produce significant

responses from children and young people in foster care.

Alongside my interviewing I met and audio recorded a participation group. These were children and

young people in foster care who had taken up Fosterton Children's Service's offer of regular discussion

meetings about their care arrangements. "Saying what we don't like about social services" as one of the

participants put it. The group met in an outbuilding behind the main offices of the Social Services

Department. The outbuilding had a kitchen and several meeting rooms.

The participation group were at the other end of the building in the kitchen, microwaving an evening

meal of burgers and chips supplied by Avril, the social worker who facilitated their meetings. Three

children and young people in foster care had attended that evening, Lila, Lisa and Levi, but the discussion I

want to draw upon here took place after Lila had left for home, while Lisa and Levi were waiting for their

transport to arrive. I asked them if their ideas about being in foster care had changed and Levi told me his

assumptions prior to care had been challenged by the experience of actually living in foster care:

> [Y]ou go into care and you realise that some of the kids are actually genuine down-
>
> to-earth people and the backgrounds aren't as bad as what other people have
>
> made them out to be.

He went on to describe the imagined backgrounds as, "absolute rough" and, having explained how he once thought of children and young people in foster care, turned to how he was currently perceived by some of the people he met,

> I'm Citizen Taboo if that makes sense? Like people don't really talk about it. It's like something that will be brushed underneath the mat.

His neat personification of his own stigmatised social status (see also Walker-Gleaves and Walker 2008; Mitchell *et al*. 2015), "Citizen Taboo", was followed by recognition of one way the stigma leads to marginalization. Warming to his description of how the existence of foster care was rendered invisible he explained:

> It's like completely brushed away. Someone brings up like a child going into care. The subject will be quickly changed.

Lisa had been unwilling to endorse Levi's point of view. She had not had an opinion about foster care before it happened to her and his account was not something she could recognise in herself but that changed at this concrete image. Now she recognised exactly what Levi was talking about and confirmed:

> …when they know you're in care and like they say something to you like that they end up realising and then all of a sudden they'll go dead quiet…'cause they feel that like they've hurt you or something.

While Levi's perspective emphasised rejection, Lisa understood that pity was also present in the social practices they described (see also Shotton 2010; Edwards and Talbot 1999; Seita 2000). This was a response that I found repudiated by some of the young people I interviewed and it was entertained as something that could be turned to advantage by Lucas, whose interest in the possibilities of carers' sympathy will be detailed below.

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If people without intimate experience of fostering form ideas that can be troubling, the perceptions of carers and social workers ought to be much better grounded and their training presumably makes them familiar with the social work discourses of foster care. Those discourses supply a quite different stream of ideas about social care from the popular view but there are points of resonance between the two registers which may not be just a matter of coincidence (Petersen *et al*. 2012; Gray *et al*. 2014). Certainly, through influence on training at different levels of the care work force (Cairns and Fursland 2007; Everston-Hock *et al*. 2012), the psycho-medical discourse of childhood (James and Prout 1990) contributes to the experience of children and young people in foster care. Even though they may not recognise or understand it as they do the popular view, it is worth looking at the scientific, psycho-medical discourse in broad outline.

I previously referred to Hendrick's historical account of the evolution of contemporary thinking about childhood (Hendrick in James and Prout 1990) which suggests that the twentieth century saw the emergence of an increasingly scientific, psycho-medical approach to the understanding of child development. In the field of welfare this led to heavy emphasis on the vulnerability of the young and their need of protection, a tendency which, of course, foster care wholly incorporates and indeed exemplifies. As a consequence, while less than half the current population of children and young people in foster care are deemed to have mental health problems (Beagly *et al*. 2014) therapeutic models are sometimes applied to these young people as a group that, '… have, invariably, experienced some adversity in their lives that has left them with a range of needs' (Gallagher and Green 2012: 437). They are neither patients nor clients, but children or young people in foster care who are under the age of 16 will, like their peers outside the care system, usually be assumed to lack the capacity to consent to medical treatment and someone with parental responsibility will consent on their behalf (NHS Choices year?). A recent review of research evidence based on studies of children and young people with acute needs (Gallagher and Green 2012) was equivocal about the outcomes of therapy (McAuley 2005, 2006; Kendrick 1992; Stevens and Furnivall 2008; Little and Kelly 1995; Gallagher *et al*. 2004). It can have important benefits such as preventing abusive behaviour from becoming entrenched (Farmer and Pollock 1998) but may also

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sometimes add to the disorientation of children or young people in foster care (Tresilotis *et al*. 1995). There is, then, a possibility that children and young people in foster care encounter a presumption of therapeutic need combined with a limited capacity to meet the need.

At a conceptual level the discourse supplies ways of thinking and talking about children and young people in foster care that have tendentious qualities. Wilson *et al*. (2004) notes predictably and properly that background was of great importance. The authors state that, '[abuse or neglect as] reasons for entry suggest that children entering the care system are likely to have severe difficulties' (Wilson *et al*. 2004:20) and they go on to provide much evidence that that prediction is borne out. Yet the strength of the evidence sometimes produces, unintentionally and implicitly, language patterns that can have worrying consequences. Within the space of a few pages Wilson *et al*. observe:

> Carers could cope with very difficult behaviour…..
>
> (Wilson *et al*. 2004: 60)
>
> They [social workers] should … engage with carers who are struggling to manage
>
> challenging behaviour…
>
> (Wilson *et al*. 2004: 60)
>
> …the chance to take breaks from difficult children…
>
> (Wilson *et al*. 2004: 69)
>
> …difficult temperaments and histories of the children which may make it difficult
>
> for them to trust foster carers or settle with them…

(Wilson *et al.* 2004: 74)

Here the therapeutic/behaviour orientation of the language represent the children as socio-psychologically impaired rather than morally defective - but on these empirical grounds some over-generalisation may obtain (Sinclair 2005) by constant reference to the difficult behaviour of the children that locates the problems for carers and social workers in dysfunctional families and offspring, drawing attention to the stress and challenges which carers must strive to manage.

Accepting that, 'those planning services and training need these labels [such as attachment disorder]' Sinclair (2005:23/4) observed that nevertheless labels are a 'poor guide to the way those labelled experience the world.' He points out that, for example, a child who has attachment difficulties may be unbearably lonely. It is that gulf between discourse and experience that this research project attempts to bridge.

Because labels fail to convey the nature of the experience Sinclair insists on the need for social workers and carers to, 'approach [children] without firm presuppositions' (Sinclair 2005: 24) but he also acknowledges that *Fostering Now*, and similar texts, bring with them the implied danger that they encourage people to see each person in foster care as a member of a difficult group. In foster care, then, children and young people encounter both professional and public presuppositions and the ways they try to deal with these will now be explored.

Partitioning

Dividing information by segregating or partitioning one element from another is one of the main functions of language (Bauman 2004), a fundamental human activity (Levi Strauss 1966) and a critical element in the development of disciplinary society (Foucault 1991). It has played its part in the 'history of the modern soul' (Foucault 1991: 23). It is something we all do. The attention given to the activity here is, then, to a very small part of a much greater whole.

The use of 'partitioning' here is child-centred, referring to the selective division by children and young people in foster care of information between different members of their social networks. For example, it is likely that a young person in care has a network that can include family members; members of the placement household including other children and people in foster care from different families; carers' broader networks of relatives and friends (Pithouse and Rees 2015); professionals including social workers, health workers and counsellors of various kinds; neighbours and members of the local community and, coming to prominence in this chapter, teachers and peer groups such as schoolmates, social contacts and 'best friends'. Individuals may be given information about some parts of the person in foster care's biography but denied other information. While some of that uneven distribution may be unplanned and unintentional, other decisions have more deliberation. They are in part responses to perceptions being brought to the fore by their various interlocutors. They are also characteristic of the person in foster care's modes of relating to others. By partitioning, children and young people in foster care seek to accept, modify or refute those perceptions, to encourage mutual recognition and counter prejudice or unwanted probing. Those responses are reflexive in that children and young people in foster care come to understand themselves as those who do and do not give information.

Keeping Secrets

In the main, the partitioning that I observed involved secret keeping (see also Smart 2010, 2011). The most common approaches included: to keep silent; to refuse to answer a question; to filter out the more sensitive material; to pretend agreement.

Lydia remained silent in various situations. For example, when she believed her classmates were worried because she had been crying in school "I didn't tell them I don't think...Thought I'd get in trouble." and she kept her teachers at arm's length too, "the teachers wondered what was wrong. Um don't think I really said." These deliberate silences were probably protective. During the second interview at her placement with Carly, with both sisters and Carly participating, Lia, Lydia and Carly all stated that Lydia had been bullied by relatives of Carly. Lia had been permanently placed in Carly's care. Following the

breakdown of her previous placement, Lydia had been placed temporarily with her sister but at that point in the development of the relationship of Carly to the sisters it was part of the care plan to foster the sisters apart. It was therefore arranged that Carly's relatives would train as foster carers to care for Lydia but when they completed their training the placement with them quickly broke down. Foreseeably[35], talking about the bullying would have alerted the school to child protection issues and the consequences would have been to precipitate a crisis for Lydia in her difficult placement. There was a conflict between Lydia's need of safety and her trust in teachers and Carly. By remaining silent she avoided that conflict and protected Carly from a potential family conflict. Of course, remaining silent allowed the bullying to continue and eventually she told Carly what was happening but for the period during which she combined tears with silence about the reasons she was trying to draw on support without compromising the status quo.

Lilian, too, could be discreet. Exactly when Shelby Simone was assigned to work as Lilian's key worker was impossible to establish (interviewees were usually rather vague about chronology except when they were able to work it out by using the framework provided by school Year groups and Lilian was no exception). What can be said with confidence is that Shelby was her key worker before she became pregnant towards the end of the second placement. Shelby saw Lilian through her pregnancy and her transition to a placement with Catherine Cannon.

Lilian's connection with Shelby seems to have been as positive a relationship as Lilian had during her care career. She did not look back with affection on anyone else in the care system but she told me she had been, "really close to my old social worker, Shelby." Shelby first saw Lilian through a number the difficulties connected with becoming pregnant. It was Shelby she told that she was pregnant in the first place. It was Shelby, too, who told Connie which Lilian described as, "a big relief off my head" but the foster carer's

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[35] According to Butler and Williamson young people are well aware of the tendency of adults in positions of authority to "blab" (1994:78) and "steam in" (1994:86).

reaction was condemnatory so as the pregnancy progressed Lilian remembered, "I had just had my scan and Shelby came with us, social worker came with us."

Following the birth of her child she was able to obtain from Shelby the reason for her removal from her family into care. The effects of this explanation were very significant. For approximately two years until it was explained, "…[T]here was bad things about coming into foster, well bad things about coming into foster care..." Then Lilian's perceptions of her family were suddenly reversed. Once she knew "what he done" she realised that her step father "could have done that to other people."

Though she struggled unsuccessfully to cope with verbal aggression she had nevertheless kept from Luciana knowledge that, some years earlier, before Lilian and her siblings were taken into care, her step-father, "Mr Taylor", had abused their half-sister, Lulu. Her decision not to pass the information on to Luciana was, perhaps, another instance of her habit of being a "Mum type of thing." By remaining silent she enabled Luciana and perhaps others in the family to preserve a measure of (possibly dangerous yet 'normal') family interaction while her own primary relationship with her baby, Noel took her on a different course.

Silent discretion is only really effective if the person in foster care has near-exclusive control of the information to be withheld. Sometimes the genie is already out of the bottle, as in the cases to be considered next and then it can be necessary to block questioning wholly or in part. Schools are particularly difficult as sites for secret keeping. There are just too many ways for school mates to learn that a young person does not live at home with their parent(s) (Madigan *et al*. 2013). Social events like sleep overs; school-family events such as Parents' Evenings or school trips; the insider knowledge of siblings or foster-siblings who attend the same school; summonses away from lessons to meet with social workers or other members of the various agencies involved in care provision; arriving at and leaving school in a taxi. All these and other signs help to fuel speculation. One of the best 'partitioners' among my participants, Leona, found it impossible to conceal fostered status altogether at school. She had a straightforward

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general policy, "I never, never say nowt" and was strongly committed to it. One of her closest friends was also a person in foster care living in a different placement but, "We never really talk about [being fostered]." The only exception was a boy she had known all her life and, "Well I used to talk to him. I talked to him in Year 7 about all that but …now we just talk about things like normal things." Even so, asked if others knew she did not live with her mother she acknowledged that they did.

Next, I want to look in some detail at a series of comments Lucas made concerning his identity as a young person in foster care and the difficulties that he had encountered in managing his self-representation among peers at school. The language he uses may be a reflection of restricted language development but will not, here, be interpreted as such. Rather, the child centred approach will be pursued at the level of meaning.

Studies of language development in institutional care are almost wholly focused on the language development of infants and toddlers. In general, high numbers of children with low performance have been found in lower socio-economic groups in some studies (Letts *et al*. 2013) and there are reports of a high rate of language delays in the foster care population (Stock and Fisher 2006). There is a 'paucity of studies… regarding the effects of placement type' on language development (Stacks *et al*. 2011: 287) and within each type of placement it is likely there will be wide variation in the level of language development (Stacks *et al*. 2011). Therefore, an unavoidable degree of uncertainty would attend any attempt at analysis of the passage that follows.

Research (Smart *et al*. 2001; Barnes 2012) supports an assumption that children and young people in foster care may use the professional language of care as a part of the frame within which they discuss their care. Specific examples from my interviews of direct borrowing from the language of care will be provided later in this chapter. Studies of other aspects of language development among older children and young people in foster care are difficult to find and seem to be restricted to communication with carers (McKinney 2011, 2014) rather than peers. On that, admittedly limited, basis I suggest the following analysis

of Lucas' account is possible at the level of meaning. Further, I suggest that in a child centred study it would be inappropriate to regard the difficulties of expression that will be examined here as evidence of nothing but language or speech difficulties.

Lucas' situation seemed to cause him more difficulties than anyone else I interviewed. When I asked Lucas if his friends knew that he was fostered at first he replied with an emphatic, "No! Just don't tell them!" but then he immediately began a different account, "Usually some people know. Some of my best friends know. You go, 'What's the matter?'"

