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BA Hons, MSc

INVESTIGATING THE PERSPECTIVES OF FOSTER CARERS AND THEIR BIRTH CHILDREN

Section A: What do we know about the impact of stress on foster carers and what factors contribute towards this?

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Project Summary

Section A: This section synthesises and evaluates empirical literature with the aim of exploring the causes and consequences of stress experienced by foster carers and what factors serve to lessen or increase this. The review included a variety of studies incorporating a range of methodological designs. Factors identified that contributed to stress included managing the impact of wider systems, such as social services and the foster carer's family, as well as the impact of individual factors such as the looked after child's behaviour. Consequences of stress included a direct impact on retention. Future research could include robust qualitative studies, which further explore the impact of stressors on the wider systems around the foster carers including the birth children of foster carers.

Section B: This qualitative study aimed to explore how the birth children of foster carers experience the relationship with their parents. Eight young people took part in semi-structured interviews, which were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The findings suggested that the processes of 'making sense' and 'feeling valued' serve to buffer the impact of potential threats to the parent-child relationship. Clinical implications include the application of a model that has been developed to elucidate the relationship between the themes.

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Major Research Project

Section A

Emma Adams

Title:

What do we know about the impact of stress on foster carers and what factors contribute

towards this?

Word Count:

6368 (204)

Abstract

There is a discrepancy between the increasing number of children in foster care and the decreasing number of foster carers. Research has highlighted the many challenges that foster carers face in caring for children who have experienced adversity. The current review synthesises and evaluates the empirical literature with the aim of exploring the causes and consequences of stress experienced by foster carers and what factors serve to lessen or increase this.

PsychINFO, ASSIA, Web of Science and Google Scholar were searched for relevant studies, which were chosen for review based on specific inclusion criteria. This search identified 15 papers.

Factors identified that contributed to stress included managing the impact of wider systems, such as social services and the foster carer's family, as well as the impact of individual factors such as the child's behaviour. Consequences of stress included a direct impact on retention. Methodological issues identified related to sampling, research design and cultural variability.

Future research needs to include the perspectives of people around the carers, including social workers and the birth children of foster carers. Clinical implications include the promotion of training and support and the development of integrated ways of working with services and foster carers' families.

Keywords: foster care, foster carer, stress, literature review, looked after children

1. Introduction

1.1. Layout of Review

This paper offers a review of the literature exploring the causes and consequences of stress experienced by foster carers. The methodology used to identify papers for the review is outlined and 15 papers were subsequently reviewed.

An outline of the key themes of the qualitative research is provided, followed by a discussion of the studies exploring child behaviour, coping style, retention of carers and attachment. Due to the wide scope of areas identified, the key themes are considered further in the discussion along with recommendations for further research and clinical implications.

1.2. Foster Care

Recent reports have indicated an increase in the number of children and young people in foster care. In the UK alone there were 85,890 children and young people placed in foster care between April 2014 and March 2015, an increase of 2% compared to 2013-2014 (Ofsted, 2015). At the same time as this increase in need, the number of fostering households had actually decreased (Ofsted, 2015). These findings are also apparent in the US and other countries around the world (Ciarrochi, Randle, Miller & Dolnicar, 2011). This highlights an important international discrepancy between the number of children and young people requiring foster placements and the recruitment and retention of the foster carers themselves.

Parenting a child in foster care has been described as going well beyond a normative experience of parenting (Tarren-Sweeney, 2008). Frequently children who are taken into foster care have experienced neglect or abuse and as a result of these early experiences may have increased physical and emotional needs (Harden, Clyman, Kriebel, & Lyons, 2004). There will have been an identified reason that these children were not able to remain in the

care of their birth parents. When birth parents have provided inconsistent, neglectful or abusive care, this negatively impacts on the child, which may subsequently be evident and expressed though their behaviour. This can lead to a varied and at times unpredictable or challenging experience of parenting for foster carers. Gibbs and Wildfire (2007) point out that a shortage of foster placements can lead to multiple children, with varying levels of increased needs, being placed into the same foster placement, which places a high level of demand on the carers that are continuing to provide foster care.

Redding, Fried and Britner (2000) found that where foster carers were supported and trained to cope with children with increased individual needs, these placements had an increased amount of stability. However, it has been argued that foster carers in fact report their needs for support and training are frequently unmet (Nixon, 1997).

Research has identified that careful matching of foster carer and child in terms of child temperament, parent temperament and parental expectations has been linked to a stable placement outcome (Redding et al., 2000). However, with an increasing number of children in need of a placement and a decreasing number of foster carers, it seems possible that this may become difficult to achieve; and thus, there may be an increased likelihood of placement disruption.

1.3. Early Experiences

Bowlby (1973) described how the early relationships and interactions with attachment figures lead children to build assumptions of themselves and others. These assumptions form the basis of an internal working model for the child. This internal working model serves as a template for relationships and subsequently influences the child's interactions and behaviours towards themselves and others.

Children who are in foster care have frequently experienced neglect or abuse (Ciarocchi et al., 2011). Due to these early experiences, looked after children may have developed internal working models of themselves, which could lead to feelings of worthlessness and an expectation that they are not worthy of care and thus expect insensitive caregiving (Gabler et al., 2014). This can make it difficult for both themselves and foster carers to develop a secure attachment with each other. In addition, children may have experienced multiple placements or Social Workers, which could also contribute to difficulties in forming attachments with significant adults in their lives.

Therefore, working towards developing a secure attachment with their foster carer can greatly benefit a child in foster care and serve as a protective factor (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson & Collins, 2005). Jarvis and Creasey (1991) identified that children's attachment outcomes are negatively affected by parenting stress in non-fostered samples and thus, it may be crucial to consider this finding in relation to a sample where attachment is likely to be adversely affected and carers are likely to be placed under an increased burden of stress.

1.4. The Impact of Trauma on the Developing Brain

There is an increasing amount of literature highlighting the neurological impact of trauma and experiences of maltreatment on the early developing brain and the subsequent impact this can have on brain functioning for children who have been exposed to these experiences (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). Children who have experienced trauma have had to focus cognitive resources on survival, meaning that the regions of the brain involved in the fear response become frequently activated. Other regions of the child's brain have been found to be less frequently activated, such as those involved in complex thought and cognition (Perry, 2001) and thus, these processes become less utilised by the

child. As a consequence children may experience a decreased ability to differentiate between danger and safety.

In addition, research has identified that structural and neurochemical damage to the brain caused by maltreatment can lead to a range of executive functioning difficulties, which can lead to decreased IQ, lower academic achievement and attention difficulties (Wilson, Hansen & Li, 2011). Healy (2004) also found that early maltreatment can permanently alter the brain's ability to produce serotonin, affecting a child's ability to experience positive feelings of wellbeing.

These factors all contribute to the later psychological presentation of children in foster care and add to the challenges that foster carers subsequently face in caring for them. There is an increasing amount of literature highlighting the many challenges foster carers face in caring for traumatised young people (Cairns, 2002). Cairns (2002) argues that foster carers need to have access to the theories and models that make sense of the behaviours of traumatised children, in order to manage this challenge in their everyday lives.

1.5. Caregiver Stress

Stress is described as the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure (NHS, 2017). Although stress responses evolved as adaptive processes, when stress is prolonged it can negatively impact both physical and mental health. Stressors have a major influence on mood, sense of wellbeing, behaviour and health (Schneiderman, Ironson & Siegel, 2005).

Psychological theories of stress emphasise the concepts of 'appraisal' and 'coping' as central (Krohne, 2002). The concept of appraisal refers to an individuals' evaluation of the significance of an event, in terms of impact on their own wellbeing. The concept of coping is viewed as an individual's efforts to manage the demands created by the event (Krohne,

2002). Lazarus (1991) argues that stress is a relational concept and should be viewed as an interaction between individuals and their environment, specifically between an individual's cognitive appraisal of the environmental situation and their resources to cope with the demands of this.

It has been suggested that parents experiencing high levels of stress are more at risk of experiencing 'blocked care', which Baylin and Hughes (2016) describe as being when high levels of stress experienced by the caregiver suppress the higher brain functions needed to support reflection, flexibility and self-regulation. These processes can all be viewed as important in order to respond to a child's distress in a way that will increase the child's trust in the carer.

If foster carers are experiencing higher levels of stress, it is important to further explore what factors contribute to this and what the impact is on the carers. This is crucial in order to allow for a secure attachment to develop between the child and carer, for a positive placement outcome to be likely and to increase the likelihood of further recruitment and retention of foster carers, who have been matched with appropriate children (Sroufe et al., 2005; Redding et al., 2000).

1.6. Review aims

This review aims to provide an overview of the relevant literature in order to explore the causes and consequences of stress experienced by foster carers, what factors serve to lessen or increase the impact of stress, and ultimately identify the clinical implications of the research in relation to the fostering process as a whole. Some limitations of the studies will be discussed along with suggestions for future research.

2.Method

An electronic literature search was conducted using the databases PsychInfo, ASSIA, Web of Science and Google Scholar. Search terms selected were foster carer* or foster parent* or looked after or looked-after and stress* or strain* or pressure*, and all terms that mapped on to these headings. Literature searches were conducted between August 2016 and December 2016.

The title and /or abstract of all identified journal articles were screened by hand in order to identify relevant research. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles written in English. Papers were included where the participants included foster carers and the research specifically addressed stress or strain experienced by the carers. Papers were included where the research used a measure of wellbeing or 'satisfaction with fostering' if the findings were relevant to the review aims and the definition of stress, i.e. investigating emotional or mental pressure. Papers were also included if they utilised a measure of coping due to the definition of coping as 'cognitive and behavioural efforts to master, reduce or tolerate the internal and /or external demands that are created by a stressful transaction' (DeMaeyer, Vanderfaeillie, Robberechts, Vanschoonlandt & Holen, 2015, p. 71). In addition, some papers have used standardised measures of coping in relation to the topic of stress experienced by foster carers and these were also included in the review.

Samples that included birth parents (without comparison measures) or adoptive parents were not included as the focus was on out-of-home foster care. Papers that included kinship carer samples were also excluded due to these samples experiencing different challenges, for example receiving fewer services (Farmer, 2009). Kinship carers also experience unique challenges in caring for children that they may have already had existing relationships with, prior to the fostering process. Kinship carers may also have existing

attachments to the child's birth parent/s. Therefore including these studies was beyond the scope of the review and perhaps a topic for review in itself.

Studies were excluded where the research provided a therapeutic parent training intervention to manage stress, as this has already been explored in a recent literature review (Rork & McNeil, 2011) and this review aimed to provide a more explorative account of the foster carers' experience. Papers were also excluded where the 'stress' being examined was related to an aspect of foster carer demographics, for example stress specifically related to the ethnicity or sexuality of foster carers, as this was beyond the scope of the review.

Fifteen papers met the inclusion criteria and were included for review. Figure 1 provides a flow diagram of papers identified.
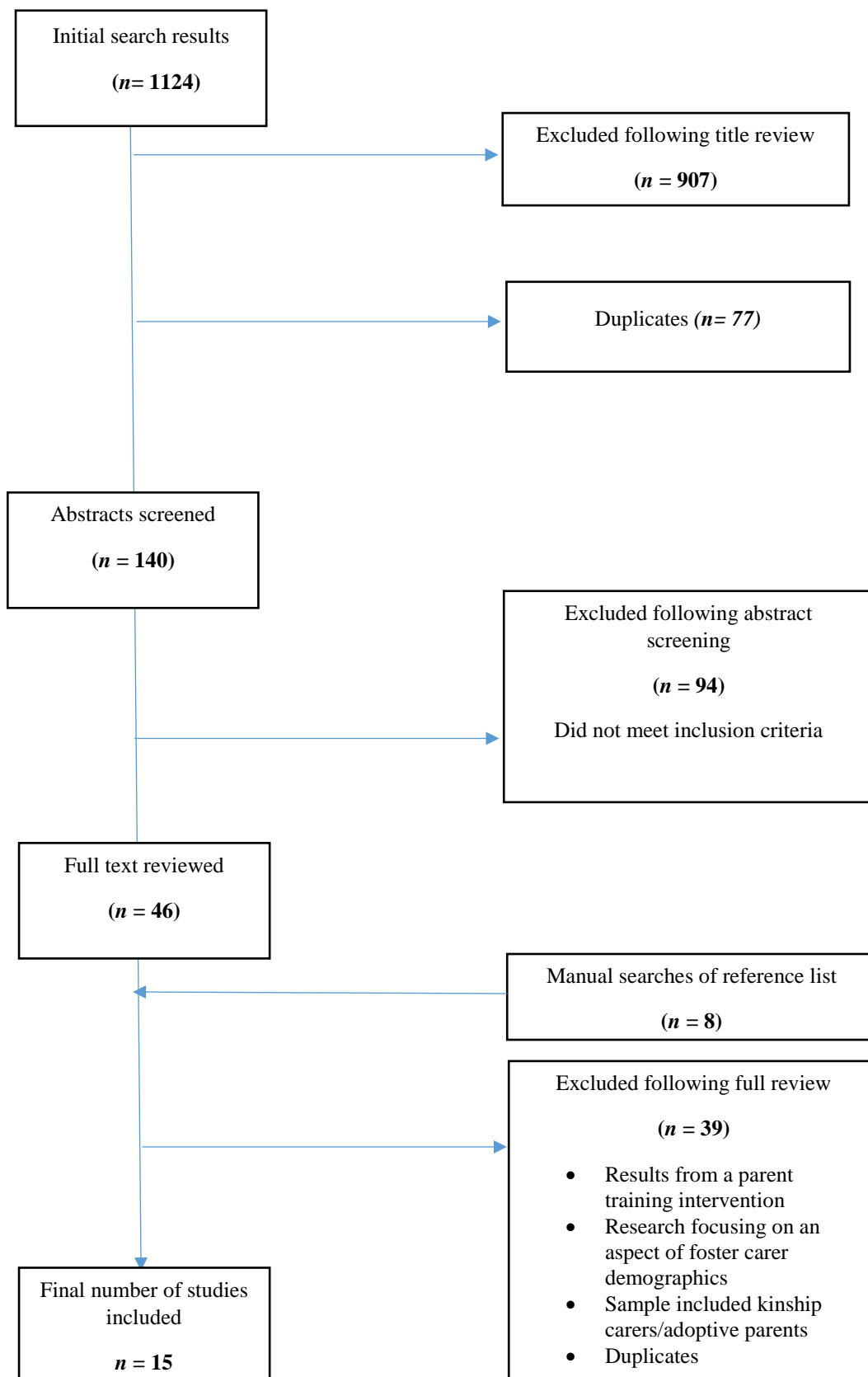
Figure 1. Flow diagram of literature search strategy

2.1.Assessing the Quality of the Studies

Each article was read and summarised (Table 1). Qualitative research was evaluated using characteristics of good qualitative research as outlined by Mays and Pope (2000) and Yardley (2000) (see Appendix A). Quantitative research evaluated using criteria outlined by the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2013) (Appendix B). Cross-sectional research was evaluated using the STROBE (2007) checklist (Appendix C). Mixed methods research was evaluated using a combination of relevant factors from the above checklists.

Table 1.

