Living with foster siblings:

The adjustment of adolescent sons and

daughters in families who foster

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Overview

This thesis is presented in three parts: the literature review; the empirical paper; and the critical review. Part one is entitled 'How does fostering affect the adjustment of adolescent sons and daughters in families who foster?' This draws together literature on adolescents in 'normative' families, stepfamilies and families who foster. Implications for future research include using more rigorous qualitative research methods to investigate the personal accounts of birth children in families who foster. Part two presents the empirical paper, a qualitative study exploring adolescent sons' and daughters' experiences of living with foster siblings. Fifteen adolescents were interviewed and the data were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This generated twelve themes, which were organised into the following four super-ordinate themes: adjusting to a new normality, working out the relationship, putting others' needs first and managing feelings. In part three, the critical review, the research process is discussed, incorporating the researcher's personal reflections on conducting the study and the various challenges encountered.

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Acknowledgements

Part 1:   Literature Review

How does fostering affect the adjustment of adolescent

sons and daughters in families who foster?

Abstract

This paper aims to review how fostering affects the adjustment of adolescent sons and daughters in families who foster. The research is presented within a developmental psychopathology framework, addressing individual, parent-child and sibling factors that affect adolescents' adjustment. These factors are initially discussed in the context of 'normative' families and stepfamilies, as a prelude for understanding the adjustment of adolescents in reconstituted foster families. Secondly, fifteen studies were reviewed on birth children in families who foster. The literature specifically on adolescents in families who foster is scarce and most of the studies reviewed sampled birth children of all ages. Findings suggest that fostering affects the adjustment of birth children both positively and negatively. Birth children are more caring and mature as a result of fostering, but the relationship with their parents seems to change, resulting in less quality time. Finally, suggestions are made for future research, and clinical implications arising from the literature are discussed.

Living with foster children has an impact on foster carers' own birth children. Sons and daughters in families who foster must adjust to changes in their established family, as foster children enter their home and then leave at varied and often undetermined times in the future (McHale & Grolnick, 2001). Children in families who foster are often referred to in the literature as 'birth children' or simply as 'sons and daughters'; these terms will be used interchangeably in the current paper. In addition to adapting to the repeated changes in family composition and losses inherent in fostering, birth children must learn to share their parents with foster children. This can be difficult as foster children usually require considerable parental attention, having experienced a range of adversities including abuse, neglect and separation, which increases their risk of emotional, behavioural and social difficulties (Bolger & Patterson, 2003). However, birth children seem to respond to their foster siblings' needs sensitively and with empathy, although living with foster children might be particularly challenging for adolescents, who are concurrently negotiating other changes in their family relationships and their developing identity (Quinton, Rushton, Dance & Mayes, 1998).

This current paper aims to review how fostering affects the adjustment of adolescent sons and daughters in families who foster. In psychological literature, adjustment is often seen in terms of an individual's adaptation to a specific challenge, which may result in the development of psychopathology. However, solely focusing on adjustment outcomes at a particular point in time ignores the realities of development and the dynamic and ongoing adjustment

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process that is expressed differently over time and across contexts (Mash and Barkley, 2003). The primary focus in this paper is the adjustment process in response to non-static family experiences. Consideration is given to children's thoughts, feelings and behaviour as they attempt to manage the challenges related to their changing family environment.

The first section provides a context of adolescents' adjustment in normative families and stepfamilies, as well as background information on the 'fostering family'; meaning the family who fosters. The second section reviews literature from fifteen studies, addressing the effect of fostering on the adjustment of adolescents in families who foster. Both of these sections are presented within a risk and resilience framework from a developmental psychopathology perspective. The focus is on individual, parent-child and sibling factors that affect adolescents' adjustment within families.

The Context: Normative and Reconstituted Families

Rationale for the context

Background literature on adolescents' development in 'normative' families provides a context to understand the adjustment of adolescents in fostering families, and also enables comparisons to be drawn between adolescents in normative and non-traditional family settings. A 'normative' family refers to children living with both of their biological parents. Literature on stepfamilies was also reviewed because of commonalities shared between stepfamilies and

fostering families, for example, changes in family composition and the need to reorganise in areas such as family role and parent-child discipline. Moreover, the introduction of new siblings into both stepfamily and fostering family constellations exerts significant stress on relationships between parents and their biological children who have historically lived in the home. Of course, the reorganisation in stepfamilies occurs under different conditions, and children in these families have often experienced previous adversities including the break-down of their family. Nonetheless, it is argued that similarities between the challenges and reorganisations that occur in these two types of non-traditional family contexts can help us understand the experiences and adjustment of birth children in families who foster. Finally, the area of adolescent adjustment in stepfamilies has been more rigorously researched and therefore is valuable for developing a psychological perspective on the adjustment of birth children in families who foster.

Relevant literature on adolescents' development in normative families and stepfamilies was found through searching PsychInfo, Cinahl and HMIC databases using the terms "adolescen*", "adjustment", "famil*", "step famil*", "sibling*", as well as reviewing relevant reference lists. The stepfamily literature focuses primarily on the impact of a remarriage on adolescents' adjustment, rather than divorce, as findings can differ accordingly. A substantial amount of the literature on stepfamilies was written over 15 years ago, and recent literature is dominated by the same American authors. There continue to be differences across studies, in terms of the way stepfamilies are categorised, with some

studies incorporating all types of stepfamilies in one group despite the differing composition or circumstances in which they were formed. There is also some variation in the studies as to whether or not they include unmarried cohabiting couples in the sample. However, since the literature on normative families and stepfamilies simply provides a context for literature on birth children in families who foster, findings are presented briefly and without discussion of the limitations.

Developmental psychopathology framework

Developmental psychopathology addresses the origins and course of individual patterns of adaptation and mal-adaptation across the life span. Significant to this approach are risk factors that increase vulnerability to certain problems and resilience factors that protect against negative outcomes by decreasing the risk or providing a modulating influence. Risk factors can cumulate together and affect an individual's adjustment at specific stages of their development. However, there is a complex interaction of risk and protective factors, which means there is immense variability in how individuals respond. Risk and protective factors vary according to individual characteristics of a child, their relationships with parents and siblings and their relationships and experiences external to the family. However, for the purpose of this paper and in the interests of conciseness, only individual, parent-child and sibling factors related to the adjustment of adolescents are considered and not genetic or external factors such as poverty, life events and their peer relationships.

The Normative Family Context

Factors affecting the adjustment of adolescents in normative families

Individual factors

Individual factors that affect children's adjustment in the family include age, gender and personality characteristics. Firstly, the nature of adolescence and challenges associated with this developmental period are outlined. Adolescence is a transitional developmental period between childhood and adulthood that is characterised by more biological, psychological, educational and social role changes than any other stage of life except infancy (Feldman & Elliott, 1990). This period of change and consolidation is typified by a young person's development of their self concept (identity) and a sense of autonomy (Erikson, 1968). As a result of these developmental changes and stresses, adolescents are at increased risk of developing psychological disorders or problem behaviours (Weiz & Hawley, 2002). However, many adolescents manage to pass through this period without significant difficulties (Petersen, 1988).

An adolescent's gender also affects their risk of adjustment difficulties, although this is dependent on the situation and type of problem. Research suggests that the way in which adolescents understand and perceive themselves can also affect their reaction to subsequent life experiences (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). Temperament and personality characteristics that indicate greater risk include low intelligence and low self esteem (Werner & Smith, 1992); an external locus of control (Kliewer & Sandler, 1992); negative bias to stressful events (Janoff-

Bulman, 1992); and inhibition of emotional expression in response to major life events (Ayers, Sandler, Wolchik & Haine, 2000).

Parent and child factors

Family relationships are important in supporting adolescents' efforts to gain independence and cope with the challenges they face (Fisher & Feldman, 1998; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). However, research suggests that the relationship between adolescents and their parents changes during this period. Evidence shows that there is more conflict between parents and their children during early adolescence, and the relationship becomes more distant as they spend less time together (Holmbeck, 1996; Laursen, 1995; Larson & Richards, 1991). Studies seem to show that boys in particular have more conflict with their parents as they reach mid-adolescence (Hill, Holmbeck, Marlow, Green & Lynch, 1985; Steinberg, 1981). The findings for girls are mixed, with evidence for both increased and decreased levels of conflict with their mothers (Anderson & White, 1986; Hill et al., 1985). However, where conflict exists, disputes are mainly about mundane matters and are rarely intense enough to disrupt the parent- child connection. This is typically followed by development of a less conflicted and more cooperative relationship in later adolescent years (Holmbeck, Colder, Shapera, Westhoven, Kenealy & Updegrove, 2000; Steinberg, 1990).

According to a number of studies authoritative parenting, meaning warmth and firmness, enhances adolescents' psychological and social adjustment as well as

their school performance (Baumrind, 1978; Steinberg, 1990; Weisz, 1980). The firmness in enforcing limits acts as a deterrent against problem behaviour, and warmth and autonomy-granting help to protect against internalising problems such as anxiety and depression (Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Factors such as inconsistency, psychological intrusiveness and reduced monitoring are associated with adjustment difficulties (Buehler, Benson & Gerard, 2006). Treating siblings differently is also linked with children's behaviour problems, depressed mood, anxiety and low self esteem (Dunn, Deater-Deckard, Pickering, & Golding, 1999; McHale, Updegraff, Jackson-Newsom, Tucker, & Crouter, 2000). The above risk factor is more common in families under stress, for example divorced families (Hetherington, 1988), and families where one sibling has cancer (Cairns, Clark, Smith, & Lansky, 1979) or a disability (McHale & Gamble, 1989).

Sibling factors

Siblings have received little attention in literature on family relationships, despite the significant positive or negative impact that siblings can have on a child's development (Dunn, Slomkowski & Beardsall, 1994). A number of studies suggest that rivalry and conflict between siblings increases in early adolescence but diminishes by late adolescence. The intensity of the relationship and positive qualities such as enjoyment, trust and understanding are reported to decline throughout adolescence (Buhrmester, 1992; Cicirelli, 1994). Dunn and Kendrick (1982) report that sisters are generally warmer and more supportive towards each other and brothers are more conflicted.

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There is substantial evidence indicating that sibling relationship quality is associated with psychological adjustment, for example high conflict is connected with poorer adjustment (Bank, Burraston & Snyder, 2004; Brody, 1998; Garcia, Shaw, Winslow & Yaggi, 2000; Richmond et al., 2005). Typically, siblings might fight about their behaviour, possessions and parental attention (McGuire, Manke, Eftekhari & Dunn, 2000). Differential treatment from parents can intensify sibling aggression and rivalry (Booth & Dunn, 1994; Hetherington, 1988). Whilst the sibling relationship can be a significant source of stress, siblings can also help each other develop an understanding of emotions and pro-social behaviours, and they can be an important agent of support throughout a person's life (Circelli, 1996; Deater-Deckard, Dunn & Lussier, 2002). Siblings sometimes share possessions and help each other avoid parental displeasure, and in certain situations or cultures siblings assume a care taking role for their younger or less able siblings (Bank & Kahn, 1982).

Summary

Numerous risk and protective factors affect adolescents' individual adjustment and their relationships with parents and siblings. An individual's age, gender, and personality characteristics affect their adjustment. There is considerable evidence indicating that children are positively influenced by parents providing authoritative discipline, emotional support and consistent monitoring, and adjustment difficulties are linked with differential treatment of siblings. Research on sibling relationships suggests that substantial conflict and minimal support can have a negative effect on adolescents.

The Stepfamily Context

The stepfamily context can highlight the challenges to adjustment faced by adolescents as a result of fundamental changes in family structure. It is estimated that 40% of children will experience their parents divorce (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). Cherlin & Furstenberg (1994) report that in the USA about half of the divorced adults remarry within four years but further divorces occur more rapidly and frequently in these marriages especially when stepchildren are present. In addition, many adults cohabit before or as an alternative to remarriage (Seltzer, 2001). Consequently, through these multiple family transitions children are exposed to numerous changes and challenges, such as conflicting loyalties, residing in two homes, ambiguous roles in their new family and building new relationships despite a lack of common history (Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985; Visher & Visher, 1988). As a result, most children initially respond by feeling angry, anxious and sad and sometimes become more demanding and non compliant. These responses typically diminish three to five years after the remarriage and many children demonstrate resilience and emerge well adjusted (Amato, 2001; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002).

However, there are also consistent findings that children in divorced or remarried homes are at increased risk for developing psychological, behavioural, social and academic problems (Amato, 2001; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Children from complex stepfamilies, several remarriages and children from both partners, were found to be more autonomous but with

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more psychological and behavioural problems than in simple, one remarriage, stepfamilies (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995). There is inconsistent evidence regarding the extent of the differences in adjustment difficulties between children in divorced and remarried families compared to children in non divorced families. Some large scale surveys using measures such as the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBC) have found that 10-15% more children from divorced or remarried homes experience severe emotional and behavioural problems (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). In summation, children respond in different ways to the changes imposed on them during a family reorganisation, and the quality of their adjustment varies according to the different risk and protective factors operating in individuals and families.

Factors affecting the adjustment of adolescents in stepfamilies

Individual factors

Normative changes and stresses experienced during adolescence may be magnified for adolescents in newly formed stepfamilies. There is some evidence that early adolescence may be a particularly difficult time for a child to experience a parent remarrying (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). Research also suggests that girls are more likely to resist a stepparent's entry into their home and remain more withdrawn with stepfathers compared to boys (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Several studies highlight the role of child temperament in adjustment to family reorganisation. Children identified as having an 'easy' temperament

demonstrate greater resilience in response to divorce and remarriage. In addition, children's cognitions and coping styles affect their adjustment. Children are more likely to have difficulty coping with their parents' marital transitions if they have low self efficacy and an external locus of control (Kim, Sandler & Jenn-Yum, 1997), if they blame themselves for their parents' marital breakdown (Bussell, 1995), and rely on distraction or avoidance rather than more active coping skills (Sandler, Tein & West, 1994).

Parent and child factors

Research suggests that immediately after a marital transition parenting is less authoritative, perhaps because parents are preoccupied in managing the changes and related stresses (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). The relationship with their child often becomes more coercive and characterised by diminished communication, affection, consistency, control and supervision (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Whilst the initial difficulties between the adolescent and biological parent generally improve over time, there may be more long lasting difficulties between adolescents and stepparents (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). For some adolescents, having less adult supervision resulted in them taking more responsibility and becoming more autonomous. However, the effect of this varied according to individual differences, with both positive and negative outcomes being identified (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003).

Sibling factors

Hetherington, Henderson and Reiss (1999) found that the sibling relationship can be influenced negatively by the quality and amount of conflict in the marital or cohabiting relationship. Several studies also indicate that adolescents in stepfamilies have less supportive and more conflicted sibling relationships (Amato, 1987; Anderson & Rice, 1992; Dunn et al., 1999; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Conversely, other adolescents in stepfamilies assume more adult-like roles in looking after their younger siblings. One study suggests that adolescents giving moderate levels of support to siblings can emerge as more socially competent and resilient but adolescents giving excessive support are at higher risk of emotional difficulties, and for girls this results in heightened vulnerability to feelings of inadequacy in adulthood (Hetherington, 1999).

More extreme positive and negative feelings were reported between full siblings compared to half and stepsiblings (Deater-Deckard et al., 2002). One study reported that differential treatment may be most marked when one child is biologically related and the other is not, and that this can impact on an adolescent's adjustment (Henderson, Hetherington, Mekos & Reiss, 1996). Stepsibling relationships are characteristically less warm and more avoidant and they are likely to disengage from one another as they move through adolescence (Anderson & Rice, 1992; Gorell-Barnes, Thomson, Daniel & Burchardt, 1998). Stepsiblings often compete over parental attention, space and privacy (Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). One study with 52 complex stepfamilies found that 39% of parents perceived normal sibling rivalry between stepsiblings,

33% observed considerable jealousy and 12% noted that they had nothing in common (Ganong & Coleman, 1994).