The doubly qualified, "usually some people know" was in danger of standing on its head his impulsive claim of complete control so he changed his claim to one of only slightly diminished control, explaining that those who knew were best friends. There was something about this account that continued to trouble him, however, and he continued, "You go, 'What's the matter'." Lucas frequently uses 'you go' as a way of introducing his own recollected statements but if I assume this is what he has said to some others why would he ask best friends what was the matter? Since he then went on to describe how he was taunted it seems most likely that "What's the matter" was addressed to a taunting person or group and, if so, it would suggesting that Lucas was more vulnerable than he was ready to acknowledge. That interpretation gets support from the way the account continues:

> People…it's for a joke, they go, 'You mong.' You just go, 'Hiya. How you doing?'
>
> They go, 'You mong.' Just for like a joke they just go, 'You mong.'

The interaction described presents him as being friendly, having his friendliness rebuffed with an insult, an insult which he reported as being just a joke. His discomfort was also apparent to people who retaliated on his behalf, "And my mates would like shout at em   [ ]."At that point he abandoned the claim that his fostered status had been protected. Saying it was 'just a joke' suggests that the original exchange remained a source of discomfort. Finally he added, "Most people know I'm fostered."

As on other occasions, Lucas wanted to convey the impression that he was in control, but having reflected on the situation, he recognised there was a wide enough dispersal of information about him for people who lay well outside his friendship group to use it freely against him.

His need to represent himself as coping reasserted itself though, and he continued to make a series of claims about how he managed the way information about him flowed around his peer group. Those who he felt could be trusted could ask questions of him, up to a point. "Tell em I'm fostered and they go, 'What's that mean?' Just go, 'That my Mum's going to court and stuff.'" Such an explanation is vague enough to be relatively undamaging if passed on but weighty enough to impart a sense of being trusted to the recipient but other situations were more awkward to defend. When he was seen with his foster sister Carol who attended the same school as him, or with her parents at school events such as Parents' Evenings, "I just say they're my foster sister." Requests for information about the causes behind his fostered status were too threatening even for this degree of appeasement however and had to be blocked by desperate measures, "I just say I don't know. Try to, 'No'" He understood very well that his pretended ignorance invited incredulity, "Like, 'How d'you not know?'."

Lacking the greater resilience, the only way Lucas found to deal with persistent challenges in this area of his life was through blatant refusal of the demand for information, "I just go, 'Don't want to speak about. Ok?'"

In overall terms his strategy seemed to be to use different stories for different people. He would recognise that some pieces of information were more sensitive than others and that he could trust (see Morrow 1996) some of his fellow pupils more than others but he lacked sufficient skill, at that point, to carry off the strategy successfully. Trying to block questions only compelled him to block further questions he had raised. His friends were apparently drawn into defending him on one occasion and telling questioners he did not want to talk about something may have won a reprieve but only at the expense of exposing his vulnerability. Generally the pattern of qualifying and re-qualifying his position together with

the glimpses he gives of underlying anxiety suggest a considerable degree of distress being managed, if at all, with difficulty.

About the time of this final interview with Lucas, his carers told me that he had caused a serious problem in their family by making allegations against his foster sister to her friends at school. It is not possible to point to any direct connection between the stress he displayed about the way he was perceived at school and that important moment in the erosion of placement stability but the desperate measures he took to maintain his self-presentation might also point to a plausible explanation for that unexplained and damaging event.

Libby appeared to display greater resilience (se Schofield and Beek 2009; Fernandez and Barth 2010; Guerney-Smith *et al.* 2010; Cairns 2006; Gilligan 2009) and more coping strategies (Pithouse and Rees 2015) to deal with a similar threat to her identity. By comparison with Lucas, she seems to have met a similar challenge at school calmly. Talking about being in a foster family she thought:

> …[E]veryone [at school] knows…it wasn't intentional like I didn't tell everyone …
>
> Just I was talking to a good friend and and then one person overheard.

Clearly she had chosen to confide in someone about being fostered. In that perhaps she was different from Lucas who apparently provided limited information even to his friends. The impression she wanted to give was that from a single instance of overhearing the information spread very extensively. Whether or not she was simplifying a more complex process, "…a rumour went round that my Mum was battering me… and there was rumours going around that I was adopted which isn't really true."

Her reaction to these rumours is awkward to interpret since having been talking about herself in the first person she slipped briefly into the third person saying, "She said well that's not true." It is easiest to assume that what she meant was that she had told some of those people who were circulating the rumours that they were mistaken and, if that is so, she probably also provided a brief but accurate account

because her general position on others knowing about her status was, "I would rather people know about it."

If the rumours about her were just as concerning as the name calling that Lucas reported, from the way she described them her reactions appear to have been comparatively successful in resolving the problems. Many factors could have contributed to that but one factor was certainly that Lucas was describing experiences in a new school while Libby was describing events in a secondary school she had been settled at for perhaps as long as three years. Leona, too, practised her determined blocking throughout a stable secondary education in the same familiar school. Wilson *et al.* report:

> Difficulties are increased by movement in the care system which frequently implies
>
> changes of school, with a consequent need to find new friends, pick up on new
>
> ways of teaching etc.
>
> (Wilson *et al.* 2005:48)

Discovery of fostered status exposes the young person to stigmatising presuppositions of a 'problem' background, personal impairments and institutional control that were discussed earlier. The impact of suddenly being identified as a person in foster care (Jack 2010; Mahmood 2015) is likely to raise difficulties but seems to have been easier for some interviewees to manage in a situation where there was a wide circle of familiar acquaintances beyond a core friendship group.

Finally, one of several unusual features of Libby's placement, compared to all the others in my sample, is that she was shielding, if not wholly concealing from her carers, her attachment to her father. Her father lived hundreds of miles away from her placement and, apart from a summer holiday with him, when she was in foster care they met only occasionally in supervised contacts which were her main opportunities to

talk to him. However, describing one supervised contact as being like "visiting my dad in prison" she told me:

> …[We] felt like we couldn't talk about as many things as we could have if we weren't supervised…there were personal things that I wanted to talk to my Dad about.

Embarrassment about being overheard may spring from various sources (see Larkins *et al*. 2015 for perspectives on family contacts) but in this instance placement tensions played a part. Her carer told me that in her opinion the father-daughter attachment was one-sided with Libby being unaware of her father's (never clarified) weaknesses. This contrasted strongly with Libby's description of their feelings founded on a mutual desire to be together. The difference points to considerable potential for conflict between carers and children and young people in foster care, a condition which was evident in their behaviour at times during the interviews. For example, my notes on Libby's first interview include the following:

> …[T]owards the end when Libby went out to go to the loo and to get a calendar to make the next appointment [her carer] began to whisper to me - some of it is on the recording - about L's relationship with her father. [The carer] struggles with her dislike of the father… and when I was ready to leave she came out with me and talked for another 15 minutes about this relationship, several times repeating a warning to me to be careful…

What she felt I needed to exercise caution about was not spelled out but subsequent behaviour helped to suggest what it might have been. Libby was aware that her placement plan was, "I'm like here 'til I'm eighteen and when I'm eighteen I'm going to do University if I can." Her carers subscribed to that plan enthusiastically. However, Libby had also been told by her social worker that she would be able to make her own decisions about who she lived with once she reached the age of 16 and she had decided to live

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with her father. She waited to tell me that when her carer Cherie was out of the interview room dealing with a phone call and explained that it would involve, "…standing up to everyone I guess." She knew, therefore, that she would meet resistance and in that context the surveillance of supervised contact was an impediment. Leaving care would bring with it financial and family implications that needed to be worked out. She was aware that she would lose funding for University attendance if she was no longer in care and it would also mean living far from her mother who, in placement, she saw each weekend so there was much to talk about, but she could not be certain that what she and her father discussed would be treated confidentially.

Both carer and young person in foster care were content with the placement but sought to conceal from each other their thoughts on its eventual duration. The arrival of an interviewer resulted in each manoeuvring to get moral support for their own position (Fontana and Frey 2005) but the aim behind presentation of different versions of the family and placement network to different audiences was to preserve the placement in the short term. A comparable solidary intention can be seen in all of the secrets discussed so far. According to Smart the keeping of secrets is a 'core activity' in bonding (and othering) members of families together (Smart 2011: 540). On this evidence secret-keeping has a similar function outside families, in the family-like settings of foster placements and in the more open networks of large peer groups. Examples of 'othering' will be considered later.

Confidentiality

A feature of foster placements that is largely absent from other forms of family home is the obligation of confidentiality by social workers, foster carers and others engaged in work related to foster care to young people in care and their families. Confidentiality is perhaps the most persistent aspect of social work discourse affecting the everyday experience of children and young people in foster care. The fear that too many people have access to information can be a major concern (Mariscal *et al*. 2015) and in my

investigation many of the placements were in smaller communities where children and young people in foster care have even more 'confidentiality dilemmas' (Mariscal *et al.* 2015: 116).

A few references from Council documents will give some idea of the range of confidentiality practices. In its practical *Family Placement Handbook* issued to me when I became a foster carer Careshire County Council defined confidentiality as, 'respecting the privacy of the details of other peoples' lives', applying that in particular to information about foster children and other children connected to them. The same Council's *Guide to Foster* Care which was aimed at foster carers but also at a much wider range of staff, made reference to confidentiality as a 'statutory requirement'. All who attend fostering panels for the approval of new carers were bound by 'strict confidentiality' (Northern County Council 2007: Section 5.2.11). The same *Guide* defined the frequency with which children and young people in foster care should have confidential meetings with key workers. It described the role of its media team in safeguarding confidentiality in dealings with the press. It expressed a general requirement of confidentiality in storing data. The county's business manual defined the documents to be kept in the confidential section of each foster carer's file. Confidentiality is a requirement, then, that structures many aspects of foster care and placement life is inevitably influenced by it. In the home-like environment of a placement, however, confidentiality is often on display.

The nervous Leo waiting outside a meeting room when I arrived for the participation group will serve as an illustration of what I mean by that. My notes of that evening record that Leo and I spoke about an email I had sent him but which he had not received. A few days later I telephoned his foster carer, Constance, who explained that he no longer had access to the Internet following concerns about the uses he had been putting it to. She also told me she and her husband had been there at the offices for Leo's latest review meeting. When I arrived they had been in the meeting room talking to Leo's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) about the present situation. Leo had gone in later. The Council's policy statement on the Independent Reviewing Service (which monitors the local authority's review of each care plan) states that

reviews must remain 'child and family centred' (Northern County Council 2007:27) and the decision to leave Leo outside was unusual, testimony to the difficulty of the situation in the placement at that time. He had been permanently excluded from college for inappropriate behaviour towards a fellow student and had then made partial disclosure of inappropriate behaviour towards a young member of the carers' family.

Reviewing Officers have discretion about the way they carry out reviews and it is not hard to understand why, in such a case, a decision was made for the carers to discuss the matter with the IRO confidentially at first. My interest here, however, is in the young man's experience of the arrangement and, in particular, in his awareness of his own exclusion from the discussion going on, literally, behind a closed door. Confidential meetings can be discreet but are not always. As in this instance, in the act of protecting, they proclaim the exclusion that is being enacted and the person being excluded knows that that is happening (Wilson *et al*. 2000). Given the variety of relationships that are protected, children and young people in foster care regularly come to know themselves as denied information or as being seen by others as denying. In that sense, when confidentiality is visible it is highly conspicuous and because it is, it lends itself to social reproduction in the sense that they enter care with disadvantages and acquire a pattern of behaviour which can increase their disadvantage (Bourdieu 1974; Tobin *et al*. 1999). Learning that information may be systematically and openly withheld by carers, social workers and others and, further, that they, too, are encouraged to withhold information, from adults as well as peers, children and young people in foster care may seek to rely more frequently on the practice. The effect of this, however, may be to undermine trust (see Farmer 2002, 2010) in existing attachments and constrain the development of new attachments.

It was possible to detect traces of learning to partition from the institutional practice of confidentiality in the interviews. Lydia and Lia were separated when they first came into care and information connected with that decision may have been withheld from them. Lydia did not know why and Lia thought they had

never been told. "Probably Carly remember" was Lydia's comment: Lydia was right. Such was Carly's dominance over the sisters that, in their presence, she could, without challenge from them, say to me, "Well that's something you could ask me when they're not here" and she made good the offer of detailed information when the sisters were no longer present at the end of the interview. Her discretionary power to withhold or provide information was not restricted to this single situation (on discretionary powers see Ennew 1994; James and Prout 1997; Finn 2013). Throughout the three interviews she gave, Lydia frequently sought Carly's permission to tell me things. Later in the same interview, for example, when Lydia was thinking of telling me about an incident that touched on Carly's family she felt compelled to ask, "Er shall we? Allowed to say it Carly?" Here as in Lucas's experiences at school, the existence of different versions of events, of tailoring narratives to fit the situation, is evident. Among the members of this placement, boundaries between what different people were or were not entitled to know were openly negotiated. If the concerns that guided those negotiations were complex and, for Lydia, sometimes worrying, some general principles were clear enough. Carly was entitled to withhold information about them from the sisters. The sisters were expected to withhold information from placement non-members under certain conditions unknown (to me). Carly acted as the arbiter of decisions to withhold or impart in the case of uncertainty. Some negative impact of these principles will be outlined next.

So far the examples have been of relatively passive forms of confidentiality where the interviewees were concerned. They illustrate looked after children's acceptance that others can exercise power over them. Leona and Lucas, however, both asserted their right not to gratify curiosity and Lia also showed she had picked up and could use the technique herself. Early in her second interview, I asked her where she was living now that she no longer lived with Carly and she told me she was not allowed to give the address out, nor tell me about the people she was living with or even tell me who had told her to keep the information secret. She forestalled all the most obvious further questioning, in doing so created a sense of mystery and her laugh that followed made it clear that she was enjoying being close lipped. In fact she was experimenting with the role of confidence bearer that she may originally have developed for use in

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connection with her sister. I shall explain shortly that it was genuinely important to her to keep information about her new home from Lydia, but this refusal to me was not maintained for long. Shortly afterwards she told me all about it, with obvious pleasure.

Carol Smart's (2011) work on family secrets makes it clear enough, if it were ever in doubt, that the keeping of secrets is a universal social practice. However, bureaucratically regulated confidentiality is different from family secrets and the considerable penetration of a principle of confidentiality into placement life is another of the factors that make most placements different from family homes. There are those who argue for extension of the confidentiality offered to children and young people in vulnerable situations to overcome the mistrust that children and young people feel in confiding to the adults who have the job of protecting them (Bell 2003; Munro 2001; Butler and Williamson 1994). Perhaps guarantees of absolute confidentiality would lead to more disclosure yet the visibility of confidentiality in itself generates anxiety. How, for example, will the experience of waiting outside the door have affected Leo's ability to contribute to his review at that important stage in his career in foster care?

