Managing the transition to foster family status:

The experience of carers' own children

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ABSTRACT

Children in today's society live in ever-changing family forms. Children are the least likely of all family members to be the initiators of family transitions, yet they are profoundly involved. With a focus on child-centred care (e.g. The Children's Act, 1989), there is an acknowledgment that it is important to understand the experiences of children living in these various family structures. The 'foster family' is one such form of family life in which children live. A common occurrence within foster families is that carers' own children are present within the home (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987).

This study explored how carers' own children managed the transition to living as a foster family. Using a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), five children (four males and one female) aged between 9 and 15 years old were contacted through an Independent Fostering Agency and interviewed about their experiences of having foster children coming to live within their families. Participants and their families had been fostering for a total of between 6 months and 14 years, and these included short-term, long-term and specialist fostering placements.

The analysis identified that participants went through a central process of *redefining* their families in the transition to living as a foster family. Within this, an explanatory process model was developed comprising four main categories of experience. These represented participants' awareness of change within their families, attempts to search for an explanatory framework to understand the changes, and of locating their own family and themselves within this new family structure.

There are a number of clinical implications highlighted by this study. Children actively try to make sense of changes to their family and it is important that families and fostering services aid children in this process. It highlights a need for the whole family to be involved in preparation and training, and for comprehensive support packages to be put in place. The role of the Clinical Psychologist within this process is discussed.

1.0   **CHAPTER ONE:**

                              INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by providing an overview of the changing profile of the 'family' in recent years. It then discusses in detail one particular family form, that of the foster family. An historical perspective on the development of the foster family is provided, followed by a critical look at foster care research. A focus on the dynamics of the foster family is emphasised, along with an examination of the role of foster carer's own children in the fostering process. This chapter also draws on the literature surrounding family transitions to set in context the experience of children in changing families. The chapter ends by setting out the focus of the present study.

1.1   Children in Changing Families

> *'Families at the beginning of the twenty-first century are going through changes at a pace that is bewildering to both observers and family members themselves'*   (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001, p1).

Family life today takes many forms and is characterised by a diverse range of structures. The traditional view of children being raised by two married parents throughout their childhood is today much less common. Forty per cent of all children in England are now born outside of marriage (Hill, 1999). This includes thirty per cent who are born to cohabiting rather than married parents (Berridge, 1997). About one-third of all marriages end in divorce (Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001). Consequently, one in five families are headed by a lone parent and one in eight children will, at some stage of their childhood live in a step-family (OPCS, 1993). In addition to this, 50,000 children in the UK have been removed from the care of their parents, of whom 11% reside in residential homes and 65% are placed in foster families (Davies, 1998). Around 10,000 children, never able to return to their families of origin, are believed to be waiting for adoptive families (O' Hanlon & Ejioforj, 1999).

This variation in family structure has attracted widespread political and public debate, with a concern centred on the perceived 'breakdown' of family life.

Increasingly, attention has focused on the *effects on children* of living in these changing forms of family life (Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001).

The concept of childhood, in parallel with the changes in family structure, has been transformed over the last century (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). Indeed, scientific research has furthered the understanding of children's development and there is now an ever-increasing acknowledgement of the need to ensure children's emotional and physical well-being. This is evidenced in the investment of services for children within the National Health Service, with specially trained health professionals equipped to deal with children who display emotional and/or physical problems.

Along with these developments has been an acknowledgement that it is important to understand the experiences of children living in these various family structures. One way of achieving this is to take seriously what children have to say about their families, and there has been a growing body of research involving children (e.g. Deatrick & Faux, 1989; Nespor, 1998; Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas & Murch, 2003). After all, as Pryor & Rodgers (2001) state, children are the least likely of all family members to be the initiators of family transitions, yet they are profoundly involved. Children are not only witnesses to, but also participants and actors in these family structures and transitions (Butler *et al*, 2003).

The 'foster family' is one such form of family life in which children live. Foster families are a group of families about whom there is little discussion, both in literature and the public arena. Foster care is at the same time a very ordinary activity and an extraordinary undertaking (Hill, 1999). Looking after children is something that many adults will do at some time in their lives, guided simply by common sense and experience. Foster care however, poses significant challenges. Foster carers offer homes to, and open their families to other people's children and look after some of the most difficult, demanding, rejected and abused children and young people in our society (Berridge, 1997).

1.2 Historical Perspective on Foster Care

Foster care, as a concept, is not a new form of alternative living arrangements for children living away from home. Indeed, fostering and residential care have run in

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parallel as alternative arrangements for children as far back as the nineteenth century (Rushton & Minnis, 2002). Foster care however, can be seen as one of the early expressions of the recognition of the rights of the child (Kelly & Gilligan, 2000); advancements in theoretical understandings have contributed to a preference for family, including Bowlby's (1951) emphasis on preserving attachment with an adult caregiver, Goffman's (1962) critique of institutions, and Maluccio, Fein & Olmstead's (1986) theories on the importance of 'permanence'. Foster care therefore constitutes an expression of the child's need for and right to the personalised family that the workhouse and other crowded institutions historically could not provide.

In the UK, foster care has been developed as the preferred placement for 'out of home' care (Colton & Williams, 1997) and is currently the principal form of care provided for children living away from home under the auspices of the local authority. At any one time, around six out of ten children looked after by local authorities are placed with foster carers (Department of Health, 1997). Although the number of foster children has remained fairly constant (currently around 33,000), they constitute a proportion of those in the care system that has roughly doubled since the 1970's. This is chiefly due to the closing down of many residential homes over the last twenty years (Kelly & Gilligan, 2000).