Summary

Children in stepfamilies have experienced numerous changes, challenges and stresses which increase their risk for developing psychological, behavioural, social and academic problems. Individual, parent-child and sibling factors affect their adjustment. There is some evidence that early adolescence is a difficult time for a remarriage to occur, and girls often find this transition more difficult than boys. Findings also suggest that adolescents who have low self efficacy, an external locus of control and avoidant coping styles are more likely to struggle with their parents' remarriage. Following a marital transition, authoritative parenting and monitoring tend to reduce and relationships often become more coercive and less affectionate. Adolescent siblings in stepfamilies are generally less supportive and more conflicted, with stepsiblings being particularly avoidant and more likely to disengage from one another throughout adolescence. These findings set the scene for thinking about the adjustment of birth children in families who foster, as birth children have similarly experienced changes in their family composition and negotiated family reorganisation.

The Fostering Context

In 2006, 60,300 children were in the care of local authorities, and of these children 70% were in foster care, whilst the other 30% were in children's homes,

living with adopted parents or in other accommodation. For 980 children, their

foster care was provided through private fostering agencies (BAAF, 2006).

There are a number of different types of foster care including shared care

(where the foster child is placed in foster care for short breaks only), long or

short term (meaning more or less than three years), treatment foster care

(concerned with affecting change) and group homes where numerous foster

children live together with a foster family. Ideas on fostering have changed in

the past 20 years. Before the Children's Act (1989), foster carers were asked to

'care for the foster child as if they were a member of the family' (Department of

Health, 1988). There is now a move towards partnership between foster carers

and a foster child's biological parents. As a result there can be some confusion

about the extent of a foster carer's responsibilities for the foster child, regarding

discipline, their educational progress and facilitating their peer relationships

(Farmer, Moyers & Lipscombe, 2004). This sometimes means that foster carers

have different rules for foster children compared to their own children.

It is important to consider foster children's experience before entering the care

system and the impact this can have on their ability to form relationships with

their foster family. Foster children have often experienced a range of adversities

including abuse, neglect and separation (Cairns, 2002; Sinclair, 2005). As a

result foster children are more likely to experience emotional difficulties such as

anxiety, anger and low self-esteem, and often struggle to build relationships and

trust others (Farmer et al., 2004; Golding, 2003). This sometimes means that

foster children react and behave in unpredictable ways, which can be stressful

for members of the new foster family (Levy & Orlans, 1998). In addition, foster

children's care is characterised by recurrent transitions between their biological

home and different foster homes. These upheavals affect the family who foster,

as well as the foster child, as the family have to cope with loss and the repeated

challenge of family reorganisation (McHale & Grolnick, 2001). The next section

reviews the literature specifically on birth children in families who foster.

Literature on Birth Children in Families who Foster

Introduction

This section reviews literature on the adjustment of birth children in families who

foster. Firstly, there will be an overview of the inclusion criteria and critique of

the relevant studies. Criteria for including literature in this review were

deliberately broad due to the lack of research in this area. Literature had to

explore the impact of fostering on birth children in families who foster as the

primary or secondary focus, using a sample of birth children, foster carers or

both. There was no specification about the type of foster care or dates literature

was published, but dissertations, unpublished work or journals not written in

English were excluded from the review.

Two procedures were used to identify relevant studies published prior to the cut-

off date of March 2007. Firstly the PsychInfo, Cinahl and HMIC databases up to

March 2007 were searched using the terms "foster care", "birth child*",

"biological child*", "son* and daughter*". Searches were also performed using

the terms "sibling*" and "adolescent*" which yielded a large amount of studies. However, very few studies relevant to this paper were found using these key words. Secondly and most helpfully, potential papers were identified from reference lists, manual online searches of the key journal 'Fostering and Adoption' and from recommendations by experts in the field. The majority of literature reviewed was obtained through interlibrary loans. In total fifteen studies met the inclusion criteria (see Appendix 2 for a summary of the studies). The review of these fifteen studies aimed to consider the adjustment of adolescent sons and daughters in families who foster within a risk and resilience framework. Similar to the previous section, the focus is on individual, parent-child and sibling factors that affect birth children's adjustment.

The studies have a number of limitations, which mean the findings will be discussed with caution. They have mainly been carried out within the social work field. The larger studies that combine quantitative and qualitative methodology are the most robust, but these are from the perspective of parents and do not explore birth children's experiences as the main focus. The studies where birth children are included in part of the sample are all qualitative. However, most of these studies have not specified their qualitative approach or data analysis procedures, and they have not followed guidelines for good practice in conducting qualitative research (e.g. Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). In addition, despite children's age being an important factor which affects adjustment, most of the studies either omitted the age of birth children or the sample spanned wide age ranges (e.g. 7- 24 years). Responses are inevitably

affected by sampling across wide age ranges, as older children are likely to have more understanding about themselves and other people compared with younger children. The studies did not focus on a particular developmental period such as adolescence and therefore it is difficult to consider the affect of fostering specifically on adolescents' adjustment.

Findings on the impact of fostering differ according to the person responding (Hojer, 2004; Kaplan, 1988; Tristeliotis, Borland & Hill, 2000). In an American qualitative study with birth children and their mothers, foster mothers tended to minimise their child's concerns and assume greater maturity from them (Kaplan, 1988). Similarly, a large mixed design study found that fathers were less inhibited and found it easier to talk about the effect of fostering on their own children than mothers did (Hojer, 2004). Therefore, it is important to consider whose perspective is being represented and whether birth children and parent views are consistent. In total there are five studies from the perspective of birth children, five from the view point of birth children and their parents and, lastly, five from the perspective of foster parents alone or with social workers, local authority managers or foster children.

The Adjustment of Birth Children in Families who Foster

Individual adjustment

Eight of the studies discuss the positive psychological adjustment of birth children in families who foster. In several studies birth children are described by

parents and themselves as being more 'worldly wise', socially aware and open

minded as well as having acquired understanding about life's hardships and

awareness of complex emotional issues beyond their years (Hojer, 2004; Part,

1993; Pugh, 1996; Tristeliotis et al., 2000). These children demonstrated

striking concern for others, and sensitivity about issues such as racism and

disabilities (Pugh, 1996; Spears & Cross, 2003). In one study, a number of

parents saw fostering as a 'lesson in empathy' (Hojer, 2004) and in several other

studies parents considered their sons and daughters to be less selfish, tolerant,

patient and caring (Ellis, 1972; Pugh, 1996; Tristeliotis et al., 2000). Through

these experiences, birth children also described being more responsible, mature

and confident, and having gained in communication skills they found it easier

making friends (Part, 1993; Pugh, 1996; Spears & Cross, 2003).

Studies also discuss the negative effects on the adjustment of birth children as a

result of sharing daily life with foster children. In one study, parents from 17

families reported that 13% of their children had deteriorated in openness and

affection in the year after a foster child entered their homes, although this was

also attributed to them becoming adolescents (Rushton, Dance, Quinton &

Mayes, 2001). In another study, parents reported their inability to protect their

children from the realities of a 'harsh world' involving violence, sexual abuse,

drugs and suicide (Pugh, 1996). In this study some birth children said it was

horrendous hearing about their foster siblings' experiences and it was "a heavy

weight to carry around". The author of one study reported that this might be

further intensified when children are confidants for abuse disclosures or when

allegations are made by foster siblings against their family members (Martin, 1993). According to a few authors, despite the difficulties faced by birth children, they are expected to 'mask' their own feelings or conflict and put others' needs first (Hojer, 2004; Martin, 1993). Both self and parent reports indicated that birth children acquired too much insight into human problems (Hojer, 2004; Pugh, 1996). Consequently, two authors suggested that, as a result of living in families with foster children, some birth children could 'lose their innocence' and 'grow-up prematurely' (Martin, 1993; Pugh, 1996).

Family adjustment

The family unit has been likened to a finely balanced 'mobile' and a foster child joining or leaving could affect the functioning of the whole family unit (Pugh, 1996). In interviews with birth children aged 15- 28 years one child described the change in family structure being "more like a boarding home than a family" and another child said "there were too many different people at too many times" for family memories to be constant (Twigg, 1994). Normal routines were upset (Ellis, 1972) and changes in family interaction occurred such as not play fighting or altering verbal banter to accommodate the new member (Spears & Cross, 2003; Twigg, 1994). New understanding over the operation of rules, allocation of roles, and power had to be reached. Most of the birth children in a qualitative study said this was particularly threatening when foster children were close in age (Twigg, 1994) and in another small study parents said the oldest child was the most affected (Ellis, 1972).

Parents and birth children stated that fostering created distance between family members (Poland & Groze, 1993; Twigg, 1994). However, these two studies include families outside of the UK involved in more intense types of fostering such as treatment, specialised and group homes as well as 'regular' fostering and so the demands are likely to be greater, potentially creating more family difficulties. Whilst Twigg's (1994) study used narrative analysis based on principles of grounded theory, Poland and Groze's (1993) questionnaire study did not specify analysis procedures. Conversely, other qualitative studies found that fostering had a positive effect, creating closer family relationships and strengthening communication (Ellis, 1972; Pugh, 1996). These were small studies though and analysis procedures were not specified. Several studies found that birth children appreciated their families even more because of their fostering experiences (Poland & Groze, 1993; Pugh, 1996; Tristeliotis et al., 2000; Watson & Jones, 2002).

Individual factors affecting the adjustment of birth children

Age of the birth child

Literature about the effect of age and gender on the psychological adjustment of adolescent sons and daughters is scarce. In a study with 10 foster carers, birth children aged between 7- 13 years were reported to particularly struggle when adapting to group home fostering (Ellis, 1972). Conversely, the authors in another study speculated that adolescent sons and daughters were likely to find fostering particularly difficult as adolescents might feel more embarrassed or intolerant of the foster child as they are developing their own identity (Quinton et

al., 1998). In Kaplan's (1988) qualitative study, age impacted on birth children's understanding of why foster children lived with them. Younger birth children (6-8 years) often did not accept reasons given by their parents as to why a child was fostered and instead they harboured ideas of intentional abandonment such as the foster child being unloved or bad which resulted in their own separation anxiety, feeling that they might be abandoned if they were naughty. However, older birth children (9-12 years) were more empathic and mature, more often internalising any guilt regarding negative feelings rather than directly expressing these.

In a literature review by Sinclair (2005), numerous studies discuss the impact of birth children's age on the likelihood of a foster placement ending prematurely. These studies have reported some contradictory findings. A number of researchers suggested that there were more difficulties when foster children were placed with birth children of a similar age and that there should be at least a five year age gap between birth and foster children (Quinton et al., 1998). Farmer et al. (2004) found that birth children younger than foster children by two to five years were in the age group most vulnerable to their foster sibling's behaviour but foster adolescents could benefit if birth children were less than two years older or younger as they might help them to form friendships. In several studies birth children expressed clear preferences about the age they wished foster children to be, many wanting babies "as you can play with them" (Part, 1996; Pugh, 1993) and younger children because "you can tell them what to do" (Spears & Cross, 2003).

Personality characteristics

Personality characteristics, particularly with regard to attribution biases and how feelings of sadness and anger are managed, impact on children's adjustment. One mother discussed how her two teenage sons blamed themselves for not having noticed that their foster sister continued to be sexually abused by her biological father. This resulted in one son becoming depressed and the other acting out his anger destructively (Hojer, 2004). From interviews with 20 birth children aged 8-18 years, a few birth children described gaining understanding about their anger threshold and how to manage their feelings (Spears & Cross, 2003) whilst birth children in another study described joking about their difficulties as a way of coping (Pugh, 1996).

However, based on numerous comments from birth children, authors concluded that birth children often tried to cope by 'bottling up' emotions and masking their conflict by being understanding and searching for explanations (Martin, 1993; Pugh, 1996; Twigg, 1994). These studies suggest that such responses might be more apparent when birth children are facing provocation and stress caused by foster siblings, yet being told and later rewarded by parents if they act tolerantly and without retaliation (Pugh, 1996; Twigg, 1994). Pressure to accept and befriend foster siblings can lead to further resentment and guilt if birth children hold undesirable feelings towards them. Ellis (1972) discussed the importance of children expressing any difficult feelings to help relieve tension and resolve any problems.

Parent and child factors affecting the adjustment of birth children

Parenting style

Parenting style including discipline and differential treatment of siblings has been linked to adolescents' adjustment in other family constitutions. Seven of the studies on birth children in families who foster discussed these issues, with children and parents consistently reporting that parents were stricter with their own children and had higher expectations, for example expecting children to share cheerfully and unselfishly, to be forgiving, obedient and friendly (Ellis, 1972; Poland & Groze, 1993; Tristeliotis et al., 2000). An American study using questionnaires reported that some birth children felt excuses were made for their foster siblings allowing them to "get away with whatever they wanted" (Poland & Groze, 1993). Similarly, in another study, birth children described feeling resentful about the different rules for them and foster siblings. For example, one birth child said "If I did what they did, I'd get grounded for the rest of my life. I have to be more strict and mature" and another birth child said, "I don't want to be good all the time. It's a big responsibility" (Spears & Cross, 2003).

Parents' different treatment of siblings specifically about material advantage was also discussed. In a questionnaire study 20% of children said that foster children were unfairly given too much pocket money (Part, 1996). Although another child in this same study said "I get extra pocket money for putting up with them". Similarly, foster parents felt that bad feelings had risen out of the "lavish way the care system treated foster children", for example with designer shoes and expensive meals (Tristeliotis et al., 2000). Conversely, some birth

children described their own material gains as a result of fostering such as more

money, better Christmas presents, outings and holidays (Spears & Cross,

2003).

Treating birth and foster children differently has implications for both parents and

children. Some of the ten foster parents from group homes said they were faced

with the paradox of feeling guilty towards foster children if they treated their own

children differently, and feeling guilty towards their own children if they treated

them the same (Ellis, 1972). In the same study, some group home parents felt

that their initial idea of "one big happy family" was not practical and their own

children needed to know they were special and belonged to them so that birth

children did not feel like foster children in their own home. Similarly, in another

study, a birth child said "We should get special treatment because we are their

sons and daughters" (Twigg, 1994).

Emotional support

The term emotional support refers here to the warmth, time, attention and

communication given by parents to their sons and daughters. In a mixed design

study, all 17 foster parents described the relationship with their birth children as

positive a year after living with foster children (Rushton et al., 2001). Over half

of the 100 birth children in a questionnaire study (Watson & Jones, 2002) and

most of the 20 children interviewed in another study (Spears & Cross, 2003)

said they would turn to their parents for support if they had fostering related

problems or were stressed and this helped to reduce their temper (Spears &

Cross, 2003). Although in two thirds of all the studies discussed, not having enough time or attention from parents was reported and so support might not always be available.

Responses from parents and birth children regarding sharing parental attention were generally consistent. Parents reported that their birth children did not like sharing parental attention with foster siblings and sometimes felt ignored, leading to resentment and jealousy even with grown up children who had left home (Farmer et al., 2004). Although parents reported that sharing their mother was one of the greatest objections for their birth children, this was not statistically significant in a large quantitative and qualitative study and only one in ten children always or usually objected to sharing their parents (Tristeliotis et al., 2000). However in several interview-based studies, children said they would like to spend more time with their parents (Spears & Cross, 2003), and an individual child estimated that 90% of parental time was spent with the foster child and the only time with their parent was after the foster child had gone to bed and the parent was 'worn out' (Twigg, 1994). Similarly, foster fathers reported that their birth children felt invisible to them at times, and 24% of parents said they felt guilty about neglecting their own children (Hojer, 2004). Parents said their birth children felt left out and "second best" and that this was a "high price to pay" (Tristeliotis et al., 2000).

Several studies suggested that emotional support was not only given by the parent but was also reciprocated, and provided by the child to their parents. A

repeated measure design study that included interviews with 68 foster carers found that 27% of the sample described their birth children as being very supportive and acting as mediators within the fostering process a year after living with foster children (Farmer et al., 2004). Sons and daughters in families who foster can have strong protective feelings towards their parents. They seem to act in a parental fashion, perhaps having observed the strain emotionally and physically that fostering can have on their family (Part, 1993; Pugh, 1996; Spears & Cross, 2003; Watson & Jones, 2002). Kaplan (1988) interpreted birth children's over-protectiveness or identification with their mother's caretaker role as a defence against their own fears of abandonment or feelings of pain and loss.