Naming

A connection between delayed linguistic development and abuse or severe neglect is well established (Manso *et al.* 2010) but if children and young people in foster care have linguistic delay among their other disadvantages they have nevertheless to find ways to explain complex relationships. Given the extent to which being separated impacted on the lives of people in foster care, it is to be expected that their ways of talking about those relationships denied or constrained would be of considerable research interest. Having been separated from their families, usually in circumstances which were stigmatising, children and young people in foster care often had difficulties when they had to represent themselves and their families to me during interviews. English provides common linguistic resources for dealing with some, but not all, of the family relationships children and young people in foster care have. Mothers and fathers of different standings sometimes can be easily differentiated by calling them 'Mum, 'step Dad, 'adopted Mum' or by

using a Christian name but, whether because of developmental delay or not, these names begin to buckle under the kinds of combination and change that were encountered among the families of the children and young people in foster care, particularly when they had had a period of adoption before being fostered. A social factor may help to account for these difficulties. Borrowing an insight from Conversation Analysis, Sacks (in Jefferson 1992:24) tells us the category 'family' routinely invites thought about the sub-categories 'mother', 'father' and so on and that any one of the sub-categories invokes all the other sub-categories, too. Yet, when fostered, the proliferation of relationships that might be included in the category 'family' makes this apparently clear dynamic between sub-categories much more difficult to rely upon in talk. In previous chapters a good number of examples of these difficulties in describing relationships have had to be disentangled. Often, the nouns and pronouns they chose were tentative, hinting at a slight, perhaps semi-conscious discomfort with expressions that only roughly represented the relationships they were trying to represent.

Take, for example, the following account Lucy gave of her adoption early in the first of two interviews:

It went; I got adopted when I was eight. It was um Cheryl and Colby was the Mum

Mum and Dad who adopted us, not the birth Mum…

What she wanted to do was simply to explain who adopted her but to say, 'It was my adopted parents who adopted us' would have been vacuous. It made more sense, because it was personalizing, to use her adoptive parents' Christian names (see Christiansen *et al*. 2012) and, had she been talking to a family insider who knew them, that would have been adequate. Having named them, she seems to have realised Christian names alone were of no help to me because I was a stranger. Their identities needed to be better established if her account of her immediate family was to succeed. She therefore announced they were 'the Mum and Dad' but her use of a definite article was awkwardly impersonal so she immediately veered back to the more personal, 'Mum and Dad'. Then, because to a stranger and family outsider an unqualified use of 'Mum and Dad' carried, even given the preceding context, a degree of ambiguity, she felt she needed to reinforce the distinction between her parents and her adopted parents and so she borrowed a

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conceptual device widely used by social workers and affirmed they were 'not the birth Mum', again using a definite article with, on this occasion, no resiling from its distancing effect.

References to 'birth Mum', 'birth Dad' and 'birth parents' - borrowed, no doubt, from welfare discourse - were made only by three interviewees – Lucy, Leo and Lanie - who had foster-care-to-adoption-to-foster-care sequences in their care careers. Presumably the legal grant of parental rights to adopted parents is accompanied by problematisation of previous uses of 'Mum' and 'Dad' (Jones and Hackett 2011) when those titles have to become available for use in the adopted family. When adoptions break down the transferred titles are problematised in turn and the result is confusion for the children and young people in foster care at the levels of both family and adopted family[36]. With one exception, the other, never-adopted interviewees were able to refer to 'Mum' or 'my Mum' without feeling the need for further clarification. The exception was Lia Lawson. It may be recalled that Lia had been removed from her parents but a number of years later had enforced her decision to exit foster care and once sufficiently independent, made contact with her mother and father. They were living separately and her father had created a new family which gave Lia a home. She referred to her father's new partner as, "…my Mummy Dora, my step-Mum" and to her other Mum as, "my Mum from Yorkshire." There are, then, other less institutionalised ways of distinguishing between people who occupy overlapping roles in a family but only in this case were there current, restorative and forward looking contact with the individuals concerned, hence more individual, familiar names or titles developed.

'Birth Mother' or 'my Mum from Yorkshire', for the person referred to (or those such as social workers or foster carers with an interest in understanding the relationship) carries information about the regard of the speaker. Other including and excluding messages in the way placements were referred to can be even more economical but still distribute values around complex sets of relationships.

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[36] Since many parents retain parental rights when their children go into foster care which is, anyway, usually intended to be a short term arrangement, informal transfer of the titles is most unlikely to occur in foster care.

Inclusive naming strategies

The choice of "we" rather than alternatives available will illustrate the economy and utility of these strategies.

Talking about a teacher who had become a helper and who worked well with his foster carers, Lamar mentioned that she had, "stuck up for Leonardo, this other foster child who we used to have." He might just as easily have said, 'this other foster child who they used to have' but chose instead to identify himself with the fragment of family history, by so doing making himself a member of the family (see Misztal 2003; Smart 2011).

Emphasising an on-going relationship of care rather than family history but with much the same effect, Laaiq told me, "We have two kids here [Leo and his brother]." Laaiq was still very much in the early stages of acquiring English and it could be dangerous to put much reliance on his grammar but he carried on to talk about the way Constance helped the other younger person in foster care with homework and commented, "myself I do help as well if they struggle with something and I can help." His sense of responsibility towards the other person in foster care was consistent with the inclusive pronoun and so in that instance there was probably no grammatical error. "We have two kids here", then, conveys self-understanding as a member of a caring group and, incidentally, appears to locate the other "kids" somewhere just beyond the group, in receipt of their care. Of course, that might have been entirely unwitting but Leo's placement was under threat, as was shown above, and if Laaiq was aware of that his ambivalent usage may have indicated not only awareness of his own membership but also something of Leo's insecurity.

When carers exhibit the qualities the young people most value, new attachments begin to develop and references to the foster family as "we" is a way of expressing that emerging sense of belonging. For young people like Lawrence, already in his fourth placement and able to look back on many different respite carers, feelings of liking and concern were experienced at the same time as rooted fear of loss. The final
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example to be considered here reveals how he managed that risk, expressing his sense of caring for his foster mother with a mixture of boldness and timidity. His foster carer, Caitlin, had had an operation a few days before his final interview and he broke that news to me by telling me, "We've got a lump in her stomach removed." The scope of Lawrence's "we've got" is not easy to judge but the term "got" was probably a reference to shared feelings of relief that followed the operation. Whatever the intention the phrase was an effective announcement of his strong interest in Caitlin's welfare. The inclusive "we", then, is an economical and discrete way of expressing feelings of affinity and belonging (Lemche *et al*. 2013; Borelli *et al*. 2013; Simmons *et al*. 2008) when applied to members of a placement who are not genetic kin, they signify emergent attachment in a way that shields feelings against the possibility of further rejection or loss.

Naming strategies of exclusion

Verbal strategies of exclusion were observed such as depersonalising names or labels that accompanied feelings of anger and blame and pointed to social distance. Since they were ways of dealing with strongly negative feelings, noticeability might have been expected yet the distancing names and labels chosen were euphemisms (McGlone *et al*. 2006) that partly concealed from addressees the exclusionary meaning they had for the speaker.

For example, when Lucas Lambert said, "My Mum went out with a London guy" he chose not to use a personal name. It is possible that he did not know the 'London guy's' name, but unlikely. In the interview Lucas also described how when "Lee was by his own and I was with my friend next door…We saw Lee shouting with the two …men holding on to him." The account of what happened next is not completely clear. First he told me, "We ran and got the next doors because the London guy and they came out and then they just ran" but he then immediately re-told the narrative and in the second telling, "the two London guys they went over to them and asked them what they were doing." The London guy, and seemingly a friend of his, was instantly available, willing to intervene and able to demand an explanation

for the men's behaviour, all of which points to a degree of integration into Lucas's family. If he was at the house quite often Lucas might very well have known but chosen not to use his name.

It would have been in his interest to affect not to know the London guy's name. The relationship between Lucas's mother and the London guy had precipitated their first being taken into care. That relationship had involved:

> [D]rinking a lot…weed. It's a drug…and then loads of violence there, loads.
> Attacking police officers…when over the road complained about them…and called
> social services.

Lucas did not, like his two younger brothers, criticise his mother to me. He wanted her to be given custody of them and believed she would be able to care for them. Depersonalising the London guy, reducing him to a member of a category (Jefferson 1992), was a way of presenting it as a fleeting relationship. It had brought about a lapse in behaviour but the relationship, seen in that perspective, was so brief and insignificant that the London guy's name had been forgotten. Once he left the scene things could and should return to normal.

Functionally similar to Lucas' diminution of the 'London guy' but much easier to observe in that the naming practice changed between her first and second interview, Lia suddenly stopped referring to Carly and replaced the name with the occupational title, foster carer as in, "…go Bingo on me own now… My foster carer never used to take me…"

The change was exceptionally sudden and for that reason, striking. The relationship was presented as suddenly stripped of privileges and obligations it had for many years until so recently rested upon; for example, Carly's freedom to withhold information from the sisters without challenge from them; her authority over any grey areas of confidentiality within the placement; the sisters' entitlement to involve her in their plans and in the pursuit of their goals. Lia's relationship to Carly had, in fact, reverted to that

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which it had been before they came to know one another. They were once again impersonal strangers linked only to the extent that they were agent and client of a single social work agency. As such, nothing was to be expected beyond what regulation required and, since Carly had ceased to be responsible for Lia's care, that meant an obligation of confidentiality that concealed each from the other. This perspective meant that Lia could change her lifestyle and renew her relationships with her birth parents without Carly's knowledge.

Changing the way she referred to Carly would not, alone, have achieved the freedom she desired and the verbal strategy was probably linked to another more concrete strategy she was adopting at the same time. She told me she had been:

> Keeping that [living with her father] from Lydia … lying to her telling lies to her …I
>
> been living at …Westlington. Had to lie to her all the time…She will take a fit.

Her anxiety about Lydia's epilepsy was rooted in repeated experience and it is perfectly clear that Lia valued her role as Lydia's supporter and protector. Nevertheless, she had an additional, unacknowledged reason to keep information about her lifestyle changes from Lydia. She could be sure that Lydia would tell Carly anything she learned and if she thereby lost the protection of professional confidentiality she could be sure that Carly would be a sharp critic of her behaviour. At the same time as she had arranged her exit from the placement with Carly, Lia left College, "'cause all the rumours are going round. About me." Gossip was a serious source of discomfort to Lia and her "lying" to Lydia was probably also a way of protecting herself against shame. Although she had created some distance between herself and Carly at that point in time she still had some way to go before she could feel secure enough to risk telling Lydia about her new lifestyle.

A further exclusionary practice (see Bowlby Vol. 3 1998; Bretherton 1998; Tucker and McKenzie 2012; Milan and Pinderhughes 2000) that relied on the manipulation of naming was Lilian's way of referring to

her step-father as Mr. Taylor. Having told me for the first time the details of an act he had committed against her youngest sister, her demeanour of polite respectfulness towards him was for once put aside and she revealed that:

> Knowing that Mum's still with Mr. Taylor as well. Disgusting. He needs to be dead
>
> like. I hate his guts. I do. Makes us sick.

'Mr. Taylor' is used to signify the person who 'needs to be dead' because the name creates the greatest possible distance (Bretherton 1998; Milan and Pinderhughes 2000) between the act of speaking and the emotions attached to the signified. By activating the most neutral name available to her, Lilian kept control of her family secret. If she encountered people who knew her before she was taken into care the change from 'Dad' to 'Mr. Taylor' would of course prompt curiosity but by the time Shelby Simone told her about the abuse her foster care career had taken Lilian some distance, geographically and socially, from her family and friends. The odds against meeting someone familiar with her past were increasing and with new acquaintances the usage would not attract particular attention, allowing her freedom to select who she would tell about, "what Mr. Taylor has done."

Even more than in the other two cases, Lilian's verbal strategy of exclusion had an interactive, conversational dimension but also served her own emotional needs. Lilian did not only have to decide who to tell and who not to tell, she also had to live with what she knew from day to day. In part she managed that by reducing her contact with her family but still the implications of the abuse resonated in her thoughts. That can be seen from the pattern of her accounts of Mr. Taylor across the three interviews (Maniglio 2009). In the first two interviews she referred to him twelve times; nine times in the first and three times in the second. Twenty minutes into the second interview she had finished with disclosing to me the nature of the abuse and her response. In the last fifteen minutes of that interview and in the fifty minute long third interview she did not refer to Mr. Taylor at all. This pattern suggests that she needed to tell me the information that, "makes us sick" and, having made the disclosure, felt no need to return to it.

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Mr. Taylor's abuse had come to be a major factor in the way she identified herself. Within an interviewer-interviewee relationship that was now more fully informed she could depend on being understood when she addressed other matters of concern to her.

Jessica Benjamin (1990) recommends thinking of self-development as involving complementary processes in two domains, the intersubjective and the intrapsychic. The intersubjective view, she says, 'refers to what happens in the field of self and other.' In the cases being examined here the intersubjective dimension consists of the interactions children and young people in foster care are seeking to influence by managing their self-representation. The intrapsychic is the unconscious, 'the inner world of fantasy, wish, anxiety and defense; of bodily symbols and images.' The intrapsychic is likely to inform the intersubjective narrative such as Lucas's longing to be restored to his trustworthy mother, Lia's anger about her long separation from her family and Lilian's sense of having been betrayed.

Benjamin points out, too, that intersubjective and intrapsychic theory are usually (and wrongly) seen in opposition to each other. That observation helps to clarify further why it is so difficult to avoid treating each young person in care as a member of a difficult group (Sinclair 2005). In institutions informed of and acting in response to early histories of trauma there is a presumption of consequent disorder (see Wilson *et al*. 2005; Magnilio 2009). When 'difficult' and 'challenging' elements of behaviour arise (Wilson *et al.* 2005; Daniel 2011), this explanatory logic is immediately available and the social contexts of 'symptoms' are likely to be missed. Since it is quite clear that Lilian has been, as she put it, "Hurt. I would say hurt's the most one…" and since it would be difficult *not* to find precise knowledge of the sexual abuse of a loved baby sister near-intolerable, it is reasonable to understand her way of referring to Mr. Taylor as a defensive mechanism. But to see that distancing as nothing but a defence in isolation from its intersubjective utility would be to miss how important that latter also is to her.