Summary of included studies

Study	Aims	Participants	Age of foster children	Study length & follow up	Design and Analysis	Findings
Brown and Calder (1999) *Canada*	To describe the challenges faced by foster carers as perceived by the carers themselves	49 foster carers (27 females, 22 males)	Not specified	N/A	Qualitative design using thematic analysis	Four themes identified: 1. Challenges of working with welfare staff, 2. Challenges related to indications that foster carers received about work having low value, 3. Threats to family and personal safety, 4. Personal/familial and stress-related challenges that could cause thoughts of quitting.
Cooley et al.(2015) *USA*	To investigate whether child 'disruptive behaviours' moderate or influence the nature or strength of the relationship between foster parent supports and satisfaction of caregivers as well as intent to continue fostering	155 licensed foster carers recruited through snowball sampling (83% female)	2-16	N/A	Cross-sectional design comparing foster carer satisfaction, intent to continue fostering and child 'disruptive behaviours'. Regression analysis used.	Foster carers who reported less disruptive behaviours were more likely to report a link between parental resilience and fewer challenges related to fostering. However, when more child behaviours were reported it did not appear that parental resilience aided in reducing challenging aspects
De Maeyer et al. (2015) *Holland*	To examine the coping style of foster carers and attitudes toward parenting	188 foster carers (78.7% female)	Not specified	N/A	Cross-sectional design measuring attitudes towards parenting using Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI), coping style of foster carers, and demographic characteristics. Descriptive statistics, multiple and logistic regression analysis used.	Almost half of participants at 'medium risk' for negative parenting on the 4 subscales of of the AAPI. Family and foster characteristics did not explain attitudes towards parenting. All 4 coping styles are utilised by the sample.
Farmer et al. (2005) *UK*	Examine the extent of strain on foster carers of adolescents, influence on parenting practices and overall impact on placement outcomes	68 young people and their foster carers	11-17	Data collected 3 months after start of placement then 9 months later (12 months after start of placement)	Prospective repeated measures design using mixed methods collected through reviewing case files, semi-structured interviews and General Health Questionnaire to measure psychosocial functioning and strain.	Carers' parenting capacity was reduced when they had experienced a high number of stressful life events in 6 months prior to the foster child being placed or if they were under 'considerable strain' during the placement. Factors that increased foster carer strain: conduct problems, hyperactivity, violent behaviour,

						contact difficulties. Significant relationship between having friends who provided help and fewer feelings of strain
Gabler et al. (2014) *Germany*	To examine the association between foster parents' sensitivity, parenting stress and foster children's attachment behaviour as well as behaviour problems.	48 children and their foster carers (89.58% female)	1-6 years	1st wave- children in placement about 2.5 months and 2nd wave children in placement about 6 months	Repeated measures design measuring attachment security, children's behaviour problems, foster carer stress and socio-demographic information. Analysis included t-test and multiple regression analysis.	Compared to normative data, foster children showed a lower level of 'attachment security' and more behaviour problems. Attachment security and behaviour problems were predicted significantly or marginally by foster carers' stress and supportive presence.
Geiger et al. (2013) *USA*	To understand what factors impact a carer's likelihood of continuing fostering	649 foster carers	Not specified	N/A	Mixed methods concurrent triangulation design measuring foster carers' intent to continue fostering, level of satisfaction, perception of locus of control, social support and family stress. Data was analysed using logistic regression analysis.	Foster carers with higher levels of tension in the family were more likely to report intentions to leave. Qualitative comments identified need for social, emotional and practical supports
Jones and Morrisette (1999) *Canada*	To explore foster carer stress and implications for counsellors	156 foster carers	Not specified	N/A	Mixed methods two stage information gathering. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.	11 themes identified such as 'foster parent-child relationship', 'foster parent wellbeing'
Lietz et al. (2016) *USA*	To understand whether a model of family resilience offers explanation to how families overcome the stressors associated with fostering	20 foster families (4 including adult birth children of carers)	Not specified	Follow up interviews (18 out of 20 families participated)	Qualitative (sequential explanatory design). Thematic analysis used.	Family resilience was described as a process of coping and adaptation that evolved over time. This was developed through the activation of 10 family strengths that are important in different ways and at different stages

Murray et al. (2010) *New Zealand*	To estimate the burden of care and stress attributable to fostering and to survey carers' perceptions of the support and training they receive in the context of this	17 foster carers (3 male, 14 female)	At least 1 child under the age of 11	N/A	Mixed methods using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics	Participants reported a slightly elevated life stress score suggesting that foster carers experienced more external stressors than is normative. Carers also reported a wide range of problem behaviours and unmet needs for support and training
Schofield et al. (2013) *UK*	To provide an analysis of foster carers' accounts of their roles as professional carers and/or committed parents to explore how they manage different and potentially contradictory roles	40 foster carers (3 men and 37 women)	5-17	N/A	Qualitative design using thematic analysis	Foster carers primarily identified as carers or as parents. Some foster carers could move flexibly between these roles while others were unable to do this. For foster carers who could move between roles this was positive and 'enriching rather than causing stress and role conflict
Soliday et al. (1994) *USA*	To assess difference between foster mothers of drug exposed and non-drug exposed toddlers on parenting stress and satisfaction. To examine the relationship between stress, satisfaction, social support and coping	18 female foster carers of drug exposed and 11 non exposed toddlers	12-30 months	N/A	Mixed methods design. Measures included parenting stress, coping measure and parent experience interview. Descriptive statistics and t-test were used for analysis.	Both groups scored within normal range on parenting stress and satisfaction. There were no group differences on parenting stress and satisfaction. Both parenting stress and satisfaction were significantly correlated with social support. High levels of satisfaction with social support served to buffer the impact of parenting stress
Vanderfaeillie et al. (2011) *Holland*	1. To examine foster parents' parenting behaviour and compare to non-foster parents and 2. Examine the influence of behavioural problems and parenting stress on parenting behaviour 2 years later	49 female foster carers	6-12	Follow up 2 years	Correlational design measuring parenting stress, child behaviour and parenting behaviour. Regression analysis used.	'Problem behaviour' had a 'direct negative impact on parenting and leads to less support and more negative control'. Also results in more parenting stress. Higher levels of parenting stress led to less effective parenting indicating a relationship between parenting stress and parenting practice
Vanschoonlandt et al. (2013) *Holland*	To examine the level of parenting stress experienced by foster mothers caring for children with externalising problems	39 female foster carers with recently placed children with externalising problems	3-12	N/A	Correlational design comparing parenting stress and parenting behaviour. Correlation, Spearman Rho analysis was used.	71.8% scored in the clinical range for at least one parenting stress subscale

Whenan et al. (2009) *Australia*	To investigate the relationship of child behavioural and emotional problems, parenting self-efficacy and foster carer-child relationship, to foster carer wellbeing, satisfaction with fostering and intention to continue fostering	58 foster carers (49 female and 9 male)	2-12	N/A	Cross sectional design comparing perceived child behavioural and emotional problems, foster carers' sense of self-efficacy, child-parent relationship, foster carer wellbeing, foster carer satisfaction and intention to continue. Regression analysis used.	Foster carer wellbeing 'was predicted by foster care training, parenting self-efficacy and foster carer-child relationship. Parenting self-efficacy and foster carer-child relationship were also significantly related to foster carer satisfaction. Intention to continue was predicted by parenting self-efficacy'.
Wilson et al. (2000) *UK*	To examine the relationship between stressful 'events' and measures of stress, satisfaction with fostering and intentions to continue fostering	950 foster carers	Not specified	N/A	Cross-sectional mixed methods comparing foster carers' experience of a stressful event with stress, satisfaction with fostering, intent to continue. Chi-square and unspecified qualitative analysis used.	Two thirds of sample had experienced one or more stressful event and these were associated with a measure of mental ill health and with attitudes towards continuing to foster. The most common event was breakdown, 2nd was family tensions

3. Literature Review

Each paper is described in more detail with relevant findings and methodological limitations discussed. Due to the variation in studies, the review is structured to include a brief summary of each paper. The review is organised into sections and themes are used as headings under which to group papers. These headings are not intended to represent a narrative analysis.

Although only three of the papers were exclusively qualitative in design, eight of the studies incorporated a qualitative element and thus, these will be summarised initially in order to explore stressors that were identified.

3.1. What do Foster Carers Identify as Stressors?

Eight of the papers utilised a qualitative method to generate an account of stressors or stressful experiences from the foster carers. Two of these papers aimed to describe or explore foster carer stress.

Jones and Morrisette (1999) aimed to explore foster carer stress by asking participants to generate a list of stressful events and this list was used to form the second stage of the study, whereby a different sample of foster carers rated the frequency and stress level of each item. They identified 11 themes and concluded that stress was most prevalent in relation to administrative issues.

Interestingly, this suggests that parenting the child was not the most stressful aspect of foster care, but in fact it was the impact of child social services policy and communication difficulties between themselves and staff. They also identified that events related to the child's birth family were also highly stressful, such as dealing with children who have been disappointed by their birth parents not arriving for scheduled contact visits.

A limitation of this study is that the sample is restricted to members of the Alberta Foster Care Association in Canada. Of the initial 200 foster carers approached to generate stressful events, only 30% replied, meaning this list could potentially be biased to begin with and thus the results may not be generalisable. Carers who are experiencing very frequent stressful events may not have the time or motivation to take part in research. However, the authors did take steps to enhance credibility of this study and used a triangulation process in the data analysis.

Brown and Calder (1999) also aimed to describe challenging events faced by foster carers, by asking participants to generate a list of challenges that would make them consider ceasing to be a foster carer. They were able to identify four themes from the results. The first theme supports Jones and Morrisette (1999) by identifying 'working with the welfare department and staff' as a particular challenge. Brown and Calfer (1999) also identified challenges related to indications that foster carers received about their work having low value, as perceived by others, threats to family and personal safety, and personal/familial stress related challenges that could cause them to consider stopping fostering. This study benefits from having a higher proportion of male foster carers than other studies but still utilises a small sample and when analysing results, still had a much higher proportion of female carer statements than male carers. Similar to Jones and Morrisette (1999), the results may not be generalisable as they identify a particular experience for a select group at one time point.

3.2. What is the Impact of Stress?

Two further studies utilised a mixed methods design to examine the impact of stress on other factors such as overall placement outcomes, satisfaction with fostering and intent to continue fostering. Farmer, Lipscombe and Moyers (2005) examined the stress experienced

by foster carers of adolescents and the impact of this on parenting practices and placement outcome. This study had the benefit of collecting data from a number of separate sources and also at two different time points. The researchers found that foster carers' parenting capacity was reduced in a number of different areas when they had experienced a high number of stressful events in the six months prior to the foster child arriving, or if they felt 'under considerable strain' during the placement. The researchers also found that strain lessened with help from friends or local professionals.

The researchers did conclude that there were higher placement disruption rates when the carer had experienced high levels of stress prior to the child arriving. However, the researchers state this finding as being 'on the border of significance' ($p=0.058$). It could be argued that this is in fact not statistically significant. The researchers also do not acknowledge any study limitations, which could in itself be a limitation.

Wilson, Sinclair and Gibbs (2000) examined the relationship between specific events and measures of stress, satisfaction with fostering, and intentions to continue. They found that two thirds of the participants had experienced one or more stressful events and these were associated with a measure of mental ill health and with attitudes towards continuing to foster. The most common stressful experience was placement breakdown or disruption followed by severe family tensions. Of the stressful experiences, only in the case of family tensions was the association significant, indicating this is a particularly stressful experience and can impact on foster carers' decisions to continue fostering. This study supports the literature reviewed so far in that multiple factors are affecting stress experienced by foster carers outside of individual foster child characteristics. However, a limitation of this study is that the authors state that the list of 'events' were selected by reviewing the existing literature, but there is no clear methodology outlined as to how this was achieved, which somewhat limits the transparency of the study.

3.3. What is the Level of Stress Experienced Compared to Support Offered?

A further study aimed to explore the burden of stress on foster carers and their perceptions of support in the context of this (Murray, Tarren-Sweeney & France, 2010). The researchers found that foster carers experienced a high burden of stress and this was in part due to the scale and complexity of looked after children's difficulties. The researchers also found that foster carers reported a deficiency in support and training. The majority of participants wanted more support in dealing with the day-to-day difficult behaviours of the children that they fostered.

The researchers acknowledged that the sample size was small and restricted to a specific area of New Zealand, perhaps limiting the generalisability of the findings. However, the study adds an important perspective to the literature in highlighting the discrepancy between the high level of stress experienced by foster cares and the subsequent level of support that is available to them.

3.4. Adapting over time and Family Resilience

Lietz, Julien-Chinn, Geiger and Piel (2016) conducted a qualitative study and examined the narratives of fostering experiences in relation to an adaptational model of resilience. This study was unique in that the sample also included some adult birth children of the carers. The researchers identified ten family strengths, which were morality/spirituality, social support, connectedness, creativity/flexibility, boundary setting, initiative, humour, communication, shared meaning making and commitment. The researchers argued that these ten strengths are activated throughout five family stages, which were survival, adjustment, acceptance, growing stronger and helping others (Lietz et al., 2016).

3.5. Fostered Children Exposed to Drugs

One study (Soliday, McCluskey-Fawcett & Meck, 1994) aimed to examine the differences in parenting stress and satisfaction between foster carers of drug exposed and non-drug exposed toddlers. The researchers found that both groups scored within normal range on measures of parenting stress and satisfaction and there were no group differences between them. Both parenting stress and satisfaction were significantly correlated with social support and they concluded that high levels of satisfaction with social support may buffer the impact of parenting stress.

This study had a small sample and this limits the generalisability of the research. However, this does add an important consideration to the review in terms of factors that serve to 'buffer' levels of stress (social support) and also identify the fact that this difference in the early experiences of children in care did not serve to affect subsequent foster carer stress.

3.6. Role Conflict

One paper (Schofield, Beek, Ward & Biggart, 2013) used a qualitative design to specifically explore how foster carers manage different and potentially contradictory roles as 'professional carers' versus 'committed parents'. This study was included due to the possibility that this role conflict may be a potential stressor and may therefore provide relevant information in relation to the review question. The study found that some foster carers were able to flexibly move between roles, whereas others were not.

The researchers also found that carers who could move between roles found the experience enriching rather than causing stress and role conflict. Similarly to the other papers reviewed, this sample may not be generalisable due to the researchers only including foster carers who were caring for a child in a long-term placement where the plan was for permanence. The results may have been different for carers providing short-term placements.

3.7. Cross-sectional Studies Looking at the Impact of Child Behaviour

Four studies investigated the impact of behaviour exhibited by the looked after child and how this impacts on stress experienced by foster carers. Cooley, Farineau and Mullis (2015) used an online survey incorporating a variety of quantitative measures to investigate whether child behaviours moderate or influence the nature or strength of the relationship between foster carer supports and satisfaction of caregivers, as well as intent to continue fostering. They found that foster carers who reported less disruptive behaviours were more likely to report a link between parental resilience and fewer challenges experienced with fostering. However, when more behaviours were reported, parental resilience did not appear to reduce the challenges. This suggests that difficult behaviour exhibited by the child can decrease internal resources within the foster carers that may usually protect them from the impact of stress.

Vanschoonlandt, Vanderfaeillie, Van Holen, DeMaeyer and Robberechts (2013) examined the levels of stress experienced by foster carers caring for children with externalising problems. They found that 71.8% scored in the clinical range for at least one parenting stress subscale. Although this was a small sample with only female foster carers, the results are consistent with Cooley et al. (2015) in that challenging behaviours in the foster child may lead to an increased experience of stress in the foster carers.

Consistent with these findings, Vanderfaeillie, Van Holen, Trogh and Andries (2011) also examined the impact of child behavioural problems and parenting stress. They found that 'problem behaviour' had a direct negative impact on parenting and resulted in more parenting stress. Higher levels of parenting stress also led to less effective parenting, suggesting a link between parenting stress and parenting practice. As with any correlational finding, the results

indicate a relationship rather than cause and effect, and thus research looking at child behaviour may not necessarily indicate that this is the cause of stress experienced by foster carers, but that it may be a relationship to consider.

Whenan, Oxlad and Lushington (2009) aimed to investigate the relationship of child behavioural and emotional problems, parenting self-efficacy and foster carer-child relationship to foster carer wellbeing, satisfaction with fostering and intention to continue fostering. They found that foster carer wellbeing was predicted by foster carer training, parenting self-efficacy and foster carer-child relationship. Poorer foster carer wellbeing was predicted by lower self-efficacy in relation to the child's challenging behaviour and a 'colder' relationship. However, the perceived child behavioural and emotional difficulties alone were not related to foster carer wellbeing, satisfaction with fostering or intention to continue fostering. A limitation of this study is the cross sectional design as all variables may be likely to change over time and perhaps a longitudinal design would address this further.

3.8. Coping Style

One study specifically examined foster carers' coping style and attitudes towards parenting (De Maeyer et al., 2015). The researchers found that almost half of the participants were at 'medium risk' for negative parenting on the four subscales of the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (De Maeyer et al., 2015). They also found that foster carers preferred a task oriented coping style. The study raises some ethical issues in that the researchers conclude 'a considerable percentage of foster parents report a high risk attitude toward parenting' (DeMaeyer et al., 2015, p. 76) but do not outline how this was addressed or whether it could be communicated back and further support offered or not.

3.9. The Impact of Stress on Foster Carer Retention

Several of the studies addressed the impact of stress on foster carer retention. Geiger et al. (2013) identified this as the sole aim of their study, involving a large sample of 649 foster carers. They found that foster carers with higher levels of tension in their family had higher likelihoods of reporting intentions to discontinue fostering. This finding is consistent with Wilson et al. (2000) in identifying a significant association between family tension and intention to give up fostering.

Parenting self-efficacy predicted intention to continue (Whenan et al., 2009) and Brown and Calder (1999) also found that foster carers reported indications that their work had low value in the perception of others, and personal/familial challenges could also impact negatively on their intention to continue fostering. It is likely that these factors interact with each other and self-efficacy is also affected by personal and familial challenges. Therefore further research may be needed to consider the foster family situation in a wider context to examine other factors that impact on retention of foster carers.

3.10. Attachment

One study addressed attachment and the relationship to parenting stress (Gabler et al., 2014). They found that attachment security and behaviour problems were predicted by foster carer stress and by foster carer supportive presence. Considering the likely impact of attachment difficulties in children who have been removed from their birth parents, it is perhaps surprising that only one study aimed to look at this as a factor in relation to carer stress.

4. Discussion

This paper reviewed 15 studies exploring the causes and consequences of stress for foster carers. Although the studies identify a variety of relevant factors, there are some common themes that appear useful to explore further.

4.1. Dealing with Authorities

Several of the studies highlighted that managing the relationship with, and the commitments from, the children's social care system were a particular cause of stress for the foster carers (Jones & Morrisette, 1999; Brown & Calder, 1999, Lietz et al., 2016). Administrative issues were both highlighted as the most stressful and the most frequently occurring stressful experience (Jones & Morrisette, 1999). Some participants highlighted the difficulties stemming from a lack of resources and the inevitable impact of this:

"Most of our workers have been as good as possible in their situation, but they are all overworked and underappreciated, and it makes it hard for them to do the best job possible for us, which in turn makes it hard for us to do the best job possible" (Geiger et al., 2013, p. 1363).