Monitoring and autonomy

For parents, spending time with foster children meant spending less time relaxing, monitoring and supervising their birth children. Birth children's responses in interviews and questionnaires indicate that fostering helped them to make decisions independently and to become more responsible and self-reliant (Part, 1993; Poland & Groze, 1993; Pugh, 1996). Birth children seemed to have mixed feelings about their increased autonomy. In questionnaires completed separately by 52 foster carers and their children, going out more and doing less with the family was seen to result from children feeling left out or pushed out of the family unit (Poland & Groze, 1993). In the same study one individual stated "I have a little more freedom to make my own decisions because Mum and Dad are always with the foster child. I kind of wanted them to

watch me too". However, this study included families involved in more intense fostering arrangements such as specialised and group homes and therefore parental monitoring might have been particularly reduced because of the added pressures, leading to children having more independence.

Foster sibling factors affecting the adjustment of birth children

Companionship and support

In a third of the studies birth children said that companionship with their new sibling was what they enjoyed most about fostering (Ames Reed, 1996; Part, 1993; Pugh, 1996; Spears & Cross, 2003; Watson & Jones, 2002). Some parents similarly described companionship and a close relationship between birth children and foster children (Hojer, 2004; Tristeliotis et al., 2000). A repeated measure design focused on different sibling relationships from the perspective of 72 foster carers, social workers and teachers (Rushton et al., 2001). It was found that of the 17 families with their own children, 52% of parents felt positive feelings were developing between the new siblings at three months, and after a year this sibling relationship had improved for 17% and deteriorated for 8%. Parents attributed negative changes to children reaching adolescence, rather than the foster placement, and positive changes to explanations such as increased age or maturity, comfort with the new family constitution and the way parents dealt with specific difficulties.

A more supportive sibling role was taken by some sons and daughters of foster carers. There were a number of qualitative comments about their role of

becoming bridges between their parents and foster children (Pugh, 1996) and acting as experts in managing their foster sibling's behaviour (Martin, 1993). At times, birth children felt it was their role to 'parent' foster children, having watched the strategies used by their parents (Spears & Cross, 2003). A number of studies reported extra responsibilities taken on by birth children (Hojer, 2004; Poland & Groze, 1993) such as babysitting (Part, 1993; Pugh, 1996), reading, playing or primary care tasks such as washing, dressing, changing nappies and bathing the foster child (Ames Reed, 1996; Watson & Jones, 2002). In a small interview study a twenty year old birth child said "It makes me feel guilty...confused...you're not sure whether you're supposed to be treating them like a normal brother or sister or wrapping them up in cotton wool and treating them differently" (Pugh, 1996). Authors concluded that older birth children were sometimes confused as to whether they were parent figures, quasi-carers, peers or siblings (Martin, 1993; Pugh, 1996).

Strangers, rivalry and conflict

The fifteen studies in this literature review all discussed challenging aspects in the new foster sibling relationship. One of the more robust interview studies found that birth children's initial anxieties about not knowing their foster sibling were challenging (Spears & Cross, 2003). Having little in common and few shared activities were also reported by 48-56% of foster children in a well designed study by Farmer et al. (2004). For some birth children it was stressful not getting on with their new sibling: "It's not much fun having someone in your home that you don't like" (Part, 1993). In addition rivalry and conflict were

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present between foster siblings, although there were mixed findings about the level and normality of these. Parents described the foster sibling relationship as cool and distant, rarely conflicted and characterised by low levels of rivalry (Sinclair, 2005). In a mixed design study, parents said any difficulties were related to normal sibling strife (Hojer, 2004), although in a well constructed repeated measure design study rivalry was found to be significant between these new siblings when compared to a control group from a normative family (Rushton et al., 2001). This latter study used a small sample and was based on parent report though. In another study, parents reported that jealousies were most common when birth children were very young or about the same age as foster children, and for some this was so pronounced that foster siblings rarely communicated (Tristeliotis et al., 2000).

The studies reported that space, privacy, sharing and behaviour caused conflict between birth and foster children. Five studies described the stress related to a lack of space and privacy (Ellis, 1972; Part, 1993; Tristeliotis et al., 2000; Twigg, 1994; Watson & Jones, 2002) and over half of the fifteen studies discussed difficulties around sharing and rivalry both from the perspective of birth children (Ames Reed, 1996; Martin, 1993; Pugh, 1993; Watson & Jones, 2002) and from parents (Hojer, 2004; Kaplan, 1988; Rushton et al., 2001; Tristeliotis et al., 2000). Whilst sharing belongings, friends, and parents can be difficult, findings from over 100 questionnaires showed that 38% of birth children did not mind sharing most things (Watson & Jones, 2002). The literature was consistent regarding foster children's behaviour, which was described as one of the most

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challenging aspects of fostering. These behaviours included stealing (Spears & Cross, 2003), threatening to run away (Poland & Groze, 1993), screaming during the night (Tristeliotis et al., 2000), and bullying or assaulting them (Watson & Jones, 2002). Some birth children had seen their foster siblings drunk or overdosed and found this very frightening (Spears & Cross, 2003).

On account of these experiences described above, some birth children felt betrayed, resentful, scared and angry. In one questionnaire a child said "Some foster children don't deserve to have kind, loving families because they just kick them in the teeth when they try to help" (Part, 1993). Parents reported concerns that their own children might try to copy some of these behaviours (Tristeliotis et al., 2000). Through questionnaires and interviews with foster parents, 17% reported that there had been deterioration in their own child's behaviour after a year of living with foster children, although this was partly attributed to their child being an adolescent (Rushton et al., 2001). A number of studies discussed the correlation of foster children's behaviour and the adverse effects on birth children with a foster placement breaking down (Farmer et al., 2004; Quinton et al., 1998).

Responses to foster children leaving their family

Birth children's response towards foster children leaving was inevitably affected by the length of placement, age of the birth child and the quality of relationship formed. Having experienced a difficult placement, some birth children were relieved that it had ended (Spears & Cross, 2003), whilst other birth children felt guilty about foster children leaving especially if they had harboured resentment

towards them (Ellis, 1972). Half of the studies discussed birth children's emotional distress resulting from a foster child leaving. Tristeliotis et al. (2000) likened this to having a death in the family and Pugh (1996) hypothesised on the basis of a few comments that such experiences might generate ongoing feelings of loss, abandonment and insecurity about birth children's own sense of permanence in the home. However, emotional distress induced by a foster child's departure was generally a minor feature in most of the studies. Only 5% of children (Part, 1993), or one in ten carers (Tristeliotis et al., 2000), stated that sons and daughters had experienced strong feelings of sadness or described it as one of the most difficult parts of fostering. One author speculated that the temporary and transitory nature of fostering may limit the extent to which family members can emotionally invest in the foster child (Twigg, 1994). This means having limited attachment and consequently less distress when foster children leave.

Summary

Fifteen studies were reviewed finding that birth children in families who foster often emerge well adjusted and are more socially aware, caring, confident and mature. However, exposure to harsh realities such as abuse and violence through the accounts of their foster siblings had a more negative impact on some children, perhaps causing them to grow-up more quickly. A few studies suggest that fostering created more distance between family members, whilst several other studies described how family relationships became closer and their communication was strengthened.

Discussion

Evidence from literature on the adjustment of birth children in families who foster has been presented within a developmental psychopathology framework. Overall, these studies suggest that fostering can have both beneficial and adverse effects on the adjustment of birth children in families who foster. As discussed, the specific adjustment of adolescent sons and daughters in families who foster can be better understood within the context of adolescents' adjustment in normative family and stepfamily constitutions. Research findings on adolescents' adjustment in these three family contexts of normative families, stepfamilies and fostering families are discussed.

Several factors affected individuals' adjustment during adolescence including age, gender and personality characteristics. Research on adolescents' general development in a normative family context suggests that adolescents, and boys in particular, often have a more conflicted and distant relationship with their parents, although the conflict tends to diminish by late adolescence. Literature on adolescents in stepfamilies indicates that girls are more likely to struggle with their parent remarrying. Research on birth children in families who foster is limited regarding the effect of age and gender as moderating factors on the adjustment of adolescents. However, Kaplan (1988) suggests that age can affect birth children's response to fostering, finding that younger birth children (6-8 years) experienced more separation anxiety and older birth children (9- 12 years) tended to internalise their negative feelings. Other studies in this field

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reported that foster placements were more likely to end prematurely when birth children were the same age or a few years younger than foster children, although findings across studies were not consistent.

Research on adolescents' general development suggests that adolescents are at higher risk of adjustment difficulties when they have the following personality characteristics: a difficult temperament; low intelligence; low self esteem; an external locus of control; negative bias to stressful events; avoidant coping; and inhibition of emotional expression. Similarly, literature on stepfamilies suggests that children with low self-efficacy, a tendency towards self-blame and avoidant coping styles are more likely to struggle with their parent remarrying and experience emotional and behavioural problems. In the fostering field, there is some evidence that older birth children in families who foster tend to internalise their negative feelings, which potentially could have a negative impact on their adjustment. However, birth children may also have a number of protective factors, which help their adjustment. Based on research that describes the demographics of fostering families, these protective factors might include birth children's average or above intelligence and high self esteem.

Evidence on adolescents' adjustment in a normative family context indicates that several risk factors operate in the parent-child relationship, associated with poorer emotional and behavioural adjustment in children. These include limited authoritative parenting and emotional support, inconsistency and differential treatment of siblings (Dunn et al., 1999; McHale et al., 2000). Stepfamily

literature has shown that the above risk factors are more prevalent in newly formed stepfamilies, resulting in more immediate conflict between parents and children, which improves over time. In contrast, research on families who foster suggests that authoritative parenting and emotional support are retained. However, reduced time with parents and differential treatment of birth children and foster children seem to operate as risk factors in the same way they do in the other family constitutions described.

Findings on adolescents' development in a normative family setting suggest an association between limited monitoring of children and poor adjustment. Stepfamily literature shows some evidence of parents in newly formed stepfamilies monitoring their children less. As a result, some children in stepfamilies became more autonomous. At times, adolescents in these families seemed to assume more supportive roles with their younger siblings. Adolescents who provide some support to their siblings can emerge with greater social competence and resilience. However, when support offered is excessive, adolescents may show elevated anxiety, depression, low social competence and self esteem, and for girls this results in a heightened sense of inadequacy in adulthood (Hetherington, 1999). In research on families who foster, birth children also seemed to assume more supportive roles with their younger foster siblings, although the effect of this on adolescents' adjustment is unknown.

Adolescents in normative families typically fight with their siblings over possessions, behaviour, attention, space and privacy. During adolescence,

conflict between siblings increases and positive qualities such as trust and enjoyment decrease. Substantial evidence suggests that the quality of sibling relationship is associated with psychological adjustment. Research on adolescents in stepfamilies indicates that siblings in this family context are generally less supportive, more rivalrous and conflicted, and difficulties are often long lasting. Studies suggest that the step sibling relationship is characteristically less warm, more aggressive, emotionally avoidant and disengaged. Similarly in fostering families, the relationship between birth children and foster children is often described as cool and distant. It seems that there is also rivalry and conflict present in the relationship between birth and foster siblings, although studies have disputed the extent to which this is 'normal' sibling rivalry. There are also reports of birth children and foster children becoming emotionally close and as a result some birth children felt distressed when their foster siblings left their home. However, most of the studies suggest that more often birth children felt 'slightly sad', and occasionally relieved when foster children left their family.

Research Implications

Despite the methodological limitations of previous research on families who foster, studies have demonstrated the benefit of eliciting birth children's views in helping to understand how they adjust to living with foster children. However, future qualitative research should use more robust methodology to explore the views of birth children and a narrower age range could be defined to increase the homogeneity of the sample. Research could focus on a specific

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developmental stage such as adolescence, since this might be a vulnerable period of adjustment for birth children in families who foster, as it is for children in newly formed stepfamilies. In addition, focusing on adolescence would allow more specific questions to be asked about the impact that fostering has on the development of birth children's self concept and their changing family relationships.

Rushton et al. (2001) reported that two thirds of birth children in families who foster experienced adjustment difficulties after the first year of fostering, such as academic, emotional and behavioural problems. However, this study was with a sample of only 17 families and based on parent report. Quantitative methodology could be used with a larger sample to test the hypothesis that birth children experience difficulties after the first year of fostering, in terms of their academic, emotional or behavioural adjustment. Standardised assessment tools could obtain reliable measures of these three areas for birth children, both before foster children are placed in their homes and again a year later. The validity of the findings could be improved by comparing the adjustment of birth children in families who foster with a control sample, matched for age, socio-economic status and other appropriate variables.

The qualitative research on birth children in families who foster suggests that parents often treat their birth children more strictly than foster children and also have less time with their own children as a result of fostering. Both of these are potential risk factors in a child's development and therefore warrant further

investigation. In order to generalise the findings discussed above, quantitative research could be conducted to investigate the presence or absence of differential treatment and changes in quality time in the parent-child relationship. This could be done by using measures of differential treatment and quality time across normative families, stepfamilies and families who foster.

Clinical Implications

The research findings presented in this paper suggest that fostering affects the adjustment of birth children both positively and negatively. Families who are deciding whether or not to foster could benefit from clear guidance about the risks and gains for their birth children of living with foster children. Currently, the evidence suggests that fostering may help to develop the character of birth children, and they may become more empathic and mature. However, they could be impacted more negatively from sharing their parents and home with foster children. Parents that understand the risks and gains for their birth children are able to respond more sensitively to their own children's needs. In addition, a few independent agencies and local authority fostering providers have piloted the use of birth children support groups which has had some success. It is important that birth children have these kinds of opportunities to express their own concerns and feelings regarding fostering.

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Part 2: Empirical Paper

Living with foster siblings:

The adjustment of adolescent sons and daughters in

families who foster

Abstract

Research suggests that living with foster children can affect the sons and daughters in families who foster in both positive and negative ways. This qualitative study uses Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore 15 adolescent sons' and daughters' experiences of living with foster siblings. The adolescents reported adapting to foster children joining their families and this ultimately became a normative part of their experience of family life. They learnt to prioritise foster siblings' needs and manage any of their own conflicting feelings rationally and without confrontation. However, some of the adolescents said that fostering affected their relationship with parents as they seemed to have less time together and were sometimes treated differently to foster siblings. They also seemed to assume parental roles in relation to foster children. Directions for future research are discussed, and clinical implications are considered, such as the need for psycho-education resources and forums for sons and daughters to talk about their feelings related to fostering.

Living with foster children affects everyone in the household, including sons and daughters of foster carers (Martin, 1993). Children in families that foster must welcome foster siblings in to their established family, who then stay for varied and often undetermined periods of time. Foster children have experienced a range of adversities including abuse, neglect and separation and therefore are at increased risk of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Bolger & Patterson, 2003). These experiences can affect foster children's ability to form close attachments with their new (and temporary) family members (Quinton, Rushton, Dance & Mayes, 1998). For sons and daughters of foster parents this often means trying to respond more sensitively to foster children's needs, as well as adjusting to the repeated changes in family composition and losses inherent in fostering. Despite the challenges faced by sons and daughters in families who foster, research has frequently overlooked their process of adjustment. In this context, the adjustment process refers to birth children's thoughts, feelings and behaviour as they attempt to manage the challenges related to their changing family environment.

Although research in this area is relatively sparse, there have been a number of qualitative and mixed design studies looking at the experiences of 'birth children' in families who foster. These children are sometimes referred to in the literature as 'birth children' or simply as 'sons and daughters'. In this paper, these terms are used interchangeably. The studies are mostly based on parent report, and children's ages are frequently not specified or span wide age ranges (e.g. 7- 24 years). One of the more robust studies based on parent report suggests that

about two thirds of birth children (whose ages are not specified) have adjustment difficulties in the year after a foster child has entered their home (Rushton, Dance, Quinton & Mayes, 2001). In the same study, parents reported that 17% of their children's behaviour had deteriorated, 13% became less open and affectionate and 8% of birth children had academic difficulties. However, parents attributed changes to their children being adolescents, as well as the effects of fostering. Research outlined below provides some evidence that fostering has an impact on birth children's individual adjustment and their relationships with parents and foster siblings.