Lilian wanted (at times, insisted) to decide to let or not to let, "just another stranger come into my life." In foster care, as we have seen, autonomy in such matters is frequently threatened at two different levels.

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Fostered status acts as a symbol of a type of family background or as a key to the interpretation of their behaviour. Distorted and distorting versions of their lives (Pithouse and Rees 2015; Sinclair 2005, Walker-Gleaves and Walker 2008; Mitchell *et al*. 2015*)* can seem to have become collective property yet the need to gain recognition of their self-understanding and sense of their situation remains (Benjamin 1994). When that recognition is in danger of being denied, young people use whatever intersubjective resources they can find.

The usefulness of partitioning goes well beyond negotiating identities. It can be practically useful when children and young people in foster care participate, as legislation and regulation encourage (Kellett and Ding 2004; OFSTED 2012; Wyness 2011), in decisions that affect their care. A range of reported participations will now be examined.

I shall first draw on a cluster of statements made by Lilian in her second and third interviews. The coincidence of becoming a mother with learning about the abuse seems to have made many care practices of immediate importance to her and she had become interested in talking about them to an extent that other interviewees were not. We have already discussed her decision to isolate herself and her son from her family and now some other implications will be brought into focus.

Since I shall be considering together a cluster of quotations from a single interviewee the sequence in which they were given is provided by the following Table.

Table 3 – Lilian's interviews

Interview no/ quotation no	Quotation
2/087	"I used to work with this Barnardo's person from, well, this LACES[37] person from Barnardo's…she used to like bring the past up and that so I didn't like working with her."
2/103 (first part)	"I don't know it - like I've got loads and loads of things I could say, loads and loads of anger. It's just trying to say it and trying to get that anger out. I've had loads of folks say to me you should do counselling, you could see the person where she'll just sit there and listen to you and you can say whatever you feel."
2/103 (second part)	"I don't want that [counselling] though 'cause that's just another stranger come into my life but I don't know sometimes it can be upsetting specially to little kids but when you're more older it's better to get it off your chest.…"
2/105	"Yeah. I don't [talk about it], I wouldn't like anybody. If I do [drowned in background noise] I wouldn't like anybody. I didn't know. I wouldn't be able to tell anybody. I'm rather better saying to my boyfriend about you know and all my friends. I'd rather get it out in front of them instead of saying it to other folk. I: Do you talk to [your boyfriend] about it?

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[37] Looked After Children Education Services

	L: Folk, I do. Yeah. He knows everything, yeah. I: And um that feels safe? L: Yeah. Yeah. Um He had a birthday. He had a birthday middle of November his birthday he was twenty one and we went out and his Nana didn't know I was in foster care and she'd said to him 'Why's Lily in foster care?' and he said 'Oh it's none of my business to tell you. She'll tell you when she's ready' So I thought, well I've been with him for quite a long time now so I might as well tell her so I told her and she went 'Oh it's awful isn't it?' I said 'Yes. But it's in the past now so just forget about it I just forget about it.' So."
2/127 (first part)	"I've never talked to Connie about [drowned in background noise but the context was an account of Mr. Taylor's abuse] I was really close to my old social worker Shelby. I haven't talked to Suri about it. I've talked to Catherine about my little brothers and sisters going into adoption"
2/127 (second part)	"I've only really talked to my boyfriend about it when I think about it now my friends all my friends know about it so I don't know."
3/297	"I didn't want to talk about my past and don't need somebody, somebody that's meant to be helping with with my independence asking me if I've seen my brother which I haven't seen him for years. So I didn't want him as my care er my Pathways worker anymore."

Lillian was the only child or young person in my sample to bring counselling practice to my attention. Whether or not there is a gender issue in the provision of counselling is unclear. A number of studies have shown no gender difference (Burns *et al*. 2004; Farmer *et al*. 2001; McMillen *et al*. 2004), but there is some indication that female youth are more likely to receive counselling or other treatment (Hazen *et al*. 2004). What seems a little clearer is that satisfaction with counselling can often be associated with freedom of choice and motivation together with counsellor qualities (Scott *et al*. 2009). The institutional context of counselling is also important to consider (Vossler 2004).

The above sequence is associative, branching at first from some thoughts she had about Luciana, her nearest sister's involvement in a course of treatment with a counsellor. The same counsellor had treated Lilian in the past (2/087) and had according to Lilian stirred up uncomfortable memories. Lilian realised she could not govern Luciana's decisions, but was worrying the counsellor would take a similar course with Luciana.

The likelihood of psycho-medical approaches in care was raised earlier in this chapter and here is a specific instance. The training, experience and skill of the counsellor in question may be significant but there is no information available about that. What is known about is the social context in which her decision to begin counselling was taken. "Loads of folk" (2/103) had apparently sought to persuade her and their persuasion, as reported, envisaged a different model of the counselling from what she eventually experienced. While as always, interview accounts need to be treated with care as to the details, it is unlikely that she could have arrived at so precise a counselling model of passive receptivity by intuition. "You could see the person where she'll just sit there and listen to you and you can say whatever you feel" is close to a professional model and so very probably a discursively derived idealisation, learned from discussions with carers, social workers or, perhaps, parents (Vossler 2004). It is quite credible, then, that a concerned adult had seen the challenges Lilian's behaviour presented as requiring treatment and had used persuasion which, in the event, seemed to have backfired. According to Lilian, the counselling was rejected

because of probing questions which were unacceptable and, having tried following advice she found unreliable, she became wary. She still saw counselling as a potential resource but had provisionally concluded she could do without strangers because she had a boyfriend Joe, who she could trust and and whose reaction to her family secret was acceptable to her (2/105) so the same emotional needs could be met with less risk (see also Pithouse and Rees 2015; Beck 2012).

Extract 2/105 explains why she trusted Joe. She began by describing how Joe respected her feelings and went on to describe how she reciprocated by letting Joe's Nana feel included. That helped to protect the relationships between the three of them, consolidating a bond, but Lilian was nevertheless treating the relationships differently. Joe "knew everything" while Nana should have understood that further questions were unwelcome. This remembering led her to cast around in her mind for others with whom she might have shared the details. She listed some placement figures, both foster carers and social workers (2/127 first part) (Atkinson 2015; Jary and Jary2005; Sacks 1964). Of those listed, Shelby was the source rather than the recipient of the information that was being shielded. Only Catherine of her carers had apparently been granted privileges and those were restricted, allowed at least in part because, as was reported earlier, Lilian wanted Catherine's help in contact arrangements with Luciana. As an afterthought, all her friends "know about it" (2/127 second part). Once again, different versions of a story were presented to the various audiences she faced.

Her sensitivity to probing questions re-surfaced in the third interview (3/297). Her understanding of the roles of a care worker was, here as with the Barnardo's/LACES worker, specific and unbending and his crossing of boundaries, as she saw it, led to his (verbally) forceful rejection. At least twice, then, Lilian ended a potentially supportive connection at an early stage because she found the workers intrusive. In both cases it looks as if the problem arose because they were trying to provide care and at the same time establish a personal connection. That is a valid principle; we have frequently seen that children and young people in foster care find personal qualities important (Scott *et al*. 2009; Schofield and Beek 2005).

However, establishing trust in counselling is a complex process and counsellors are not always successful (Scott *et al*. 2009).

In summary, in all of these cases there is a strategic dimension but also an affective and indeed moral one demonstrating that partitioning can place both cognitive and emotional demands on the young person. In the separated and supervised life lived by children and young people in foster care very difficult information may often appear to require management or concealment. Its concealment can be problematic but even when it is relatively simple to achieve, the partition may need to be defended against risk of new damage. Thus the practice of attempting to control who knows what, modelled and reinforced by professional practices of confidentiality, is used by children and young people in foster care to minimise potential sources of stress in their environment, but since partitioning itself involves risks, it cannot eliminate them.

Participation strategies

Foster care is a family centred service. The local authority's policy statement on foster care makes clear that the children, together with their parents are "central to all activity" and that all planning and practice will reflect that centrality (Northern County Council 2006:4). The processes by which policy becomes practice is not the main focus here but the part played by children and young people in foster care in the system, whether or not it works in the ways envisaged by policy makers, is very much of concern.

All the young people who participated in this research had had two years or more, sometimes much more, in foster care and while the youngest was a nine year old the average age was little short of 14. They had, then, experience of foster care, they had developing capacities for reflection upon that experience, they were in on-going placements that called for present responses from them, and in many cases there

was a resilient[38] framework of care that could tolerate a considerable degree of exploration and experimentation from them. The institution gave them opportunities and channels for participation, and when frustrated they had the further option of waiting for their eighteenth birthday when they leave care with a range of continuing entitlements (Harris and White 2013) . To all of this we can add a range of personal strategies they chose.

Parents act as advocates for their children and so, although none ever mentioned having had access to advocacy services, in the family-like setting of foster care, several children and young people in foster care reported asking carers to be advocates (Barnes 2012). Some talked about asking carers when they needed help with school or college while others asked for help with social service departments or individual social workers. There was only one instance of a person in foster care turning to a social worker rather than a foster carer for help with an educational issue. When Lydia and Lia had repeatedly asked Carly to help them re-arrange Lydia's College timetable so she could do games "Lydia been asking Seth to do the same sort it out for her in college for gym do sports for her." Seth's response was to put the ball back in their court, "He just said 'Try and have a word with them. Tell them what you want to do.'" and they seem to have decided that meant continuing to work through Carly but she was convinced that Lydia's mental faculties were deteriorating in repeated epileptic episodes. As we have seen, she was prepared to fall out with a respite carer who did not protect Lydia sufficiently in this respect so it is very likely that she took the same view as the College about Lydia's exclusion from games. Still, Lia's continuing confidence that Carly could have an effect - "Let Carly write a note for [the teacher] and ask [the teacher] they're only to ring Carly. That's oh it easy." also suggested that Carly was trying to manage the situation so as to avoid a direct refusal of help,

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[38] In Leo's case the care framework was, quite remarkably, containing a profound threat to the security of a very young member of the fostering family without terminating the placement.

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The relationship between Lamar's carers, Carol and Colin, and his school (see Pithouse and Rees 2015; Wilson *et al*. 2005; Sinclair *et al*. 2003, 2001; Jackson and Martin 1998) were by far the most developed in the sample. They spoke to teachers by telephone, visited the school to resolve problems about uniform, were visited at the placement by a teacher-ally of Lamar and Lamar had enough experience of placement and school overlapping to be able to predict what would happen if he got into trouble at school:

> I always talk to her [Carol] about it. Like say if something's been went on like in school like I always come back and tell her before she gets a phone call…'cause I I found I found out, it's over years, if you don't tell her she gets a phone call she gets more mad but if you tell her first and she knows like what's actually went on she jo she hears your side first and then she hears the teachers she puts two and two together and she's alright about it, aren't you Car?

At the beginning of this chapter I observed that teachers at Lamar's school misunderstood the purpose of foster care and there was wide awareness and sometimes misunderstanding of his fostered status among both teachers and pupils. However, it may also be that the establishment of genuinely family-like collaboration between school and placement is easier to establish "over years" when both institutions find ways to reduce protective confidentiality.

The other main area in which foster carers were asked for help was as a link with social workers. Foster carers were usually asked by children and young people in foster care to get social workers to improve their experience in placement; developing contact arrangements; arranging trips and getting additional resources for a person in foster care. The other major area in which they talked of getting foster carers to help was to have preliminary conversations preparing the way for children and young people in foster care to have more difficult conversations with their key worker. Face to face discussions between the young people and their key workers will have covered contacts, trips and resources as well as school and behaviour but when interviewees talked about unmediated requests to or discussions with key workers it
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was nearly always in connection with more fundamental organisational decisions. For example, placement transfers, the removal of unacceptable agency workers and, in one case, a serious complaint against the person in foster care were all negotiated directly between social workers and children and young people in foster care with a single exception when, according to Lydia, "So they put us [both] at Carly's. Carly forced them. Put it that way."

When they were unable to achieve their goals, an alternative for some participants was simply to be patient and wait. Writing about the daily routine, Bullock *et al*. (1998: 100) mentioned, 'the endless 'waiting' that seems such a feature of children's looked after experiences' (. This finds some expression in a comment by Lia who said she and Lydia "Put time in. Put time in." The repetition emphasised her dissatisfaction with the tedium of placement life. At a different level, foster care is, of course, a time limited process, ending for some at 16, for others at 18 and only continuing beyond 18 for a minority. Commentators have expressed concern about that, (H. M. Government 2013; Sinclair *et al*. in Sinclair 2005; Jackson and Cameron 2012; Hiles *et al.* 2013) and some of my interviewees were apprehensive about the challenges it would pose but as the age of independence neared, others among my interviewees viewed it as a hopeful prospect and, sometimes with mixed feelings, were waiting for the opportunities it offered.

Another alternative was to become appealingly submissive (Woodier 2011). Lydia, as we have seen, was frustrated by the refusal of her College to allow her to use the gym because of fears about her epilepsy (see Murray 2013 on exercise and disability and Sullivan and Van Zyl 2008; Marmot Report 2010; Martin *et al*. 2014 on the management of serious, permanent conditions including epilepsy in children and young people) but her carer and social worker had in her view done nothing to change the situation (Ayre 2010) for her. According to her sister she was still, "trapped. They keep her trapped in chill out room." I therefore asked Lydia what she would do next and, using the same word that she had used in describing Carly's success with social workers she told me she would, "Just like try and force them to let us go to the gym." With Lia's help, Lydia was capable of resistance to authority (see Cameron 2007; Botrell 2009; Mayall *et al*.

2015; Driscoll 2013 for discussions of youth and authority), as we shall see, but in discussion with her teachers what she would do to force them was "I'll just say that I want to be honest. Just say I want to be sweet." Once again, the learned response of honesty is recited but now she adds something of her own; a charm offensive.

Always softly spoken, keen to please, regularly showing concern for others, it would not be at all surprising if Lydia had sometimes heard herself described as 'sweet'. Numerous examples of her temperament could be given but briefly: she would pretend to agree rather than upset social workers, and Carly told me that Lydia was "famous", having been in the local newspaper for her charity and community work. This quotation, however, shows her considering turning that personal quality to advantage, even if her chances of success were probably slight.