Over time, fostering has become an increasingly complex and difficult task. As Hill (1999) succinctly summarises, the task historically often involved either straightforward physical care of a child on a temporary basis, or else long-term substitute parenting. It was not unusual for foster carers to bring up the child virtually as a full member of their own family on a quasi-adoptive basis, often with little or no contact with birth parents (Rowe, Caine, Hundleby & Keane, 1984). Although the demands of this role are not to be trivialised, considerably more is expected of foster carers today.

There are two key reasons for this increased pressure on foster carers. The first reason surrounds a change in legislation that has radically altered the way in which children are perceived and treated within society. The introduction of the Children's Act (1989) encompassed an acceptance of children as having rights and needs of their own. This challenged the dominating framework within the child care system, at that

time one of permanency planning with a focus on either returning the child to their birth parents or securing alternative, permanent living arrangements (Hill, 1999). The Children's Act stressed the welfare of the child as paramount and stipulated that where possible, children should be brought up within their own families. It emphasised the importance of partnership with parents, rather than opposition, and family support rather than compulsory separation (Packman & Jordan, 1991). This has meant increased demands on foster carers. They now have obligations to encourage and facilitate contact with birth parents, where appropriate; more frequent and formalised involvement is required in planning, decision-making and reviews; and there is greater emphasis placed on children's participatory rights (Borland, 1998).

The second reason, taking into account the legislative backdrop, has meant that only children who have, or whose family have the most serious problems, enter and remain in public care (Kelly & Gilligan, 2000). Developments in prevention and family support have raised the threshold for children to become looked-after away from home. This has resulted in a high proportion of children looked-after by local authorities having a greater incidence of mental health needs than those in the general population of the same age (Richardson & Joughin, 2000). Children come into care for a diverse range of reasons. These may include experiences of parental deprivation, whether from inadequate and/or abusive parenting or tragic circumstances, such as loss or death. As Hughes (1999) highlights, however, the precipitating events leading to reception into care are often only the end of a lengthy experience of neglect, trauma and abuse.

Children who enter foster care therefore, are not a homogenous group and there are many different types of foster homes. These are designed for children in a range of circumstances and reflect the huge range of reasons why children enter local authority care. As Berridge (1997) summarises, some foster homes admit children at very short notice. This is usually for a short period, providing emergency accommodation or a period of respite for the child and their families. Others offer long-term or permanent homes to children who are unable to return to their own parents. 'Bridging' placements also exist for children in intermediate circumstances, such as those in preparation for adoption, or, for older children as a bridge to

independence. 'Specialist' fostering deals with children who have particular requirements, such as those with disabilities, sibling groups, or where behaviour is especially difficult to manage. Foster care also offers 'remand' placements and may be a venue for assessment of needs prior to a court appearance. Foster care then has a variety of functions (Hill, 1999).

1.3   A Critique of Foster Care Research

Systematic research on fostering has developed since the 1960's with attempts to investigate the stability of foster family placements, by focusing on the 'outcome' of placements. One way of doing this is to look at the statistics on the rate of breakdown in foster placements. Berridge & Cleaver (1987) define breakdown as "a placement ending that was not included in the social work plan, either in the ending itself or the timing of the termination" (p30). In looking at the rate of breakdown, one gets a complex picture of figures. It is useful to break these down according to the different types of placement:

Short-term foster care is generally defined as placements intended to last up to eight weeks (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987) and is the most common initial placement for children entering local authority care. Short-term foster care has been found to be broadly successful. For example, Millham, Bullock, Hosie & Haak (1986) found a breakdown rate of only 8%. Berridge & Cleaver (1987) found similar results, with 10% of placements breaking down. Researchers argue that success may be due to the fact that short-term foster care has less complex aims than long-term foster care and so the aims are more frequently met. In addition, it is more commonly used for young children whose families are in 'crisis', and they are often returned successfully to their homes after a short period of respite.

Long-term foster care is regarded as usually indefinite in its anticipated duration, where both the child and carer would be expected to make a more permanent commitment to one another. The most widely quoted figure for breakdown in long-term placements comes from Parker (1966) and George (1970), at 50%. Triseliotis (1989) suggests 30% as a typical breakdown rate for placements meant to last two years or more. Berridge & Cleaver (1987) in a comparison of local authorities, found a contrast of 40% breakdown within three years in one borough,

compared with only 15% in another. However, this was largely attributed to differences in the child populations within each borough. It appears from these studies that, although figures vary, long-term placements are at a much higher risk of breakdown.

Intermediate/'Specialist' foster care (the two terms appear to be used interchangeably in the literature) tends to be defined as appropriate for children who pose particular problems in terms of behaviour, health, or physical or mental handicap, and tend to be planned as medium-term in duration. Berridge & Cleaver (1987) suggest this is often between eighteen months and three years. In their study, they found a breakdown rate of 21% within a one-year period. Thoburn, Murdoch & O'Brien (1986) found a breakdown rate of only 5% over the first two years in an agency for children with physical disabilities and/or severe learning difficulties.

It is apparent from these studies that there is much variation in the reported rate of foster placement breakdowns in the research literature. This may, in part, be due to the heterogeneous nature of both the children entering foster care, and the families who foster them, dynamics that are difficult to control for in large-scale outcome studies of this kind. For example, foster children all differ in the experiences they bring with them to placement; equally, foster families all differ in their make-up, in the amount and type of fostering experience they have, and so on. These and many other factors all interweave to produce either a 'successful' placement or one that breaks down. This makes it difficult to conclude that the statistics cited on the rate of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' placements are comparable across studies, and problematic when generalised to the foster population.