Several studies have examined the effect of fostering on birth children's individual adjustment, including how they manage their emotions. Kaplan (1988) interviewed 15 mothers and their children aged six to twelve years, finding that the age of birth children affected their strategies for managing emotions. More than half of the six to eight year olds rejected reasons given by their parents as to why children were fostered. Instead they believed that children were fostered because they were unloved or bad, which resulted in their own separation anxiety, feeling that they too might be abandoned if they were naughty. According to the author's own conclusions, nine to twelve year olds were empathic and mature, more often internalising any guilt regarding negative feelings rather than directly expressing these.

Kaplan's findings (1988) are consistent with conclusions from two other qualitative studies, where children were seen to 'mask their own feelings' and

put others' needs first (Martin, 1993; Twigg, 1994). Moreover, in two additional studies, parents described their birth children as understanding and emotionally mature (Hojer, 2004; Pugh, 1996). However, parents in these studies also expressed concerns that their children had acquired too much insight into human problems, which in a few cases negatively affected children's psychological well-being. Consequently, the above findings have been interpreted as showing that, as a result of living in families with foster children, some birth children could 'lose their innocence' and 'grow-up prematurely' (Martin, 1993; Pugh, 1996). In summary, these studies suggest that fostering can affect the adjustment of birth children by helping them to become more understanding and aware of others, but as a result children might subjugate their own needs and grow up too fast. However, the studies discussed have not clarified how conclusions were reached and seem predominantly based on authors' interpretations of qualitative data in the absence of rigorous methodology.

The adjustment of birth children is also considered in terms of the impact that fostering has on the relationship with their parents. A number of studies suggest that birth children receive less parental attention and are sometimes treated differently to foster children. In one qualitative study, birth children aged above 15 years described 'losing' parental time, attention and family closeness when living with foster siblings (Twigg, 1994). Similarly, in a large mixed design study based on parent reports, fathers said their own children felt invisible to them at times and 24% of parents said they felt guilty about neglecting their sons or

daughters (Hojer, 2004).   In a study by Tristeliotis, Borland and Hill (2000) foster parents reported being stricter with their own children and having higher · expectations of them, for example that they would share unselfishly, act obediently and forgive quickly.   From the perspective of the birth child, an interview study showed that some birth children felt resentful about being treated differently, and one child said they would get "grounded for the rest of their life" if they acted similar to foster siblings (Spears & Cross, 2003).   In summary, the findings described above are generally consistent.   However, despite children's age being an important factor which affects the parent-child relationship, most of the studies either omitted the age of birth children or the sample spanned wide age ranges.

Finally, a number of studies have investigated the quality of the sibling relationship between birth children and foster children; the findings from these studies are mixed.   In one study, 52% of parents felt positive feelings were developing between the new siblings after three months of living together, and after a year the relationship had improved for 17% and deteriorated for 8% (Rushton et al., 2001).   In other studies, parents described the foster sibling relationship as cool and distant, rarely conflicted and characterised by low levels of rivalry (Hojer, 2004; Sinclair, 2005).   Two studies from the perspective of birth children suggest that coping with the behaviour of their foster sibling was one of the most demanding aspects of fostering (Pugh, 1996; Spears & Cross, 2003). However, in one of these studies children also reported becoming companions and assuming supportive roles in relation to foster siblings (Pugh, 1996).   In

another study, parents pointed out that children who had developed close relationships with foster siblings sometimes found their departure distressing. Parents likened this to a 'death in the family' (Tristeliotis et al., 2000). Therefore, a mixed picture emerges in regard to the relationship between birth children and foster children, with some foster siblings appearing to form close relationships and others remaining more distant.

Overall, studies on the experiences of birth children have fairly consistent findings. The larger studies that combine quantitative and qualitative methodology are the most robust, but these are from the perspective of parents and the exploration of sons' and daughters' experiences is a secondary focus. Several studies report that findings differ according to the person responding as parent reports may be characterised by certain biases; these include, minimising their child's concerns and assuming greater maturity from them (Hojer, 2004; Kaplan, 1988; Tristeliotis et al., 2000).

The few studies where birth children are included in part of the sample are qualitative. However, most of these studies have not specified their qualitative approach or data analysis procedures, and they have not followed guidelines for good practice in conducting qualitative research (e.g. Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). As a result, the evidence should be considered carefully and not assumed to be conclusive. In addition they have mainly been carried out within the social work field, and they lack conceptual frameworks underpinned by relevant psychological theories. Finally, most of the studies focus on a wide age

group and do not examine children's experiences in relation to their developmental stage such as adolescence.

In light of these limitations, it may be helpful to consider evidence on the adjustment of children in other reconstituted family situations that have been more rigorously researched, such as the step family context. Findings from step family literature can highlight the challenges to adjustment faced by adolescents as a result of fundamental changes in family structure. Research has consistently found that adolescents in step families are at higher risk of adjustment difficulties including psychological, social, behavioural and school problems (Amato, 2001). Reduced authoritative parenting (warm but firm) and differential treatment of siblings are more apparent in remarried families, and are linked with poorer psychological adjustment (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). Evidence from the step family literature indicates that change in family organisation can have an impact on adolescents' adjustment. As a result, it seems pertinent to consider the effect of family changes on the adjustment of adolescent sons and daughters in families who foster.

The current study aims to explore the subjective accounts of adolescent sons and daughters in families who foster. Despite the methodological limitations of previous research, studies have demonstrated the significant benefit of eliciting birth children's views in helping to understand how they adjust to living in families who foster. Evidence indicates that birth children face challenges and dilemmas in relation to living with foster siblings. The present study uses

qualitative methods because they are particularly suited to understanding individuals' complex experiences and feelings. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003) was chosen because it is a systematic and practical approach to understanding the meanings held by individuals towards specific events and experiences. This approach involves describing and interpreting experiences that have personal significance for participants, allowing the researcher to gain an "insider's perspective" (Conrad, 1987).

As mentioned, previous studies have tended to include children spanning a range of ages, and studies on adolescents are particularly sparse. The present study focused on adolescents because this developmental stage requires the negotiation of changes in family relationships and development of identity, which may be affected by living with foster siblings. Adolescents also have well developed abstract reasoning abilities, which would enable them to make some sense of their fostering experiences, and have some insight into their feelings towards foster siblings and other family members (Kaplan, 1988). The study addressed the following research questions:

1) How do adolescents' experience their relationships with foster siblings?

2) What are adolescents' perceptions of the effect of fostering on them and their family relationships?

3) What feelings do adolescents experience in relation to living with foster siblings and how are these managed?

Method

Ethics

Ethical approval was given by the UCL Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1 for approval letter).

Participants

Eligibility Criteria

Adolescent sons and daughters in families who foster were eligible for the study if: (1) they were aged between 12 to 16 years old, (2) their families were currently fostering or had been fostering in the last four months, which was seen as a time period close enough to their experience of living with foster children for them to report accurately (3) and their families had fostered for at least two months in total. An initial criterion that families had fostered for at least a year was reduced to two months due to difficulties in recruitment, and this was seen as a long enough time period for adolescents to experience some beneficial and challenging parts of living with foster children. Families that specialised in treatment, group or respite fostering or who fostered specific groups such as individuals with learning disabilities were excluded. If there was more than one child in a family who met the age criterion, only the oldest child was invited to participate. This was because the older siblings generally had advanced abstract reasoning abilities and they seemed more able to reflect on their fostering experiences.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through independent fostering agencies in London and surrounding boroughs. Only recruiting participants from fostering agencies meant that their families had similar training experiences and levels of support, providing a more homogenous sample as recommended for qualitative studies. Contact details for over 50 agencies were obtained through the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) website. Thirty of these agencies that fitted the research criteria were contacted by phone or email. Initially managers from 12 of the agencies expressed an interest and agreed to help with recruitment, but only six of these were able to provide interested participants who fitted the research criteria. Foster agencies identified 34 families who fitted the research criteria and social workers in the agency gave the parent and potential participant in each of these families an information sheet about the study (see Appendix 3 for participant and parent information sheets). Of the 34 families, 17 expressed an interest in the study and consented for the researcher to contact them. Subsequently, one participant decided not to participate and two participants were excluded because they did not fit the research criteria. As there was less interest than anticipated by the fostering agencies, one additional participant was recruited by 'word of mouth'; in this instance the family was contacted directly by the researcher because the family had stopped fostering a few months before.

Description of Participants

Seven boys and eight girls participated. Their average age was 14 years

(range: 12 to 16 years). Their ethnic background was: 10 White British, 2 White

Turkish, 1 Asian, 1 African Caribbean and 1 mixed White British and African

Caribbean. The family constellations included 13 two-parent and two single

mother families. Seven participants had one birth sibling, another seven had

two birth siblings and one had more than two. Nine participants were the

youngest birth sibling, three were the middle and three were the oldest sibling.

Families had fostered from two months to eleven years with an average of 4.5

years. The participants ranged in age from five to fourteen when their families

first started fostering (mean age: 9.7 years). Since starting fostering, between

one and fifteen foster children had lived with each family at different times. The

placements varied considerably in length, from one week to six years; 11 of the

15 families had children staying with them at the time of being interviewed.

Table 1 provides details on each participant.

Procedures

Parents discussed the study with their adolescent sons and daughters; both the

adolescent and their parent had to agree to participate in the study. Consent

forms were completed by adolescents and their parents for participation and

recording of the interview (see Appendix 4 for participant and parent consent

forms). Interviews with adolescent participants took place at their homes and

Table 1: *Description of participants*

Participant	Gender	Age in years	Time since started fostering	Number of children fostered	Principal foster child: [a] Age and length of their foster placement
1	Boy	12	6 years	10	Girl (aged: 9 yrs) for 2 yrs [b]
2	Girl	14	7 years	6	Boy (aged:13 yrs) for 6 yrs
3	Boy	15	18 months	8	Boy (aged:14 yrs) for 6 months
4	Boy	14	3 years	3	2 sisters (aged: 7 and 11 yrs) for 3 yrs
5	Girl	15	11 years	15	Girl (aged: 15 yrs) for 1 year; Boy (aged:10 yrs) for 5 yrs [b]
6	Girl	14	5 years	4	Girl (aged:10 yrs) for 2 yrs
7	Girl	14	1 year	2	Girl (aged:15 yrs) for 1 month [b]
8	Girl	16	11 years	15	Girl (aged: 15 yrs) for 1 year; girl (aged: 18 months) for 18 months [b]
9	Boy	16	4 years	13	Sister (aged: 4), brother (7) for 3 yrs
10	Boy	13	5 years	5	Girl (aged: 15 yrs) for 2 yrs
11	Boy	14	3 years	2	Girl (aged: 10 months) for 1 year
12	Girl	12	5 years	2	Girl (aged: 17yrs) for 5 yrs
13	Boy	15	2 years	9	Boy (aged: 16) for 18 months
14	Girl	15	18 months	2	Boy (aged: 13 yrs) for 1 yr
15	Girl	13	3 months	1	Boy (aged: 15 yrs) for 3 months

[a] The main foster child or children referred to in the interview.

[b] Foster child not currently living there

they received a £10 voucher for their involvement. Parents completed a form with information about the family's demographics and current and historical foster placements (see Appendix 5 for family demographic form).

Interview

Each adolescent took part in a semi-structured interview, which took place in a private room in their home. The interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour and was tape recorded. A semi-structured interview protocol was constructed in order to elicit the participants' personal accounts of their relationship with their foster siblings, other family relationships and strategies for managing feelings related to living with foster siblings (see Appendix 6 for interview protocol).

It was anticipated that some adolescents might hold back when being interviewed and give limited responses, whilst others might talk openly about their experiences. It was hoped that following their lead and asking both open ended and closed questions would help them feel more comfortable (Poland & Groze, 1993; Rowe, Hundleby & Keane, 1984). In line with recommendations for conducting qualitative interviews, more personal questions were addressed later in the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Family change is a sensitive topic and so it was necessary to balance encouraging elaboration whilst not pushing participants beyond what was comfortable (Amato & Ochiltree, 1987). All of the participants engaged well when interviewed and spoke articulately about their experiences. At the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity

to reflect on the interview process and to raise any additional issues. Most reported finding the interview interesting and helpful.

Data Analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), in accordance with the procedures described by Smith and Osborn (2003). Initially transcripts were read and re-read enabling the researcher to become "immersed in the data" and identify ideas about the participant's experiences. Ideas that were expressed were summarised or interpreted if in a more implicit form. The set of ideas identified were then transformed into a tentative set of categories, or themes that conveyed significant personal meaning for each participant.

The lists of themes identified were reviewed and connections were made across the transcripts to develop a conceptual framework. These were organised into a hierarchical structure of super-ordinate themes, each consisting of several themes. It was necessary to continually review the raw data to ensure that the emergent super-ordinate themes and underlying themes were a good representation of the participants' accounts. Appendix 7 shows each stage in the process of identifying themes from the original transcripts.

Validity

Principles for evaluating qualitative research outlined by Elliott et al. (1999) were followed in order to enhance the validity of the findings. A colleague training in

clinical psychology initially analysed two transcripts and identified themes, following which she and the researcher compared and discussed the themes they had each identified.   They agreed that the themes identified from these two transcripts reflected what the participants said.   In addition, two senior researchers familiar with IPA independently audited parts of the data by checking that themes corresponded with the raw data.

The Researcher's Perspective

A researcher's perspective inevitably influences the nature of qualitative data collected and the way it is analysed and therefore it is important that the researcher is explicit about any prior beliefs (Elliott et al., 1999). I have a view that different experiences and perspectives are equally valid which influenced my decision to undertake research using qualitative methodology. It is important to note that my parents-in-law were previously foster carers and their children on the whole had a positive experience.   Therefore, I anticipated that the adolescents in this study might be well adjusted, but suspected that some aspects of their experience may have been more difficult. However despite this bias I attempted to maintain a non-judgmental and curious position throughout.

Results

The analysis generated twelve themes, organised into four super-ordinate themes: adjusting to a new normality, working out the relationship, putting others' needs first and managing feelings (see Table 2). These super-ordinate

themes reflect the process through which participants seemed to progress when adjusting to living with foster siblings. Adolescents had to get used to foster children coming and going, and work out the nature of their relationship accordingly. They learnt to put foster children's needs first and then manage any of their own conflicting feelings. Themes are presented in the order shown within Table 2. Each of the themes is described below, with quotations to illuminate their accounts. Participants are referred to interchangeably as adolescents or sons and daughters.

Table 2: List of themes

Super-ordinate Themes	Themes
I. Adjusting to a new normality	1 Who is this stranger?
	2 Getting used to it
	3 Comings and goings
II. Working out the relationship	4 Sort of part of the family
	5 Being parental
	6 How close can we get?
III. Putting others' needs first	7 I am not the one that needs attention
	8 Helping makes me feel good too
	9 But what about me?
IV. Managing feelings	10 Conflicting feelings
	11 Avoiding confrontation
	12 Becoming grown-up

I. Super-ordinate Theme: Adjusting to a new normality

Participants adjusted to being in a family that fosters, to the extent that it became their new normality. Initially, adolescents wondered who this 'stranger' was in their home. They soon got used to foster children joining their families, and having siblings 'coming and going' became a normal aspect of family life.

Theme 1: Who is this stranger?

Foster children were initially seen as 'strangers' by adolescent sons and daughters. Adolescents had mixed feelings about these 'strangers' joining their established families, including fear, anxiety and excitement. They expressed concerns about their vulnerability when living with children they did not know, particularly regarding their physical security.

> *You don't know who they are, what they have done or where they have come from. (P13)*

> *One of the social workers said "Oh be a bit careful with some of them". I was a bit worried about sleeping, like if one of them would come in my room or something. (P3)*

Participants also described the threat that foster children posed to their emotional security. The comments below show adolescents' fears about becoming 'invisible' to parents or being 'swapped'.

> *I was a bit scared that she might take over and I might be a bit invisible. (P12)*

> *I think I felt a bit threatened or something and a bit frightened cos I thought that they were like swapping me with them. (P1)*

Adolescents described initially feeling uncomfortable, as well as excited, about getting to know the new residents. Factors such as the age of the foster child or

the language they spoke seemed to influence how comfortable the sons and

daughters felt.