Although foster carers were able to give consideration to lack of resources, negative relationships with social care professionals has been identified as the main motivator for foster carers choosing to cease fostering (Rodger, Cummings & Leschied, 2006) and thus is an important factor in exploring the impact of this particular stressor on retention of carers.

4.2. Family Tensions

Another factor identified as contributing towards stress and impacting on the retention rates was the effect of fostering on the foster carer's biological family (Geiger et el., 2013; Wilson et al., 2000; Brown & Calder, 1999). Wilson et al. (2000) found that the most common stressful experience was placement breakdown. The second most common stressful

experience was carers experiencing severe family tensions. Some of the participants

identified the impact of having foster children who had been sexually abused and the difficult

impact this had on their own birth children (Wilson et al., 2000). The researchers

acknowledge that there is likely to be some interaction between the stressful events and

indeed research has identified that foster placements are more likely to break down where

foster carers have biological children within the family (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987).

One study specifically included the adult birth children of foster carers in the sample

(Lietz et al., 2016). Out of the twenty foster families that took part, four of these included

adult birth children. The researchers found that the initial stages of fostering were the most

difficult time for carers and referred to this period as the 'survival stage'. At this time, an

important family strength was being connected with each other and providing mutual support

(Lietz et al., 2016). This highlights the importance of considering the wider impact of the

people around the foster carer, not only in relation to worsening the impact of stress, but also

in terms of supporting to lessen this.

4.3. Child Behaviours

The review highlighted mixed findings on the impact of child behaviour as a stressor.

Inevitably this can be viewed as a source of stress for the foster carers to some extent, but the

findings also highlight an important interaction between perceived self-efficacy and the

quality of the relationship between the foster carer and foster child (Whenan et al., 2009).

Murray et al. (2010) highlighted that the scale and complexity of foster child

behaviour contributed to foster carers experiencing a high burden of stress and that carers

reported a need for more support and training specifically around this difficulty. The

researchers concluded that there is a need to develop specialised behavioural management

programmes that address the complexity of trauma and attachment-related mental health

difficulties. This supports the work of Cairns (2002) in arguing that foster carers need to have access to theories and models to make sense of the complex behaviours they may witness in children who have experienced early trauma.

It is also important to consider that the impact of child behaviour is likely to vary across time and be buffered by positive factors such as social support.

4.4. Social Support

It is helpful to consider what the research adds to our understanding of ways of alleviating the stress experienced by foster carers. Social support was identified as an important factor in increasing fostering satisfaction (Geiger et al., 2013) and decreasing stress (Farmer et al., 2005; Soliday et al., 1994; Lietz et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2010). Although it may be difficult to ensure each carer is receiving the social support of friends and family, literature has suggested more structured ways that this could be provided by other foster carers. For example, MacGregor, Rodger, Cummings and Leschied (2006) found that foster carers identified that encouraging a process of helping each other in ways such as support groups or coffee mornings could particularly improve retention of foster carers.

Additionally, in a review of the international literature on peer contact between carers, key themes that were valued by the carers emerged, such as the opportunity to meet with each other, to offload and talk to someone with a shared understanding of issues and to learn from each other (Luke & Sebba, 2013).

Interestingly Lietz et al. (2016) identified receiving social support as a family strength needed for the 'survival' stage of the family adaptation and giving social support at the fifth stage of 'helping others'. Therefore foster carer support groups could function as important factors for carers at different stages of coping, in offering both the opportunity to receive and also give social support.

4.5. Summary

In summary, there is likely to be a huge variation in stressors and levels of stress experienced by foster carers, not only affected by the early experience and subsequent individual characteristics of the foster child but also the individual circumstances of the foster carers. It seems of value to allow particular consideration to the impact of dealing with the Children's Social Services and the impact on the birth family. Both of these stressors suggest that taking a more systemic view of the care around a looked after child and exploring the way these factors can inevitably interact can provide a helpful way of exploring the causes and consequences of stress for foster carers.

In addition, it is also helpful to consider the impact of social support serving to buffer the effects of stress and considering ways to promote or ensure this is maintained for foster carers.

5. The Quality of the Research

Over half of the studies included a qualitative element in the research design. Although qualitative research can provide a detailed view of a particular group's experience, it seems that much of the research is providing a perspective of foster carers in different countries and thus different cultural and social care settings. Only three of the fifteen studies were set in the UK. While the research can still provide an important and interesting insight, it may be useful to consider that this may limit the generalisability of the findings to some extent.

Many of the studies utilised a mixed methods design and thus perhaps cannot be too rigidly evaluated using qualitative criteria only. However, only three of the seven studies referenced any of the quality criteria and only one of the papers (Lietz et al., 2016) included more than a sentence and referred to more than one quality criteria. This paper acknowledged

how triangulation and reflexivity would be met, how they would manage bias, member check results and maintain a full audit trail. This paper particularly stood out as ensuring quality was met and addressed.

In terms of the quantitative elements of the research, many of the samples could be viewed as biased, with the research utilising convenience and snowball samples, and the majority of the participants being female foster carers.

In addition, many of the studies use self-report measures and it is unclear as to whether some of the measures have been validated for use with foster carers. Few of the studies report the age of foster children in placement, which may have an impact on the difficulties experienced, particularly when considering the impact of trauma on brain development, and thus it may be useful for researchers to outline the age of foster children and potentially the age they were taken into local authority care.

The majority of the research in this area utilises a mixed methods cross-sectional design, thus capturing data at only one time point. Particular areas of research may benefit from using a longitudinal design, such as those studies investigating the impact of child behaviour and attachment. Both of these are likely to vary and thus affect the stress experienced by the carer in different ways and at varying levels across time.

6. Implications for Future Research

Qualitative research can provide a rich and detailed perspective and future research should include robust qualitative research with clear outlines of how quality has been assessed and ensured in the study.

It may be useful to further examine relationships between foster carers and Children's Social Care staff and consider both perspectives on how this relationship can be supported. Wilson et al. (2000) identify that future research needs to look further at stressful events in

order to tease out the views of various people involved. This could include exploring the perspective of more male carers and other members of the families that foster, based in the UK.

Research examining multiple perspectives could also include members of foster carers' family such as birth children. Although Lietz et al. (2016) did include birth children of carers in their sample, this only applied to four of the 20 families included. They also only included adult children and thus it would be beneficial to further this perspective by including larger samples with a focus on this population. Geiger et al. (2013) highlight that this is an understudied area and therefore, studies investigating the perspective of the birth children of foster carers could provide an important addition to the literature.

In addition, future quantitative research could seek to develop culturally relevant measures that have been validated for use with foster carers in the UK to further investigate the relationships between stress and the themes highlighted in the review.

7. Clinical Implications

This review suggests several clinical implications. Firstly, the application of psychological theory may have a role in supporting a more holistic perspective of the professionals around the foster carer. This could involve facilitating a more fully integrated way of working between mental health and social services. The aim of this would be to lessen the stressors associated with navigating the social care systems and other professionals working with the foster child, and promote a way of working together as a team, which very much includes the foster carer.

It is also important for services to take a non-judgemental attitude in supporting carers with difficulties, to ensure carers feel comfortable in reporting stressors and thus supported to

deal with difficulties. This could be further enhanced through the facilitation of foster carer support groups to promote the experiences of giving and receiving social support.

In order to support foster carers in understanding young people's behaviours, Clinical Psychology may have a role in providing psychoeducation on the impact of trauma and early attachment difficulties on subsequent development. This could be provided in the form of parenting groups with the aim of teaching psychological ideas, such as attachment theory and the impact of trauma, in accessible formats.

Foster carers may wish to be more included in supporting the foster child and thus some forms of working, such as dyadic developmental practice (Hughes, 2011) may be worth considering in order to provide support to the foster carer-child relationship. This could also involve an element of psychological work with the foster carer, which may allow the carers to express stressors, for example around difficult child behaviours and feel able to explore these in a way that can contribute to therapeutic work. Hughes (2011) stresses the importance of developing a therapeutic trusting relationship with foster carers in order to facilitate an open exploration of the impact the child is having on them.

Finally, clinical psychology may have a role in ensuring further research is conducted to continue the understanding of factors that contribute to foster carer stress and indeed the carers' family stress.

8. Limitations of the Review

There are a number of limitations that should be considered. The review emphasises the multifaceted nature of stressors experienced by foster carers and thus covers a number of different topics. The variability between the research design and measures used does make it more difficult to compare the findings and quality of the reviewed studies. However, this

does have the benefit of providing an overview and highlights the lack of research that exists in this area.

It has been argued that it would not be of use to consider any single set of quality guidelines as definitive (Mays and Pope, 2000) and therefore, when assessing the quality of research, it is important to consider that this is just one perspective that can be taken.

9. Conclusion

This review explored the causes and consequences of stress for foster carers and what factors serve to lessen these. Papers reviewed identified a variety of factors that foster carers are managing and that have the potential to contribute to stress. Factors identified that contribute to stress include managing the impact of the wider systems around the carer, such as the social care processes and the members of the foster carer's family, as well as the impact of individual factors such as the child's behaviour.

Consequences of these difficulties include the direct impact on foster carers' decisions about whether or not to continue fostering, and thus are important to manage to ensure carer retention. Factors that served to lessen stress included the social support of others and this included both giving and receiving support.

Future research could include robust qualitative studies based in the UK, which further explore the impact of stressors on the wider systems around the foster carers, such as social workers and the birth children of foster carers.

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Major Research Project

Section B

Emma Adams

Title:

"For that moment, and for that month, they needed the attention more than I did": How do the

birth children of foster carers experience the relationship with their parents?

For submission to: Journal of Fostering and Adoption

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Abstract

Background: Research has demonstrated that there is more likely to be a disruption to the placement where foster carers have birth children. Given the limited presence of the birth children of foster carers in research and the importance of the retention of carers, it seems relevant to policy and practice to investigate the parent-child relationship. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how the birth children of foster carers experienced their relationship with their parents.

Method: Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyse semi-structured interviews with eight young people who were the birth children of foster carers.

Results: Three superordinate themes emerged. These were: 'relational processes that give value to my role in the family', 'threats to our relationship' and 'making sense as a way of managing the threats'. Each of these superordinate themes contained subthemes.

Conclusions: The findings suggest that the processes of 'making sense' and 'feeling valued' serve to buffer the impact of potential threats to the parent-child relationship. Clinical implications include the application of a model that has been developed to elucidate the relationship between the themes. This has clinical implications for further understanding and informing the way services support both foster carers and their children.

Key words: foster care, looked after children, birth children of foster carers, parent-child relationship, qualitative

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Context

In the UK there has been a substantial increase in the number of children and young people placed in out-of-home foster care, coupled with a decrease in the overall number of foster carers offering placements (Ofsted, 2015). This has led to a discrepancy between the need for placements and the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

For children who have been removed from their birth families, a good quality foster placement can be a valuable opportunity for intervention and rehabilitation (Ciarrochi, Randle, Miller & Dolnicar, 2012) and increase the likelihood of children developing secure attachments (Smyke, Zeanah, Fox, Nelson & Guthrie, 2010). Thus, it is crucial to ensure these opportunities are available and that foster carers are supported and fully understood with regards to their motivations to offer and continue to offer placements.

1.2. Foster Carers' Perspective

Research investigating the motivations for fostering has previously identified that foster carers with higher levels of tension in their family had higher likelihoods of reporting intentions to discontinue fostering (Geiger, Hayes & Lietz, 2013). In addition, in a study exploring foster carer stress, Wilson, Sinclair and Gibbs (2000) found that of all stressful experiences identified by foster carers, only in the case of family tensions was there a significant association between this stressful experience and the carers' attitudes towards continuing to foster.

Therefore, in order to fully explore this factor it would be important to consider the

wider context of the whole family that fosters, including the birth children of the foster

carers, and this is also outlined as a further recommendation from the existing research

(Geiger et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2000). It has been argued that it is in fact the whole family

who takes on the task of fostering and the level of involvement that the foster carer's children

have in this process needs to be acknowledged (Martin, 1993).

1.3. The Birth Children of Foster Carers

The birth children of foster carers have been referred to as 'quiet voices' (Sutton &

Stack, 2012) and 'unknown soldiers' (Twigg, 1994) due to their somewhat limited presence

in the research into fostering (Hojer, Sebba & Luke, 2013). Although research has begun to

explore the experiences of birth children of foster carers, much of this research is

retrospective in design and focuses on carers or children recalling past experiences, which has

been identified as a limitation of the current evidence base (Hojer et al., 2013).

Sutton and Stack (2012) found that generally the experience of being a birth child in a

foster family was viewed as positive. The researchers highlighted that strategies were utilised

within the family to adapt to the experience. These emphasised the existing attachment

relationship between the parent and birth children as crucial to the development of these

adaptive functions.

1.4. Parent-child Attachment

Bowlby (1969) suggested that a secure attachment relationship with a parent will

allow a child to explore, develop and grow. Attachment theory also suggests that children

utilise this attachment style in subsequent relationships. It may be that a secure attachment to

parents will allow children to develop coping strategies to allow another child to 'share' their

parents. Hojer (2006) found that many biological children of foster carers reported spending less time with their parents. In addition, Thompson and McPherson (2011) found that both positive and negative relationship changes were reported. Some children reported a loss of family closeness whereas others felt that family relationships actually became closer (Thompson & McPherson, 2011).

Thompson, McPherson and Marsland (2014) specifically explored the relational changes between foster carers and their birth children. However, the researchers acknowledged themselves that the study was limited in only interviewing the foster carers. Thompson et al. (2014) argue that relational changes between foster carers and their birth children are important to explore in order to develop support or interventions and to support a positive placement outcome. Additionally, Sutton and Stack (2012) suggest that future research should explore the nature of the different attachment styles between parent and child and how this relationship can influence subsequent coping strategies.

1.5. Rationale for Research

Previous research has argued that foster placements are more likely to disrupt where foster carers have birth children within the family (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987). Some parents report that a perceived negative impact on their own children was key to their decision to give up fostering (Sinclair, Gibbs & Wilson, 2004). Therefore, whether changes in the parent-child relationship have been positive or negative, they will understandably impact on the experience of fostering for the whole family. Some research into the potential impact has identified that when children experienced a change in their relationship, such as having to share parental time, being able to have open, honest discussions with parents about this influenced an overall positive attitude towards fostering (Sutton & Stack, 2012). Therefore exploring the meanings that children make of their relationship with their parents is

particularly important in identifying the potential impact of fostering and ultimately

promoting sustainable foster placements.

The present research consists of interviews with the birth children of foster carers

living with children in current foster placements. The research aims to explore how the birth

children of foster carers experience the relationship with their parents.

2. Method

2.1. Design

A qualitative design using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used in

order to explore how individuals make sense of their experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin,

2009). The approach allowed for a detailed personal account of the participants' experience

to be explored.

The researcher's role within IPA is to engage in a double hermeneutic, i.e. to engage

in making sense of the participant making sense of their experience. Therefore the researchers

take on the dual role of both engaging with the participants' interpretation and interpreting

that more systematically (Smith et al., 2009). This was deemed the most appropriate analytic

method in order to explore how the participants made sense of their relationship with their

parents.

The research utilised in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to allow each

participant to express their experience in detail.

2.2. Participants

Participants were eight young people (four male and four female) aged between 14

and 16 (see Table 1 for demographic information). Smith et al. (2009) recommend 4-10

interviews for a professional doctorate study when using IPA. The number was selected to

allow for a detailed exploration of experiences while ensuring that enough quality data are

collected.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Birth/Adopted Siblings	Foster children in placement (Age)
Casey	Female	15	White British	1 brother 2 stepbrothers 2 adopted	1 female (17) 2 male (17 and 15)
Ibrahim	Male	16	Black British	1 sister	1 male (14)
Lewis	Male	16	British Asian	1 brother	1 male (6 months)
Sophie	Female	14	White British	1 brother	1 female (6 months)
Sammy	Female	15	White British	1 sister	2 female (15 and 9)
Jamie	Male	15	White British	1 sister	1 female (15)
Jasmine	Female	15	British Syrian	None	2 female (16 and 11)
Charlie	Male	14	White British	1 brother 1 sister	1 female (14) 1 male (17)

To be eligible for the study, the inclusion criteria were:

- Birth children of foster carer/s, aged 13-16

- Living with a current foster child in placement

- Parents had been fostering for over one year in order to ensure the young

  person had sufficient experience of fostering and to address ethical issues

  described below

- The parent was fostering through the Local Authority

- The parent's fostering social worker was based within the teams that had

  ethical approval, from the Local Authority, to be involved in the study

Participants were excluded if they met the following criteria:

- If the foster child was currently receiving input from the child and adolescent

  mental health service where the supervising researcher was based, in order to

  avoid any conflict of interest

The researchers approached local authority fostering social workers by attending team meetings and foster carer support groups. Participants were therefore recruited through the social workers referring the foster carers or directly from contact with the foster carer at the support group. The researchers offered a £10 voucher to each participant as an incentive and thank you for taking part in the study.

2.3. Interview Schedule

In developing the semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix D), current literature was considered along with consultation with an adult who was the birth child of foster carers and had lived with foster children as a child themselves. A pilot interview was also conducted with a 16 year old young person in order to ensure the interview schedule would flow and elicit relevant information from this particular age group. No further changes were made to the schedule in response to this.