Triseliotis (1980) studied perceptions of the fostering experience from the viewpoint of both former foster children (now adults) and their carers. He pointed out that whilst a 'breakdown' is easily identifiable, by the very fact that it ends, one cannot assume that all other placements are therefore 'successful'. His study illustrated that many former foster children reported being unhappy in their foster homes, including not feeling part of the family or not getting on very well with their carers. Yet, these foster placements did not break down. Nor however did either party

feel they were a 'success'. Equally in this respect, children may gain many benefits from a placement that ends prematurely (Hill, 1999).

This highlights a fundamental methodological problem in using breakdown rates as a measure of 'success' or 'failure' of placements, and this research suggests a hidden figure that is more difficult for researchers to tap into.

In recognising the difficulty of defining placements as 'successful' solely on the basis of breakdown rates, much research subsequently has concentrated on identifying factors that are, in some way, predictive of success or failure. In one of the most comprehensive studies to date, Berridge & Cleaver (1987) conducted a large-scale study of foster placements across the spectrum, including short-term, long-term and intermediate foster care placements. From this, they defined three groups of factors that were linked to fostering outcomes. These included child-related factors; social network and care careers; and placement-related factors. The first two of these groups will be reviewed briefly here and the third group of factors will be examined in more detail.

1.3.1   Child-related factors linked to placement outcome

Berridge & Cleaver (1987) found that age was a factor related to placement outcome, with foster care more problematic to provide for older, rather than younger children. This was particularly so for adolescents. This finding has been consistently replicated by other studies (e.g. Rowe, Hundleby & Garnett, 1989; Baxter, 1989).

Studies also confirm that success in all types of fostering is more likely when the child is not very disturbed (e.g. Baxter, 1989). As noted earlier however, many children admitted to care have experienced abuse or neglect. Berridge & Cleaver (1987) found factors commonly related to such experiences played a major part in the demise of a placement. This included temper tantrums, extreme mood swings, sullen withdrawal and aggressive outbursts.

Berridge & Cleaver (1987) also found a link whereby fostering where the child was able to remain in their local social network and not be uprooted from school were less likely to end prematurely. Finally, a more obvious finding is that placements

are more likely to succeed when children's needs are met (Scottish Office, 1991). Triseliotis, Borland, Hill & Lambert (1995) found that disregarding the wishes of young people jeopardised placements. They concluded that an important influence on fostering outcome is the need for young people to feel cared for and respected.

There are therefore many factors in relation to the child being placed that are consistently shown to have a bearing on the foster care placement. These include the age of the child at placement, with younger children seeming to succeed better than older children; the presence or absence of behavioural problems; changing school seems to be a risk factor, along with failing to meet their needs. However, these alone cannot account for whether a placement works out or not. This leads us onto the second group of factors argued by Berridge & Cleaver (1987) to be associated with fostering outcomes. These are centred on the child's wider social network and care 'career':

1.3.2   Social network and care career factors linked to placement outcome

Berridge & Cleaver (1987) emphasised the benefit of looked-after children maintaining contact with their birth parents (except where there are good reasons why this should not take place). The Scottish Office (1991) found that placements were more likely to break down where visiting plans for parents were not fulfilled.

Another finding has been the function of sibling group placements as a protective factor against breakdown (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987; Thoburn & Rowe, 1988). Sibling groups taken into care are frequently separated from each other. Once separated, they often have intermittent contact or lose contact with each other (Mullender, 1999). Fratter, Rowe, Sapsford & Thoburn (1991) found that when separation did occur, maintaining contact emerged as a protective factor against breakdown. There is a growing body of research highlighting the important function sibling's play for each other. Dunn (1983) in her pioneering research in this area, comments that siblings may well have spent more time with one another in their early years than with their caregiver(s). This may be particularly so for children living in abusive or neglectful circumstances. Siblings placed together can therefore look to one another for support and protection, and provides opportunities to talk about their birth family (Rowe et al, 1984).

A third factor found to be of importance is ensuring pre-placement preparation of both the child and foster family. In particular, this includes clarifying expectations prior to placement so that both parties know the position they are starting from and what they want to achieve. This also includes setting up an appropriate system to help them deal with any difficulties that arise (Triseliotis, 1980). Sadly however, contingency plans are seldom in place should problems arise (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987) and lack of support once the placement has commenced relates strongly to placement breakdown (Wilson, Sinclair & Gibbs, 2000; Triseliotis, Borland & Hill, 1998).

In addition to taking account of factors related to the actual child being placed, research therefore highlights that professionals must place this in the wider social context by addressing issues of contact with birth parents, other siblings, and ensure good pre-placement preparation and support. Alongside all of these factors, research also finds a number of factors related to the placement itself, which have a role to play in placement progress. These are interesting, as they start to look more closely at the dynamics within the foster family:

1.3.3   Placement-related factors linked to placement outcome

One of the most consistent findings over the last forty years, and tracing back to Trasler's (1960) influential study, has been that failure rates in foster placements are noticeably higher when foster carer's have a child or children of their own living in the household. This was confirmed by George (1970) and by Berridge & Cleaver (1987).

Placements with foster families where carers' own children are present are a common occurrence. Berridge & Cleaver (1987) found that in long-term placements this occurred in one in every six households; similarly, in four-fifths of short-term and 64% of intermediate placements, foster carers' own children were present.

It is useful to turn to the systemic literature and to consider the impact on the family of a new arrival. Satir (1967) talks about the concept of the family as 'mobile' and the idea that relationships, power, alignments and splits shift and change when a

member leaves or a new one joins. The process of family formation is therefore highly charged. The arrival of a new member in the family, in this case, of a child, imposes a change in the family's general pattern of interaction. To reach a harmonious balance, adaptations in role and other forms of functioning are necessary (Cann, 1980). A family therefore faces a risk to itself and its existing relationships whenever it admits a new member. This is likely to be especially so when the new member does not arrive as a baby but as a child or young person who has likes, dislikes and a will of his or her own. The dynamics are therefore very complex. Within this, researchers have looked at the different ages of all the children in the family.