> *Like when they first come you feel a bit uncomfortable cos you don't know what to say to some of them. (P6)*

> *I was excited that she was there... All of us were really, really excited to get to know her and that. (P11)*

Theme 2: Getting used to it

Adolescents gradually got used to their new family situation and it then became

'normal' for them. They adjusted to sharing their parents, sharing bedrooms

with their birth siblings, and living with foster siblings of a different gender for the

first time. This was often difficult at first but it soon became 'normal'.

> *You have to consider that there is another person in the family now so like you don't have your mum all to yourself you have to share your mum....it's fine really. She is everyone's not just mine. (P12)*

> *It was kind of difficult adapting to him, having him here, like a boy. And I had to start sharing a room with my younger sister, which was different. (P14)*

Getting used to living with foster siblings occurred naturally over time for some

participants. Other participants were more pro-active, for example in helping

foster children feel comfortable, they also adjusted and felt more relaxed about

their new living arrangement.

> *Cos like the first week I didn't really want him being here and I was like...'isn't he going back and my mum goes 'no no he's staying a while' and I was a bit annoyed but I don't mind him living here now. (P15)*

> *You remember that it is them that are probably more scared than you are. Then you like try to get to know them a bit more. And then when you know them, you are quite more open as well with them and the same the other way round. (P1)*

Having foster children in the home was such a normal part of life for some families, that it was difficult for some adolescents to recall their adjustment process. Even something new occurring, such as fostering babies, soon became the 'norm' again.

> They are just there. Like you are watching TV and they walk past. It's not good or it's not bad, it's just normal. You are sitting down and they are eating dinner with you. It's just like normal life. (P10)

> For me it was the norm but if it's something new like the babies coming. It was quite like ooh this is different. Obviously when we had had 4 of them it became the norm again. It has just been a normal part of my life. (P8)

Theme 3: Comings and goings

Participants had to adjust to foster siblings joining their families, as well as them leaving. Foster children continually 'coming and going' became a normal and accepted process. Participants often had ambivalent feelings; for example one adolescent felt frustrated when children kept coming and then going but also perturbed when children stayed for too long.

> There is always another one coming and going, coming and going innit...You can't do anything about it. It's like bye, hello, bye. (P13)

> You either really like that kid or you don't and they keep going or coming and it's like are we ever going to just stick with two, or stick with one....But then when one stays you are like oh when does this one go. You get used to it and you are like I want another one to come now. So it's really strange. (P3)

Some participants felt relieved when foster children left because they had more "space" again. They were particularly relieved when the foster sibling relationship had been difficult.

> To be honest I wasn't crying about it or anything....But it was a bit relieving as well 'cos they had been there that long and finally you have got more space and stuff to just chill or whatever. (P9)

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> *When E went I felt Oh God she's gone, I can go back to my life and that and I thought I hope the other kids aren't gonna be like this. (P7)*

Participants described how they had to "move on" when foster children left because this was an inevitable part of fostering. They often seemed to forget names and details about foster siblings after they had left. In fact one adolescent could not remember who was currently living there and another actively chose to forget about previous foster siblings.

> *You just have to move on really. (P11)*

> *I just completely forgot about them. I still remember them but I don't think about them what so ever unless I have to. (P10)*

II. Super-ordinate Theme: Working out the relationship

Adolescents had to work out the nature of their temporary sibling relationship. They described foster children as 'sort of part of the family' and often assumed a more parental role with foster siblings. Participants were aware of the limitations on how close they could become, both because of their differences and their inevitable goodbye.

Theme 4: Sort of part of the family

Participants appeared to grapple with the issue about whether foster children were part of their family. Several adolescents described a close relationship and genuinely accepted foster siblings as part of their family. One adolescent told friends that her foster brother was born as a result of her mother having an affair because she was so keen for him to be viewed as part of the family.

> *Like we couldn't be closer if we was blood related- we couldn't...........*

I just say my Mum had some fling with another man but she is back with my Dad now. It's kind of confusing cos like you can't say that's J's dad cos
he's Turkish and J is English so it's kind of confusing. (P2)

Foster siblings felt more like real siblings when they had been part of the family for a long time. However, even then participants discussed the reality that foster children were not "really, really part of the family", but only "slightly part" of the family. They also said foster siblings did not entirely "belong there".

It's just like having a sister around but you know that she is not really, really part of the family but because she has been here so long she is really part of the family. (P12)

We had G when I already knew what was going on and why we had them so they would never feel fully part of the family. They always feel like they are part of it, or a slight part of it but they will never be fully part of your family or your parents' daughter. (P10)

Theme 5: Being parental

A parental role was often taken by adolescent sons and daughters in relation to their foster siblings. This was reflected in the way they looked after foster siblings and also in their parental attitude towards them. Adolescents discussed helping care for foster children to protect their parents from the strain of fostering.

I used to dress them in the morning and just played with them and keep them from getting in my mum's hair...I help my parents out more so they don't get tired or over-worked. (P1)

So me and my cousin said 'well come on we will take you out' to give my Mum a break because my Mum was strained and that. (P7)

Foster children were often referred to as if they were the participants' own children. Participants appeared to see themselves as adults and foster siblings (whatever their age) as 'children'. In talking about their foster siblings, they

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sometimes seemed to overlook the fact that they themselves were actually children.

> She is our foster daughter. (P12)

> Children I think are a reward on their own. (P8)

Theme 6: How close can we get?

Adolescents were wary about how close they should get to foster siblings. The relationship was described as more distant and cautious compared to that with birth siblings, largely because of its temporary nature. Their interaction was affected by the limited time they had known each other and awareness that foster siblings could leave at an undetermined time in the future.

> With my sister you can talk like more openly and with all the other foster siblings it's not so chatty with them. You don't feel that close. (P6)

> I do things whatever I want around my brother and sister and I don't really feel I can do it around M. I say different things. (P15)

Participants noted that conflict had to be handled differently in this relationship, and they had to be more serious and resist teasing foster siblings. They expressed concerns about 'getting in trouble' with social workers and fear of allegations being made against them by foster siblings if they acted more playfully or aggressively. Social workers had also told them that joking with foster children might trigger emotional reactions related to their past. At times, adolescents felt this was unfair as foster siblings could 'speak more freely' and yet they were unable to tease them back.

> If me and my brother have a fight, we sort of hit each other sometimes and my dad breaks it up, but if I have a fight with; well I can't exactly have a fight with my foster brother, cos you get in trouble for things like that. (P3)

> *They said to me you are not to tease them because they come with emotional problems......You could be saying something that could hurt them on a deeper level. (P5)*

Adolescents were also cautious about the closeness of their relationship because of foster siblings' imminent departure. When participants did form caring and intimate relationships they felt sad and 'traumatised' when foster siblings left. Participant 2 likened this to losing a sister. To avoid this pain, families tried to maintain some distance, for example not allowing foster siblings to use the word 'dad'. However, one participant described this situation as "catch 22", because if you get attached it hurts when they leave but if you don't get close you feel guilty about treating them differently.

> *I just think my Dad doesn't want L to call him Dad so she doesn't get as close probably. So if they did have to leave it wouldn't be as bad. (P9)*

> *You either grow attached and it hurts, or you don't grow attached and you feel guilty. I think it's a lot nicer to have treated them as your own rather than send them out to the world thinking that they are different because I think the price of guilt would be too much. (P8)*

III. Super-ordinate Theme: Putting others' needs first

Adolescents and their parents tended to put foster children's needs first. Participants understood that they were not the ones that needed attention and found that by helping others they felt good too. However, at times they wanted more parental attention and for their needs to be considered more.

Theme 7: I am not the one that needs attention

Sons and daughters were understanding about foster children's backgrounds and often felt they should put foster siblings' needs above their own. Adolescents empathised that siblings were in a harder position than them. A

twelve year old participant stated that growing older helped him accept that his

needs were less pressing and that foster children need more attention.

> I feel more on their side...it must be really hard moving around quite a lot
> and having to get used to new surroundings. They have had a harder
> time as well and I haven't, I have never had to move around. (P4)

> ....as I got older and more mature I was like yeah it's alright...I thought I
> am not the one that needed it (attention). (P1)

Sons and daughters demonstrated understanding towards foster children,

despite at times being the target of hostility and aggression. This level of

understanding shown by most of the participants reveals their own sense of

security and maturity.

> I could understand how upset and frustrated you would be that you would
> take it out on someone. So I can't really hold it against him. (P5)

> I have realised how tough it is for other kids who aint got like lives. And I
> know how much loved I am and that. (P7)

Theme 8: It makes me feel good too

Participants said that helping others was one of the best parts of fostering and

this had a positive impact on them as well. Helping others made them feel good

about themselves because it felt meaningful and also others' reactions boosted

their confidence. Adolescents described making a difference in the lives of

children who had experienced adversities. Identifying with a 'helper' role

seemed to positively influence the way they saw themselves.

> Well the best parts are knowing that you are doing something good. You
> are helping people who have had a rough background. (P4)

> It makes you feel quite good that you are helping other people as well.
> (P1)

The encouraging reactions of friends and their parents also made them feel good. This seemed to build their self esteem and cultivate feelings of pride about their family's helping role.

> ...my friend she came into school the next day and said my Mum and Dad think your parents are really good. That was quite a boost as well, and it made me want to do something just as good. (P8)

> It's pretty cool, because like when my friends come over and stuff and they go like 'who's this' and I'm like 'oh like my foster brother' and they are like 'oh wow your Mum fosters and stuff'. So you get quite a lot out of it. (P14)

Theme 9: But what about me?

Participants were not always able, or even willing, to subjugate their own feelings and needs as described in theme seven. In these instances, adolescents had feelings of resentment at being unfairly treated or left out. They spoke about foster siblings constantly getting their mother's attention instead of them, to the point that they could not speak to their parents alone. As a result they felt pushed out, which on occasions caused problems between adolescents and their parents. One participant noted particular difficulties in the relationship with his mother, who compared him unfavourably with foster children who had recently arrived. He described feeling rejected but resigned to this.

> Well when he first came he kind of stuck with Mum a lot. He was kind of with Mum all the time so we couldn't really talk to her and stuff without him being there, so it was different then because he was kind of taking our Mum. (P14)

> She keeps coming up with a new boy and saying why can't you be more like this. And I'm like who's that and she's like oh he come the other day. And I'm like how can you compare me to someone who come the other day? (P13)

Several participants described parents treating them differently to foster siblings. Parents were reported to interact more gently with foster children, including not shouting at them and being more forgiving of their mistakes. Several participants stated that differential treatment occurred because of the specific training and instructions provided by the foster agency. Adolescents reported that parents were not allowed to shout at foster children, even though they would do this to any "normal child".

> *Like M might say something to my mum and she just laughs or something like that. But if I come out with something like that she would be all like 'uhhhhuhh' or shout at me and like say 'don't say that' or whatever. (P15)*

> *..You aren't allowed to shout at them. You have to like discuss things and if they say I don't want to then you have to be like ok fine. But with children, like I dunno, how you would any normal child you would tell them off and stuff. (P5)*

Privileges were also seen to differ, with foster children being allowed to do more activities and get 'away with more'. In some instances participants found it difficult to manage feelings about the discrepancy in material privileges. Although other participants said they also benefited from fostering, getting higher pocket money and their own bedroom.

> *She was the same age as me, but instead she was allowed to sometimes stay out late....and even if she had done something naughty during the week she could still have her pocket money, cos you have to give it to her but if I like didn't do my chores or something I couldn't get mine. (P3)*

> *My mum used to spend a lot of money on A and like nothing on me. So that was hard cos she would be coming home with all this stuff and she would be like look what I got. (P5)*

IV. Super-ordinate Theme: Managing feelings

At times, adolescents had conflicting feelings associated with being in a family that fosters. These were frequently handled by avoiding confrontation with foster siblings and consequently managing any difficult feelings on their own. Fostering seemed to help adolescents become more grown up.

Theme 10: Conflicting feelings

Participants expressed conflicting feelings about fostering generally, specific foster children, and comparisons between them and foster siblings. One adolescent described his ambivalent feelings towards fostering. He reported telling friends that he hated fostering, concerned that he would be viewed as "soft and nice" if seen to like living with foster siblings.

> *I would probably say that I hate fostering. But I know that I don't hate it. I don't know why but I just say that because you just think to yourself if I say that it's good they will probably ask loads more questions and think to yourself you are really soft and nice. (P10)*

Adolescents also had conflicting feelings about specific foster children. They felt guilty about having resentment towards foster siblings and wanting their 'Mum and Dad back'. Sons and daughters noted that foster siblings could not help it and participants felt they should have been more understanding. Conflicting feelings were often intensified when adolescents were victims of their foster siblings' aggressive or manipulative behaviour. In these circumstances, the intensity of adolescents' own distress seemed to be in conflict with their desire to understand and not cause problems within the family. As a result, one participant did not tell anyone for a couple of years about her difficulties of living with a foster sibling, despite feeling "emotionally and physically down".

It can get you physically and emotionally down to the point where like you feel like you can't wake up and bothered to go out of the room and deal with that day in and day out..... But I think its only like a couple of years ago when like I finally said you don't understand how hard it is just to share your parents as well as have to help and deal with their problems. (P5)

Participants experienced other conflict including feeling 'more special' to their parents compared to foster children but then feeling guilty about this. Another participant discussed having a "better life" than foster children, which meant he felt happy about having a "nice family" but bad that they did not.

I feel like....mmmm....I'm just more.....I can't really explain this...there is not really a way of making this sound very good.....I feel more special....it doesn't sound very nice, does it? It makes it sound like they aren't very special. (P4)

It makes me feel a little bit bad but it makes me feel nice cos it must mean I have got a nice family. And they have got bad luck and that makes me feel bad. (P3)

Theme 11: Avoiding confrontation

Sons and daughters of foster carers saw it as essential that they got along with foster children all of the time and that arguments and tensions in the house were avoided. Many of the participants discussed preferring to manage conflict or uncomfortable feelings by retreating and dealing with these feelings on their own.

You don't want to argue as well because that would upset everything. You just get along with them all the time. (P9)

I used to think to myself right I will take myself out of the room. I will go and do something outside or I will go and play with my dogs and sit on the grass with them for a while. Or I would go upstairs and clean my room. (P7)

Various reasons were given for the need to avoid confrontation, some of which were described in theme six. One participant was concerned that confrontation might cause 'something unfixable' or make a 'bad situation worse'. Participants also expressed their concern about foster children's volatile reactions and were keen to stay on their 'good side'.

> *I just went to my room or went round a friend's house and I just kept to myself because I didn't want to cause something that would be unfixable. (P8)*

> *I don't want to like upset him or anything so I try to just stick to the good side of him instead of like getting on his nerves and pestering him cos I don't want to be at the bad end of one of his tempers you know. (P14)*

Theme 12: Becoming grown up

Participants showed signs of being more grown up as a result of their fostering experiences. They became more socially and self aware, as well as more autonomous. Adolescents described being more understanding of people and the hardships they face, making them less judgemental. This made them look at their own life differently and appreciate their family more.

> *I would say it has made me view the world with open eyes and not just look, not to judge a book by its cover. (P1)*

> *It's made me look in a different way to life knowing that other people are not like rejected from their families but they kind of can't be there anymore. (P14)*

Adolescents also developed a sense of who they were through living with foster siblings. Participants seemed to identify with the 'helper' role and reported an aspiration to help others in the future on account of their fostering experiences. They reported wanting to pursue caring careers such as becoming a doctor, and to foster or adopt children themselves.

It helps you a lot with your own life. With your personality, it makes you more aware of stuff and who I am. (P6)

Because I never before really sort of cared. I will be quite honest I didn't but now when I am older I want to adopt a child. (P14)

Participants described themselves as more autonomous and independent. One participant felt better able to make decisions for herself regarding leaving home, having observed foster children making choices about where they should live. Adolescents also discussed being more independent and participant eight joked that she had "raised herself". Another participant said his mother monitored him less since she started fostering. He had mixed feelings about this, as he enjoyed having more freedom with friends but resented having less time with his mother.