2.4. Procedure

All social workers within the local authority teams identified were approached either via contact at their team meeting or by email with information about the research (Appendix E). Social workers were asked to hand out information sheets to foster carers with children

who met the inclusion criteria. After feedback from the local authority Research and

Development Department, an additional recruitment strategy was introduced and the

researcher also attended foster carer support groups (run by social workers) to speak directly

to foster carers and hand out information sheets both for them (Appendix F) and their

children (Appendix G).

Foster carers were asked to consider the information and discuss it with their

child/children. If a child expressed an interest in taking part, then an interview date was

arranged via email or telephone contact. All interviews took place at one of three NHS

clinical settings, depending on the geographical location of the participants. Recruitment and

data collection took place between May 2016 and November 2016.

At the interview, each participant and their parent were asked to sign a consent form

(Appendix H & I) before taking part in the interview and the parent was asked to remain in

the waiting area while the interview took place in a separate room. The interview schedule

was used as a guide and interviews ranged in duration from 40-69 minutes, guided by how

long the participant chose to speak about their experience. At the end of the interview, the

researcher spoke with each young person in order to debrief, answer any questions and advise

whom they could contact if they would like to ask anything else about the research.

Interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed and anonymised for

analysis. All recordings were stored on an encrypted memory stick and written material was

stored in a locked cabinet.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data was analysed using IPA (Smith et al., 2009) (see Appendix J for details of the

audit trail process). This initially involved repeated reading of each transcript and immersion

in the data, followed by recording descriptive, linguistic and conceptual aspects of the data

for each transcript (Appendix K). Themes from each individual transcript were printed (Appendix L) and visually organised into clusters in order to explore spatial representations of how the emergent themes related to each other. Clusters were organised into superordinate themes and given representative titles (Appendix M). This process was repeated for each participant and superordinate themes were then subsequently compared across all participants to explore pattern across cases (Appendix N). This led to a reconfiguring of some themes and the development of higher order concepts to form overall superordinate themes and subthemes (Appendix O). The researcher compared the superordinate themes with the original quotes from the transcript at each stage to ensure this was an accurate representation of the participants' reported experience. See Appendix P for extended list of quotes by superordinate and subtheme.

2.6. Quality Assurance

The quality of the study was ensured by following guidelines outlined by Mays and Pope (2000) and Yardley (2000). To ensure commitment and rigour, established methodological guidelines for IPA were followed (Smith et al., 2009). To ensure identified themes were grounded in the data, inter-coder agreement (Yardley, 2008) was used by comparing analysis of four transcripts with the internal supervisor's analysis and two further transcripts with the external supervisor. Any potential disagreements between coders were resolved through verbal discussion in order to reach agreement. There was also discussion and agreement with both additional researchers around the three superordinate themes.

To ensure reflexivity (Yardley, 2000), a bracketing interview (Fischer, 2009) was conducted in order to identify pre-existing assumptions that may bias the interpretation of the results (Appendix Q). The researcher also kept a reflective diary in order to continuously identify further perspectives throughout the research (Appendix R). Throughout the process

of data analysis, the bracketing interview and research diary were referred to, in order to ensure the interpretation of the results were not biased. If any identified assumptions also emerged from the data the researcher discussed this with supervisors and thought about the origin of these assumptions and the extent to which this could impact the findings.

2.7. The Researcher

The interviews and analysis were conducted by myself as the primary researcher. I am a 32 year old White British woman completing my doctorate in clinical psychology. I have a prior interest in working with children and families. During the second half of completing this research I was undertaking a placement working therapeutically with looked after children and their foster carers. I have also spent a considerable amount of time with children of all ages and their families both in my personal and professional life.

2.8. Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from Canterbury Christ Church University's Ethics Committee (Appendix S) as well as from the Local Authority Research Governance department (Appendix T).

The researchers acknowledged that the interview may highlight concerns for the wellbeing of the participant in the context of a family that fosters. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher outlined the limits of confidentiality and made it clear to the young person that if anything of concern were to arise in the interview, this information would need to be discussed further with the external supervisor, and any further necessary steps taken. Parents were also in the waiting room, should the researcher need to share any concerns during or after the interviews. There were no issues of concern raised in any of the interviews.

If concerns for the wellbeing of the participants had been significant and it was felt that these could not be addressed whilst the foster placement was ongoing, it may have been possible that this might have led to the foster child being moved to a different placement. In order to minimise the risks, the inclusion criteria specified that participants be identified from families that had been fostering for at least one year. This was identified in order to avoid recruiting participants who are new to the experience of fostering and may still be adjusting to the changes this has led to.

Young people were advised they could take a break or terminate the interview at any time. The supervising researcher or an identified clinician from the team collaborating on the research was present and available in the building during the interviews to support the researcher, or discuss any issues of concern if needed.

At the end of each interview, participants commented on their experience of the interview and none of the participants raised any concerns or reported any distress.

3. Results

The study aimed to explore how the birth children of foster carers experience and make sense of the relationship with their parents. Although each participant reported a unique experience of this relationship, there were three superordinate themes that emerged that appeared to capture this overall experience. These reflected the threats that fostering posed to the parent-child relationship, and the processes that enabled the participants to manage these threats and continue to feel valued in their role within the family. Eight subthemes were incorporated under these three superordinate themes (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Table illustrating superordinate themes and subthemes identified

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Illustrative quotation
	Feeling valued within fostering/ being the carer	"If you're playing a game and that's your mission it makes you feel like you've completed that so it's like a bonus for you" (Charlie)
	Feeling valued within my relationship with my parents/ being cared for	"She'll cook me my special food, she'll give me really good advice, she'll be open, she'll sing like our favourite songs" (Ibrahim)
	Missing out	"I remember on a Thursday night I'd have ballet and after that in the evening we'd go out for um we'd go out to like get dinner and stuff and obviously I remember that stopping when we first got like the boys" (Casey)
	Loss of attention	"We're really close but where we share the attention is like my friends are closer to their parents because it's just them or it's just them and their brother or sister"(Sammy)
	Taking it out on each other	"It just impacted on all of us and we ended up getting in a lot of arguments just because of the things of him, in a way" (Jamie)
	Rationalising/ positive re-framing	"For that moment, and for that month, they needed the attention more than I did" (Casey)
	Staying attuned to parents' needs	"If I see that she's like getting stressed out about it or she's not in like a good mood and stuff then I'll just leave her, keep it to myself or speak to my brother" (Lewis)
	Negotiating working together	"with the fostering obviously we have to work together" (Casey)

The results demonstrated that although there were negative effects of fostering identified as potential threats to the parent-child relationship, these threats were buffered by the ways that participants attempted to make sense of these. Experiencing a sense of value in their role, both in their relationship with their parents and in the family, also served to alleviate the impact of the threats. Through utilising both of these processes, participants were able to effectively manage potentially negative threats to their relationship with their parents (see Figure 1).
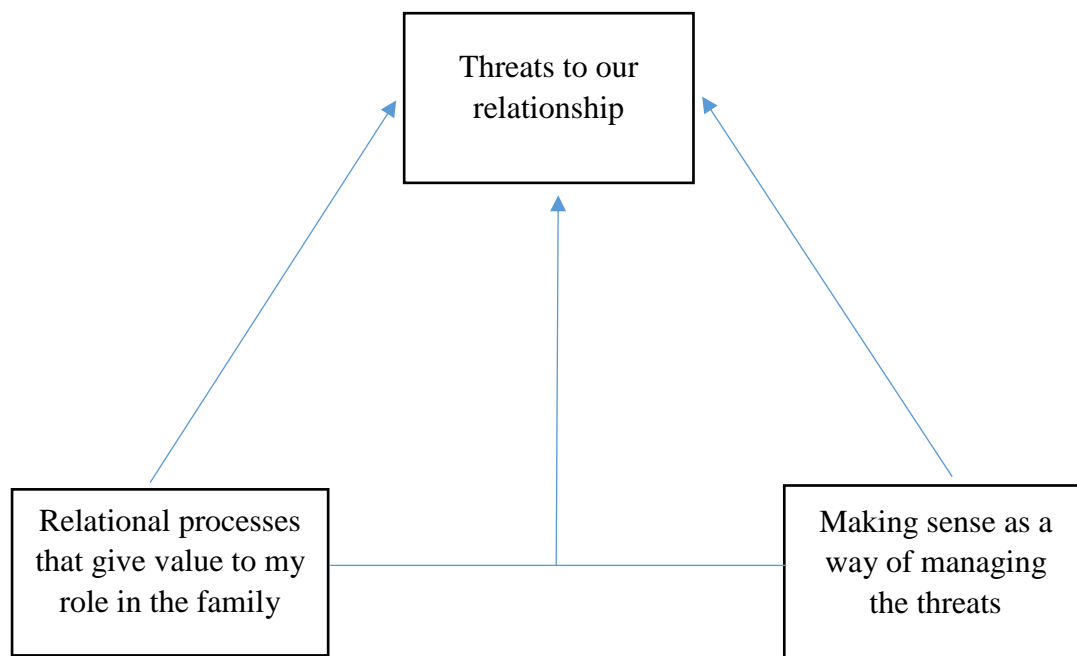

Figure 1. A model of managing threats to the parent-child relationship

3.1. Relational Processes that give Value to my Role in the Family

This superordinate theme reflects the relational processes that enabled participants to experience a sense of value and importance within their family.

Feeling valued within fostering/being the carer

Participants reported a sense of their role in the family in relation to fostering, at times almost taking on the role of the carer and appearing to gain a sense of value from this. Some participants spoke about experiences where the foster children had opened up to them and the meaning they assigned to this:

"I remember like two weeks after he came he told me about his situation and all the stuff and ever since then I was like wow this guy's opened up to me!" (Ibrahim, p. 22,480-481)

Ibrahim reflected on an experience of a foster child sharing the story of being an asylum seeker and the difficult experiences he had encountered. Ibrahim's language here reflects the almost wonderment he experienced at this being shared with him and he appeared proud that he was the person that the child had opened up to. The way Ibrahim says 'ever since then' also reflects the long lasting effect this interaction has had on his feeling value in this relationship. This was also experienced by Casey:

"I think to myself if I hadn't done that he probably wouldn't have spoken which would have like stopped the development of him opening up" (Casey, p.16, 5-6)

Casey has experienced a foster child speaking to her when they had not spoken to anyone else, and expresses the significance in this interaction in her feeling important. She described her feelings in a similar way to Ibrahim-"Oh my gosh wow I can't believe I did that" (Casey, p.16, 12-13). Casey expressed feeling that something she did had enabled this change and thus she has taken a direct valuable role in a child's progress, as if she were the carer.

Other participants also expressed positive feelings around taking a role in fostering:

"If you're playing a game and that's your mission it makes you feel like you've completed that so it's like a bonus for you" (Charlie, p. 24, 537-538)

Charlie used the metaphor of a computer game to express the sense of achievement he felt from taking an active role in fostering. The expression 'playing a game' also gave a sense of something enjoyable and Charlie referred to his enjoyment of games and computer games throughout the interview. The language used in describing this as a 'mission' could be related to the context of language used frequently in computer games, but also gave a sense of a higher purpose and an experience of something that is both challenging yet rewarding.

Feeling valued within my relationship with my parents/being cared for

In addition to feeling valued in taking on the responsibility and rewards of caring for a foster child, participants also expressed the ways they feel valued by their parents in their role as son or daughter and position of being cared for. Some participants expressed the ways in which their parents are still available to them:

"I mean if I really said to her like next Tuesday can we go out for a meal unless she had something really big planned she wouldn't be like no" (Jasmine, p. 18, 409-410)

Jasmine highlighted that having the knowledge that her mother would always make herself available to her if she requested this, made her feel special and valued, and she spoke of having Tuesday as their day when they will spend time with just each other. Some participants spoke about the importance of requesting time with parents:

"Yeh I was like well I can't actually say it otherwise I'm going to get told off and now it's just like I can say what I want when I want to say it (laughs)" (Sammy, p. 16, 359-360)

Sammy reflected on feeling able to suggest spending time alone with her parents now whereas previously when fostering was a newer experience, she had felt worried that she might be 'told off' at expressing this. Sammy expressed that having the confidence to request this and feeling like it was an option was important to her sense of value and almost portrayed a sense of empowerment in her role in that relationship.

Ibrahim also spoke of special time with his mother being of importance:

"She'll cook me my special food, she'll give me really good advice, she'll be open, she'll sing like our favourite songs" (Ibrahim, p. 9, 170)

Ibrahim emphasises the personal significance of his mother's actions in terms of '*my* special food', '*me* really good advice' and '*our* favourite songs'. Through these personal connections, Ibrahim is still experiencing value in his relationship with his mother.

Through parents making special time, being available and doing regular activities with their children, the participants were able to still experience value in their relationship and thus allow for the impact of the difficult experiences to be buffered (Figure 1).

3.2. Threats to our Relationship

This superordinate theme highlighted the negative experiences of fostering that have the potential to threaten the parent-child relationship. They were organised into three subthemes.

Missing out

Participants spoke about experiences that they are not able to have or things they are not able to do with their parents due to fostering:

"If they have like contact or if they like meetings or my mum has meetings and this sort of thing that she can't cancel then we can't go" (Lewis, p.10, 226-227)

Lewis spoke about the commitments fostering involved outside of the day to day care of children, such as time spent taking children to contact visits and meetings, and expressed this taking priority over going out with his parents. Participants also expressed that having foster children increased the number of people in the family, which changed the activities that they would do with their parents:

"I remember on a Thursday night I'd have ballet and after that in the evening we'd go out for um we'd go out to like get dinner and stuff and obviously I remember that stopping when we first got like the boys" (Casey, p.10, 30-31)

"I mean if the girls are on respite then obviously we can go up as a family just like me, my stepdad and my mum but with the two girls here we can't really because there's too many of us" (Jasmine, p. 11, 231-232)

Jasmine reflected on not being able to go with her mum to visit her aunt and grandmother due to the number of people who would need to go on this visit. Jasmine also reflected on being 'a family' when the foster children are in respite, indicating missing out on not only this particular visit, but also the experience of being able to do things with her parents and being 'as a family'.

Loss of attention

The participants reported a loss of attention from their parents as a result of fostering, particularly when the children first moved in:

" sometimes it's really hard because especially when they first move in, a lot of the time, for mum and dad it's their sort of sole focus is on those children" (Casey,p.4, 6-7)

"Well the attention thing like when the first children came it was very much you had to be with them all the time" (Sammy, p.3, 60)

Sammy and Casey both described most of the attention being focused onto the foster children at the start of placements and acknowledged that this is difficult. The expressions 'sole focus' and 'all the time' emphasise that there was not space for the birth children to be the focus or have time and attention during this period. Sammy goes on to explain:

"I'd make up things like I've got homework and I need help with it I would make up things so I get to spend time with them like one time I said I've got to make a globe thing out of paper mâché just so I could spend time with my Dad" (Sammy, p.16, 341-343)

Sammy emphasised the lack of time and attention that was available to her at this time, and her feelings that she needed to have a concrete reason with the focus on school, in order to spend time with her Dad. Homework is something that she has to do and thus perhaps provided a safe way of asking to spend time together, as this is a necessary task. This gives us an insight into Sammy's thinking that her wish to have time and attention, just because she enjoys this, was not important enough and she felt that she needed a more task oriented reason.

Lewis also reflected on the impact of taking a foster baby to events, such as a recent family wedding they had attended:

"It's just like having the pushchair, having to like push the pushchair around, make sure the baby's eating and my mum even said that you know she would have liked to have spent a bit more time with like family and things…everyone just put their handbags on the pushchair so you have like random women's handbags on the pushchair and stuff and then it's just like you have to push this thing around and fold it up, up stairs, down stairs, make sure the baby's eating, make sure he's not crying, nappy change, as well as like looking after us" (Lewis,p.22, 517-523)

Lewis described quite a chaotic scene and emphasised the extent of all the different things his parents were managing, by listing the different obligations, and then lastly says 'as well as like looking after us', perhaps reflecting the order that these different commitments have to take, with the attention on him feeling last in the long list of priorities. Lewis also describes the 'random women's handbags' weighing down the pushchair and this felt like it was an intrusion, perhaps an illustration of the public role his Mum is now taking as a foster carer, attending to all these external factors and 'random' people, before being able to attend to him.

Taking it out on each other

This subtheme related to participants recognising that they would often take their annoyance or frustration out on their parents and feeling their parents would also do this, rather than expressing negative emotions to the foster child. This was not necessarily an active process that was managed by the young people but a negative aspect that they had noticed occurring:

"If I'm getting annoyed with like the child or something like I would take it out on them" (Sophie, p.6, 130-131)

"It just impacted on all of us and we ended up getting in a lot of arguments just because of the things of him, in a way" (Jamie, p.4, 80-81)

Sophie described taking out her annoyance on her parents, perhaps as a way of protecting the foster child, perhaps partly due to Sophie's family typically fostering very young children or babies and it not being possible to express frustrations in a way that would be understood by the foster child. Jamie recognised that he and his siblings would argue more with his parents and attributes this to the foster child's presence and difficulties with the foster child's behaviour.