There is general agreement that the age-gap between children placed together (either with foster carers' own children or with other, unrelated foster children), is an important factor in placement outcome. The research is less clear, however, about how this is important. For example, Trasler (1960) found failure rates were higher if the carer's own child was within three years of age of the foster child. Similarly, Wedge & Mantle (1991) found breakdown was more likely in placements where another child of a similar age was present. Berridge & Cleaver (1987) found that in placements that broke down, the carers' own children were under the age of five.

Turning to the developmental research literature, particularly on birth order and age gaps among siblings, this also gives contrasting answers. For example, Dunn (1984) in her research into siblings found that some parents attributed the friendliness of their children to their closeness in age. The close matching of interest and effectiveness as partners in play of children who are only two years apart is held to be of real importance. Other parents believed that their children got along well because there was a large gap between them. The older child does not feel so displaced and since he or she is more secure, perhaps both in relation to the attachment to the caregiver and in relation to their established 'position' within the family, behaves in a more friendly way towards the younger. Dunn concludes that both accounts are plausible, and there is evidence to support both points of view (for a more detailed discussion, see Dunn (1984)).

Kaplan (1988) conducted a study in the USA looking at the psychological impact on carers' own children and found that most of the children rejected their parents' explanations of children coming into care through a temporary difficulty, believing that such children were unloved or had been 'bad'. Kaplan found that this led to high levels of separation anxiety, particularly in the younger children, who feared they might themselves be abandoned if they were naughty. This was supported by Pugh (1996) and may contribute to the finding that foster carers who have young children of their own are more highly represented in the breakdown statistics.

Pugh (1996) proposes this could be linked to the finding that the older children of foster carers in her study perceived their relationship with the foster child differently to the younger ones. They were more likely to see themselves as contributing to the caring process, rather than having expectations of the foster child as a potential companion (often seen in the younger children and indeed, by the carers), expectations which were often disappointed.

There is consequently much to consider about the interaction between foster children and the carers' own children and the impact this might have on the placement. Certainly, it would seem that, in a context in which foster carers' own children are likely to be present, both the foster and the carer's own children can find the situation difficult to endure.

1.3.4   Summary of Critique

This broad review of the research literature highlights the complexity and vastness of foster care research. It is evident that there is a huge range of factors to take into consideration when planning to place a child in foster care. There are specific child-related factors, there are wider social factors to consider and then there are factors related specifically to the make up of the placement itself to think about.

Much of this research has centred on broad and general surveys, and reached broad and general conclusions highlighting the complex range of factors that appear related to placement outcome (Marshall, 1991). This has been vital in establishing an evidence base from which to build, and has taken account of the methodological problems with researching this field. This has addressed the conclusions drawn by

Prosser (1978) in his review of foster care research, in which he emphasised the lack of official statistics on foster care.

A point highlighted both in the Prosser (1978) review and in Berridge's (1997) review some twenty years later however, is of the lack of qualitative research undertaken. Consequently, as yet, there is little detailed understanding of placement dynamics and interactions between participants. Information about these interactions have been highlighted at in the current literature, for instance, the finding that foster carers' own children seem to play a key role in the fostering process. A number of studies acknowledge this, and many studies concentrating on foster carers highlight the impact of fostering on their own family as a frequent reason why they cease to foster (e.g. Triseliotis *et al*, 1998; Wilson, *et al*, 2000).

We will now turn to a critical examination of the literature looking more closely at foster carers' own children.

1.4   Research involving foster carers' own children

There is comparatively little written about foster carers' own children. There is evidence of early studies conducted predominantly in North America and Canada in the early 1970's. There then appeared to be a significant drop in interest in this area until resurgence in the early 1990's, particularly evident in the research literature in the UK. It is interesting to speculate on this renewed interest and is perhaps due to the change in legislation (e.g. Children's Act, 1989) and an acknowledgement that all children, not just those looked-after, deserve to have their needs identified and met. Indeed, other publications (e.g. Department of Health, 1991) have called for more attention to be given to the needs of carers' own children. As with much of the foster care research reviewed, research focusing on carers own children is complex; studies include foster placements of varying types, with children of different ages, using a range of different designs. These studies are reviewed below:

1.4.1   Early Studies

Early studies in this area began to provide some insight into placement dynamics. Ellis (1972) explored the effects on carers' own children of living as a group foster family. The study had three phases involving firstly, interviews with ten

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group home foster parents; secondly, a tape recording of a meeting between group home foster parents and social workers; and thirdly, a tape recording of a panel of five teenage birth children. Her study highlighted the assumptions that parents often made in relation to their own children, including ideas that own children would automatically adjust, along with an expectation that they would happily share their belongings with foster children. Some parents acknowledged that they had higher expectations of their own children and thus were harder on them. In practice, they found that their children could themselves become disturbed, particularly in relation to feeling pushed out when pressures were great, and could be left to deal with difficult emotions, for example, if endings were unpleasant. However, she also found benefits that could be gained by the family. These included the strengthening of family relationships and communication, increased sensitivity to each other's needs, and own children becoming better equipped to understand and meet others' needs (although it is not clear whether these views were expressed by the birth children or their parents).