I feel like I can make a decision for me not for my family as much as like my Mum wants to keep me here, it's like my future and my choice to make. With fostering you understand a lot more that like some of the children chose to run away and got home by doing that so even if you are making a decision on your own even if it could come out for worse it is worth it. (P5)

Before she fostered she used to ring me all the time: 'Where are you, where are you, come home' but now she is with them they take up a lot of her time. She will ring me late 'Where are you, come home now'. One call during the holiday.... Can be good, can be bad at the same time. (P13)

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the adjustment of adolescent sons and daughters in families who foster. Overall, the results suggest that living with foster siblings affected adolescents' individual adjustment and their relationships with their parents and foster siblings, which is consistent with previous findings.

Adolescents seemed to adapt quickly to foster children joining their families and this ultimately became a normative part of their experience of family life. They exhibited advanced maturity, seemed to put foster siblings' needs above their own and tended to respond to conflicting feelings by avoiding confrontation and rationalising their emotions. These sons and daughters also felt that fostering affected their relationship with their parents as they seemed to spend less time together and were sometimes treated differently to foster siblings. The results suggest that the relationship adolescents had with foster children also affected their adjustment, in regard to the parental role they assumed and having to contend with issues of attachment and loss.

Adolescents spoke about getting used to living with foster siblings. At first, they felt concerned about having 'strangers' in their homes and were particularly worried about their physical and emotional security. However their worries seemed to subside quickly, often within the first few weeks, and they accepted the 'comings and goings' of foster siblings as a normal part of family life. This is in contrast with findings from step family literature, which suggests that children have more emotional difficulties immediately after their family reorganisation and typically adjust to this within the following three to five years (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002). However, children in step families have often experienced previous adversities including the break-down of their family, and therefore are already more vulnerable to adjustment difficulties compared to birth children in families who foster.

The responses from adolescents seem to show that fostering increased their emotional maturity, helping them achieve the tasks of adolescence, conceptualised by Erikson (1968) as developing one's identity and autonomy. Adolescents described becoming more sensitive and aware of the problems of others, as well as more reflective regarding their own self concept. They seemed to identify with the notion of being a 'helper' both as an individual and as a family, and also learnt to be less dependent on others. Previous findings also point towards birth children becoming emotionally mature (Hojer, 2004). A similar pattern of psychological growth and maturity can be seen in adolescents that have faced adversities, such as having a sibling with cancer or a sibling who has died (Forward & Garlie, 2003; Kramer, 1984). Negotiating the changes and losses inherent within fostering, as well as hearing about foster siblings' past experiences may have accelerated the 'growing-up' process for adolescent sons and daughters. However, authors in two previous studies concluded that birth children might grow-up too quickly (Martin, 1993; Pugh, 1996).

The adolescents' accounts also suggest that fostering may affect their individual adjustment in terms of the way they respond to other people's needs and manage their own feelings. For instance, adolescents seemed to become more understanding and learnt to put the needs of foster siblings before their own. Consistent with previous studies, participants said that, in prioritising their foster siblings' needs, they also felt good about themselves (Part, 1993; Pugh, 1996). However, at the same time, their responses suggest that sometimes their own needs were neglected and they had negative feelings towards foster siblings.

Adolescents seemed to manage their conflicting feelings arising from this dilemma by avoiding confrontation and rationalising their own feelings by themselves, partly out of concern that conflict might trigger emotional reactions from foster siblings related to their past.

Several previous studies also described birth children 'masking' or 'internalising' their negative feelings about foster siblings and their own unmet needs (Kaplan, 1988; Twigg, 1994). Similarly, research on adolescent siblings of children with disabilities suggests that adolescents may have unexpressed emotions about their siblings with disabilities and about family interaction, and this could lead to feelings of guilt, fear and isolation (Opperman & Alant, 2003). Since adolescents in families who foster have a tendency to avoid confrontation and internalise their feelings regarding their foster siblings, they are also potentially at risk of experiencing guilt and isolation. In addition, there is evidence that inhibited emotional expression when confronting difficult life events can contribute to adjustment difficulties (Ayers, Sandler, Wolchik, & Haine, 2000).

The results also suggest that fostering affected the relationships adolescents had with their parents. Adolescents generally accepted the changes in their family and adapted to sharing their parents with foster siblings. However, on occasion they felt resentful about having less time with parents and sometimes felt pushed out. In addition, they described receiving stricter treatment from parents and having fewer privileges compared to foster siblings. These findings are consistent with previous studies on the relationship between birth children

and their parents (Tristeliotis et al., 2000; Twigg, 1994). Research on factors affecting the adjustment of adolescents suggests that limited parental support and differential treatment of siblings increase the risk of behavioural and emotional problems (Dunn, Deater-Deckard, Pickering, & Golding, 1999; McHale, Updegraff, Jackson-Newsom, Tucker & Crouter, 2000). However, birth children also seem to have protective factors such as authoritative parenting and a secure attachment style, which may moderate challenges to their adjustment.

A recurring theme from the adolescents' accounts was that they often assumed a parental role in relation to foster siblings. In taking a more supportive and responsible role, adolescents seemed to be trying to protect their parents from the strain sometimes endured as a result of fostering. They seemed to identify with their mother and her helping role, and on occasion talked in a 'parental' way about foster children as if they were foster carers themselves. Previous studies have discussed the confusion sons and daughters face regarding their role and as to whether they were parent figures, quasi-carers or siblings (Martin, 1993; Pugh, 1996). Similarly, research on adolescents in step families has found that adolescents sometimes give 'parent-like' support to their younger siblings. One study in the stepfamily field suggests that adolescents giving moderate levels of support to siblings can emerge as more socially competent but adolescents giving excessive support are at higher risk of emotional difficulties (Hetherington, 1999).

Adolescents described their relationship with foster siblings in mixed ways. On the whole, the relationship tended to be distant and rarely conflicted, leading to unemotional and sometimes relieving 'goodbyes' when foster children left. This description is consistent with previous findings (Sinclair, 2005). However, in the current study some adolescents formed close relationships with their foster siblings and in these instances it was more painful when foster children 'moved on' and two participants described this as "traumatic" and like losing their own brother or sister. Comparative findings that a minority of birth children felt distressed when their foster sibling left have been found elsewhere. In a small qualitative study 5% of birth children reported feeling distressed by this (Pugh, 1996) and in a larger quantitative study 10% of carers said that this was like a bereavement for their own children (Tristeliotis et al., 2000). Literature on children who have experienced loss through the death of a sibling or through a divorce, suggests that this profound disruption can affect the relational capacities and expectations of the child (Charles & Charles, 2006; Yagla-Mack, 2001). Birth children who are distressed by the 'loss' of their foster sibling could be affected in similar ways.

Limitations

The conclusions from this study are limited by a number of factors. Firstly, there was a recruitment bias. As the results indicate, most participants appeared relatively well adjusted to living with foster siblings, which may have contributed to their interest in participating. In part, this was influenced by recruitment

strategies employed by foster agencies, as they were less willing to approach families who had experienced fostering difficulties or with whom they had a fragile relationship. Recruiting participants from independent fostering agencies rather than local authorities may in itself have led to a well-adjusted sample of adolescents, since research findings suggest that agencies provide more effective training and twenty-four hour support for families who foster (Sellick & Connolly, 2002).

The sample was heterogeneous in terms of the length of time that families had fostered, and this was more apparent when an initial criterion that families had fostered for at least a year was reduced to two months due to difficulties in recruitment. The length of time and number of foster siblings that adolescents had lived with was likely to affect their experiences; however this could not be examined, given the small sample and the qualitative design. The study was also limited by having only one point in time in which adolescents were interviewed. Since adjustment is affected by time, a longitudinal design would have been better for investigating this construct. However, it was beyond the scope of this study to explore the effect of changes in time on adjustment.

It can be difficult interviewing adolescents, as they sometimes hold back and give limited responses, which can alter the quality and validity of their accounts. Adolescents' responses in the interviews might have been influenced by their relationship with parents and foster siblings; parents, and sometimes foster siblings, were present in a different room within the house at the time of the

interview. Despite the confidentiality of the interviews, adolescents seemed concerned about responding in a way that would upset or be disloyal to their parents or foster siblings. Lastly, the study could have been improved by using additional credibility checks such as testimonial validity procedures (Elliott et al. 1999), where the results are checked by the participants to ensure their views have been fairly represented.

Directions for Future Research

In future studies it would be important to explore the affect that age has on the adjustment of birth children of other age groups such as children in middle childhood or young adults. Employing longitudinal design would help to control for potentially confounding effects of retrospective self-report and further our understanding about the impact of fostering on the adjustment of developing birth children. Such design could be conducted by administering interviews and questionnaires with a large sample of parents and their birth children at multiple time points, for example using measures such as the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBC), Child Depression Inventory (CDI), Sibling Relationship Questionnaire and Sibling Inventory of Differential Treatment. Comparing the adjustment of birth children in families who foster with a control sample, matched for age, socio-economic status and other appropriate variables could improve the validity of the findings.

In addition, a longitudinal design could be used to investigate the long-term effects that fostering has on birth children's strategies for managing difficult feelings. This could be measured through interviews and questionnaires with multiple informants and at various time points, including after birth children have left home. Lastly, the value that adolescents in the current study placed on helping others could be researched further, particularly in terms of how this might affect their future career choice.

Clinical Implications

Living with foster siblings seems to have an impact on the birth child's individual adjustment and on their relationship with parents. At the initial planning stage, fostering services could provide families with psycho-educational resources about the impact that fostering can have on birth children, which might help families to make an informed decision about whether or not they should foster. In addition, psycho-educational input and a forum to discuss the types of issues that birth children often face and what may be seen as "normative" responses could help families to problem-solve and manage future difficulties themselves.

The findings from this study have also highlighted the need to consider birth children's perspective at both the planning stage and at regular points in time throughout the period in which their family fosters. Adolescents in this study tended to hide their own negative feelings in relation to fostering, and deal with these rationally on their own. Opportunities for birth children to discuss their

feelings could help to relieve tension in the house and perhaps reduce the likelihood of them experiencing adjustment difficulties. This could be provided on an individual basis or within a support group format, as already piloted in some fostering services.

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Part 3: Critical Review

Introduction

This paper is a critical reflection on the research undertaken. It consists of four sections: (1) Personal reflections about the research, in terms of how it took shape and then ultimately how it shaped me; (2) Challenges related to the foster care setting, including recruitment and the literature; (3) The development of the interview schedule and interviews with adolescent participants; (4) Methodological issues related to the qualitative approach and the analysis process. Each section focuses on issues that I faced as a researcher.

Personal reflections

Influences on the research topic

In this research, I hoped to explore the following key concepts: adolescence, sibling experience and foster care. I have worked clinically with adolescents in a number of different settings and find the issues they face particularly interesting, such as negotiating their identity and independence. In addition, adolescence is a period of heightened vulnerability to psychological and mental health difficulties (Weiz & Hawley, 2002). As a result, I was keen to situate the context of my enquiry with the developmental stage of adolescence.

Secondly, I was keen to consider issues related to the sibling relationship. Siblings have been largely ignored in research on family relationships, despite the sibling relationship being fundamental in informing one's experiences of self and the world (Charles & Charles, 2006). It is pertinent to explore the sibling relationship further during adolescence, since siblings play a crucial role in

identity development (Bank & Kahn, 1982). I have a particular interest in adolescents who are coping with stress related to having a sibling with difficulties such as an illness or disability. This personal interest arose having had a sibling with cancer during my own adolescence, and seeing the impact this had on family relationships regarding time with parents and differential treatment of siblings.

Finally, I was interested in researching a topic related to foster care. Research suggests that, having experienced a range of adversities, foster children often struggle to form relationships with others, including members of their new foster family (Schofield, 2002). Taking a different stance, I wondered about the impact of living with foster children on the family who fosters and in particular the effect of this experience on birth children. I was more inquisitive having heard about the experiences of being in a family who fosters from my parents-in-law and husband, who fostered for twelve years. On the whole, they reported that fostering had a positive effect on their family.

My interest in adolescence, sibling experience and foster care undoubtedly affected the aim and nature of the research questions, and led to the exploration of adolescents' experiences of living with foster siblings. In conjunction, children in foster families are under-researched and are often an overlooked population. I hoped that my study might help parents and services better understand birth children's feelings and needs and offer them support accordingly. My personal

interest in the research topic helped me stay motivated throughout the research process.

The influence of the research on me

Completing this work has motivated me to pursue a clinical psychology role specialising in adolescents and looked after children (foster care). I have particularly enjoyed finding out more about adolescents' normative development in families and considering family stressors such as remarriage or fostering that can affect their adjustment. From my experience, interviews with adolescents in clinical settings tend to have a more problem centred focus. In comparison, the current research interviews with non-clinical adolescents required a more objective approach that was fundamentally inquisitive, as I had limited expectations regarding the nature of their responses. This helped me to remain curious in regard to challenges and gains that affected participants' adjustment.

The participants came across as articulate and mature, in terms of their responses and approach to the interview. Many of the responses surprised me as they didn't seem to fit with the participants' ages. For example, despite being only twelve years old, a participant said that as he got older and more mature he learnt that his needs were less pressing compared to his foster siblings. Similarly, other adolescents responded maturely and talked about their foster siblings in a parental manner as though they were foster carers themselves. These responses seemed particularly unusual for an adolescent population.

The foster care setting

Challenges in recruitment

Recruiting participants only from independent foster agencies increased sample homogeneity, which is recommended when using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). However, although the first foster agency contacted anticipated that they could provide all the participants for the study, only four adolescents actually participated. A similar theme emerged throughout the study, whereby foster agencies over-estimated both the number of birth children that fitted the eligibility criteria and potential participants' interest in the study. In addition, fostering agencies were sometimes reluctant to approach families who had experienced fostering difficulties or with whom they had a fragile relationship. This recruitment bias meant that adolescents with more positive experiences were more likely to gain the opportunity to participate, and consequently the sample in this study might not be representative of birth children in general.

There were additional complications in terms of recruitment, concerning the consent required before an adolescent could participate and how this was obtained. As mentioned, the foster agency had to firstly agree and encourage families to participate. Since the participants were 16 years or younger, parents also had to consent to their child taking part in the study. The study was dependent on parents passing on information about the study to their children, which in some cases might not have happened. Social workers reported that parents with whom they had a more difficult relationship were less willing for their child to participate. Finally, the adolescents themselves then had to decide

whether or not to participate. Adolescents are known as being difficult to motivate and engage, and as a result a £10 HMV voucher was offered to encourage participation. However, problems in recruiting participants could have occurred at any of the three levels discussed: the foster agency; the parents; or the adolescents themselves.

Liaison and literature in the foster care setting

This research required substantial liaison with social workers and drawing on literature primarily written by social workers. It was important to build strong alliances with the foster agencies as they were the first gateway to accessing participants. As a result, I contacted social work managers by phone, visited their work setting and built a rapport with the team, so that they were comfortable with introducing the study to potential participants. At the same time, I reviewed in depth the literature on birth children in families who foster, which is in the social work field and predominantly descriptive. Consequently, I found that I was thinking more in terms of description rather than trying to elicit underlying psychological phenomena, which initially influenced my own written work. With the help of supervisors, it was necessary to separate myself somewhat from the foster care context and assume a more psychological perspective. This was also imperative as I hoped to produce a more rigorous study that had a firmer methodological and theoretical foundation and enabled the exploration of underlying psychological constructs, rather than a repetition of previous studies.

Interviewing adolescent participants

Developing the interview schedule

A number of factors had to be considered when developing the interview schedule. For instance, it was important that the questions in the schedule were appropriate for the participants' ages and developmental stage. This was challenging since the adolescents ranged in age between 12- 16 years and their maturity and ability to understand questions were likely to differ. Since the adolescent period can vary enormously, the sample of participants was unlikely to be homogenous in terms of development. In addition, many young people experience adolescent 'issues', regarding their identity and independence, well beyond these teenage years. However, it was necessary to restrict the upper limit to 16 years to enhance homogeneity. To further take into account developmental differences, the language in the interview schedule was simplified and avoided jargon so that all respondents could understand.