She was not the only participant to see her personal appeal as a means to an end. We saw in Chapter 5 page 149 that Lee remembered his first carers being, "very kind to you but when you start living there they not that kind to you." Purposeful varying of behavioural cues is a universal social practice (Zinkemagel 2013) that is drawn on in the training of carers (Landy and Munro 1998; Octoman *et al*. 2014). For example, a booklet used in a training session I was involved in states, '(W)here we choose to talk with a child, whether we sit or stand, and who we sit next to, are all part of structuring. Structuring can be used to set a warm, informal, friendly tone, or it can be set a cold, business like, authoritative tone' (Holden *et al.*1998: Workbook 28), and it is possible that the behaviour of those carers was not simply the result of spontaneous mood shifts (see also Octoman *et al.* 2014). Whether that was the case or not, Lee had decided the way to respond was, "If you behave how they want you to behave they'll be nicer with you." Several years later in Callum's and Caitlin's home he was applying what he had learned at the first placement and winning Lucas's scornful comment about being deliberately "smarty." In Lee's case, as in Lydia's, the deliberate choice of conformity was a concession to further his own interest. Here is a social skill, then, that looks likely to increase stability by assisting the development of attachments. However, as

Triseliotis (1994:51) warns, carers need to be aware of the effect they are having on those with whom they interact and the effect of this pattern of behaviour on self-understanding and the understanding of others may be ambivalent. Looking into the use of personal narratives, next, we shall see that while Lucas expressed teasing disapproval of Lee's smarty behaviour, his own manipulation of carers' emotions was capable of being every bit as artful and, at least in imagination, a good deal more ruthless.

Personal narratives

We all, '…[L]ive and/or understand our lives in storied forms, connecting events in the manner of a plot…'(Joellson in Anderson *et al*. 2011:224). But within that universal practice Lucas briefly referred to what amounted to a strategy of victim narratives and these, while not exclusive to children and young people in foster care, arguably offer more possibilities to children and young people in foster care than to most of their peers because children and young people in foster care are members of a group selected from the whole population of children on the basis of abuse or neglect and have, therefore, histories that can easily be turned into intense narratives with the power to attract concern. Telling a victim narrative (Holland 2010; Jägervi 2014) in placement would be a powerful means of self-representation, readily affecting the identification the others in the placement might ascribe the narrator. For Lucas, they were a resource.

Asked how he would advise a person going into foster care he said, "[Unintelligible] or try to make them cry. I've never tried crying but I've tried all ways." The remark came at the end of his final interview when he was summing up his feelings about foster carers as, "you just think oh grumpy idiots but they're actually not that bad." Placing the remark in that context, what he values is a capacity for sympathy he has encountered, a capacity he believes can be exploited. The form of masculinity that Lucas affected has been mentioned at various points and his predatory construal of soft-heartedness here is consistent with that. He need not be taken entirely at face value then, but his feeling of being distinct from foster carers and in

some degree against them is genuine enough. While he might not have actually told victim narratives in the way he suggests, he was not blind to the possibility.

While none of the other interviewees seemed to want to manipulate their carers feelings by telling them stories about the past, the practice of story-telling was common place among them as indeed was to be expected in an interview situation where the narration of biographical events and details serves as a good form of explanation (Holland 2010; Somers 1994; Leydesdorff *et al*. 1999). While that has methodological implications, the focus here needs to be on the role of storytelling in their everyday experience and the clearest insight into this can be had by returning once more to the triangular relationship between Lydia and Lia Lawson and their carer, Carly.

Early in the first interview it became apparent that there was a collective dimension to some of the narrative elements I was hearing. For example, Carly was supporting Lydia in giving an account of her likes and dislikes, prompting her with questions, sometimes supplying details Lydia could not remember or found difficult to articulate, sometimes taking over the account altogether. She told me, "There's every food under the sun that Lydia loves except one. You might as well say it ''cause everybody in [the county] knows it" and while, clearly, this was a joke, it was a long-standing, often repeated one that mattered because it affirmed a bond (Eysenck 1942; Ziv 1989; Howland and Simpson 2014).

The first interview was mainly concerned with anodyne matters of this sort but more sensitive material became important in the second interview where the three were jointly commenting on the unorthodox way in which the placement had been created. Their three-sided account reached a point at which Lydia was trying, uneasily because of her fear of offending Carly, to describe problems she had had with Carly's relatives.

It may be remembered that Carly first fostered Lia alone and Lydia was placed elsewhere because there were concerns about the relationship between the sisters. However, one of Lydia's placements broke

down and she stayed with Carly and Lia for some months until Cal, a cousin of Carly, was trained with his wife specifically to foster Lydia. That is an unusual basis for a new placement and it came to an abrupt end when Lia discovered that Cal and his wife were bullying Lydia. Lia confronted Cal's wife and, later, Lydia returned to Carly. Carly's responsibilities as the foster carer of both sisters were put on a permanent footing.

During the interview in which these events were set out, Lia became impatient with Lydia for hesitating in her narration of the events and told her to, "Just tell him about Cal, what Cal told pushed you on the sofa. Say that bit." Put in that way, it was apparent that the story, often told, chronicled a key moment in the development of the relationship between the three of them. The "bit" when Cal pushed Lydia was not only a decisive moment in the breakdown of that placement and beginning of a permanent placement with Carly, it was also the point at which Carly chose between a family member and Lydia and the event had been recited often before. Its full significance can be understood with help from an exchange between Carly and Lydia late in the third interview.

> Lydia : I said to Carly that was, I said to Lia as well I said, 'You're the only one I've got in the real family'

> Carly: Yeah

> Lydia: apart from Carly's family.

> Carly: Yeah which are your family as well.

> Lydia: Yeah.

> Carly: You know.

Lydia: Yeah.

Carly: We're blood family.

The first two statements from Lydia are separated by an interjected 'yeah' from Carly but there is no sign on the recording that the qualification, 'apart from Carly's family' was prompted by Carly. Although she probably did not include it in the conversation with Lia she was reporting but only added it for Carly, there was no external prompt and it appeared to express Lydia's present feeling of relatedness to Carly's family. Carly's confirmation that her family was Lydia's, emphasised by the phrase, 'you know' was also a statement of a relationship in which Carly was secure. The passage is, therefore, an unforced affirmation and reaffirmation of a set of relationships which are of significance to them both. It ends with the claim, 'We are blood family' which is presumably not intended literally but, as hyperbole, is an attempt to indicate how strongly and permanently established Lydia should consider the bond to be (see also Schofield and Beek 2005; Woodier 2011).

Seen in that context, the narrative of Cal's bullying was an account of an important moment in the creation of a bond that was significant not just to the fostering 'unit' but to the family as a whole. It told how Lydia became a family member and of the part that Lia played in making her so. Its telling and retelling, in a form that was made up of familiar 'bits', suggests it was part of what Smart calls a specialized circle of memory. She explains that, 'These memories are specialized because they are created around a small group of individuals who relate to one another over many years' (Smart 2011:543). The Lydia-Lia-Cal-Carly narrative may have begun as a way in which the placement was affirmed but over time had become part of a greater body of family memories, perhaps shared by other family members in the circle just outside the placement.

What has been demonstrated in Lydia's case was also present in Lucy's accounts of her early bonding with Christianna, Lamar's accounts of days out with the Charlton family, Libby's story of a crisis of

anaphylactic shock, Lanie's reminiscences of a group of friends she made in an early placement and so on. The telling of stories in placements helps form, clarify and sustain relationships (Holland 2010).

Conclusion

In this chapter the impact on interviewees of being identified, and of their self-identification, as a child or young person in foster care, has been further explored. The accounts and narratives provided by the children and young people included a number of 'performance features of language' i.e. how language is used in social interaction (McKinney 2011:1218). These performance features - secret keeping, selective information sharing, inclusive and exclusionary naming, use of pronouns, borrowings from welfare discourse, dissimulation, collective narration and a single example of a victim narrative - have been related to inter-personal relationships they either cultivated or rejected.

All inter-personal relationships have discursive elements but some of the performance features mentioned above were located in relation to specific discursive themes; construals of children and young people in foster care as disreputable victims and the influence of welfare discourse. Other performance features were considered in the context of: attachment theory; ways language was used in the development of new attachments between carers and children and young people; ways to distinguish between attachments of greater, lesser or negative value to them.

By making those connections and distinctions I have suggested that language serves a number of functions for those who are cared for in foster placements. In relation to prejudice, rejection, unwanted pity or the unnecessary probing of their care status the performance features were attempts to retain control of self-presentation. However, quite highly skilled performances seemed necessary and the capacity for defensive partitioning among my participants varied, affected by personal characteristics and effects of the care provision. In relation to attachments, the use of exclusionary naming strategies, some improvised and others borrowed from welfare discourse, also had defensive value while the inclusive use

of pronouns may have made advances in the development of trust a little easier. In two placements where trust was well established, collective narratives, in which members of placements joined together to narrate key events, affirmed bonds and reinforced identities based on membership of a family group. A third set of performance features were involved in achieving or maintaining amenities and services from care and education systems. These performance features included attempts to manage the feelings of adults through varying styles of self-representation; as compliant, charming or pitiable.

Finally, it has been suggested that we need to consider the reflexivity that accompanies performance features such as these. While we all partition, keeping secrets, adapting names and the like, the circumstances under which children and young people in foster care grow up are singular. The strength and pervasiveness of confidentiality constrains their family and foster care relationships in a way that is unusual. It has been suggested in this chapter that children and young people in foster care are encouraged to withhold information from adults and peers who, they may often be aware, are withholding information from them. Smart (2011) has shown that secret keeping has a general place in structuring of family life but this additional layer of practice has the potential to imbue the self-understanding of children and young people in foster care with a particularly strong anxiety about revealing their origins.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

In this final chapter I summarise the main findings and review my observations against the aims that have framed this thesis. In this final concluding chapter I also reflect on my approach to the study, limitations and opportunities and what my study might suggest in terms of ways forward for future research. Strong policy recommendations cannot be made on the basis of small-scale doctoral work such as this, but nevertheless, I indicate the policy relevance of my findings and what my observations indicate in terms of new policy directions or revisions. I am mindful of the importance of making final comments about what my work might contribute to understandings about placement breakdowns, and any final discussion would be incomplete, where it does not refer to this subject. Finally, I consider foster carers and what my work suggests in terms of the support needs of this very important group of 'substitute' carers.

Summary

The approach taken throughout has been to examine accounts from children and young people and to consider what they reveal about children's experiences of foster care. Close engagement with the qualitative accounts, enabled a conclusion to be drawn about the persistence in children's words, of concerns, preoccupations and fantasies about birth parents and more broadly, birth family relationships. Children and young people's accounts, with all the difficulties they sometimes presented for clear understanding, nevertheless delivered a consistent message that children's primary relationships with their birth parent(s) no matter how troubled, were enduringly present in their everyday worlds in foster care, presenting emotional and practical challenges for both the child or young person, as well as those endeavouring to provide foster care.

Consistent messages from the children and young people in foster care drew attention to the fear involved in moving from birth family home into foster care and between foster care placements. I also found that both at the commencement of placements and throughout a possibly prolonged settling in period, attachment issues associated with separation from birth families could affect the development of trust essential for the creation of new attachments to foster carers. This was because meals, clothing, transportation, use of respite care and the demeanour of carers were identified as elements of care that could convey messages of inclusion or exclusion. Children and young people in foster care who brought to new placements feelings of separation and loss were sensitive to both types of those messages.

Separation, loss and difficulties associated with adjusting to care were not only told through interview, but at times were also 'performed' through ways of naming or positioning – the choice of words that children and young people used. Some performance features bore on self-understandings that were 'at risk' because of separation and fears of rejection and exclusion. They could often be understood as attempts to gain, recover or maintain control over self-presentation. At other times they were better understood as guarding against rejection in the course of the development of new attachments. Still others, particularly when attachments to a carer or carers were well established, were reiterations of key events and served to reinforce bonds.

Reflections on conducting a study in the foster home setting

Access

At the outset of this thesis, I described my intention to conduct my research in the home environment of the child or young person's fostering placement. Although this ambition was ultimately achieved, my early inability to gain access to foster care almost frustrated this aim, with my experience sharing much in common with other researchers who had to negotiate adult

gatekeepers. Accounts of access difficulties for researchers in the field are common enough (e.g. Murray 2005, Phelan and Kinsella 2013) perhaps this is because research is not perceived by providers as likely to be in their interest (care providers - foster carers or social workers).

For example, occasionally, carers found my interviews disturbing. One carer fled in embarrassment when she realised she had been indelicate towards her foster child in front of me. While some of the carers who invited me into their homes were glad to share their homes, thoughts, experiences and concerns with me, and may have benefitted from the encounters almost as much as I did, one refused to let her foster children participate, having seen how they reacted during the introductory meeting. Another, as has been described, was very concerned to ensure I knew the dangers her fostered young person was courting, probably for fear that I might unwittingly encourage her in the wrong direction. And of course social workers who agree to opening up access have to weigh what they are allowing with great care; adding to their workloads; gambling against the possibility of destabilising encounters or breaches of confidentiality.

The processes of building trust, however time consuming and diplomatic they need to be, are essential. The foster carers who welcomed me into their placements did so because they hoped to gain from the experience and I think care authorities have the right to appraise those who want access to their charges. Our proposals need to offer something tangible to those we ask to support us.

On the other hand, public provision needs to be research based and unjustified refusal or delay in access is to be deplored. I was long delayed in gaining access and no attempt was ever made to justify it. I now believe I was probably unlucky in my timing. Two or three years later, OFSTED reported on Careshire as having been through a period of restructuring during which management posts had been filled on 'an interim basis'. If interim measures explain my experience,

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they were of long standing, and that raises more general concerns. However, I am prepared to accept that during such a transitional period my unsolicited proposal could have been given very low priority.

I can only commend the advice I followed that led me eventually to the colleague who gave me her generous support; to remember that a pathway blocked on one occasion may open another day (Butler and Williamson 1994). I am very grateful to Butler and Williamson for that advice.

Data collection

The digital recorder[39] I used during interviews had a reasonably sensitive built in microphone and its software for uploading recordings allowed me to slow down playback and eliminate background noise. Still, I frequently found myself replaying extracts over and over again and even then I had to accept that many remarks would remain inaudible. If I had far superior equipment, some of the problems would have been likely to persist.