Some participants felt blamed for situations when this involved the foster children and this led to arguments between themselves and their parents.

"Like I won't get let off as easily as they would, I know my mum will you know punish them by doing whatever they will get off a bit easier, whereas with me she'll be harsher and it kind of annoys me" (Jasmine, p. 7, 147-148)

"If I've had an argument with anyone it's always I'm in the wrong" (Sammy, p.8, 175)

This was another way of perhaps taking out negative feelings on each other, perhaps because this was a safe interaction and could be resolved. Casey explains:

"If one of, like one of us is annoyed obviously we can't take it out, well not that we would, but we obviously can't be like 'oh you're really annoying me '*foster child's name*' because he wouldn't understand" (Casey, p.16-17)

Casey suggested that there was something in taking frustrations out on each other, even if this resulted in an argument, which could not be expressed to the foster children directly due to them being perceived as not able to understand. The implication in this is that her parents do understand and thus it is an acceptable way of handling difficult emotions such as anger and annoyance, although still a threat to the parent-child relationship.

3.3. Making Sense as a way of Managing the Threats

The third superordinate theme reflects the approaches that the young people took in order to make sense of the potential threats to the parent-child relationship. The young people were able to utilise different ways of managing, which served to buffer the impact of the difficulties (Figure 1).

Rationalising/positive re-framing

Participants often explained or justified difficulties by rationalising or framing them positively:

"For that moment, and for that month, they needed the attention more than I did" (Casey, p.6, 8)

"Not all the attention is on me so I kind of do get a bit more freedom" (Jasmine, p.10, 219-220)

Both Casey and Jasmine are considering the impact of loss of attention. Casey attributed this to a reason that perhaps could be understandable to her and thus make sense and no longer be a negative aspect of her relationship with her parents. Similarly, Jasmine viewed less attention as a positive thing in her life as a 16 year old girl and focused on this meaning that she has more freedom.

Casey also elaborates further:

"There was a part of it that I had to understand that because if I didn't, I would-, I wouldn't cope" (Casey, p.6, 10)

Casey is explicit in her thinking around the foster children needing more attention and if she had not 'understood' this and made sense of this change in her relationship with her parents, she would not feel that she could manage this.

In thinking about the experience of missing out on a family weekend away due to contact visits for the foster children, Charlie also utilises this way of making sense of his experience:

"If they want to see their family I'm fine with it don't get me wrong, there's 52 weeks in a year, we go down every weekend so it doesn't really bother me, we're seeing them most of the time" (Charlie, p. 6,117-119)

Charlie had spoken about finding it disappointing that they were not able to be away that weekend but was able to quickly rationalise his feelings and see the perspectives of both the foster child and his parents -"It makes me feel like they are doing the correct thing" (Charlie, p.6, 125). This has the effect of managing the impact of the potentially negative experience of missing out on a weekend away with his parents.

Staying attuned to parents' needs

The participants also demonstrated an ability to stay attuned to their parents' needs and take these into account, sometimes meaning that they put their parents' needs before their own:

"If I see that she's like getting stressed out about it or she's not in like a good mood and stuff then I'll just leave her, keep it to myself or speak to my brother" (Lewis, p.10, 208-209)

Lewis demonstrated a conscious process of reading his parents' mood and assessing whether he would speak about difficulties to them. Lewis was aware of when his parents might be stressed and therefore would rather keep difficulties to himself at times when he perceived this. Jamie also expressed this attunement:

"I could speak to my mum but she didn't really, she had other stuff so it was a bit hard" (Jamie, p.14, 299)

Jamie expressed the dilemma of knowing that he could speak to his mum but reading her emotions and deciding that she 'had other stuff' in the context of difficulties with a foster

child. Jamie demonstrated assessing that his mum perhaps did not need any more 'stuff' and therefore he would not speak about difficulties with her at this point.

Sophie also spoke about feeling the need to help her parents if they are having any difficulties with the foster children:

"I don't want my mum just to have to deal with it all or my dad" (Sophie, p.15, 333-334)

Sophie felt an obligation to help her parents as a result of staying attuned to their needs. Sophie also expressed feeling excited when a new foster child is due to stay because this will be positive for her Mum:

"I get excited because um and also it's just like if we don't have a child for a few months and then we like someone and they tell us that we're going to get another one like um it's really good because my mum, like my mum hates being bored and um like with a child like having a child there like she never gets bored" (Sophie, p.16, 369-371)

In this way the participants described being attuned to both 'positive' and 'negative' emotions experienced by their parents and actively adapting in response to these. This reflected the interaction between experiencing potentially negative threats to their relationship and making sense, through this attunement, as a way of managing (Figure 1).

Negotiating working together

This theme reflected the way participants would sometimes explicitly negotiate working together with their parents:

"Yeh we all talked about it and we all talked find or tried to find solutions" (Ibrahim, p. 13, 277)

Ibrahim discusses the approach his family took when considering hypothetical scenarios of what might be difficult with fostering. The approach sounds like that of a team

and sounded quite methodical in the way that they worked together to problem solve any difficulties.

Some participants also spoke about internally negotiating working together, for example when a foster child had told them something that they thought their parents needed to know, the process of considering this:

"Sometimes I would tell them but sometimes I would just handle it myself if that doesn't work then I'll go and tell mum" (Sophie, p.15, 348-349)

Sophie considered whether she could manage things alone, whether she needed to involve her parents and work together or sometimes whether it would be taking a trial and error approach in managing situations. This was also reflected by Charlie:

"They may ask me er can you not tell (Mum's name) but I think it's better to let the parents in on it then they can help deal with the situation" (Charlie, p. 17, 377-378)

Charlie also speaks about negotiating communication with his parents when he has been witness to something that has happened at school involving the foster child:

"I'd go into the office and ask to use my phone to call my mum to just say could you pick us up after school, there's a problem and then like explain it to them after, like when we get home" (Charlie, p. 20, 439-441)

Charlie describes the way he negotiates the situation with school and what he decides to tell his Mum, reflecting the complex decision process and constant managing of this.

4. Discussion

In summary, the results revealed that although there were negative effects of fostering identified as potential threats to the parent-child relationship, the young people were able to make use of processes that served to buffer the impact of these. Participants were able

to make sense of the threats as a way of managing these. In addition, participants experienced a sense of value in their role, both in their relationship with their parents and in the family as a whole. These processes, both individually and combined, allowed participants to alleviate the impact of negative experiences in their relationships. These concepts are explored further in relation to relevant existing literature.

Previous literature has highlighted some of the difficulties birth children have experienced through fostering. For example, Hojer (2006) found that the birth children of foster carers reported spending less time with their parents and this is supported by the results of the current study. The factors contributing to this included missing out on experiences with parents or 'family time', and having to share parental attention. One of the participants highlighted making up a homework project in order to spend time with her father. Poland and Groze (1993) argue that sharing parents' time is one of the most tangible impacts on children's lives when their parents foster. Some of the participants remembered what their relationship had been like before fostering and reflected specifically on the changes to their old routines, or missing out on family visits due to the number of people now in the family.

Where participants experienced frustration, they often expressed directing this towards their parents and the arguments this could cause. Within this subtheme, some participants also expressed feeling blamed for arguments with the foster child. Hojer and Nordenfors (2004) found that the birth children of foster carers reported that foster children would sometimes lie and they would get the blame for things they had not done. In addition, Spears and Cross (2003) also found that participants reported that foster children were treated better and not punished for things, which they would be punished for themselves.

It seemed as if participants protected the foster children from negative emotions and thus these would be directed towards their parents instead. Hojer and Nordenfors (2004)

found that children of foster carers took responsibility for and worried about the foster children living with them. It could be related to these feelings that participants in the current study were reluctant to express frustrations directly to the foster children.

Participants were able to demonstrate various ways of making sense of the difficulties, which appeared to enable them to manage and buffer the impact of threats to their parental relationships. When processing the difficult experiences, all participants rationalised and positively framed the difficulties, perhaps as a way of lessening the impact.

Participants focused on positive factors gained from fostering, such as potential experience for the future. One participant framed having less attention as positive in terms of having more freedom. Another participant outlined that the foster children needed the attention more than she did and understanding this helped her to cope. Although this could be viewed as positive in enabling the young people to 'cope', previous research has also highlighted that children of foster carers can tend to put their needs behind those of the foster children and view these as having less importance (Hojer et al., 2013).

In their review of the literature, Hojer et al., (2013) also found that the children of foster carers would often put the needs of their parents before their own. This finding relates to the current study in identifying participants' abilities in staying attuned to the needs of their parents, and this research further highlights that young people were actively adapting their own responses in relation to these perceived needs of their parents. It is perhaps surprising, given the age range of the participants, that they were able to skilfully acknowledge and consider the perspectives of others as well as attribute reason and rationalise their own and their parents' responses.

An important finding in this study was that the impact of threats appeared to be buffered by relational processes that gave participants a sense of value and purpose.

Participants reported a sense of value, sometimes achievement, from taking a role in fostering. This was evident through positive feelings of being able to teach or care for the foster children as well as feeling as if their role had been particularly significant in the child's overall development. This seemed to reflect genuine feelings of being valued and gave the young people a sense that they were important in their role. It often appeared that participants seemed to be taking on a caring role, with one participant explicitly describing themselves as a foster carer rather than the child of a foster carer.

Pugh (1996) has highlighted that foster children may find their role identity confusing in thinking about whether they are taking a caring role or that of an equal peer with a foster child. However the current study does suggest that the experience for these participants was that in taking on the caring role and feeling some value from this they were able to perhaps stay motivated and involved in the fostering process. It is also possible that by taking on a caring role this in some ways aligned participants with their parents in a positive way, which together with feeling value in their relationship enabled them to consistently manage the impact of negative experiences. This may have implications for other young people taking on a caring role, for example young carers, and perhaps indicate that experiencing value in their perceived role could allow for the management of potential negative impacts.

Some previous research has found that being involved in fostering had a positive effect for young people as they viewed this as giving them a purpose (Swan, 2002). However it seemed that the young people also needed to experience value in their relationship with their parents in order to stay motivated in actively contributing to this purpose. This element of the findings may relate to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), in that participants were able to experience feeling secure through this process, which allowed them to develop ways of coping that enabled them to feel able to 'share' their parents. Participants experienced this through their parents making special time for them, as well as 'knowing' that their parents

were available to them if they requested this. Some participants expressed a change from

when they first started fostering in their ability to request time with their parents, reflecting

that they felt more able to do this now and this was a positive factor in their relationship.

Through this relational process, participants experienced a sense of importance and value

from their parents and thus were more able to manage negative experiences and more

motivated to engage in ways of lessening the impact of these.

Unlike much of the current literature, this study did not employ a retrospective design

and thus provides an insight into the experiences of young people currently in a foster family.

The research also focused specifically on how the birth children of foster children

experienced the relationship with their parents, rather than exploring their experience

generally. Some of the difficulties that young people highlighted have been supported in

previous research, yet focusing on the relationship directly enabled an understanding of the

way different factors can interact in the participants' overall experience to enable them to

manage some of the difficulties and continue to feel valued in their role, and these factors are

vital in enabling a positive experience and ultimately promoting a positive placement

outcome.

4.1. Limitations

The study sample may be limited in that only the children of carers who put

themselves forward for the research took part. Nothing is known about those carers who met

criteria but decided not to approach their children, or in fact those who approached their

children but they themselves then declined to participate. Some feedback from foster carers

whose children did not take part included that children were too nervous about being

interviewed or that they did not want to give up their time. This study also only represents

views of a select group of young people aged 14-16. Swan (2002) found that young people

who were the children of foster carers experienced a shift towards becoming more equal in the fostering process at this age and thus the views of the young people may have been different, had they included younger children. It is possible that the experience of younger children may vary and this could be explored further in future research.

There was also variation between the participants in terms of their experience of fostering. The children who were being fostered also varied in age. These differences may have been a factor in how participants experienced their relationships.

It is possible that participants actively chose to present certain narratives in response to an interview in a clinical setting with a mental health professional. This also may have been shaped by the sensitivity of the topic, both for themselves and their parents. One participant did acknowledge at the end of the interview that she expected the interview to be asking her about what she did to help in relation to fostering.

Finally, the interviews were a snapshot of one time point and interpretations cannot be made about temporal aspects of experience.

4.2. Clinical Implications

The results provide several implications to practice. Cairns (2002) argues that foster carers need theories and models to make sense of the challenges they face in caring for children who are looked after. This research has begun to provide a model of understanding the processes experienced by young people who are the birth children of foster carers. This model could be used to inform the way foster carers and their birth children are supported by services.

Some participants expressed that they were not able to attend events organised for the foster children. This seemed to evoke a sense of unfairness and perhaps an enforced separation by services, whilst also the expectation that they be 'together' in the foster family.

If participants experience a sense of value from fostering, not involving them in rewarding experiences could be detrimental to this continuing, which could affect their ability to manage the impact. It may be helpful to organise events that promote a sense of 'togetherness' and further reinforce the value young people experience in taking an active role in fostering.

At the same time, the participants expressed a wealth of experience and knowledge, and one participant suggested it would be helpful to meet with other birth children of carers in order to share this knowledge and learn from each other. This could be something clinical services are involved in. Services frequently run therapeutic parenting groups and perhaps there is an opportunity for the birth children to be included in similar groups, although with a focus on their unique role. If there was an opportunity to provide joint parent and child groups this could also further reinforce some of the ways parents and children work together and promote their relationship.

The results also highlight the need for feeling valued in their relationship with their parents and services may have a role in ensuring that carers are adequately supported in order to enable them to provide this. In addition, services need to have a role in acknowledging the role that birth children take in fostering, and celebrating their contribution.

4.3. Future Research

Future research could expand on the current study by exploring the views of service professionals and investigating the ways in which they could support the relationship between foster carers and their birth children. If children are motivated to take an active role in fostering through experiencing a sense of value, future research could also explore ways of providing this and evaluating outcomes for both carers and young people. It would be beneficial to explore the perspectives of the whole foster family, including children who are

fostered and birth children, in order to further explore how positive placement outcomes can be supported.

Further research could seek to explore the views of young people of different ages to investigate whether the ways they make sense of their relationship with their parents fits with the themes identified in the current research. Research could also benefit from utilising designs such as focus groups. This may encourage those young people who were reluctant to meet for one to one interviews to contribute to the evidence base.

It may be of use to incorporate ways of measuring the factors identified in the current research, such as impact of threats compared to feeling valued within the fostering process. These factors could be measured across different time points to further explore their interaction. This research could develop the model in order to further understand the processes experienced by the birth children of foster carers

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the ways that the birth children of foster carers experienced and made sense of the relationship with their parents. The findings suggest that these young people actively participated in complex processes that enabled them to manage the impact of particular threats that fostering posed to this relationship. These processes included making sense as a way of managing the threats and experiencing value in their relationship with their parents as well as in the fostering process as a whole. The research provides the beginnings of a model for understanding these processes for the young people, which could be used to inform the way both foster carers and their children are supported by services. However, this study provides a detailed account of the experience of a select group of young people at one time and thus, further research is needed to expand this model and continue to acknowledge the role and contribution of the birth children of foster carers.

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Appendix A: Qualitative research criteria

Quality criteria as outlined by Mays and Pope (2000)

- Triangulation
- Respondent validation
- Clear exposition of methods and data collection and analysis
- Reflexivity
- Attention to negative cases
- Fair dealing
- Relevance

Criteria as outlined by Yardley (2000)			
Sensitivity to context	Commitment and rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact and importance

Appendix B: Criteria Outlined by the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2013)

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Appendix C: Cross-sectional research STROBE (2007) checklist

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Appendix D: Semi-structured interview schedule

<u>Interview Schedule</u>

- Introduction (my name, University name, supervisor's names)
- General introduction to the project:

We are interested in gaining an understanding about your experiences of being a young person in a family that fosters. I will be asking you some questions as I am interested in your views; there is no right or wrong answers. Your responses will be kept confidential. This means I would not talk about what you said with anyone who isn't involved in this research. The only reason I would speak to anyone else is if I was worried about your safety or wellbeing or the safety or wellbeing of someone else. Do you have any questions?

1. **Tell me about who is in your family/lives at home with you**

Prompts

-Brothers/sisters/how many foster children

2. **Tell me about when your parents started fostering**

Prompts

<u>- How old were you?</u>

-How were you told about this/how did you find out about it?

-How did you feel/what did you think about this?

- What ideas did you have about what it might be like? Was there anything you were excited about/worried about etc.?

- What were you told about what it might be like?

3. **Tell me about what it is like to be in a family with foster children**

Prompts

-Is there anything you particularly like?

-Is there anything you particularly don't like?

-Are there any differences with your family because your parents foster?

4. **How would you describe your relationship with your parent/s?**

- Is there anything that you enjoy doing with your parents? If so, what.

- Is there anything that your parents do that annoys you? If so, what.

-What is it like between you and your parents?

-How do you get on with your parents?

-Has it always been like that?

-Are there ways that your relationship has changed?

-Are there any ways your relationship with your parents is different because your parents are foster carers?

5. **Are there any ways (other) relationships in your family are different because your parents foster?**

-parents or other family members, e.g. siblings

6. **Is there anything in particular that you think may help you or other young people whose parents are foster carers?**

-Are there things that have helped you? How did they help?