Wilkes (1974) expanded on these findings in a paper looking at the positive and negative aspects of fostering on the family. He concurred with Ellis (1972) in his argument of emotional demand on own children to cope with the disruption to family equilibrium when a foster child joins the family, but also recognised that fostering can impact positively on the family. He suggested that it could produce more openness and awareness in family members, with own children developing a greater appreciation of their own family.

1.4.2   Later Studies

Later studies have concentrated largely on obtaining views about fostering directly from own children themselves. This has expanded on early studies and produced an interesting picture of both positive and negative feelings towards the experience of fostering.

A number of studies have used postal questionnaires to obtain these views. Part (1993) conducted the first of these studies in the UK. With a 78% response rate from children aged between 3-24 years old, she found that the 'best things' about fostering included companionship, looking after babies and young children, and the

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challenge of helping others. The 'worst things' about fostering included having to deal with difficult behaviour, such as stealing, coping with the attention given to the foster child by parents, lack of privacy and having to share. These findings have been consistently backed up by other studies (e.g. Pugh, 1996; Ames, 1997; Fox, 2001; Spears & Cross, 2003). In addition, Watson & Jones (2002) found a number of 'altruistic' responses to the best things about fostering, such as helping those who need it and seeing foster children happy, as well as 'practical' reasons for enjoying fostering, for instance, having someone to play with. Of the worst things about fostering, they also obtained responses on the emotional impact of placements, particularly those associated with endings, and concern over the attitude of Social Workers at times to them and their parents. Poland & Groze (1993) further found that children reported enjoying increased freedom whilst their parents spent more time with foster children, but at the expense that they no longer had as much time together as a family.

Although yielding important findings, there are inherent methodological difficulties with some of these studies. In Part's (1993) study, this was part of a larger piece of research involving foster carers. The children's questionnaire was enclosed on a loose sheet for children to complete if they wished. It is therefore interesting to speculate whether some of the children, aware that their parents could read their replies when they handed them back, were conscious of this in the answers they gave. Indeed, in both Part (1993) and Watson & Jones' (2002) studies, there were incidences of parents completing the questionnaires on their children's behalf.

Other studies have used interviews and discussion groups to gain a closer insight into the effects of fostering on carers own children. Twigg (1994) interviewed eight children from the ages of 13 upwards whose families had been fostering for at least three years. Using a grounded theory analysis, he found that all children felt they had lost something through the foster care experience. This included loss of parental time, with many of the children feeling they had to compete with the foster child for their parent's attention; loss of family closeness, with reports that the presence of a foster child created distance between family members; and loss of place within the family.

Pugh (1996) interviewed nine children and four adult foster carers, all of whom had experienced at least three time-limited placements. She noted the strains that can be placed on own children; for example, children talked about being exposed to areas of life which most parents would want to protect their children from, including violence, sexual abuse or drug abuse. Pugh suggested that there is a loss of innocence amongst this group of children. She also noted that the children displayed a striking concern for others and an awareness of complex emotional issues beyond their years, and expressed concern that they are at risk of growing up prematurely and of suffering emotional harm.

Pugh's study is of particular interest because, for the first time, she highlighted the *contribution* that these children make to the fostering experience. She concluded that carers own children can perform a number of important functions within the foster family. Firstly, they often act as a role model for acceptable behaviour. Many parents interviewed said this was often more effective than them themselves trying to explain house rules to newcomers. Secondly, they can act as a 'bridge' between the foster child and carers. Children commented that foster children would often go to them first if they had done something wrong to ask them what they thought their parents' response would be. They may even become the first recipients of disclosure of previous abuse and there may be pressure on them to keep a secret (Macaskill, 1991). Thirdly, Pugh found many instances where the children acted in a supportive way towards their parents, providing both emotional and practical support, such as babysitting. These findings have been reinforced by Fox (2001), suggesting that these children do see themselves as having a role in the fostering process. Hill (1999) goes further and suggests that the experience of a fostered child will, in fact, be greatly affected by the response of the carers' own children. It is probable that a positive response from their own children will encourage foster carers to persist, whereas unhappiness or resentment may, at the very least, evoke doubts about whether it is worthwhile. Carers' own children then, have the potential to exert a powerful influence over the progression of a placement.

In drawing conclusions from these studies it seems that certainly, own children's views on their experiences of fostering highlight that they experience a range of positive and negative feelings towards fostering. Whilst positive aspects can

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include being able to help others less fortunate than them, negative aspects seem to centre around the problems foster children can present in placement, and the disruption fostering causes to family life. Further studies have highlighted the strains placed upon them and have suggested some important roles that birth children can play within the foster family.

In comparing the early with later studies, there has also been an assumption that carers own children will simply adapt to the transition to living as a foster family. This is also evident in more recent studies, with own children rarely being formally involved in planning or preparation for the transition to foster family status. Pugh (1996) found that parents are often left with the responsibility of educating their own children about fostering, and this has been reinforced by the findings of Ames (1997) and Fox (2001).

In addition, whilst foster carers receive formal support, this is rarely evident for their own children. Fox (2001) found that parents or friends formed the major sources of support for these children. Pugh (1996) outlined the potential benefits of support groups: for example, providing own children with the opportunity to gain reassurance from others that face similar problems; the idea of shared solutions arising out of shared difficulties; groups as providing a safe outlet for venting frustrations, particularly if children feel they do not want to bother parents with their worries; and finally, that groups can combine the functions of mutual support with educational and social activities. Where formalised support is available, it appears to have been regarded by own children as very useful (Spears & Cross, 2003).

Overall then, carers' own children appear to be largely undervalued, not taken seriously or considered by others to be an important part of the dynamic, even in the face of research that shows they play a significant role in the fostering process (Fox, 2001). In reviewing the research literature, it is evident that there has now been much repetition in the studies conducted, particularly with regard to the views of birth children on fostering.