The interview questions were formulated to elicit participants' views on their relationship with foster siblings, other family relationships and their self concept in conjunction with the research aims. In line with recommendations for conducting qualitative interviews, more general questions were asked first and personal questions were addressed later in the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This is particularly important when interviewing young people about a sensitive topic such as family change (Amato & Ochiltree, 1987). Asking generally about who was in their family and how they would describe each

person, seemed to help participants to feel comfortable, and they were able to disclose more as the interview progressed.

Participants seemed to struggle in responding to questions that aimed to address their self concept and strategies for managing their feelings. In part, this could have been a consequence of their age and because they had not spoken about these issues much before. In addition, questions related to their self concept could have been improved to reflect this construct more effectively. After the first few interviews, I tended to ask participants the following question: 'How would you have been different if you had never lived with foster siblings?' This question seemed to help the participants think about changes to their self concept as a result of fostering, and participants were surprisingly mature and able to articulate clear responses.

The interviews

Having worked clinically with adolescents, I anticipated that some of them might hold back when being interviewed and give limited responses. Rapport and engagement are key issues when interviewing adolescents. Following adolescents' lead, using a mixture of open and closed questions and incorporating humour into the interview seemed to have a positive effect on their engagement (Poland & Groze, 1993; Rowe, Cain, Hundleby & Keane, 1984). However, it is possible that participants would have felt comfortable without these strategies, as the sample were strikingly open and articulate, and their responses reflected a high level of understanding, reflection and maturity. Their

presentation tended to belie their chronological ages and I found myself using language appropriate for an older age group. As previously discussed, these interviews were noticeably different compared to interviews with adolescents in clinical settings. During the interview debrief, most of the adolescents said they had not spoken about their experiences before and remarked that it had been interesting and helpful.

As discussed in Part 2 of the thesis, the adolescents appeared protective of both their parents and foster siblings. This meant the interviews were more challenging as several adolescents were reluctant to talk about any negative feelings they had in relation to family members. As a result, their responses may not reflect the entirety of their feelings. Adolescents who did talk about some of their more negative feelings seemed to feel guilty afterwards and retracted their comments or at least expressed their ambivalence regarding their feelings. It was interesting observing this process and seeing the conflict that participants seemed to contend with. Understandably, this seemed more uncomfortable for participants whose foster siblings or parents were in the next room. This raises the issue as to whether adolescents should have been interviewed in their homes or in a more neutral context. One could argue that interviewing adolescents in their homes made them feel more comfortable and was more convenient, which facilitated recruitment, but it may have hindered their freedom to talk about their relationship with family members.

Qualitative method and analysis

Using a qualitative approach

Previous positive experiences in using qualitative methods influenced my decision to carry out a qualitative study. In addition, I hold the belief that different experiences and perspectives are equally valid and I place value on understanding individuals' experiences, feelings and thoughts. This stance affected my decision to use Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). There have been previous qualitative studies conducted on birth children in families who foster, and so arguably it would have been more helpful to investigate this population using quantitative methods, especially since quantitative studies with large samples of birth children may be needed in order to generalise findings about this population. However, I reasoned that a qualitative method using an established interpretive phenomenological approach and employing credibility checks to enhance the validity would be helpful as this area of research is still novel and under-researched. I hoped that this study would help elucidate previous findings, and generate new ideas and hypotheses for future quantitative studies.

The process of analysis

There were a number of challenges at the analysis stage, including deciding how to organise the data into themes and the compromises about which data to include. There seemed to be several ways in which the data could have been organised, which made me consider the significant influence I had as a researcher, in terms of how the data were interpreted, categorised and

organised. Principles for evaluating qualitative research outlined by Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) were followed in order to enhance the validity of the findings. For instance, two senior researchers audited identified parts of the data, and another colleague analysed two transcripts and agreed that the themes identified by the researcher reflected the accounts of participants. However, I am aware that additional credibility checks that are outlined in Barker, Pistrang and Elliott (2002) could have been employed; including testimonial validity where the results are checked with the original participants, and triangulation where the phenomena is examined from multiple perspectives.

It was a dilemma deciding which data to include in the results, as a number of comments often reflected the main point being demonstrated. The aim was for the researcher to interpret the data and capture phenomena accordingly. This required ruthless compromises so that the reader was not over-saturated by quotations from participants' accounts.   In addition, some interesting issues were lost as relevant data were not sufficient to indicate a theme, or appeared less important than other emerging themes.   For example, a couple of adolescents discussed being possessive with friends and families, and the associated difficulties in saying 'goodbye'; adolescents wondered whether their fostering experiences had influenced the development of these characteristics.

Summary

There have been a number of surprises during this research process. As discussed, I was struck by the articulate and mature presentation of the

participants that tended to belie their chronological age. In addition, I had not anticipated that the research would have a considerable impact on me, in terms of influencing the clinical field I hope to specialise in. There have also been various challenges in conducting this research. The foster care setting was a novel environment for me and recruitment was more difficult than initially expected. Finally, having previous experience in using qualitative methods was helpful, although the analysis process seemed more demanding in this project, perhaps because of the size of the sample. In conclusion, conducting this study has been rewarding, challenging, and certainly an educational experience.

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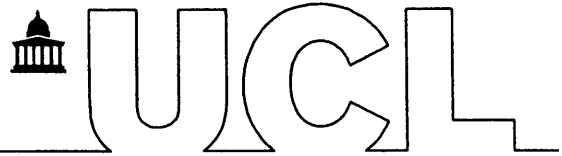
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Appendix 1

Ethical approval:

University College London (UCL)

UCL GRADUATE SCHOOL

Dr Nancy Pistrang
Sub-Department of Clinical Health Psychology
UCL

13 June 2006

Dear Dr Pistrang

Re: Notification of Ethical Approval

Re: Ethics Application: 0724/001: Living with foster brothers and sisters

Further to your satisfactory responses to the remarks made by members of the UCL Research Committee, I am pleased to confirm that the above research has been given ethical approval for the duration of the project.

Approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. You must seek Chair's approval for proposed amendments to the research for which this approval has been given. Ethical approval is specific to this project and must not be treated as applicable to research of a similar nature. Each research project is reviewed separately and if there are significant changes to the research protocol you should seek confirmation of continued ethical approval by completing the 'Amendment Approval Request Form'.

The form identified above can be accessed by logging on to the ethics website homepage: http://www.grad.ucl.ac.uk/ethics/ and clicking on the button marked 'Key Responsibilities of the Researcher Following Approval'.

2. It is your responsibility to report to the Committee any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to participants or others. Both non-serious and serious adverse events must be reported.

Reporting Non-Serious Adverse Events.
For non-serious adverse events you will need to inform   Ethics Committee Administrator (   ), within ten days of an adverse incident occurring and provide a full written report that should include any amendments to the participant information sheet and study protocol. The Chair or Vice-Chair of the Ethics Committee will confirm that the incident is non-serious and report to the Committee at the next meeting. The final view of the Committee will be communicated to you.

Reporting Serious Adverse Events
The Ethics Committee should be notified of all serious adverse events via the Ethics Committee Administrator immediately the incident occurs. Where the adverse incident is unexpected and serious, the Chair or Vice-Chair will decide whether the study should be terminated pending the opinion of an independent expert. The adverse event will be considered at the next Committee meeting and a decision will be made on the need to change the information leaflet and/or study protocol.

UCL Graduate School, North Cloisters, Wilkins Building
University College London. Gower Street London WC1E 6BT

www.ucl.ac.uk/gradschool

On completion of the research you must submit a brief report (a maximum of two sides of A4) of your findings/concluding comments to the Committee, which includes in particular issues relating to the ethical implications of the research.

Yours sincerely

Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee

Cc: Jessica Richardson

Appendix 2

Summary of the studies in the literature review on

birth children in families who foster

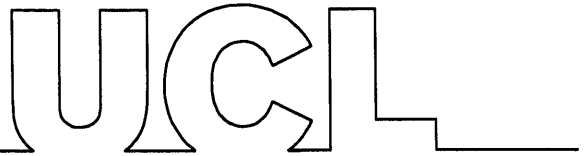**Table 1: Summary of studies in the literature review (Part 1) on birth children in families who foster**

Author (date)	Sample and size	Age of birth children	Type of fostering	Design	Analysis (relevant to birth children)
Birth Children's Perspectives					
Martin (1993) UK	Unspecified number of birth children	10-15	Regular fostering	Discussion group	Not specified
Part (1993) UK	75 birth children from 43 families	3- 24	Regular fostering	Questionnaires	Not specified
Spears & Cross (2003) UK	20 birth children	8-18	Regular fostering from an independent agency	Interviews	Recurrent themes
Watson & Jones (2002) UK	Over a 100 birth children (exact number not specified)	7 plus	Regular fostering	Questionnaires	Not specified
Birth Children and their Parents' Perspectives					
Ames-Reed (1996) UK	23 birth children from 17 families (all group discussions except 4 interviews). Plus 16 foster parents (interviews)	8- 20	Long term fostering with children with learning disabilities	Group discussions and interviews	Not specified
Ellis (1972) Canada	10 foster carers; plus group with 40 foster parents and social workers; group with 5 birth children	Adolescent birth children (unspecified age)	Group foster homes. Fostered for 3 months to 5 years	Interviews and discussion group	Not specified

Kaplan (1988) US	15 parents and their children	6-12	Regular fostering	Interviews. With children: kinetic drawings, creating and telling stories, sentence completion	Ratings- high and low
Poland & Groze (1993) US	52 foster carers and 51 birth children from 34 families	8- 32	Specialised, group home and regular fostering	Questionnaires	Not specified
Pugh (1996) UK	9 birth children and 4 foster carers	Not given	Regular fostering	Interviews	Not specified
Twigg (1994) Canada	8 birth children and their families	15- 28	Treatment based foster care for children with learning disabilities, physical, emotional difficulties plus young offenders. Fostered for at least 3 years with private agency	Interviews	Narrative analysis based on grounded theory principles
Parents (and others)					
Farmer, Moyers & Lipscombe (2004) UK	68 foster carers (58 had their own children), 68 foster children aged 11- 17 years	N/A	Regular fostering from Local Authority (LA) and private agencies; fostered for less than a year to 36 years	1 Year prospective repeated design. Interviews at 3 and 12 months since placement started and review of case files	

Hojer (2004) Sweden	366 parents (husbands and wives)- questionnaires; 17 carers interviewed	N/A	Regular fostering	Questionnaires and interviews	Not specified
Quinton, Rushton, Dance & Mayes (1998) UK	61 foster carers (30 had their own children); 61 foster children (aged 5-9)	N/A	Regular fostering	1 year repeated design: Interviews at 1 and 12 months since placement started	
Rushton, Dance, Quinton & Mayes (2001) UK	72 foster carers but only 17 had their own children; unspecified number of social workers. Comparison group of 100 families who did not foster.	N/A	Adoptive or permanent foster placements from LA and voluntary placement agencies	Repeated Measure Design: Questionnaires and Interviews at 3 and 12 months after placement started. Comparison group completed questionnaires and telephone interview	Carers completed Sibling Relationship Questionnaire for each sibling
Tristeliotis, Borland & Hill (2000) UK	822 active foster carers (questionnaires) and 40 active carers (interviews) but only 755 carers had their own children; 92 former foster carers (questionnaires) and 27 former carers (interviews) ;32 local authority fostering services (questionnaires and interviews)	N/A	Regular fostering	Questionnaires, interviews and group discussions	

Appendix 3

Participant and parent information sheets

SUB-DEPARTMENT OF CLINICAL HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY
UCL PSYCHOLOGY

Jessica Richardson
Trainee Clinical Psychologist

Dr Nancy Pistrang
Senior Lecturer in Clinical Psychology

Living with foster siblings

Participant Information Sheet

You have been invited to take part in a research study. Please read this information carefully and discuss it with your parent and anyone else if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the research about?
We are interested in your opinions and feelings about living with foster children. We would like to talk to a number of children to find out how their family's fostering experiences affect them. We are also interested in your relationships with your foster brothers and sisters and other people in your family. Although there is some previous research from the view-point of children whose parents also take care of foster children, little is known about how fostering children may affect how you feel about yourself and about other people in your family.

Why me?
We understand that you are aged between 12- 16 years and that your family fosters children through an independent agency.

What will I have to do if I take part?
Both you and your parent will need to agree to take part. If you both agree to take part, we would like to meet to talk to you on your own about your experiences of having foster brothers and sisters in your family. We will ask you questions about who is in your family and how you get on with everyone, how you feel about living with foster children, how you feel when they arrive and then leave your family and how you and others would describe yourself. There is not any right or wrong answers – we just want to hear about your opinions and experiences of being in a family that fosters children.

We would like to meet individually with you in a place where you feel comfortable. This might be at your home or at the foster agency building. Our meeting will take no more than an hour. If you agree, we will tape record our

meeting so that we can remember exactly what you said. To say thank-you for taking part in the research we will give you a £10 HMV voucher.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you if you take part. If you do not want to, you do not have to give a reason and no one will make you do it. Even if you have agreed to take part, you can still pull out at anytime if you change your mind. Nothing bad will happen if you choose not to take part in the research.

Explaining the research to children who are currently being fostered
Your parent will tell your foster brother or sister about the interview and let them know that it is not about the foster child personally but about your experiences of fostering and your family relationships more generally.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?
We think you will find it interesting talking about your experiences of living with foster children. However, if you do feel uncomfortable at any point we can stop talking about the difficult subject or stop our meeting altogether. We hope that our research will help us to understand what it can be like to have foster children in the family.

What happens to what I say?
Everything you say will be confidential (private). This means that we will not tell anyone what you say unless we feel that you or others around you might be at risk of being harmed. If this happened we would tell your parents and the foster agency. However, this is unlikely and normally only the researchers will know what you have said and this will only be used for this project.

The information will be collected and kept safely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Information on the computer will be protected by a password and paper files and audio- tapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. What you say on the tapes will be written out and then the tapes will be erased. Anything that makes it obvious that it is you will be removed so that no one can tell it is you or your family. Any reports or publications resulting from the project will not reveal who any of the children are that took part. In accordance with normal scientific procedures the written material will be held for 5 years after publication and then destroyed.

What do I do now?
If you would like more information about this project or have any questions, contact Jessica Richardson (phone number and email address at the top of this information sheet). If you think you would like to participate, speak to your parent and then tell the fostering agency and we will then contact you and your parent. Before taking part in the research, you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep and a consent form to sign and keep.

Thank you very much for considering taking part in this study.

THIS RESEARCH HAS BEEN APPROVED BY UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON'S RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Sub-department of Clinical Health Psychology
University College London Gower Street London WC1E 6BT

www.ucl.ac.uk/clinical-health-psychology

SUB-DEPARTMENT OF CLINICAL HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY
UCL PSYCHOLOGY

Jessica Richardson
Trainee Clinical Psvchologist

Dr Nancy Pistrang
Senior Lecturer in Clinical Psychology

Living with foster siblings

Parent Information Sheet

Your child has been invited to take part in a research study. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with your child and anyone else if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the research about?
We are interested in the views of birth children whose parents also take care of foster children. We would like to talk to a number of birth children to understand how being part of a family that includes foster children might influence how birth children grow up. We are also interested in how they get along with their foster siblings and their own family members. Although there is some previous research on birth children whose parents also take care of foster children, little is known about whether growing up in this kind of family situation affects how children see themselves and their family.

Why has my child been chosen?
We understand that your family fosters children though an independent agency and that one of your own (birth) children is between the ages of 12- 16 years old.

What will my child have to do if they take part?
Both you and your child will need to agree to take part in the research. If you both agree to take part, we would like you to complete a small information sheet about your family and for your child to be interviewed. The information sheet will briefly cover your history as a foster carer and the interview will focus on your child's experience of living with foster children including their views of having parents who take care of foster children, their feelings about getting to know a foster child and how they feel when they leave, and how fostering might affect how they see themselves. There is not any right or wrong answers – we just want to hear about your child's opinions and experiences of being in a family that fosters.

We would like to meet individually with each child in a place that they feel comfortable. This might be at their home or at the foster agency building. Each interview will take no more than an hour. With your child's permission we will tape record the interviews, so

that we have an accurate record of what was said. As a token of our thanks for their participation, we will give them a £10 HMV voucher.