- within the family/services/other?

7. **Is there any advice you would give to another young person in your situation?**

8. **Is there anything you would have liked to have known before your parents started fostering?**

9. **Is there anything you thought that I was going to ask but that I didn't ask?**

- **Thank you for participating in this research**

Appendix E: Fostering social worker briefing

Information Briefing about research

How do the birth children of foster carers experience the relationship with their parents?

Hello. My name is ███████████ I am a Trainee Clinical Psychologist at ███████ ████████. I would like to inform you about my research study. The research is being supervised by ████████████████████ and ████████ psychologist, ████████████████████████

What is the purpose of the study?

The research aims to explore the experiences of the birth children of foster carers; in particular looking at how children experience their relationship with their parents in the context of fostering.

Background to the study

The biological children of foster carers have been referred to as 'quiet voices' (Sutton & Stack, 2012) or 'unknown soldiers' (Twigg, 1994) due to their somewhat limited presence in the research into fostering (Hojer, Sebba & Luke, 2013). Although research has begun to explore the experiences of biological children of foster carers, much of this research is retrospective in design and focuses on carers or children recalling past experiences, which has been identified as a limitation of the current evidence base (Hojer et al., 2013).

Research has shown that foster placements are more likely to break down where foster carers already have biological children within the family. Much of the existing research is retrospective and focuses on carers or children recalling past experiences.

The relational changes between foster carers and their biological children have been highlighted as a key factor to explore in order to develop support or interventions to support a positive placement outcome. Therefore exploring the meanings that children make of their relationship with their parents is particularly important in identifying the potential impact of fostering and ultimately promoting sustainable foster placements**.**

How will the research be conducted?

Interviews will be conducted with 8 children (aged between 13 – 16 years old) who are the birth children of foster carers. Young people who are living with a foster child who is currently open to ██ ███████ are excluded from this research to avoid a conflict of interest with regards to Dr ████████████ who is working in this service and supporting the research.

The interviews will be analysed and main themes will be summarised. The research will be written up and will form part of my thesis for my Doctorate in Clinical Psychology. It is also planned that the research findings will be shared with participants and their families, relevant services and written up for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

It is then hoped that the information could be used to inform the design of services to support foster families.

How did the study gain ethical approval?

We have obtained ethical approval from ████████████████████████████ Ethics Panel. This ensured that the research met appropriate ethical standards.

What will the recruitment and interview process involve?

Parents of children who meet the inclusion criteria will be approached in the first instance. If they are potentially interested on behalf of their child, they will be provided with a participant information sheet (there is a sheet for parents and a sheet for the child). Parents will then be encouraged to speak to their child about the research. If the child expresses an interest then the parent will communicate this to the researcher. Prior to the interview, the research process will be explained in detail to the parent and the child and if appropriate, the parent and the child will sign separate consent forms. The interview will not go ahead if both parent and child do not consent.

A time will be arranged for the interview. The interview will take place ████████████████ ████████ and the secondary supervisor and parent will be present in the building at the time of the interview. The child will be interviewed by the researcher for approximately one hour. The interview will be audio-recorded. Following the interview, the child will return to their parent.

In the event that a safeguarding issue arises during the interview process, the researcher will raise this immediately with the secondary supervisor and safeguarding procedures will be followed as appropriate.

How can you support the research?

We would like to work with you to identify potential participants: children aged between 13 and 16 who are the birth children of foster carers (who have been foster carers for at least 1 year) and not currently living with a foster child who is open to the ████████████ team. This may include talking to parents about the research. The researcher will also attend fostering support groups to recruit and tell foster carers about the study. We would also like to be able to work with you to think about how the interview process may impact on families and how this may be usefully integrated into the support to foster carers that you are providing.

Further information and contact details

If you would like to speak to me and find out more about the study or have questions about it please email me at ████████████████████████ or you can contact my supervisor, ██████████████ ████████████████████████████████ at or ████████████ ██

Thank you for taking the time to read this information

Appendix F: Parent information sheet

Information about the research

How do the birth children of foster carers experience the relationship with their parents?

Hello. My name is ███████████████████████████████
███████ I would like to invite your son or daughter to take part in a research study.

Before you decide whether or not you would like to suggest participation to your son or daughter, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for your son or daughter.

I have also enclosed an information sheet for your son or daughter.

(Part 1 tells you the purpose of this study and what will happen to you if you take part.
Part 2 gives you more detailed information about the conduct of the study).

Please talk to others about the study if you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of birth children within families that foster. The research is specifically looking at how children experience the relationship with their parents and what the impact of fostering has on this. In previous research children have described positive ways in which their relationship has made it easier for them to adapt to 'sharing' their parents. We are interested in the meanings that children give their relationships and how this might help us to develop support for the birth children of foster carers. Previous research has shown that the parent-birth child relationship can be important in promoting sustainable foster placements.

Why has my son or daughter been invited to take part?
Your son or daughter has been invited as they have been identified as a birth child of a foster carer with at least one child currently in a foster placement with the family.

Does my son or daughter have to take part?

It is up to your son or daughter and you to decide if your son or daughter can join the study. If you agree to your son or daughter taking part, then I will ask you and your son or daughter to sign a consent form. Your son or daughter is free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. This would not affect the standard of care and/or support you/your son or daughter receives from any relevant agencies.

What will happen to my son or daughter if they take part?

If your son or daughter would like to take part and you are also happy for them to take part, they will be invited to attend an interview with me. This will be at your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service or the university where we have interview rooms available.

In addition, to the interview I will also ask you and your son or daughter to complete a short demographic questionnaire which will include information such as his/her age and family structure.

The interview will last for approximately 1 hour.

This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed by me at a later date.

All information gathered will be treated confidentially (please see below).

Expenses and payments

I can offer up to £10 towards any travel expenses.

What will I have to do?

You would need to bring your son or daughter to the interview and wait in the waiting area during the interview. You would then need to be available after the interview in order to take your son or daughter home.

Your son or daughter will be asked to talk about their experiences of having a foster child in the family and about their relationships with their parents and other family members in this context.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

This may be a sensitive topic for you son or daughter and it is possible that your son or daughter may become upset during the interview. I will only be asking young people to share their own experiences.

The interview will be conducted at an NHS clinic/university site and the external research supervisor, who is based in ███████████████████████████████████, will be available.

If the interview highlighted anything that was significantly negatively impacting on your son or daughter then we would share any concerns with you and your fostering social worker.

If you have any concerns after the interview please contact your fostering social worker who will be able to contact the research supervisor, if appropriate.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your son or daughter may find it enjoyable and/or beneficial to talk about their experiences. It is hoped that the findings of the research will be able to inform ways to offer support to young people whose parents are foster carers.

What if there is a problem?

There are specific procedures in place should you have any concerns following your son or daughter's participation in the research. The detailed information on this is given in Part 2.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. We will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about your child will be handled in confidence. The details are included in Part 2.

This completes part 1.
If the information in Part 1 has interested you and you are considering participation, please read the additional information in Part 2 before making any decision.

Part 2 of the information sheet
What will happen if my son or daughter doesn't want to carry on with the study?

Your son or daughter has the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Your son or daughter can stop the interview at any time.

What if I am unhappy with the way the research is conducted?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you can speak to one of the researchers ███
██
██

If you would like to speak to someone at the University regarding a complaint you should contact ██
████████████████████

Will taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information obtained will be kept confidential. Names will be changed when the audio recordings are transcribed to protect anonymity.

If any concerns for the safety or wellbeing of your son or daughter or anyone else were highlighted in the interview we would discuss these with you and your fostering social worker and take further action if necessary.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be written up in a report for submission at ████████████████████
████████████ Participants will not be identified in any report/publication.

Anonymised quotes from interview questions may be used in published reports.

Who is organising and funding the research?

████████████████████████████

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by ████████████████████████████

Further information and contact details
If you would like to speak to me and find out more about the study or have questions about it answered please leave a message for me at ████████████████████████████████
████████████████████████████

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet

Appendix G: Young person Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study title

*How do the birth children of foster carers experience the relationship with their parents?*

Part 1 – to give you first thoughts about the project

1.   **Invitation**

Hello. My name is ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and I am a Trainee Clinical Psychologist. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Please read this information carefully and talk to your parent about the study. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you want to know more. Take your time to decide if you want to take part. It is up to you if you want to do this.

2.   **Why am I doing this research?**

We wonder about whether there is anything that we could do to support you when your parents are foster carers and talking to you will help us to understand this.

The aim of the research is to find out more about what it is like to be a young person whose parents are foster carers.
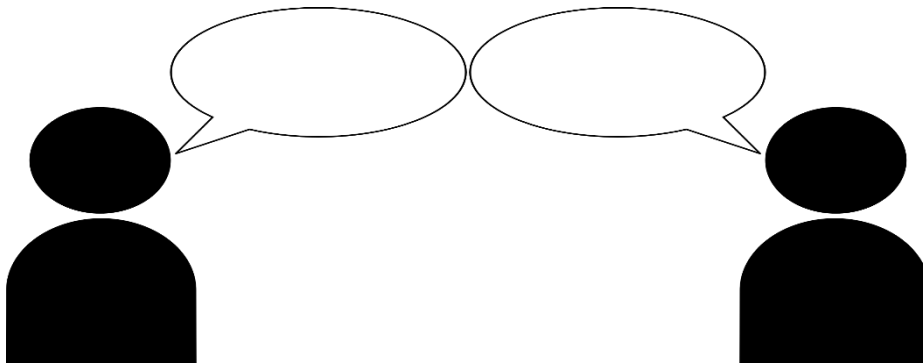
3.   **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been invited because your parent is a foster carer.

I have asked your parent/s to give this information sheet to you.

4.   Do I have to take part?
No. It is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part:

- You will be asked to sign a form to say that you agree to take part (a consent form)

- You will be given this information sheet and a copy of your signed consent form to keep.

You are free to stop taking part at any time during the research without giving a reason.

5.   What will happen to me if I take part?
I will ask you to come and meet me for an interview. This will last for about 1 hour. During the interview I will ask you about your experiences of having a foster child/ren in your family and what this is like for you. I will record this interview with a digital audio recorder so that I can type it up afterwards.

6.   Is there anything else I should know before if I take part?
Sometimes people find it difficult to talk about their experiences so you might want to think about this with your parent/s first. If you are worried about anything to do with the interview you can contact me or speak to your parent/s. Your parent will be in the waiting room during the interview.

7.   Will the study help me?
Some people find it helpful and enjoy talking about their experiences. It might be the case that the information from this study helps give us some ideas on what we could do to help and support the biological children of foster carers.

8.   What happens when the research study stops?
I will type up all the interviews and write a report on the findings.

9.   Contact for further information
If you would like any further information about this study you can contact me.

Thank you for reading so far - if you are still interested, please go to Part 2:

Part 2 - more detail – information you need to know if you still want to take part.

10.   What if I don't want to do the research anymore?

Tell your parents or myself at any time if you no longer want to be part of the research. You can also ask to end the interview at any time when we meet.

11.   What if there is a problem or something goes wrong?
Tell us if there is a problem and we will try and sort it out straight away. You and your parent can either contact me or the project supervisor. Your parent/s will have contact details for us.

12.   Will anyone else know I'm doing this?
The fostering social work team will know you are taking part.

All information that is collected about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. However, if I am concerned about your wellbeing or safety or the wellbeing or safety of anyone else I may need to pass on my concerns to your parents and/or professionals or the fostering social worker.

When I type up your interview I will change your name and any other identifying information so that it is anonymous – that means that someone reading a report about the research would not be able to recognise that it was you who had taken part.

13.   What will happen to the results of the research study?
When the study has finished I will write a report on the findings to submit to my university as part of my course. We would also like to submit the report to a journal to see if this can be published. Your name will not be in this report.

14.   Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being done as part of my Clinical Psychology Doctorate at ███████████████████
███████

15.   Who has checked the study?
Before any research goes ahead it has to be checked by a Research Ethics Committee. This is a group of people who make sure that the research is OK to do.

16.   How can I find out more about research?
Please feel free to contact me or my supervisors if you would like to know more about the research or ask any further questions.

Thank you for taking the time to read this – please ask any questions if you need to.

Appendix H: Participant consent form

Centre Number:
Study Number:
Participant Identification Number for this study:

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: **How do the Birth Children of Foster Carers Experience the Relationship with their Parents?**
Name of Researcher ████████████

Please tick the box

1. I have read the information sheet about this study and have had the chance to ask any questions.

2. I understand that it is up to me whether I take part in this study and I can stop the interview at any time.

3. I agree that my interview will be audio recorded and typed up afterwards.

4. I understand that I can speak to the researcher or my parents if I have any other questions.

5. I understand that I might be contacted about my interview afterwards.

6. I agree that anonymous quotes from my interview will be included in the report and this report will be available to the public.

7. I agree to take part in this study

Name _____ Date_____

Signature _____

Name of person taking consent _____

Date_____

Signature _____

Appendix I: Parent consent form
Centre Number:
Study Number:
Participant Identification Number for this study:

CONSENT FORM   Title of Project: **How do the Birth Children of Foster Carers Experience the Relationship with their Parents?**
Name of Researcher: ██████████

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my son or daughter's participation is voluntary and that we are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without care or legal rights being affected.

3. I understand that the interview with my son or daughter will be audio recorded and transcribed afterwards.

4. I agree to accompany my son or daughter to the interview, wait in the waiting room during the interview and take them home after the interview.

5. I agree that anonymous quotes from my son or daughter's interview may be used in published reports of the study findings [if applicable]

6. I agree that my son or daughter may be contacted by the researcher after the interview regarding the interview transcript and findings

7. I agree that my son or daughter can take part in the above study.

Name _____ Date_____

Signature _____

Child's name _____

Name of Person taking consent _____ Date_____

Signature _____

Appendix J: Audit trail process

The following documents were reviewed by the lead and second supervisors:

- Initial codes for 6 out of 8 transcripts
- Initial subthemes and superordinate themes
- Table of final superordinate and subthemes with illustrative quotes
- Full write up of results
- Developed model

Appendix K: Coded interview transcript

This has been removed from the electronic copy

Appendix L: Theme development stage one, writing out initial codes at participant level

<u>Transcript 1</u>

Ways of describing relationships

Fostering as normal

'Growing up with it'

Self as a foster carer

Levels of involvement in decision to foster

Ambivalence- excited and nervous

'Will my mummy still be my mummy?'

Relationships- how will fostering affect these?

Identity

Family identity

Perceptions of others

Individual and collective role in fostering

Gender

Gaining someone you never had

Learning about the process

'I thought you could ask for a little girl and get one'

Someone to take care of

Taking on a new role

Positive memories

Beginnings and endings

'I'm finally a big sister'

Very positive perspective

Achievement

Realisation of how much you are doing

Pros and cons

Difference in 'looking in' and 'being in'

Enormity/overwhelming

Sometimes it's really hard

Sole focus for mum and dad

Disability

Mental health of foster children

Full on

Positive experience of having a big family

Opportunities

Looking on the bright side

Adoption

Speaking like the carer

Hidden struggles

Children leaving

Others don't understand

Priviledged position vs forced to understand

Frustration

Sometimes I just want to have my mum there

Context of being a teenager

Jealousy

You have to understand

Give and take

Acceptance

Sharing the family

Rationalising

Dedication

Foster child's needs before mine

Experience

Having 'girly time' with mum

Not feeling involved

Supportive parents

'for that moment, and for that month, they needed the attention more than I did'

Having to understand in order to cope

Perceptions of others

Disability

Foster children 'fitting in' with other foster children

Belonging

Being 'normal'

Others not understanding

Self as a foster carer

Differences between self and peers

Opportunity vs being thrown in

Argue over little things with parents

Similarities with parents

Ways of coping

Shared strategies with parents

Give and take (with parents)

Time to talk

Shared struggles

Recognising similar frustrations in parents

Getting angry with each other

Taking on a caring role

Responsibility

Helplessness

Taking an overview/perspective over relationship with parents

Differences in relationship with mum and with dad

Missing out

Loss of opportunities

Little things matter

Knowing mum is there

Special time together

Private instead of public time

Changes in family experience

Some things perceived as not having changed

Reality of own difficulties

Helping others as a way of helping self

Working together

What is my role?