Certainly, a key theme to emerge from all research in this area is that it is the *family* that fosters, not just foster carers. As Martin (1993) comments, with the

children coming into foster care increasingly having experienced damaging and disturbing circumstances, they cannot easily be integrated into family routines. Their needs require adaptation from everyone involved in their care. The implication is that carers' own children too must adapt and adults must take into account the demands that caring makes on children.

It is useful to turn to the systemic literature and draw on research focusing on family 'transitions' to examine the factors that help children adapt to a major family transition.

1.5   'Transitions' Literature

An area that has received extensive research interest is the area of marital transitions, including separation and divorce. Whilst there is great diversity in children's responses to these events, research has generated some consistent findings. Of importance, is the finding that although studies have largely focused on documenting the effects on children by examining outcome on measures such as emotional maladjustment and behaviour problems, studies have tended to demonstrate that the effects of these transitions are often more subtle, and involve changes in children's relationships with mothers, fathers, siblings and other family members (Amato, 1987).

A number of researchers have pointed to a range of 'protective' and 'risk' factors that seem to have an impact on children's adjustment. As Herbert & Harper-Dorton (2002) summarise, the three most significant 'protective' factors related to a benign outcome for children include: (a) communication about the transition (Walczak & Burns, 1984); (b) a continued good relationship with at least one parent (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980); and (c) satisfaction with custody and access arrangements. Alternatively, 'risk' factors include lack of communication about the transition, not getting on well with at least one parent following the separation, and dissatisfaction with custody and access arrangements (whatever these are).

The central role of the parent-child relationship in mediating the effects of major family transitions is therefore very important (Hetherington, Bridges & Insabella, 1998). Elements of the parent-child relationship associated with better

adjustment following separation and divorce include the maintenance of consistent discipline, warm and supportive parenting (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1979), and maintenance of the inter-parental relationship.

Age has been found to play a role in children's adjustment following the transition, with very young children often responding with fear and anxiety that their parents might abandon them, and older children often experiencing sadness and blaming of themselves for the separation (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

In addition, the passage of time seems to be an important factor in facilitating adjustment post-transition. Research has found that immediate reactions to parental separation, usually seen in acute form, subside over time. Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) found that by one and a half years post-separation, most children had passed through the acute stage of the crisis; a majority had resumed their earlier developmental pace, resumed their usual schedules at school, developed new routines at home and had a more realistic, less fear-dominated view of divorce and it's consequences.

Pryor & Rodgers (2001) conclude that what is often remarkable about the children who are faced with such transitions is the degree of adaptability and resilience they show. As highlighted above, they are able, especially with the help of contextual factors, such as good communication and close relationships with their parents, to survive and even thrive in re-arranged family forms, and to adapt their understanding of families to these realignments.

1.6   **Focus of the Present Study**

It is hard to compare directly the experiences of children in families going through marital transitions with those adapting to living as a foster family. What the literature demonstrates however is that the whole family system is affected by transitions, whether these are marital in nature or involve bringing new family members into the home. Furthermore, the factors that help children adjust to family transitions (shown here in the literature on marital transitions) are negotiated through relationships *within* the family. Thus, the dynamics within families are crucially important in mediating the effects of major family transitions.

In focusing on the foster family, the literature highlights a broad range of factors that are related to placement outcome, along with increased knowledge of the experiences of birth children. However, it lacks a detailed understanding of family dynamics and the interactions between participants in the foster family.

In drawing together messages from these two fields of research, the focus of this study was therefore to examine how the birth children of foster carers *managed the transition* to living as a foster family. Thus, the study focused on the major family transition to foster family status and attempted to gain insight into how this was negotiated through family dynamics. In order to explore the processes within this, the study explored participant views on family life before fostering, perceived involvement in planning and preparation, views on living as a foster family, in particular, what it was like in the beginning, and family life presently (as a foster family).

Given that this was a relatively unchartered area in foster family research, this was an exploratory study employing a qualitative research methodology, in particular, that of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A detailed rationale for employing this methodology is given in Chapter Two (see Section 2.2.3), within the context of a critical discussion of the use of qualitative research methods.

2.0

CHAPTER TWO:

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the emergence of qualitative research and the key concepts underpinning this paradigm. The chapter then focuses in more detail on one particular qualitative research methodology, that of Grounded Theory. This method of analysis is critically explored in terms of historical development and key characteristics defining the approach. Its applicability to psychological research is discussed and a detailed rationale for its adoption in the current study given. The chapter then goes on to discuss the current study, outlining participant characteristics and the role of the researcher, the process of data collection and procedures for data analysis. The chapter ends with a look at the quality measures employed in this study.

2.1 What is Qualitative Research?

2.1.1 Setting the Scene – The Paradigm Debate

The human sciences, in recent years, have witnessed a growing debate surrounding the nature of scientific enquiry. This has centred on the traditionally dominant 'quantitative' paradigm and the emergence of a 'qualitative' paradigm. The debate surrounding the two paradigms centres on differences of underlying epistemology, or theories of knowledge, which, in turn, have shaped the methodology of research. This debate is outlined briefly below.

Historically, the field of psychology in particular has attached considerable importance to a model of research known as the 'scientific method', encompassed in the quantitative research paradigm (Henwood & Nicolson, 1995). The epistemology underpinning this paradigm is based on positivist assumptions of a reality consisting of a world of objectively defined facts (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). The aim of scientific research is to ensure accurate discoveries are made of these universal laws of cause and effect that govern phenomena. The hypothetico-deductive method is the principal means by which causal relationships are established. This privileges the testing of *a priori* theory through the collection and analysis of numerical data, in settings under which phenomena are controlled as far as possible (Flick, 1998). In these settings, the researcher is seen to be objective and does not impact on the

research. This process aims to reduce complexity and provide objective and reliable 'facts' that can be generalised.