Shifts of physical attitude away from the microphone, sudden rapid bursts of speech when excited, whispering when sad, the slipping away of words when the complexity of what was being said became too much, interruptions and overlaid sound from someone else who decides to join in, the background noise of everyday life all contributed to these problems. There were also individual speech characteristics that made listening still less straightforward. Lydia spoke in monosyllables when shy or under stress and when she strung words together in more complex sentences some phonemes could be difficult for her to handle. She lisped and had other speech habits that I was not able to identify but which acted as barriers. Unpredictably, her syllables could be extremely hard to hear and I frequently had the impression she had to approximate rather than iterate some words.

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[39] An Olympus DS 40 with DSS Player

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For example, talking about herself when she entered care she said, "Used to be dead fat at first. Absolu [Sounds like; me chine.]" Perhaps she meant 'Absolutely minging (i.e. disgusting)' but if so the combination of colloquialism and cacophony can be as challenging as it is important to understand.

Lamar spoke standard English with a heavy Careshire accent, constantly enlivened by dialect forms. Although I had lived in Careshire for 20 years and was reasonably attuned to the local dialect there were times when I could not understand his speech at all. My transcripts of his interviews are punctuated with bracketed attempts to record the sounds in the hope (usually disappointed) that I would later realise what he had said. For example, talking about the death of a dog he liked he told me, "Twelve thirteen. [Sounds like: Or bot us crap] a good age for a boxer."

All features of the individual interviews were treated as part of the data. These auditory obstacles have to be accepted along with a far wider range of obstacles that need to be overcome when listening to young people in care. The notion of 'voice' is misleading because the term is singular and people do not provide standardised, consistent information. Especially when speaking of such deeply felt concerns as physical self-image, the death of a loved pet or attachments to missed or lost parents, people are unavoidably given to vacillation, indecision, trying to have things both ways, thinking aloud with some of the characteristics of internal conversation conserved – elision, truncation, the use of symbols and so on (see Archer 2005). I am not able to speak about the 'voice' of a single one of my research participants, far less of their collective voice. It does not exist as a unified phenomenon. Instead, what have been sought are patterns of responses over time.

Differing outlooks have to be expected in the same individual and all forms of their speech can be attended to without being treated as a language deficit (Jones 2013). Because we share our

language, the meanings of others can eventually be construed if we allow the intentions of the speaker to have priority.

Making a contribution to the knowledge of the cultures and social relations that children and young people in foster care create for themselves?

The overarching aim of the study was to make contribution to the fostering literature, that enabled new understandings to be gained about the cultures and social relations that children and young people in foster care create for themselves. Did I achieve this aim? Certainly children's accounts took me into their everyday worlds and thus I began to appreciate how they negotiated initial anxiety about the setting, the strategies they developed for coping with aspects of the institutional context of fostering that they found troubling. Here it was useful to pay attention to both the content of their talk, but also how things were said. I noticed that in making sense of relationships old and new, birth family/foster family, children engaged in ways of family naming and partitioning that first became apparent in the pilot study and recurred in various forms throughout the main series of interviews. Since they were brought forward by the research participants in interviews designed – as discussed previously - to discover what people in foster care would choose to talk about (or refuse to talk about) I claim that these practices reveal the immediate concerns of my interviewees, but are an incomplete account.

Family language

The centrality of separation in the lives of my interviewees was observable in the way they used the language of family and family life. We saw that in talking about her family life, Lilian categorised her mother's second husband, i.e. her step-father, as Mr. Taylor. In very much the same way, Lucas categorised his mother's boyfriend as, 'the Londoner' – not even a name made available. These non-familial, formal categories serve to exclude, to delete the expectations of 244

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intimacy which, when we are talking of family members, are usually present. In doing so, they signify the children's alienated relationships to these people.

A different set of problems the children and young people in foster care encountered when talking about their families was met with more frequently. It was less specialised to express distance, though that was part of its usage. Conversational navigation through sets of familial, adoptive and/or fostering relationships is a common task for people in foster care and demands verbal agility; more than most of them were able to command. Other young people might find themselves explaining, like Lawrence, "My uncle, well at least I think he's my uncle, well he's relative, well he's part of the family." However, gradations of family relationships can have an added import for children and young people in foster care in view of their uneasy status, balanced between birth families and foster families. Children and young people in foster care need to know, "Do you mean like foster family or real family?" They will ask, "What do you mean, 'go home'?" They differentiate between, "real kids she's got um two boys and a girl of her own" and "this other foster child who we used to have." Interviews featured use of social work categories for "the birth parents", "the birth Mum" and "birth Dad." Once again, the conversational strategies are manners of dealing with inclusion and exclusion but at this point Sack's (ref, in Biehal *et al* 2010) concept of a cohesive family team of sub-categories has become inadequate. Being in foster care involves a language that is needed to express not 'really' belonging to anyone. The distinction between 'real' or 'own' and 'foster', very closely associated with ideas about the 'normal' discussed at the beginning of this chapter, expresses confusion about family boundaries in a language that has to be created out of the overlapping vocabularies of family and welfare (see Biehal *et al*. 2010).

Partitioning
A different set of practices is the partitioning that took up much of Chapter 7. One form of partitioning seeks to maintain silence and, simultaneously, to conceal the motives for that silence.

Though I was able to make (uncomfortable) ethnographic observations of this form, as described in Chapter 3 page 74, my conclusions will depend on the reflective explanations for partitioning given to me by my interviewees.

Partitioning is aimed at preserving an inner core of feelings and values (See Woodier 2011 for discussion of the importance of values in promotion of resilience). It also points outwards to the highly surveilled circumstances in which people in foster care are cared for and the problems they experience, like other stigmatised groups, in managing their self- and other-identification. It creates a boundary between the inner, subjective experience and intra-psychic activity and the outer, cultural and social experience. In the form under discussion, it is a response to normative expectations.

Being in care, as we have seen, threatens to place individuals outside the 'normal' for a proportion of peers and adults around people in foster care. Partitioning goes some way to conceal possible grounds for social exclusion from the peer group or neighbourhood. When Leona told me, "I talked to him [a friend who was also in foster care] in Year 7 about all that [fostering] but …now we just talk about things like, normal things" she reproduced the fostering/normality opposition while, by changing her interactive behaviour, she protected herself from unwelcome attention.

A different aspect of partitioning can be seen in the account, given earlier, of a supervised contact:

> We felt like we couldn't talk about as many things as we could have
> if we weren't supervised…there were personal things that I wanted
> to talk to my Dad about.

If there was an unattainable normality guiding interaction at that moment, it was a norm shared between that young person in foster care and her father; a normality in which father and daughter have a right to privacy. There was no direct external threat of deliberate shaming, but perhaps shame was felt. The inhibition, felt by both father and daughter it seems, came from the presence of an official which set aside the right to privacy. By doing so, it signalled to them that their family affairs had become so unmanageable that they had become a matter of public, and therefore shame-worthy, concern.

Had the father and daughter been able to share personal information, doing so would have had instrumental value, perhaps, but would also have reinforced a prized bond, but bond reinforcement is also available through collaborative partitioning such as the sharing of family secrets (Smart 2010). Agreeing tacitly or openly to avoid personal matters, the bond is preserved into a future when, it is hoped, it will be easy to share personal confidences. By way of compensation, the intruding official is jointly othered. So, partitioning practices have versatility. It is a form of self-defence through managing who knows what. It can protect others from unwanted self-knowledge, can act as a form of resistance or, in an inclusive mode, affirm relationships. Family secrets are, as Smart (2011) informs us, a core feature of family life and this is in some ways just an instance of that 'normal' behaviour. However, the intervention of public institutions in family life adds a further dimension to the already tense family concerns that commonly result in partitioning.

'Us' talk

Remembering that power can be creative as well as oppressive (Cohen 1978); on some occasions carers took part in interviews and, by their presence, changed what was said. The coexistence of insensitivity and mutuality could be observed in some of these exchanges and I do not want to present a one-sided view of more complicated relationships. However, detailing insensitive fostering lays outside the scope of this thesis while the existence of mutually enjoyed

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talk, even within a relationship that was unequal and contended is justifiable. Tension is a condition of all foster care arrangements at one time or another.

On every occasion when carers and a child or young person in foster care were interviewed together they told shared narratives that had some of the quality of recitation. Participants jogged each other's memories. They completed sentences for each other. They 'chimed in' with particularly enjoyed story fragments or phrases (Shotton2013). The narratives were often largely celebratory, even when the events were about unhappy experiences (Pithouse and Rees 2015: 131 discuss other ways of 'doing family'). So, for example, when sharing the narrative of a life threatening medical emergency Libby reminded her carer, "…[M]y little left foot was like that [demonstrating how she kicked] wasn't it?" In the sequence that followed, my notes recorded 'a feeling of delight and intimacy in what they shared. There are giggles, whispers and joking.' These are emergent family memories but they are also further reminders about the complexity of hearing the voice of people in foster care. Often recited memories are easier to recall and to recount than those which have rarely, if ever, proceeded from internal conversation (conversation, with internalised interlocutors rather than monologue) to articulated accounts. The repeated narrative may take the centre ground, then, but repetition can mask its importance. Repetition routinises, neutralizing the feeling that brought about the construction of the narrative in the first place. Settling on a narrative allows people to 'move on', but possibly at a cost. Feelings can't be articulated with the same passionate immediacy on many occasions, nor can they be received with the same responsive sympathy by the, frankly, bored listener. Yet repetition can improve the story telling abilities of children (Feltis *et al.* 2011*)* and these over-familiar narratives may have more to offer if they can continue to find attentive listeners.

So, what does my study suggest about the reasons for placement breakdown, as expressed by children and young people in this study? My principal conclusion has been about the centrality of separation and loss for people in foster care. I have examined the diverse forms these concerns take, pointing to the way the continuing sense of being separated affects the young people's responses to their care and carers. There are studies that suggest adoption is a better way to deal with these sorts of insecurity but some children do not want to be adopted. Others are hard to place in adoption for a variety of reasons. It may be that the perceptions carers and cared for have of permanence is more important than the type of home (Biehal 2010: 9-19). Adoptions *can* disrupt, as I have shown in three cases. There will, then, continue to be a need for foster care to address these important feelings of separation, loss and insecurity.

My participants were preoccupied with unresolved feelings towards parents. That being the case, my conclusions here address situations in which "hurt, anger or ambivalence" towards birth parents persist in placements.

Some areas for attention

It is self-evident that foster care ought to reduce rather than exacerbate anxiety. It is also generally agreed that it should allow space for difficult-to-manage feelings to be experienced and lived through. My study hints at a few aspects of care that might be adapted to that end.

1. This project was, from the first, concerned with the practical limits to listening to children and young people in foster care and the choice of interviewing as a method ensured a tight focus on language. Not surprisingly, then, much that has preoccupied the study has been the form of fostered people's accounts and narratives of foster care and the problems of capturing and understanding these. The language of children and young people in foster care but also that of the

carers and social workers is put under specific pressures by the circumstances of foster care. People in foster care need to find ways to develop their communication as they come to understand, better and better, their experiences of exceptional circumstances. Unrepresentative though my evidence is, it prompts me to suggest that discussion groups have a part to play here. Carers and social workers have a vital part to play in assisting children and young people to explore their emergent feelings. Professional sensitivity to emergent feelings is something that could be supported by training.

2. Decisions to share or withhold information pertaining to admission into care or family changes during a period of care can be difficult (See Munro 2001 for the rights of children and young people in foster care to be informed). This raises questions of confidentiality, but inattention to this issue can be damaging to social and emotional wellbeing. On the other hand, gaps in understanding relationships may have implications for the processes of identity formation. If self and family knowledge are factors in the development of a sustainable sense of identity, the period in care may be the best, or only, opportunity for work towards understanding why foster care has been necessary. I would, then, argue for a stronger presumption that people in foster care, certainly those in my group of participants, and others of similar age, be given information when they request it. Further, support for the young people to assimilate what they are learning would have to be planned.

3. Everything in the material environment of people in foster care can become symbolic of relationships and so the most familiar everyday practices in placements come to be felt in ways that are ultimately to do with belonging (Pithouse and Rees 2015). This appears to be a given that can only be recognised and accepted, offering no obvious ways to reduce or eliminate the associated anxiety. However, I think it is worth emphasising as a reason for conceptualising foster care as a

time for the development of a sense of personal identity, which I want to explore in the final section.

A positive reason for foster care

Sinclair (2005: 123) proposes a form of care that 'more nearly approaches a 'family for life'. However, the development of families out of placements cannot be legislated into existence. If it is to happen, it involves many family decisions over long periods of time. It seems to me there is a better chance of more of those decisions being well made if there is a clear sense of what the foster care is for.

I think it is worth fastening on Wilson *et al.*'s (2004) concession, greatly elaborated by Cichetti's (2013) analysis, that the effects of removal on a child's long-term sense of identity are not yet clearly understood. If many young people in foster care are preoccupied with understanding why they are in care, they are entitled to have those preoccupations taken seriously. Further research is needed into the long term effects of removal. So far as they are understood, support for processes of identity formation should be treated as one of the purposes of foster care.

Getting on with life in foster care

Many of the behaviours and situations looked at above are played out in (usually less serious forms) in ordinary families, so that it is inevitably difficult to decide what is attributable to their being children and young people in foster care rather than just children and young people. On the basis of the evidence I have gathered I have to conclude that, for a large proportion within my sample, the extent and difficulty of their multiple adversities make their difference from their peers important enough to bear heavy emphasis. For them, overcoming the ordinary turbulence of their teenage lives may be more than ordinarily difficult. On the other hand the similarities with their

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peers are significant in that they imply we should beware of over-reacting to their status as children and young people in foster care.

Those who were adapted (or adapting) to their circumstances, welcome foster care. Two, Lydia and Lilian, recognised the decisive importance of child safety measures. Others rejected any suggestion that they were disadvantaged and this is best seen in the way that, in several interviews the idea of the 'normal' (expressed either in that term explicitly or by implication) were nearly always used positively. Negative senses did occur as in, "…she's easier to talk to than normal people" which clearly involved reference to feelings of marginalisation. This usage by Leo is unusual and perhaps reflects his exceptionally difficult situation in a placement that seemed on the point of disruption.