They are family

Memories of significant moments

'sister fights'

Appreciating having a 'proper sister'

Mum understands when I don't

Problem solving with parents

Aggressive behaviour

Being scared

Parents handling difficult experiences

Being treated equally with foster children

Advice from parents

Parents helping to 'push ourselves'

Secrets- 'You can't tell your mum'

Feeling positive about foster children talking- involvement

Negotiating communication between foster child and parent

Taking on a parent/carer role

Foster children feeling safe

Building a bigger picture together

Satisfaction with caring

Significant memory of child

Rewarding experiences

Importance of role in child's development

Realising potential/importance

Taking it out on each other rather than foster child

Tailoring conversations to age and level of understanding

Developing traditions

Emotional attachment to foster children

Managing relationships with different foster children

Not wanting relationships to change when new children come in

Shared positive experience with parents

Seeing progression together with parents

Mixed feelings towards foster children

Difficult to vocalise negatives

Wanting to meet other children of foster carers

Being open as a family

Being in the same position

Wanting to share experiences

Reflecting on growth/progress

Self as a foster carer

It gets better

Importance of talking to parents

Responsibility of parents to help you through

Not expressing negative thoughts to foster child

Wanting them to feel wanted

Knowing you can talk to mum and dad

Support of friends

Hard to let some people go

loss

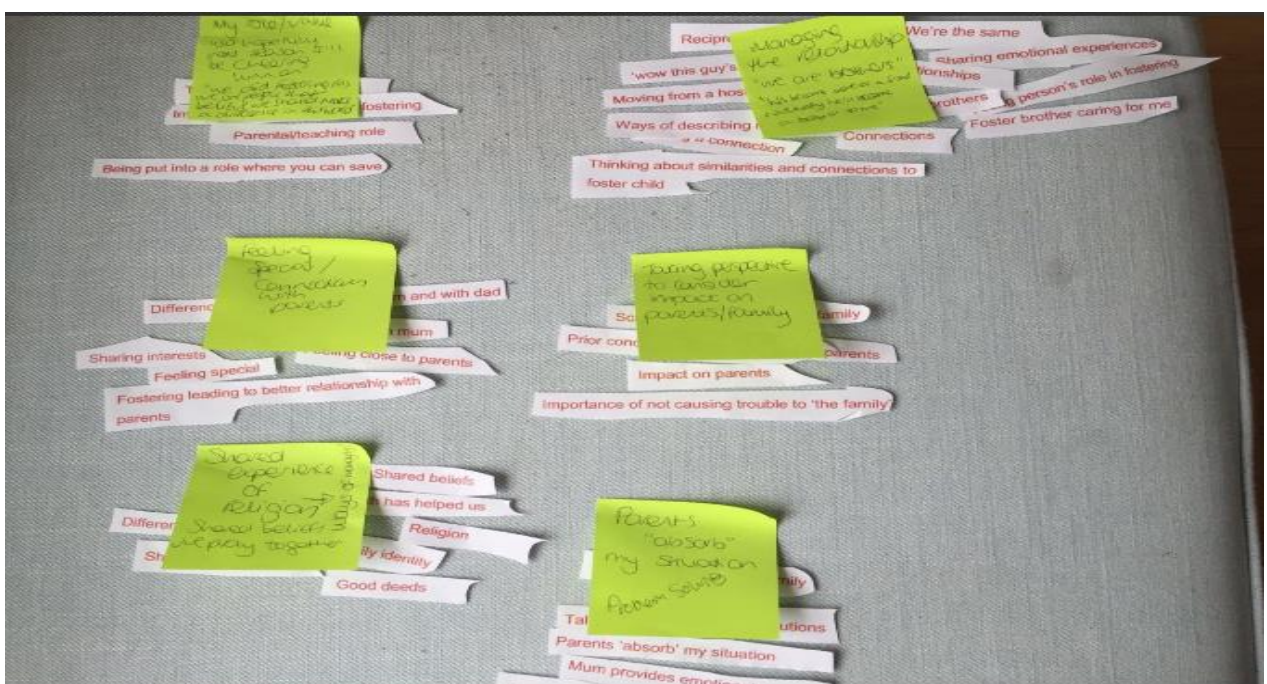'I had claimed and she was mine'- attachment, bond
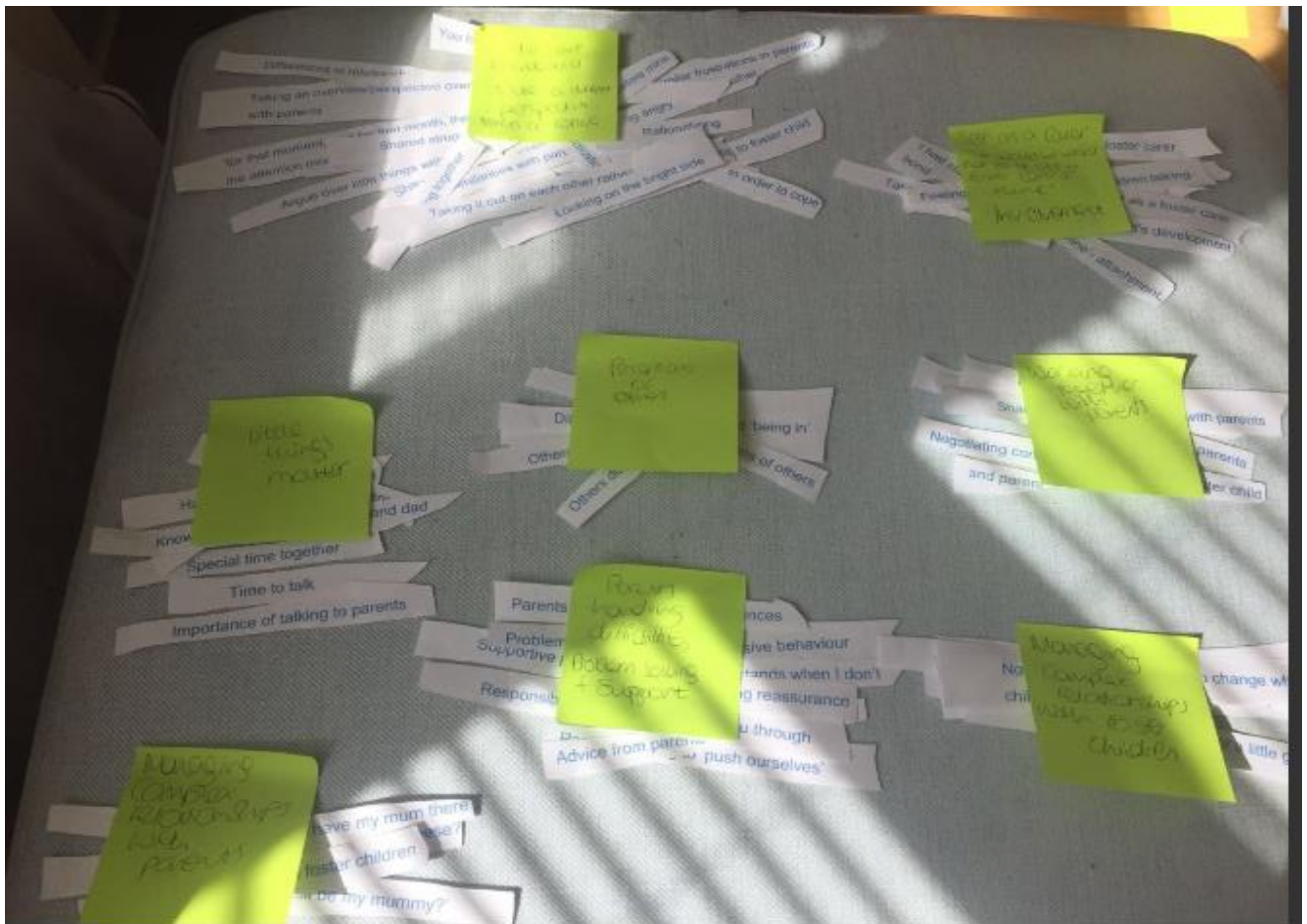
Rationalising the pain of people leaving
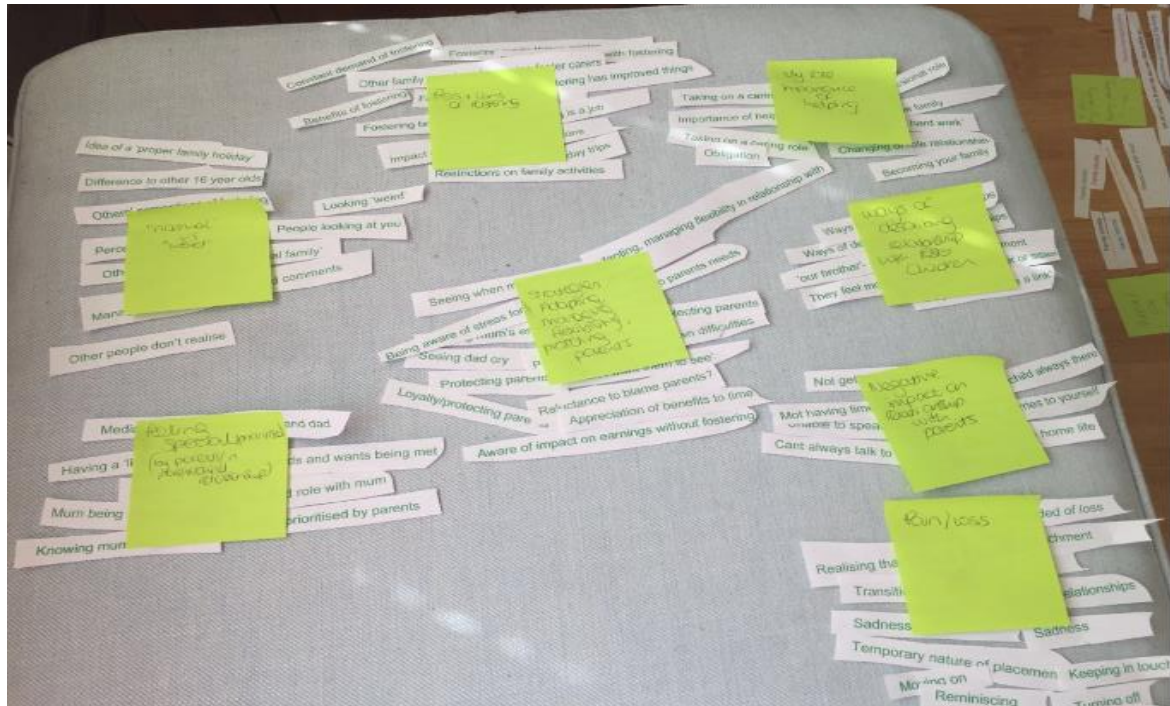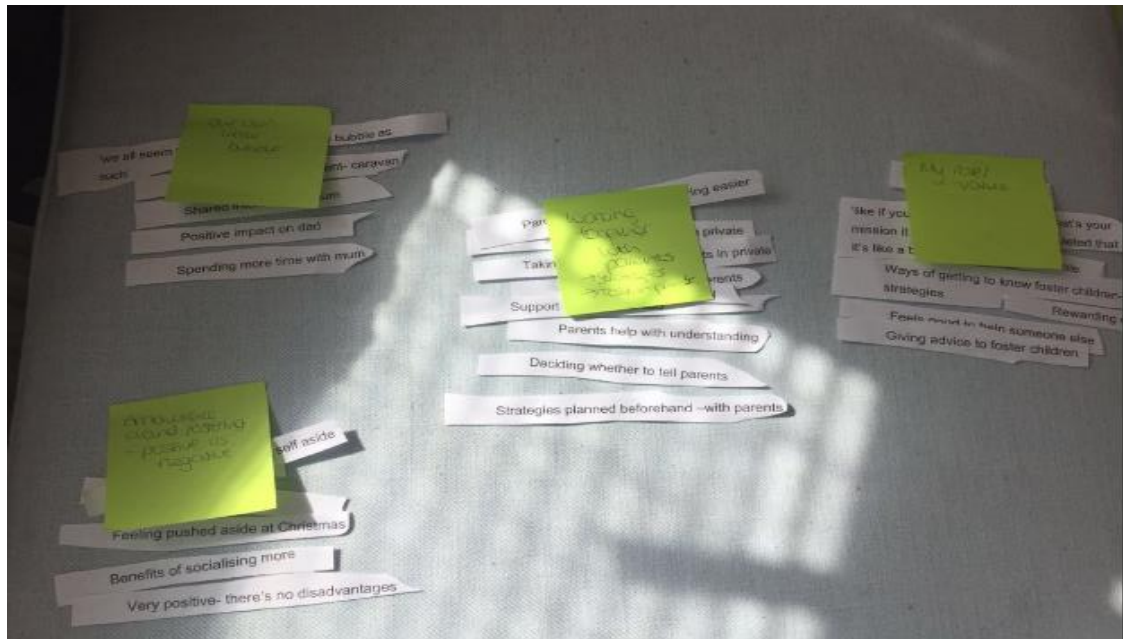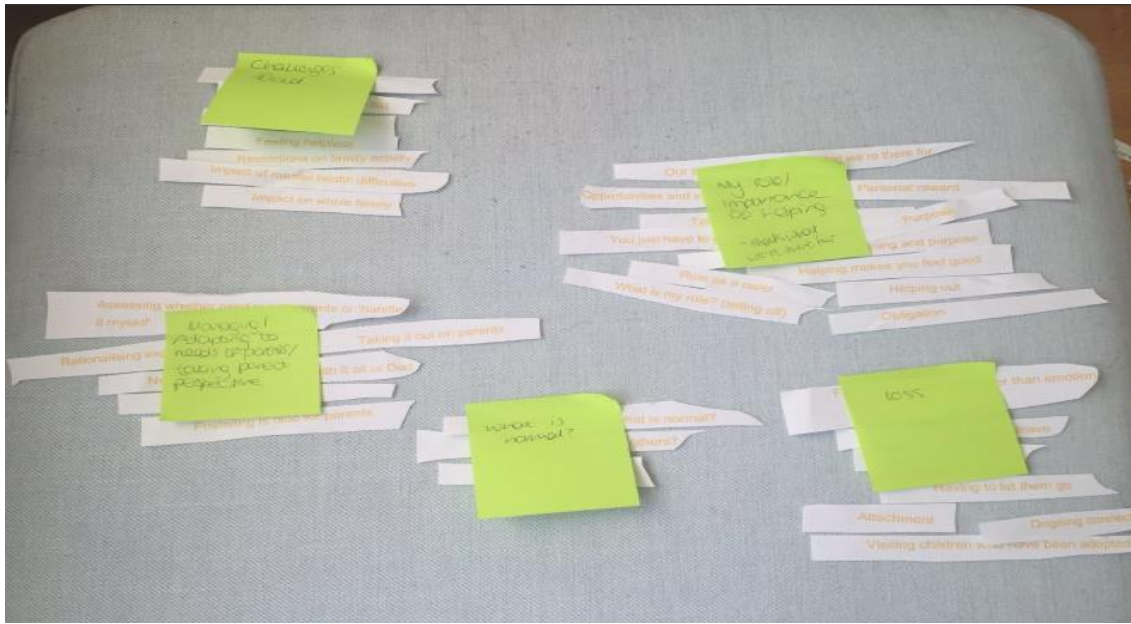
Helping each other through it

Uncertainty

Wanting reassurance

Needing to understand why relationships might be lost

Appendix M: Theme development stage two: developing emerging themes at participant level

Appendix N: Theme development stage three: developing emerging themes at group level

My role/my value Self as a carer My role-that's what we're here for What is my role? My role and value My role in fostering	**My role/value**
Managing complex relationship with parents Flexibly managing relationship	**Negotiating complex relationship**
Strategies to adapt Ways of managing You have to understand Taking a perspective Taking perspective to consider impact on parents/family Taking the parent perspective Relationship strategies Rationalising Re-framing Managing/adapting to needs of parents	**Rationalising/Perspective taking/attunement to parents- ways of coping**
Importance of helping Working together with parents Parents role in supporting with difficulties Working together with parents	**Working together with parents**
Enjoying time with parents Little things matter Feeling special connection with parents Feeling special and prioritised by parents Parents handling difficulties Problem solving and support Parents 'absorb' situation Ways of feeling appreciated	**Feeling valued by parents**

Perceptions of others Our own little bubble Normal vs weird	**Perceptions of others**
Challenges faced Loss of attention Strategy to spend time Challenges Challenges faced Impact on relationship Changes in the relationship Negative impact on relationship	**The challenges- missing out, loss of attention, arguments**

Appendix O: Final superordinate and subthemes

Superordinate theme	Subtheme
	Feeling valued within fostering/ being the carer
	Feeling valued within my relationship with my parents/ being cared for
	Missing out
	Loss of attention
	Taking it out on each other
	Rationalising/ positive re-framing
	Staying attuned to parents' needs
	Negotiating working together

Appendix P: Extended list of quotes for superordinate and subtheme

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Illustrative quotation
	Feeling valued within fostering/ being the carer	"I remember like 2 weeks after he came he told me about his situation and all the stuff and ever since then I was like wow this guy's opened up to me!"- (Ibrahim) "If you're playing a game and that's your mission it makes you feel like you've completed that so it's like a bonus for you" (Charlie) "I think to myself if I hadn't done that he probably wouldn't have spoken which would have like stopped the development of him opening up"- (Casey) "It's really good cos you get to like play with them and help them like learn new things" (Sophie) "It would be weird not to be like a foster carer I think" (Casey) "You can see so many changes like you can remember them crawling, like nappy changing, you can remember all those little things" (Lewis) "A lot of the time it's getting to teach them to realise what's right and wrong and how they should approach a situation" (Jamie) "She would ask me to come down and like kepe an eye on them…I didn't relay mind that actually I quite liked spending time with them cos they were quite cure" (Jasmine) "It kind of gives you an experience in something that you could do later in life for a job" (Charlie)
	Feeling valued within my relationship with my parents/ being cared for	"We'll meet and we'll go home together, which is just things like that which are really nice that I don't always get to do but when I do it's sort of really fun" – (Casey) "She'll cook me my special food, she'll give me really good advice, she'll be open, she'll sing like our favourite songs"- (Ibrahim) "I mean if I really said to her like next Tuesday can we go out for a meal unless she had something really big planned she wouldn't be like no" (Jasmine)