This contrasts with an alternative qualitative paradigm, also known as the 'naturalistic', 'interpretative' or 'contextualist' paradigm. Epistemologically, this paradigm challenges the positivist notion of a unitary science capable of producing an objective body of knowledge, and instead emphasises the irreducible and contextual nature of knowledge. It therefore moves away from the assumption of universal laws waiting to be 'discovered' and specifically focuses on understanding the meaning of experiences, actions and events as these are interpreted through the eyes of participants (Richardson, 1996). The focus is therefore on understanding the individual perspective, moving away from the notion of 'generalisation'. This has far-reaching implications for the way in which research is conducted.

Qualitative researchers focus on analysing non-numeric data sources, such as interview transcripts or observational field notes. Complexity is essential, with rich descriptions necessary to understanding experiences from an individual's point of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In order to understand the experiences of people as they encounter, engage in and live through social situations (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999), research must take place in the contexts where these experiences 'naturally' occur. Another key difference surrounds the role of the researcher, who is seen as central within the qualitative paradigm. In a move away from the idea of an 'objective' researcher, the subjectivities of the researcher, that is their impressions and feelings, are seen as integral part of the research process and as such form part of the data corpus (Flick, 1998). The overall aim of qualitative research turns on its head the idea of *a priori* theories directing the research process and is characterised by an emphasis on moving *from* the data towards theoretical concepts (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

Up until the mid-twentieth century, the quantitative paradigm largely dominated scientific research. Some qualitative research was conducted, but it was often used as a preliminary exercise to refine quantitative instruments or open up areas where there was little existing theory, thus used as a pointer for further quantitative enquiry (Richardson, 1996). During the 1960's however, initially

witnessed in disciplines such as sociology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and later in psychology, researchers began to question the uncritical use of quantification in social science research (Richardson, 1996). Whilst it was acknowledged that it had a role to play in contributing to the understanding of social and psychological processes, some argued there was too much focus on fixing meanings that actually were variable in relationship to their context of use; of neglecting the uniqueness and particularity of the human experience; and of imposing 'objective' systems of meaning on the subjective (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). It was argued that to limit the use of qualitative methods to a preliminary exercise for furthering quantitative research was overlooking the potential of qualitative methods (Charmaz, 1995). Rennie, Phillips & Quartaro (1988) emphasise that qualitative methods offer access to aspects of human experience which are difficult to address with traditional approaches to psychological research, yet are inherent in the subject matter of psychology.

From the 1960's onwards, qualitative research gradually began to emerge as a field of enquiry in it's own right (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), with this paradigm often regarded as in diametric opposition to the quantitative paradigm (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

2.1.2 The Paradigm Debate Today

Recently, many within psychology have argued that it is unhelpful to see the two paradigms as polar opposites, as they ultimately work towards the same goal of furthering understanding of psychological processes (Silverman, 1992). The polarisation between the two positions has therefore become gradually less definitive (McLeod, 2001). An important indicator of this change has been a wider recognition that quantitative and qualitative methods are not fixed to particular epistemological stances. Henwood & Pidgeon (1992) for example note that some quantitative methods (e.g. structured questionnaires and Q-sort methodology) have been used by discourse analysts. In addition as Charmaz (1995) states, some qualitative methodologies such as Grounded Theory (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were originally developed within a positivist paradigm. Some studies have gone even further and utilised both approaches in analysing data to maximise understanding (e.g. Silverman, 1992).

It is important to note at this point that qualitative research is not based on a unified theoretical and methodological concept (Flick, 1998). This results from different developmental lines in the history of qualitative research (e.g. see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Guba & Lincoln (1994) suggest that one's choice of method in qualitative research is largely informed by the position one takes within the epistemological debate. This is explored further in the next section which focuses on one particular method of analysis within the qualitative paradigm, that of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

2.2 Grounded Theory Methodology

2.2.1 History

Grounded Theory was developed in the 1960's through the collaboration of two American sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Although they came from different philosophic and research backgrounds (Glaser was a trained quantitative researcher, whilst Strauss had a background in symbolic interactionism), both shared concerns with a perceived threat to theory development in sociology at this time, due to the popularity of quantitative methods espousing a deductive approach that forced data into existing theories (Rennie *et al*, 1988).

Drawing together their areas of expertise and an interest in searching for the meaning and understanding of individual experiences, they produced a set of data collection and analytic procedures for making sense of initially ill-structured data (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995).

The essential features of this approach are that it is *grounded* and *theoretical*. The term 'theoretical' means that a theory of the phenomenon in question is developed, and that this must be more than a descriptive account. 'Grounded' by contrast indicates that a theory must be developed *from* the data, and not from predetermined hypotheses or formulations (Chamberlain, 1999). This emphasises an *inductive* mode of enquiry, ensuring the theory emerges from and is 'grounded' in the data collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In developing this approach, Glaser & Strauss (1967) began the process of legitimising qualitative research as a mode of enquiry within its own right. They also

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challenged the belief that qualitative methods were impressionistic and unsystematic, and showed that qualitative methods could generate new theories and ways of understanding phenomena (Charmaz, 1995).

2.2.2 Grounded Theory and Psychological Research

With a focus on studying local interactions and meanings as related to the social contexts in which they occur, Grounded Theory is regarded by many to have considerable potential for psychologists (Pidgeon, 1996). Indeed, recent years has witnessed a growth in the application of Grounded Theory methodology by psychological researchers in many fields of the discipline. This is particularly evident in the practitioner disciplines, such as health psychology. Here it has been used to investigate topics such as how general practitioners discuss psychosocial issues with patients (Aborelius & Osterburg, 1995); the experience of chronic illness (Charmaz, 1990); and the experience of recovery after liver transplantation (Wainwright, 1995).