For the Lambert brothers 'normal' was a way of conveying inclusion:

People see foster kids like normal people, normal people who are living their life just like everybody else. Not illegal. (Lawrence)

…but then some people get homesick and then it's not like a normal family. (Lee)

… just living at your normal house but you just don't live with your own family. (Lee)

Normal families they can talk to their Mum. (Lucas)

Lawrence reflected on the inclusive use of the idea and presented it in opposition to impermanence, loss and hardship:

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Well I tell people that it's just the same as being normal kids, well

there's no such thing as normal it's just the same really but with a

different family just like house Mum Dad you they are placed with

foster Mum Dad and then sometimes it's temporary and you can get

out quickly but sometimes it's just like that and my sister was taken

away like that and don't know which one it was and she was

adopted my sister erm and I tell them [people who ask what it's like

in foster care] like it's hard when you've just started but if you've

been in it six years playing the game you know what it feels like.

For Lee the normal, in the form of "your Mum's house" was an idea he could turn to in

order to deal with fear, "Just think it's er your Mum's house or your family's. Just don't think about

it really because it'll make you more upset and more scared so you just think [unintelligible] go

along with it but no need to be scared really..."

For Leona the preservation of 'normal' self-understanding was so important that she

idealised the experience of being in foster care, claiming that there was "Nothing really to it. It's

just as if you're sleeping at somebody else's house for like years."

The overall sense in which the 'normal' is used is best encapsulated in Lucas' aspiration to

be, "a person [who] like just gets on with like life smoothly." In this ideal image is the resolution of

the central concerns running throughout the lives of many children and young people in foster care;

freedom to pursue primary attachments; a permanent family; no fear; protection against loss;

freedom from stigmatisation. The 'normal' is a state of equilibrium that has to be sought - for some,

by a conscious and continual effort of will - among the anxieties of daily practice. Life goes well, smoothly, when it is pervaded by a sense of normality (see, for example, Madigan *et al*. 2013).

There were, however, many accounts dealing with serial placements, exceptionally high stress levels accompanying placement moves, a shifting cast of social workers, liability to unpredictable displacement from 'home' to respite care, unwelcome surveillance that limited or prohibited contacts with the closest family. The most disadvantaged interviewees also revealed gaps and sometimes chasms in their knowledge of their personal and family histories.

A majority of my sample liked their carers, appreciated their generosity and tried not to worry too much about their membership of the latest substitute family but most of them knew it might have an expiry date. In the meantime they got on with life, went to clubs, took up sports, listened to music, developed crushes on celebrities, identified with heroes in books and films, went shopping, crashed through barriers around alcohol and sex, made and lost friends, and were putting in time until, eagerly or reluctantly, they could leave care.

Problems in placements are a consequence of an earlier life marked by neglect, abuse or parents who are unable to cope (Wilson *et al.* 2005*;* Vanderfaeillie *et al.* 2013). However, life lived in foster care changes the children and young people in ways that also need to be taken into account when considering outcomes which are concerning. I found several had become perceptive observers, alert to changes in their carers' behaviour, students of the care system aiming to get the most out of what was on offer, keeping track of who knew who around the local networks and forging alliances to handle individual agents or agencies in their own interests. Their early struggle to survive in the conditions that first called for care might predispose them in such ways. Nevertheless, by the time they were interviewed by me the care system had become a major object

of study for them; a network within which collections of details might empower them (Munro 2001 discusses their feelings of powerlessness helpfully).

I was often taken completely by surprise by developments in placements during the period of data collection. Relationships with carers, in particular, often proved to be far less secure than they appeared (See Buehler *et al.* Butler and Charles 1999; Rock *et al.* 2015 for discussion of carer factors in placement instability). I therefore have no enthusiasm for predicting the futures the fifteen of them now face. In two cases, Lydia and Lamar, there are grounds for some confidence that their foster parents will continue to care for them well into the future. For all of them, it seems possible that their post-care lives will not be like most of their non-looked after peers (see Pinto and Woolgar 2015; Metzler *et al.* 2013). When we decide we are ready to leave home most of us can return for periodic top ups of funds, food, clean clothes (see Dowling and Hougham 2015 on transitions from youth to adulthood). Our families are typically just a phone call away when there is trouble. Their (birth) parents are strangers, or dead, or estranged, too ill to cope or too harmful to endure. If they are still available they may be available only for a repeat of the difficulties that led to care in the first place (Boddy *et al*. 2014).

An enhanced role for foster carers

All young people, no less people in foster care, must make sense of their lives and reflect on the implications for who they are and will become in the future. This study indicates that the domestic world of foster care continually creates important opportunities for developing a sense of acceptance or rejection and for people in foster care to do the sometimes very difficult work of relating an earlier way of life with their fostered life. This reality suggests there is scope for the training of foster carers to include support for their role in identity formation (Thoburn 1994; Smart 2011).

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Among many other qualities and capacities, carers need to be able to step back and think about how their work fits into a larger overall picture. They frequently seem to struggle with the perception of others that they have no overarching role to perform, that theirs is a vital but essentially 'lay' task (See, for example Ogilvie 2007) and thinking about the overall direction of care is the province of professionals: social workers, health workers and so on.

For me, Schofield's (2002) question about the positive function of foster care can be at least partly answered by a focus on the development of self-identity. Without a realistic and acceptable sense of who they are, the young people leave care ill-prepared for independence. If that is what foster care should be aiming to mitigate and at best prevent, then foster carers are absolutely entitled to clear understanding from the outset that that is the goal.

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Foster care careers of research participants

Lucas, Lee and Lawrence Lambert

Lucas (13years), Lee (12 years) and Lawrence (9 years) were coming up to their sixth year in foster care when they were interviewed. They were taken into care following complaints from neighbours about neglect and violent behaviour among adults in their mother's home. They had four older siblings who were not, so far as I know, subject to care orders. The youngest member of the family, a sister, had been adopted and they knew little about her so she may have been born when they were no longer at home.

Lawrence had a different father from Lucas and Lee but the brothers formed a close knit unit. Lucas, the eldest, had looked after his brothers before they were taken into care. The three boys had always been kept together in foster care. The first of their three previous foster placements had broken down due to conflicts between the foster children and the carers' family. Another placement was terminated by the carers, apparently because of a dispute they had with a social services department about respite care and holiday arrangements. The third placement was temporary provision that was repeatedly extended because of difficulties in finding a placement in or nearby the boys' home area. My interviews began when their fourth placement, managed by a private fostering agency and located outside the County in which they had been cared for previously, was confirmed as permanent after a settling in period of four months. By the time I met them they were talking about and practising shared strategies aimed at making the most of their opportunities.

The new placement was a great early success. The carers, Callum and Caitlin Calloway, had two children of their own, a thirteen year old girl, Carol, and a 10 year old boy Chad. The Calloway family had been enthusiastic about fostering the Lambert brothers who, for their part, each individually reported very positive feelings about all the members of the placement. Family contacts were frequent and often attended by many members of the wider birth family. The carers worked hard to facilitate these but privately reported to me that they were worried about the effects they had on the older boys. Lucas, the eldest, pinned great hopes on a court case his mother was bringing to recover custody of her children and for this reason, together with other personal characteristics, was the least well settled in the placement of the three of them.

About six months later, towards the end of the series of interviews, serious conflicts developed with the carers' children. First, Lucas made allegations against Carol at school, then Chad began to complain vehemently of lack of attention from his parents. Especially because Chad started to withdraw from family life, the carers decided to terminate the placement and new placements were found for the three brothers back in the original home area. They were separated at that time, Lucas and Lee being placed together and Lawrence separately but nearby. The placement breakdown meant that I was unable to complete a third interview with Lee.

Social workers: Early placement an unnamed social worker was remembered as lots of fun. Since then the social worker for all three brothers was Samuel Scott.

Lilian Lennon

Lilian (16 years) was the oldest girl in a complex family that included seven children, the offspring of two sets of married adults (Lilian's Mum and Dad and Lilian and Lionel Taylor) who at some point exchanged partners and re-married. Some of the children were Lilian's full siblings, some were half siblings and one was a step brother. Following the rape of a sibling by the step-brother, one set of parents (Lilian's Mum and Lionel Taylor) took sole custody of six children including Lilian. The reasons for those children later being taken into care were never explained but one of the younger girls (Luciana) disclosed to her foster carer that she had been sexually abused by her step father (Mr. Taylor). At the time of the interviews the youngest child, Lilian's half brother (Lance), had been adopted. Another half-brother (Lenny) and half-sister (Lulu) were fostered together. Lilian and her full sister (Luciana) had originally been fostered together but had later been separated. Her full brother (Lionel) was fostered separately from the outset and her step-brother was living independently.

When Lilian and Luciana were separated Lilian was fostered by Cliff and Connie Carey. It was a difficult placement for all concerned and Lilian pressed her social worker unsuccessfully for another new placement. Then she became pregnant and shortly after the birth of a son, Noel, she moved to a specialist placement with Catherine Cannon. Catherine was a retired military nursing officer starting a second career in foster care and had plans to develop a centre for young women with new babies. Lilian was her first fostered person but Catherine and Lilian soon came into conflict about responsibility for Noel's care. The conflict escalated quickly and severely and between the second and third interview the placement broke down. The final interview was conducted at Lilian's fourth foster placement with Carmella Carrington. It was conducted against a very uncertain background. Catherine had made allegations about Lilian's care of Noel and these were in the process of being investigated. Custody of Noel was at stake but Lilian was hopeful she and Noel would be housed independently.

Social worker: Shelby Simone, Sarah Sage, Suri Sesay

Lia and Lydia Lawson

Lia (22 years) and Lydia (16 years) were removed from their parents following Lydia's hospitalization for meningitis at about six years of age. Under clinical observation symptoms of abuse were identified and both sisters were taken into care. Ten years later at the time of the interviews both had learning difficulties, Lia were diabetic and Lydia was incontinent and had grand mal epilepsy.

At first they were fostered separately but neither settled well. Lia was placed with a foster carer in Riverton. At that time Lia was being driven to school 20 miles away by a driver, Carly Connel who formed an attachment to her that proved to be important. The placement broke down because the Riverton carer had a disabled, adopted son who touched Lia in ways she found disturbing. Her second placement was much closer to her school but there were new tensions caused by the new carer's insistent preferences for Lia's appearance and manners. The relationship that had begun between Lia and Carly was consolidated during this placement because the new carer, Carina, made frequent informal arrangements with Carly for Lia to spend increasing amounts of time at Carly's home. When Carina's husband became ill those arrangements were placed on a formal basis and Carly's home became a permanent placement for Lia.

Lydia's first placement had lasted about two years. The second was also terminated after two years by carers who informed the social services department without prior notice that Lydia would not be allowed to return to the placement at the end of a day at school. Lydia first definitely had contact with Carly after Lia had settled in there at some point during Lydia's second placement. Contacts between Lia and Lydia began to be organised around Carly's home. As an emergency measure following this placement collapse Lydia moved in with Carly and Lia for a period while relatives of Carly were recruited and trained specifically to foster her. When they had been inducted Lydia moved in with them for about eighteen months but this ended when Carly and Lia together with teachers at Lydia's school became concerned for her physical safety at the placement. Eventually she moved back to Carly's and by the time of her first interview she had been there for four years.

The placement gave a powerful impression of stability. Carly confided in me that she had bought the house so that Lia and Lydia would have a place to live when, eventually, she was not able to care for them. Her grown up family was closely involved with the sisters and they had many contacts in the neighbourhood. They looked to Carly for the solution to all their problems, large and small. However, towards the end of the series of interviews Lia alleged that Carly had hit her and the placement was suspended with both people in foster care being housed elsewhere while the allegation was investigated. When the investigation concluded there was no substance in the allegation Lydia returned to the placement but Lia did not.

The second interview with Lia was carried out in a work experience placement following her exit from care but I subsequently lost touch with her and could not organise a third interview.

Social workers: Seth Simons, Sheila ShelleyScott Samuelson (Carer's link worker), Sharon Bullock (Lydia's independent visitor), 2 senior practitioners involved in emergency placement for Lydia

Leona Lanning
Leona was twelve when the first interview took place. She preferred not to talk in much detail about the reasons she and her younger sister, Lacey, were taken into care four years earlier but her absenteeism from school was mentioned as a factor. Their older brother remained with their mother and Leona had had unsupervised contact with them at their home. She also had contact with her father who lived separately.

She and Lacey spent two years in a temporary placement before both moved to their current placement with Charlene and Cameron Callaghan. At the time of the interviews she had been there for two years and had formed seemingly stable relationships with Charlene, Cameron and their three daughters, all of whom were older than Leona. The placement continued to be stable through the interview period which was longer than usual, lasting about a year.

Social workers: Salima Sakura, Shelby Simone

Libby Law
Libby was an only child. She had become a ward of court following her parents' difficult divorce and entered the care system; fostered with experienced carers, Cherie and Chico a few miles from her mother's home. By the time of the interviews, when she was fourteen, she had been living in the placement for two years. She had a nut allergy and the early period of the placement had an episode

of anaphylactic shock. The dramatic experience seemed to have helped to consolidate her bond with her carers and she was planning to stay there until she was sixteen.

She spent weekends with her mother and had her own room in her mother's house. Contacts with her father were also regular but Libby was unhappy with the degree of supervision that was involved at first. Her carer complained that when he visited their area for contact they had found his visits disruptive. More recently the contact regime had been relaxed and Libby sometimes spent school holidays with him in his home. She was planning to live with him permanently once she was sixteen when, she had been told by her social worker, she would be free to choose who she wanted to live with. This met with some disapproval from her carers but any differences were managed with some sensitivity on both sides and relations appeared to be good throughout the period of the interviews.

Social workers: Seth Simons

Lucy Lachapelle

It is difficult to be sure about some of the details of Lucy's care 'career' because her accounts were often patchy sometimes inconsistent and in some details at odds with what her foster carer, Christianna, told me.

According to Lucy (17 years) her mother was unable to care for her and her sister, Lesley. Lucy was not sure why that was the case but remembered financial problems and social isolation that were partly abated by her Grandmother. At that time her Grandmother was in and out of hospital and when she was not there to take the girls they were left to fend for themselves which finally resulted in their being taken into care.

Lucy was vague about the first years in care but gave the impression that she and Lesley may have been kept together in a single, stable placement until, when she was eight, they were both adopted. The adoptive parents had two sons and a daughter, all older than Lucy and living independently of their parents by the time of the interviews. Both sons had left the region but the daughter was living in a neighbouring town and regularly visited her parents.