		"Just go out for a meal, usually go to Bluewater, just walk around, it's not like massive things like we'll go to like an adventure park…just small things"- (Sammy) "to some home like know mum was there and stuff or like know that you could talk to someone" (Lewis) "When my dad gets home from work early and he's happy and all that then we just have a laugh in the front room, joking about, watching tv" (Jamie) "Yeh I was like well I can't actually say it otherwise I'm going to get told off and now it's just like I can say what I want when I want to say it (laughs)" (Sammy) "We do American football my dad likes to sit down and watch it with us, my mum sometimes likes to talk about it and that as well so then we all seem to talk about it" (Charlie) "Things like that, for me, like she's there, like I know she's there" (Casey)
	Missing out	"I remember on a Thursday night I'd have ballet and after that in the evening we'd go out for um we'd go out to like get dinner and stuff and obviously I remember that stopping when we first got like the boys"- (Casey) "If they have contact or if they like meetings or my mum has meetings and this sort of thing that she can't cancel then we can't go"- (Lewis) "Where we would have a like 2 hours or so maybe being able to do something, go to a park and have fun, it gets cancelled and so we have to go back, grab them and it ruins everything"- (Jamie) "It would be helpful if we could have some more (respite) so me, sister and dad can just go out for like the weekend and go like I don't know somewhere like Dorset and just go there and not have to worry and just spend time with each other" (Sammy) "I mean if the girls are on respite then obviously we can go up as a family just like me, my stepdad and my mum but with the 2 girls here we can't really because there's too many of us" (Jasmine)
	Loss of attention	" sometimes it's really hard because especially when they first move in, a lot of the time, for mum and dad it's their sort of sole focus is on those children" (Casey) "Well the attention thing like when the first children came it was very much you had to be with them all the time"- (Sammy) "I couldn't speak to my parents because they were always like work, work, work" (Lewis

		"They've got to spread themselves out so not all the attention is on me" (Jasmine)
		"I guess kind of being pushed aside like when it comes to Christmas…it just makes me feel a bit odd that we seem to be more overlooked"- (Charlie)
		"I'd make up things like I've got homework and I need help with it I would make up things so I get to spend time with them like one time I said I've got to make a globe thing out of paper mâché just so I could spend time with my Dad" (Sammy)
		"It's just like having the pushchair, having to like push the pushchair around, make sure the baby's eating and my mum even said that you know she would have liked to have spent a bit more time with like family and things…everyone just put their handbags on the pushchair so you have like random women's handbags on the pushchair and stuff and then it's just like you have to push this thing around and fold it up, up stairs, down stairs, make sure the baby's eating, make sure he's not crying, nappy change, as well as like looking after us" (Lewis)
	Taking it out on each other	"my dad gets annoyed obviously annoyed because he knows that I'm annoyed then we get annoyed at each other" (Casey)
		"If I'm getting annoyed with like the child or something like I would take it out on them" (Sophie)
		In response to do you ever talk about (feeling blamed for arguments with foster children) with parents- "I try to but it always ends in an argument" (Sammy)
		"It just impacted on all of us and we ended up getting in a lot of arguments just because of the things of him, in a way" (Jamie)
		"like I won't get let off as easily as they would, I know my mum will you know punish them by doing whatever they will get off a bit easier, whereas with me she'll be harsher and it kind of annoys me" (Jasmine)
		"If I've had an argument with anyone it's always I'm in the wrong" (Sammy)
		"If one of, like one of us is annoyed obviously we can't take it out, well not that we would, but we obviously can't be like 'oh you're really annoying me *foster child's name*' because he wouldn't understand" (Casey)

| Making sense as a way of managing the threats | Rationalising/ positive re-framing | "For that moment, and for that month, they needed the attention more than I did" (Casey)

"We all obviously have to share it but we've got used to it" (Sammy) (Speaking about attention)

"They have to be neutral and try and help both of us" (Jamie)

"Not all the attention is on me so I kind of do get a bit more freedom" (Jasmine)

"There was a part of it that I had to understand that because if I didn't, I would-, I wouldn't cope" (Casey)

"If they want to see their family I'm fine with it don't get me wrong, there's 52 weeks in a year, we go down every weekend so it doesn't really bother me, we're seeing them most of the time" (Charlie)

"the more my sister got distant away from my family but my parents um they're more closer with me, they're more closer with my foster brother, it's not because of any favouritism, it's just like, like I said before my sister doesn't like loads of noise, she doesn't like company over a long period of time but she doesn't feel any different about the guy" (Ibrahim) |
| | Staying attuned to parents' needs | "They were scared as it's a new person coming in…and me being friends with him makes my parents be more ecstatic, more happier" (Ibrahim)

"I see that she's like stressed out about it or she's not in like a good mood and stuff then I'll just leave her, keep it to myself or speak to my brother" (Lewis)

"like they've like hit you or done something or like misbehaving or shouting or screaming like try and help out cos obvious I don't want my mum just to have to deal with it all" (Sophie)

"I could speak to my mum but she didn't really, she had other stuff so it was a bit hard" (Jamie)

"I get excited because um and also it's just like if we don't have a child for a few months and then we like someone and they tell us that we're going to get another one like um it's really good because my mum, like my mum hates being bored and um like with a child like having a child there like she never gets bored" (Sophie)
"The way they talk to my mum and dad was rude like well they're not going to speak to you properly if you're |

		going to be rude to them maybe if you showed them some respect they might actually tell you" (Sammy)
	Negotiating Working together	"with the fostering obviously we have to work together" (Casey) "Yeh we all talked about it and we all talked find or tried to find solutions" (Ibrahim) "sometimes I would tell them but sometimes I would just handle it myself if that doesn't work then I'll go and tell mum" (Sophie) "sometimes the foster children have told me things that are quite worrying and I have to go and tell my mum" (Jasmine) "They may ask me er can you not tell (Mum's name) but I think it's better to let the parents in on it then they can help deal with the situation" (Charlie) "We'll both go in separate rooms then I'll tell my mum later and things get sorted" (Jamie) "I'd go into the office and ask to use my phone to call my mum to just say could you pick us up after school, there's a problem and then like explain it to them after, like when we get home"(Charlie)

Appendix Q: Themes from bracketing interview

- Might be a sense of normality with fostering for the children then they will be less affected
- Challenges of losing privacy in their own home – public setting with social workers coming in and out
- Reporting experience as tough due to sharing parents with foster children
- Might be difficult to hear about difficult experiences of neglect or abuse from foster children
- Open and honest relationship with parents needed
- Parents might give them less attention due to focusing attention on foster children- they may need extra support due to difficulties and individual needs
- Birth children may report that it would help if they had more support as there is limited support for them
- It might help to think as a family unit rather than just the foster child being an outsider
- They might worry about being selfish by reporting negative experiences for themselves
- Unsure about whether children will report there are things they would have liked to have known

Appendix R: Abridged research diary

This has been removed from the electronic copy

Appendix S: Ethical approval letter from University

This has been removed from the electronic copy

Appendix T: Ethical approval from Local Authority Research Governance

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Appendix U: Author Guidelines for submission to the Journal of Fostering and Adoption

Adoption & Fostering is the only quarterly UK peer reviewed journal dedicated to adoption and fostering issues. It also focuses on wider developments in childcare practice and research, providing an international, inter-disciplinary forum for academics and practitioners in social work, psychology, law, medicine, education, training and caring for children and young children.

1. Peer review policy

Adoption & Fostering operates a strictly anonymous peer review process in which the reviewer's name is withheld from the author and the author's name from the reviewer. The reviewer may at their own discretion opt to reveal their name to the author in their review but our standard policy practice is for both identities to remain concealed. Each manuscript is reviewed by at least two referees. All manuscripts are reviewed as rapidly as possible, and an editorial decision is generally reached within 6-8 weeks of submission.

2. Article types

Articles may cover any of the following: analyses of policies or the law; accounts of practice innovations and developments; findings of research and evaluations; discussions of issues relevant to fostering and adoption; critical reviews of relevant literature, theories or concepts; case studies.

All research-based articles should include brief accounts of the design, sample characteristics and data-gathering methods. Any article should clearly identify its sources and refer to previous writings where relevant. The preferred length of articles is 5,000-7,000 words excluding references.

Contributions should be both authoritative and readable. Please avoid excessive use of technical terms and explain any key words that may not be familiar to most readers.

3. How to submit your manuscript

Manuscripts should be submitted to the editor by e-mail attachment

4. Journal contributor's publishing agreement

Before publication SAGE requires the author as the rights holder to sign a Journal Contributor's Publishing Agreement.

Adoption & Fostering and SAGE take issues of copyright infringement, plagiarism or other breaches of best practice in publication very seriously. We seek to protect the rights of our authors and we always investigate claims of plagiarism or misuse of articles published in the journal. Equally, we seek to protect the reputation of the journal against malpractice. Submitted articles may be checked using duplication-checking software. Where an article is found to have plagiarised other work or included third-party copyright material without permission or with insufficient acknowledgement, or where authorship of the article is contested, we reserve the right to take action including, but not limited to: publishing an erratum or corrigendum (correction); retracting the article (removing it from the journal);

taking up the matter with the head of department or dean of the author's institution and/or relevant academic bodies or societies; banning the author from publication in the journal or all SAGE journals, or appropriate legal action.

4.1 SAGE Choice and Open Access

If you or your funder wish your article to be freely available online to non subscribers immediately upon publication (gold open access), you can opt for it to be included in SAGE *Choice*, subject to payment of a publication fee. The manuscript submission and peer review procedure is unchanged. On acceptance of your article, you will be asked to let SAGE know directly if you are choosing SAGE *Choice*. To check journal eligibility and the publication fee, please visit SAGE Choice. For more information on open access options and compliance at SAGE, including self author archiving deposits (green open access) visit SAGE Publishing Policies on our Journal Author Gateway.

5. Declaration of conflicting interests

Within your Journal Contributor's Publishing Agreement you will be required to make a certification with respect to a declaration of conflicting interests. *Adoption & Fostering* does not require a declaration of conflicting interests but recommends you review the good practice guidelines on the SAGE Journal Author Gateway.

For more information please visit the SAGE Journal Author Gateway.

6. Other conventions

None applicable.

7. Acknowledgements

Any acknowledgements should appear first at the end of your article prior to your Declaration of Conflicting Interests (if applicable), any notes and your References.

All contributors who do not meet the criteria for authorship should be listed in an `Acknowledgements' section. Examples of those who might be acknowledged include a person who provided purely technical help, writing assistance, or a department chair who provided only general support. Authors should disclose whether they had any writing assistance and identify the entity that paid for this assistance.

7.1 Funding Acknowledgement

To comply with the guidance for Research Funders, Authors and Publishers issued by the Research Information Network (RIN), *Adoption & Fostering* additionally requires all Authors to acknowledge their funding in a consistent fashion under a separate heading. Please visit Funding Acknowledgement on the SAGE Journal Author Gateway for funding acknowledgement guidelines.

8. Permissions

Authors are responsible for obtaining permission from copyright holders for reproducing any illustrations, tables, figures or lengthy quotations previously published elsewhere. For further information including guidance on fair dealing for criticism and review, please visit our Frequently Asked Questions on the SAGE Journal Author Gateway.

9. Manuscript style

9.1 File types

Only electronic files conforming to the journal's guidelines will be accepted. The preferred format for the text and tables of your manuscript are Word DOC, RTF, XLS. Please also refer to additional guidelines on submitting artwork [and supplemental files] below.

9.2 Journal Style

Adoption & Fostering conforms to the SAGE house style. Click here to review guidelines on SAGE UK House Style

9.3 Reference Style

Adoption & Fostering adheres to the SAGE Harvard reference style. Click here to review the guidelines on SAGE Harvard to ensure your manuscript conforms to this reference style.

If you use EndNote to manage references, download the SAGE Harvard output style by following this link and save to the appropriate folder (normally for Windows C:\Program Files\EndNote\Styles and for Mac OS X Harddrive:Applications:EndNote:Styles). Once you've done this, open EndNote and choose "Select Another Style..." from the dropdown menu in the menu bar; locate and choose this new style from the following screen.

9.4. Manuscript Preparation

The text should be double-spaced throughout and with a minimum of 3cm for left and right hand margins and 5cm at head and foot. Text should be standard 10 or 12 point.

9.4.1 Keywords and Abstracts: Helping readers find your article online

The title, keywords and abstract are key to ensuring readers find your article online through online search engines such as Google. Please refer to the information and guidance on how best to title your article, write your abstract and select your keywords by visiting SAGE's Journal Author Gateway Guidelines on How to Help Readers Find Your Article Online.

9.4.2 Corresponding Author Contact details

Provide full contact details for the corresponding author including email, mailing address and telephone numbers. Academic affiliations are required for all co-authors. These details should be presented separately to the main text of the article to facilitate anonymous peer review.

9.4.3 Guidelines for submitting artwork, figures and other graphics

For guidance on the preparation of illustrations, pictures and graphs in electronic format, please visit SAGE's Manuscript Submission Guidelines.
Figures supplied in colour will appear in colour online regardless of whether or not these illustrations are reproduced in colour in the printed version. For specifically requested colour reproduction in print, you will receive information regarding the costs from SAGE after receipt of your accepted article.

Avoid confusion between ambiguous characters and take care to ensure that subscripts and superscripts are clear. Numbers below 11 should be written out in the text unless used in conjunction with units (e.g. three apples, 4 kg). Full points (not commas) should be used for decimals. For numbers less than one, a nought should be inserted before the decimal point. Use commas within numbers (e.g. 10,000).

9.4.4 Guidelines for submitting supplemental files

Adoption & Fostering does not currently accept supplemental files.

9.4.5 English Language Editing services

Non-English speaking authors who would like to refine their use of language in their manuscripts might consider using a professional editing service. Visit English Language Editing Services for further information.

10. After acceptance

10.1 Proofs

We will email a PDF of the proofs to the corresponding author.

10.2 E-Prints

SAGE provides authors with access to a PDF of their final article. For further information please visit http://www.sagepub.co.uk/authors/journal/reprint.sp.

10.3 SAGE Production

At SAGE we place an extremely strong emphasis on the highest production standards possible. We attach high importance to our quality service levels in copy-editing, typesetting, printing, and online publication (http://online.sagepub.com/). We also seek to uphold excellent author relations throughout the publication process.

We value your feedback to ensure we continue to improve our author service levels. On publication all corresponding authors will receive a brief survey questionnaire on your experience of publishing in *Adoption & Fostering* with SAGE.

Appendix V: End of study notification letter to ethics panel

Dear (chairman of ethics panel)

How do the birth children of foster carers experience the relationship with their parents?

I am writing to notify you that I have now finished the above study and will no longer be conducting this research. I enclose a short summary report on the findings of the research, which will also be sent to participants. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Best wishes,

Trainee Clinical Psychologist

Appendix W: Summary report of study to be sent to participants and ethics department

**"For that moment, and for that month, they needed the attention more than I did":
How do the birth children of foster carers experience the relationship with their
parents?**

Study Aim:

The birth children of foster carers have been referred to as 'quiet voices' (Sutton & Stack,

2012) and 'unknown soldiers' (Twigg, 1994) due to their somewhat limited presence in the

research into fostering (Hojer, Sebba & Luke, 2013). As there is less research looking at the

experiences of the birth children of foster carers it seems relevant to investigate the parent-

child relationship. This study aimed to explore how the birth children of foster carers

experienced their relationship with their parents.

Method:

Eight young people aged 14-16 (four male and four female) took part in semi-structured

interviews and spoke about their experiences. These interviews were recorded and then typed

up and analysed by the researcher. Key themes were identified in the data and compared

across all participants to identify three main themes with a number of subthemes.

Findings:

- The young people expressed some difficult experiences that could be seen as threats
  to their relationship with their parents

- These threats seemed to be to do with loss of attention, missing out on some
  experiences and sometimes taking things out on each other

- It seemed like the young people were able to manage these threats by engaging in
  processes like making sense of things by rationalising or looking on the positive side
  about things

- Young people were also able to manage by experiencing value. This was achieved by feeling positive feelings about being involved in fostering like helping a child to develop. This was also achieved by them feeling valued by their parents

- These findings suggest that the processes of 'making sense' and 'feeling valued' serve to buffer the impact of potential threats to the parent-child relationship

Implications:

Cairns (2002) argues that foster carers need theories and models to make sense of the challenges they face in caring for children who are looked after. This research has begun to provide a model of understanding the processes experienced by young people who are the birth children of foster carers. This model could be used to inform the way foster carers and their birth children are supported by services.

Suggestions for future research:

Further research could seek to explore the views of young people of different ages to investigate whether the ways they make sense of their relationship with their parents fits with the themes identified in the current research. Research could also benefit from utilising designs such as focus groups. This may encourage those young people who were reluctant to meet for one to one interviews to contribute to the evidence base. If children are motivated to take an active role in fostering through experiencing a sense of value future research could also explore ways of providing this and evaluating outcomes for both carers and young people.

Thank you to all the young people who took part in this study. Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.