Do we have to take part?
Taking part is voluntary. If you or your child does not want to take part, you do not have to give a reason and no pressure will be put on either of you to change your mind. You can both withdraw from the project at any time. If you or your child chooses not to participate, or would like to stop the interview at any time and no longer participate in the study, this will not affect your relationship with the fostering agency.

Explaining the research to children who are currently being fostered
It is important for you to tell children who are currently being fostered about the interview. It may help them to know that the interview is not about the foster child personally but about your own child's experience of fostering and their family relationships more generally. Being clear about this will help to reduce any potential difficult feelings that the foster child may have about the interview taking place.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?
We anticipate that your child will find it interesting to talk about their experience of fostering. However, it is possible that during the interview they may feel uncomfortable about talking about some aspect of their experience. If this happens, we will ask them or they can tell us if they would like to stop the interview. We hope that our research will provide a better understanding of what it can be like to have foster children in the family.

What happens to what my child says?
All the information your child gives us will be confidential and used for the purposes of this study only. Only the researchers will have access to the information and what your child tells us will not be passed on to you or the fostering agency. However if something your child tells us leads us to believe that either their health and safety or the health and safety of others around them is at immediate risk, we will let you and the foster agency know
.
The data will be collected and stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Electronic data will be password protected, and paper files and audio- tapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The tapes will be transcribed and then erased. All identifying information will be removed from the interview transcripts so that your child cannot be identified individually. Any reports or publications resulting from the study will not reveal the identity of anyone who took part. In accordance with normal scientific procedures the transcripts will be held for 5 years after publication and then destroyed.

What do I do now?
If you would like more information about this study or have any questions, contact Jessica Richardson (phone number and email address at the top of this information sheet). If you think you would like to participate, speak to your child and then tell your fostering agency and we will then contact you. Prior to taking part in the research, you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep and a consent form to sign and keep.
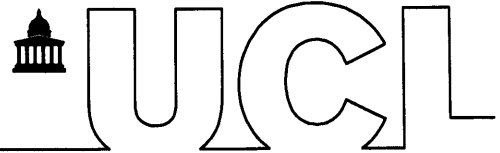

Thank you very much for considering taking part in this study.

THIS RESEARCH HAS BEEN APPROVED BY UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON'S RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Appendix 4

Participant and parent consent forms

**SUB-DEPARTMENT OF CLINICAL HEALTH
PSYCHOLOGY**
UCL PSYCHOLOGY

| CONFIDENTIAL |

Participant Consent Form

Living with foster siblings

*This form is to be completed independently by the participant.

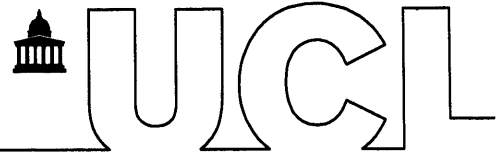|	Yes	No
I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet. OR: I have had the Participant Information Sheet explained to me.		
I have been able to ask questions and discuss the study.		
I have had satisfactory answers to my questions.		
I understand that I can pull out of the study at any time without anything bad happening to me.		
I understand that deciding not to continue with the interview will not affect my family's relationship with the foster agency.		
I know that my discussion will be taped and I agree to this happening.		
I agree with the publication of the results of this study in a research journal. I understand that in the publication nobody will know it is me or that I took part in the research.		
I agree that I would like to take part in this research and give my consent to do this.		

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:

Name in CAPITALS: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date:

Name in CAPITALS: _____

**SUB-DEPARTMENT OF CLINICAL HEALTH
PSYCHOLOGY**
UCL PSYCHOLOGY

| CONFIDENTIAL |

Parent Consent Form

Living with foster siblings

*This form is to be completed independently by the participant's parent.

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the Parent Information Sheet. OR: I have had the Parent Information Sheet explained to me.		
I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study.		
I have had satisfactory answers to my questions.		
I understand that I can withdraw consent for my child's participation at any time without penalty.		
I understand that withdrawing from the study will not affect my family's relationship with the foster agency.		
I am aware and consent to the tape recording of my child's discussion with the researcher.		
I agree with the publication of the results of this study in a research journal. I understand that the family will not be identified in these publications.		
I give consent for my child to take part in the study and for my completion of a background information about my family.		

Signature of Parent: _____Date:

Name in CAPITALS: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____Date:

Name in CAPITALS: _____

Appendix 5

Family demographics form:

Completed by parent

Living with foster siblings

This form is to gain background information about your family and about the current and past children that you have fostered.

Information about you and your partner:

1) Your relationship to the child who is participating in this study:...................	2) Partner's relationship to the child who is participating in this study:.......................
Your age:..	Partner's age:..
Your highest education qualification:......................................	Partner's highest education qualification:......................................
Your occupation:...............................	Partner's occupation:............................

Information about your own children:

3) Age of child who is participating in the study:..... .Gender (circle one):   M   F
Ethnicity of child who is participating (eg Asian, White British)...........................
4) Ages of your other own children...
Ages of all your own children when you started fostering..................................

Information about children who are currently being fostered (fill out as applicable):

5) Age of child who is being fostered:....................Their ethnicity:...................

Length of foster placement:...........Reason for placement:..............................

6) Age of child who is being fostered:...............Their ethnicity:.....................

Length of foster placement:...........Reason for placement:..............................

7) Age of child who is being fostered:.................Their ethnicity:......................

Length of foster placement:.........Reason for placement:..............................

Information about your history of fostering:

8) Approximate date when you started fostering..

9) Number of children you have fostered in total..

10) Average length of their stay:..

Thank-you for completing this form

Appendix 6

Interview protocol

Interview Schedule

This study is about how you feel about living with foster brothers and sisters. I will be talking to different children about this. Some children enjoy some parts and find other things difficult. There are no right answers to the questions. I am just interested in how you personally feel.

I. Relationships in the foster family

1. Who is in your family? Could you tell me a bit about each person?: *(Prompt: reason for foster sibling in family, previous foster siblings)*

2. Can you tell me a bit about when X (foster brother/ sister) first joined your family? (Prompt: feelings and any difficulties)

3. What is it like being in a family that looks after foster children? *(Prompt: best and worst parts, specific good or bad memories, similar or different to other families)*

4. How do you get on with your foster brothers and sisters? How do you get on with your own brothers and sisters? Is it similar or different in any way?

5. How do you get on with your parents *(mother and father)*? How do your foster brothers and sisters get on with them? Is it similar or different in any way?

6. Do you remember what it was like when Y left your family? (Y- most recently gone or best foster brother/ sister) What kind of feelings do you remember having? How did you handle these? *(Prompt: normalise feelings and coping)*

7. How do you get on with your foster brothers and sisters after they leave?

II. Impact of fostering on the identity of adolescents

8. What has it been like for you personally living with foster siblings?

9. What are your interests? What do you do at home? Are these things the same or different because you live with foster brothers and sisters?

*10.*What do your friends (or others at school) think about you living with X? How are things the same or different for your friends?

*11.*Can you remember times you have felt sad or stressed out. What makes you feel like this? *(Prompt: Some kids can find living with foster brothers and sisters a bit tough at times and may feel stressed out)* How do you deal with these feelings? *(Prompt: talk to others)*

12. Do you remember just before X came to live with you? What did you know about living with foster brothers and sisters? What would you say to a friend now if they were about to start living with a foster brother or sister?

Appendix 7

Interview excerpts and examples of Interpretive

Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interview Excerpt: Participant 3

Participant: When some of them leave, you don't want them to leave you sort of feel like, you sort of walk in one room and you think they're going to be there but they're not. So it's like, you sort of miss some of them, but you don't as well because you've got more room in the house again.

Interviewer: It sounds like in some ways it's a bit of a relief when foster children leave, but you kind of miss them as well.

Participant: Yeah. If you have a nice one that goes, you might get a horrible one the next time. And if you get a horrible one it sorts of makes you feel bad again....When they're not here long and then they go it's alright but when they've been here a while you're sort of like, you either really like that kid or you don't and they keep going or coming and it's like are we ever going to just stick with two, or stick with one. I think D will be here till he's sixteen but I can't see any other kids that we've had who we've kept really.

Interviewer: And what's it like having kids coming and going from your family?

Participant: When some of them first came, like they said, one of the social workers said, oh be a bit careful with some of them, I was a bit worried about sleeping, like if one of them would come in my room or something but once you get to know them you trust them but if you don't trust them you're always like at night you don't want to go to sleep or something. You don't want to leave any of your stuff about. Like when they first came we had locks on all the doors but now we've only got them on my mum's and brother's room.

Interviewer: What is harder, children coming or going?

Participant: More coming, 'cos once they're already here you know em, you've seen em, but when they're coming you don't know who they are and what they're like. I think girls are better though really, because with a boy you always think, oh what background they coming from with a girl they're not usually as much trouble. But I say that, but H was more trouble than D.

Interview Excerpt: Participant 8

Interviewer: What is it like being in a family that looks after foster children?

Participant: Umm it's quite nice you get a warm fuzzy feeling. When you are younger it's like having another friend or having another brother which isn't so good (laughs) but as you get older you appreciate what we do more and it' quite nice, like when my mum explained it to me when I was little and I was asking why, she said these children don't have another family we have to be their family until they find their own. When you are younger that makes sense and it is quite nice to be able to help in any way you can.

Interviewer: What do you think are the good and bad parts of fostering?

Participant: The good parts are the fostering itself- like the helping and obviously with the babies you grow really attached to them. Children I think are a reward on their own. Um the bad parts would be the saying goodbye and with the babies as well if I am studying at school and doing homework and they are crying or whinging or climbing all over you, that would be the minor annoyance I think. But the worst part is saying goodbye especially when you have grown attached. That I think is the only draw back unless you get a really bad egg.

Interviewer: Have you had that experience?

Participant: Yeah that was H the troubled one. She thought that this was her house and just used to come and go. But its not, it's my Mum and Dad's house, it's my house. I didn't really like her attitude in that way. She wasn't really respectful in any way. She didn't understand that this wasn't her home and she didn't have the final say in everything. She didn't argue. She wasn't confrontational. It was like a quiet defiance like you couldn't stop in anyway.

Interviewer: And what effect did that have on you?

Participant: Umm I spent a lot more time in my room on my own so I didn't miss out anything. I was still going to school so I was gone for the most part of the day and I had my friends to say 'She has done this again and she done that or this happened' so I had a good outlet for it. Obviously when I came home I would do my homework and I would do that in my room and then I would just stay up there and watch films or read a book or something. So I didn't spend so much time downstairs which I felt bad about afterwards because I realised I was kind of inflicting her on my parents.

Data Analysis Stage 1

Extract from P3

• **It's alright when they go if not been here long** • **You like the kid or don't** • **They keep coming and going**	Participant: When they're not here for long and then they go it's alright but when they've been here a while you're sort of like, you either really like that kid or you don't and they keep going or coming and it's like are we ever going to just stick with two, or stick with one.........
	Interviewer: And what's it like having kids coming and going from your family?
• **Need to be careful** • **Worried about sleeping** • **Trust them once you know them** • **Scared of sleeping and safety** • **Locks on the doors** • **Less locks now**	Participant: When some of them first came, like they said, one of the social workers said, oh be a bit careful with some of them, I was a bit worried about sleeping, like if one of them would come in my room or something but once you get to know them you trust them but if you don't trust them you're always like at night you don't want to go to sleep or something. You don't want to leave any of your stuff about. Like when they first came we had locks on all the doors but now we've only got them on my mum's and brother's room.

Extract from P8

	Interviewer: What is it like being in a family that looks after foster children?
• **You get a warm fuzzy feeling** • **It's like having a friend or brother** • **Learn to appreciate what we are doing** • **They don't have a family** • **Nice being able to help other people** • **Helping is good** • **Grow attached to babies** • **Children are a reward** • **Saying goodbye is hard** • **Annoying when babies cry** • **Goodbye is hardest**	Participant: Umm it's quite nice you get a warm fuzzy feeling. When you are younger it's like having another friend or having another brother which isn't so good (laughs) but as you get older you appreciate what we do more and it's quite nice, like when my mum explained it to me when I was little and I was asking why, she said these children don't have another family we have to be their family until they find their own. When you are younger that makes sense and it is quite nice to be able to help in any way you can........... The good parts are the fostering itself- like the helping and obviously with the babies you grow really attached to them. Children I think are a reward on their own. Um the bad parts would be the saying goodbye and with the babies as well if I am studying at school and doing homework and they are crying or whinging or climbing all over you, that would be the minor annoyance I think. But the worst part is saying goodbye especially when you have grown attached.

Data Analysis Stage 2

Extract from P3

Participant: When they're not here for long and then they go it's alright but when they've been here a while you're sort of like, you either really like that kid or you don't and they keep going or coming and it's like are we ever going to just stick with two, or stick with one.........

• **Ambivalence**

• **Frustration that kids keep coming and going**

Interviewer: And what's it like having kids coming and going from your family?

Participant: When some of them first came, like they said, one of the social workers said, oh be a bit careful with some of them, I was a bit worried about sleeping, like if one of them would come in my room or something but once you get to know them you trust them but if you don't trust them you're always like at night you don't want to go to sleep or something. You don't want to leave any of your stuff about. Like when they first came we had locks on all the doors but now we've only got them on my mum's and brother's room.

• **Initially cautious and worried about safety**

• **Trust them over time**

• **Less cautious over time**

Extract from P8

Interviewer: What is it like being in a family that looks after foster children?

Participant: Umm it's quite nice you get a warm fuzzy feeling. When you are younger it's like having another friend or having another brother which isn't so good (laughs) but as you get older you appreciate what we do more and it's quite nice, like when my mum explained it to me when I was little and I was asking why, she said these children don't have another family we have to be their family until they find their own. When you are younger that makes sense and it is quite nice to be able to help in any way you can...........
The good parts are the fostering itself- like the helping and obviously with the babies you grow really attached to them. Children I think are a reward on their own.... Um the bad parts would be the saying goodbye and with the babies as well if I am studying at school and doing homework and they are crying or whinging or climbing all over you, that would be the minor annoyance I think. But the worst part is saying goodbye especially when you have grown attached.

• **Feels good to help**

• **Learn to appreciate what we do**

• **Nice being able to help**

• **Helping is the good part**
• **Growing attached**
• **Parental-like response**

• **Difficult goodbyes**

Data Analysis Stage 3

Extract from P3

Participant: When they're not here for long and
then they go it's alright but when they've been
here a while you're sort of like, you either really
like that kid or you don't and they keep going or   **Theme 3:**
coming and it's like are we ever going to just stick   **Coming and going**
with two, or stick with one.........

Interviewer: And what's it like having kids coming
and going from your family?

Participant: When some of them first came, like   **Theme 1:**
they said, one of the social workers said, oh be a   **Who is this stranger?**
bit careful with some of them, I was a bit worried
about sleeping, like if one of them would come in   **Theme 2:**
my room or something but once you get to know   **Getting used to it**
them you trust them but if you don't trust them
you're always like at night you don't want to go to
sleep or something. You don't want to leave any of
your stuff about. Like when they first came we
had locks on all the doors but now we've only got
them on my mum's and brother's room.

Extract from P8

Interviewer: What is it like being in a family that
looks after foster children?

Participant: Umm it's quite nice you get a warm   **Theme 8: It makes me**
fuzzy feeling. When you are younger it's like   **feel good too**
having another friend or having another brother
which isn't so good (laughs) but as you get older
you appreciate what we do more and it's quite
nice, like when my mum explained it to me when I
was little and I was asking why, she said these
children don't have another family we have to be
their family until they find their own. When you are
younger that makes sense and it is quite nice to
be able to help in any way you can...........   **Theme 8: It makes me**
The good parts are the fostering itself- like the   **feel good too**
helping and obviously with the babies you grow
really attached to them. Children I think are a   **Theme 5: Being**
reward on their own. Um the bad parts would be   **parental**
the saying goodbye and with the babies as well if I
am studying at school and doing homework and
they are crying or whinging or climbing all over
you, that would be the minor annoyance I think.
But the worst part is saying goodbye especially   **Theme 6: How close**
when you have grown attached.   **can we get**