After some years, her new mother, Cheryl, developed cancer and this seems to have accompanied, perhaps precipitated, what Lucy described as usual teenage behaviour. She did not want to go into details about this behaviour but at that time her adoption broke down while Lesley remained with the adoptive family. Then Lucy claimed that she had two foster placements before moving to the placement where she was interviewed. Her latest foster carer, Christianna, told a different story of that transition.

In Christianna's account there were no other foster placements between adoption and her own involvement. The other carers Lucy described may have been providing respite care to support an adoption in crisis. According to Christianna, who had known Cheryl for some time before the adoption broke down, the adoption breakdown had been on the cards for a long time. Cheryl found Lucy very difficult to manage and felt she was being given inadequate support by her social service department. In the end Christianna said Cheryl "dumped" Lucy on the department. Christianna was called in to provide an emergency placement and Cheryl retained parental responsibility. By the time of the interviews Lucy had been fostered with Christianna for 2 years and was planning to stay for at

least one more year before leaving to live independently. In her large home, Christianna also housed two adult daughters, 2 grandchildren and 2 other people in foster care.

In the end only two interviews were conducted because of difficulties in contacting the placement.

Social workers: Shay Shaw, Sam Scotlynn, Trish ? (Pathways)

Leo Leach

Leo was sixteen at the time of his first interview. He had spent almost the whole of his life in foster placements apart from a period of adoption. The immediate cause of removal from his parents seems to have been the violent abuse of his father but he has many memory gaps and it is difficult to be sure. There seems to have been some limited contact with his mother at first but he had had no contact with either parent for many years.

His recollection of his career in foster care is particularly limited and disorganised. He, his older sister Lyra and younger brother, Luke, were taken into care when Leo "was tiny" and at first they were kept together. He was able to name or locate three sets of foster parents but there may well have been others before the three siblings were adopted by Cleo and Conroy Carrier when he was seven. They lived with Cleo and Conroy for at least six years when Conroy was imprisoned for acts committed against Lyra. At that point the siblings were separated for the first time, Lyra being fostered separately from the brothers. Leo and Luke moved into foster care with Constance and Corbyn and that was where Leo was interviewed, having been in placement for something in the region of three years.

His relationship with Constance and Corbyn became difficult as Leo entered adolescence. Following his first serious girlfriend he began to change his behaviour, drinking and resisting their attempts to control him by running away. Between the first and second interview he was excluded from College and later Constance became suspicious that he may have harmed her grand-daughter. While the placement continued, various investigations were conducted. There was extreme strain and no third interview was sought.

Social workers: Salvatore Stephano

Lamar Langdon

Lamar and his older brother Lewis came into care when Lamar was about five years old. Two temporary, short term placements lasted about a year but when Lamar was six the two brothers were placed with Carol and Colin Charlton where they had remained ever since (he was sixteen at the time of the interviews). At first they maintained contact with both their parents but there had been no contact with their father for five or six years. Both brothers maintained contact with their mother but the relationship was less important to Lamar than it was to Lewis.

When he first arrived at the placement Lamar had significant speech impairment. Socially, and for the purposes of my interviews, he seemed to have largely overcome the impairment, or found ways of compensating.

The Charltons had two children of their own, Cole and Christy. Cole had left home. Christy was the youngest in the household, in her final year of primary education. Lamar was strongly attached to Carol and, though their relationship was not directly observed, to Colin as well. Before Cole left home he had also been an important source of support for Lamar. Integration into the family therefore appeared to be particularly strong.

Social workers: Salvatore Stephano

Lanie Leach

Lanie (17) was the youngest daughter of a former foster child. She was taken into care as an infant, the earliest of any of my participants. Her mother had been coping, presumably with difficulty, with the two older girls but Lanie's birth resulted in the family being broken up, all three girls going in foster care.

Lanie kept score of twenty four houses she had lived in but these were not all individual placements. The earliest foster carers she could clearly remember were Comfort and Chaney. She shared this placement with her sister Lexie while her oldest sister Luz seems to have been cared for separately from the outset and by the time of my interview contact with her had been lost. Comfort and Chaney moved a lot themselves and at times the Lanie and Lexie returned to their mother until the carers had settled down and then they would be fostered again.

Quite early on she became attached to a social worker, Siobhan Scott, who she thought of as a sort of Aunty. Siobhan was responsible for the compilation of a detailed Life Story Book that covered the period up to adoption. By the time of the interview, however, this contact had been attenuated or may actually have ceased.

Lanie was separated from Lexie eventually, for reasons that were not discussed. During this period she had foster carers who had a grown up son who, with his wife, eventually adopted Lanie. For that reason she referred to the carers only as Grandma and Grandpa. She also spent three years with Coretta and Charly in what seems to have been a stable and successful placement which only ended when her adoption was finalised.

She was adopted when she was six and moved to a different region with the adoptive family which included an adoptive brother and sister. The adoption broke down, however, when Lanie was fifteen. The adoptive family was disrupted when her new sister lost a baby at birth and Lanie reacted badly to what she experienced as relative neglect at that time. She went into care with Connie and Cliff and when interviewed she had been placed with them for nearly two years. She received letters from her birth mother but Connie reported that she showed little interest in them. She had occasional visits from Lexie with whom she also stayed in contact by email.

The only interview conducted took place at a time when the members of the placement were hoping to recover from a recent episode when Lanie had disappeared for a week, prompting a county-wide police search and media attention. Then Lanie's Pathways officer asked me not to seek any further interviews when Lanie became pregnant and left the placement.

Social workers: Siobhan Scott, Sharna Service, Stacey Stevens, Sara Steele (Pathways), Scott Samuelson (Carers' link worker)

Laaiq Libena

Laaiq was made homeless and stateless by conflict (1998-2000). His school was attacked; he ran away and became permanently separated from his family. Having crossed North Africa, been taken from a boat on the Mediterranean and given temporary refuge in Italy he travelled, without papers, to England and was fostered by Constance and Corbyn Curtis while his case for asylum was considered and eventually granted.

His account of his migration from North Africa was extraordinary and his case attracted much sympathy among neighbours, who campaigned for him to be granted asylum. Due to his language differences it was difficult to judge his disposition towards the other members of the foster placement but Constance appeared to be much attached to him. When, at one stage, the asylum decision looked in doubt, she told me there were detailed plans prepared for him to go 'underground' rather than be returned to Italy or his birthplace.

Laaiq felt his separation from his family strongly and also had difficulties resulting from his experiences but it was apparent that he was fiercely dedicated to self-education in England as his best path to independence.

Social worker: Salvatore Stephano.

Appendix 1: Chronology of access application

10/11/2006	Children's Services Team Leader suggests sharing my dissertation.
23/01/2007	Email to Team Leader about the possibility of a collaborative studentship.
26/02/2007	Email from Team Leader arranging a meeting with me on Friday 16 March.
02/03/2007	Email from Team Leader suggesting I collaborate with one of his junior colleagues who was monitoring an AKAMAS training programme.
02/04/2007	Email to Team Leader making a formal request for access to people in foster care for the purpose of my research.
30/04/2007	Email from Team Leader referring me to Governance Committee website for ethical clearance for my proposed study.
21/06/2007	Application to Governance Committee.
01/07/2007	Conditional approval of my research proposal from Governance Committee.
11/10/2007	Email from Team Leader acknowledging a request for work shadowing as a preliminary to beginning the research.
15/10/2007	Email from Team Leader refusing my request on the grounds that it would be inappropriate since I had worked for the Team as a foster carer. He suggested Town A as an alternative.
19/11/2007	Email from Team Leader about contacting Town B for work shadowing.
30/11/2007	I met with the County Director of Children's Services. He offered to support my research proposal.
13/01/2008	Email to Director of Children's Services sending the further information he had requested at the meeting on the 30th November.
04/02/2008	Email to Director of Children's Services with request for permission to work shadow at Town C.
05/04/2008	Email to Director of Children's Services with revisions to research proposal and arranging meeting between him and my Supervisor.

20/04/2008	Meeting between my Supervisors and Director of Children's Services at Northerton.
22/04/2008	Email from my Supervisor to Director of Children's Services and me about contact with managers.
04/06/2008	Email to Director of Children's Services about contact with managers.
18/06/2008	Meeting with Director of Children's Services. Asked for access to a participation group.
07/07/2008	Email to Director of Children's Services about his idea that I have contact with one of his senior managers.
15/07/2008	Second email to Director of Children's Services about his proposal that I have contact with a senior manager.

Appendix 2: Vignettes for use with the participation group

<u>Opener</u>

Why are you a member of this group?

<u>Fostering and normal family</u>

1:      They all look after you and and they give you the food that you want they're very er they like you can tell them if something went bad and if it's serious they'll tell other peop not like their friends or anything they'll tell social services or some from Fostering Solution and they well then we'll get sorted out for you so you won't have to worry about anything else. Just get on with your life. It's like just living at your normal house but you just don't live with your own family but

Me: That's

1:      it's really the same it's like you just think yourself and you think your in your house with your Mum and things.

Do you think there is any difference between being fostered and any other family life?

<u>Special to foster care</u>

Me: …one of the other things we were talking about was your lost mobile you lost a mobile phone.

2:      No em my foster carers have it.

Me: Oh they do?

2:      Social services Fostering Solutions said I can't have it 'cause I was contacting my Mum.

Me: How do you feel about that?

2:      I think it's balls. Total balls. You expecting me to say more?

Me: I'd like to.

2:      Normal families they can talk to their Mum I think's absolute balls you can only see your Mum once in two months. All crap.

Me: Got any theories about why it's different for foster kids?

2:      No. I think just moving to another house is bad enough.

Me: Say again.

2:      Moving to another house is bad enough.

Should LAC accept that their carers and social workers know best about things like contact?

<u>How people see foster kids</u>

3:      Yeah I said we were just sort of twenty questioning each other if that makes any sense

Me: mm

3:      just getting to know each other asking questions and so and she I said she said to me so what you doing 'cause it was on a Friday we really started texting she said to me so what you doing tomorrow and I said oh I'm coming through to Whitehaven to see my Mum and she kind of texted me back it's like alright as if to say ok then I was just like She's she just said so yeah she said to me alright as if to say well tell me more and she was like know what so I go I'm in foster care just and she goes ohh I didn't know that and then just told her about it.

Me: From your experience of other kids

3:      Mhm

Me: What do they think foster care is?

3:      Tracey Beaker.

303

4:      Most teachers try to do it 'cause like they know you're fostered and they know you've got social worker and if they phone your social worker you think oh they're going to get into more trouble but she doesn't really bother me in two ways *[laughs].* Just doesn't.

Me: How do they know?

4:      Oh they all know. J everyone knows you're fostered. I don't know how it's just yan of those things.

How do people react if they learn that you are fostered?

Trust

5:      Well at first I wasn't too sure that well 'cause I didn't know her I wasn't too sure that I was going to trust her…like get to know her that easily…but as I got to know her I started telling her things and telling her all my problems.

6:      This person who used to work at Barnado's she used to like bring the past up and that so I didn't like working with her.

How do LAC decide who to trust and who not to?

Independent living

7:      When I'm 18 I'm wanting to move out and like get a little flat somewhere like probably close to my family and stuff like that and I'll still come and see my carer keep in touch with her so I want want to move closer to my mates and to my family and erm I'm probably wanting, the scariest thing about it is living on my own so I'll probably well I thought about living with a mate or something.

What makes people want to stay in touch with their carers?

Closer

How have your feelings about foster changed as you've got older?

You can be part of a study of fostering.

My name is Peter Denenberg. I do not work as a social worker or foster carer - I do research. I am going to look at what it is like to be a fostered young person.

I am going to look at the lives of young people who are fostered.
I want to find out what's involved in living with a foster family; what helps you and what does not.
I want to find out what you think and feel about being fostered.

I want to find out how well you feel you can communicate with the adults who are taking care of you.

I would like to spend time with you and talk with you.
I will ask if I can record conversations but you make the decision about this.

I will keep looking at young peoples' lives for six months.

I will not tell anyone what you say unless you tell me something that means you or someone else is in such serious danger that they might be badly injured or even killed.

Would you like to be one of these young people?
If you say "yes" now you can still change your mind.
Nothing bad will happen to you if you say "no".
Do you have any questions? I can come and talk to you before you say "yes" or "no". If you are want to know more, phone me on 016973-61743.

Consent form for young person:

Name: …………………………………………………………………….

The research has been explained to me and I know I might be asked if conversations can be recorded

I know I can change my mind and say "No" whenever I like

I know that I can say "Stop" to recordings at any time

I know that nothing I say will be passed on to people outside the research team unless it involves a serious threat of injury or death

I know that my name will never be used in reports. I know that if I am referred to in reports, books or journals I will be fully informed and consulted in advance

Yes, I want to take part in the project.

Signed ………………………………………..

I agree to recording of conversations.

Signed ………………………………………..

Signed by person witnessing …………………………………………..

Date …………………..

Consent form for foster carer:

Name:…………………………………………………………….

The research has been explained to me and I know I might be asked to provide a place for interviews to take place

I know that observation of the placement may be included in the research

I know I can change my mind and say "No" whenever I like

I know that I can say "Stop" to observation at any time

I know that everything will be kept confidential

I know that my name will never be used in reports. I know that if I am referred to in reports, books or journals I will be fully informed and consulted in advance

Yes, I want to take part in the project.

Signed …………………………………………..

I agree to recording of observations.

Signed …………………………………………..

Signed by person witnessing …………………………………………..

Date …………………..

Appendix 4: Sibling relationships

Interviewee	Siblings	Foster siblings	Total sibling relationships
Lawrence	Lucas, Lee, 4 older brothers and 1 older sister, unknown younger sister who has been adopted	Chad and Cathy	9
Lucas	Lawrence, Lee, 4 older brothers and 1 older sister, unknown younger sister who has been adopted	Chad and Cathy	9
Lee	Lawrence, Lucas, 4 older brothers and 1 older sister, unknown younger sister who has been adopted	Chad and Cathy	9
Leo	Luke, Lyra		2
Lucy	Lesley, older sister	2 other people in foster care, 1 female + her 2 female offspring, 1 other female	8
Leona	Lacey, older brother	Cilla and 2 other females	5
Lanie	Luz, older sister (adoptive)		2
Lydia	Lia	Cedric	2
Lia	Lydia	Cedric	2

Lilian	Luciana, Lionel, Lulu, Lenny, Lance, 1 rejected step-brother		6
6+3+Lamar	Luis	Cole and Christy	3
Total			**57**