It has also been applied to investigate areas within clinical psychology, such as the study of carer-client relationships in a learning disabilities unit (Clegg, Standen & Jones, 1996); to psychotherapy process research, including client's experiences of significant moments in psychotherapy sessions (Watson & Rennie, 1994); and clinical psychologists' experiences of client non-attendance (Tweed & Salter, 2000). Grounded Theory as an approach then, holds promise for diverse application within the discipline of psychology (Rennie *et al*, 1988).

2.2.3 Rationale for using a Grounded Theory Approach

There were three key reasons for employing a Grounded Theory approach in this study. Firstly, the approach is sensitised to people's own understandings as seen from their local frames of reference (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995). This was crucial in gaining an understanding of the birth child's day-to-day experiences of living as a foster family. Secondly, it is useful where there is no strong prior theory (Pidgeon, 1996). As outlined in the Introduction, there is limited research literature on the lived experiences of birth children in foster families. Finally, the approach was also selected for pragmatic reasons. It offered a well-documented systematic approach to data collection and analysis, and this was useful as the researcher was new to qualitative research.

2.2.4 Process in Grounded Theory Research

There are a number of process strategies that characterize the Grounded Theory approach. These are designed to help the researcher maintain 'groundedness' and enable them to move towards a theoretical account (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 1995). These are outlined briefly here. Later in the chapter, the reader can see how these strategies were employed in the current study.

In Grounded Theory research, the chronological distinction between data collection and data analysis is deliberately blurred (Giles, 2002) and analysis begins much earlier in the research process. This is crucial as the ongoing analysis and emerging concepts are used to *direct* further data collection. The two are therefore deliberately inter-related.

Once data collection begins the analysis therefore also commences and involves 'coding' the data to give it meaning. Whilst the different stages in coding will be outlined in detail later, this essentially involves moving from initial concepts through broader categories to more abstract categories, which are integrated into a theoretical account at a later stage. Throughout this process, the researcher engages in continually and systematically comparing each element of data for similarities and differences. This is known as the *constant comparative method* and is one of the central analytical tasks in Grounded Theory. This ensures that the researcher explores the full diversity and complexity of the data corpus (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). By engaging in this continual process, the researcher builds conceptual and theoretical depth into the analysis in the move towards the generation of a theoretical account (Pidgeon, 1996).

As an important adjunct to this analytic process, the function of *memo writing* aids the development of a grounded theory (Orona, 1997). Memo's are used to document the journey of developing initial concepts through to explicating and linking different categories, and so form an important intermediate step between coding and writing up (Charmaz, 1995).

As theoretical properties of the data are generated, this process in turn feeds back into the sampling of new data. *Theoretical sampling* involves the researcher in

the active sampling of new cases on the basis of concepts that have proven relevant to the evolving theoretical account (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The sampling is therefore explicitly driven by theoretical concerns, with new cases selected for their potential for extending the researcher's understanding, and so enables the elaboration of a conceptually rich, dense and contextually grounded account (Pidgeon, 1996). One way of doing this is to search for a *negative case*. This involves recruiting a participant because some aspect of their experience challenges the developing theory, in an attempt to incorporate all variation into the eventual theory (Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000). Theoretical sampling is a powerful technique for developing understanding, and strengthening credibility of conclusions drawn from the research. Sampling should continue until theoretical *saturation* is reached (Richardson, 1996). Saturation of the theory occurs when further data collection adds nothing new conceptually and the theory can account for all the data that have been obtained (Chamberlain, 1999).

Another key tenet of Grounded Theory is that the researcher avoids conducting a literature review prior to commencing data collection and analysis (Cutcliffe, 2000). This is intended to ensure that the analysis is based strongly in the data and pre-existing constructs do not shape the analysis and subsequent theory (Chamberlain, 1999).

In addition to this, the subjectivities of the researcher form an integral part of the research process. Strauss & Corbin (1990) suggest that the researcher approaches the research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity, depending upon previous experiences or knowledge of the topic area. They used the term *theoretical sensitivity* to refer to the ability of the researcher to have insight into these influences and balance these with being able to recognise what is important in the data and to give it meaning. It is therefore important that the researcher is transparent about what they bring to the research, outlining clearly their personal and professional influences (Elliot *et al*, 1999) in order that Grounded Theory research can be carried out effectively (see Section 2.4.2).

Before going on to illustrate how this approach was employed in the current study, it is useful to look at some of the criticisms levelled at Grounded Theory.

2.2.5 Critique of Grounded Theory

There are a number of debates surrounding the use of Grounded Theory and the approach has been extensively critiqued by some authors (e.g. Charmaz, 1995; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). Debates have centred on issues of epistemology and methodology.

An area of much debate has surrounded the epistemology or forms of knowledge which grounded theories represent (Charmaz, 1995). Indeed, tensions regarding the nature of assumptions underlying Grounded Theory has led to the development of different versions of Grounded Theory (Annells, 1996).

The early Grounded Theory developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967) was positivist in emphasis and premised on a realist stance which assumed the notion of an external reality from which 'facts' could be 'discovered' using the appropriate method (Charmaz, 1995). This was reflected in their claims for the 'emergence' of meaningful concepts and the 'discovery' of theory. It also assumed an objectivist epistemology, with a detached observer seeking an objective view (Chamberlain, 1999). Glaser & Strauss (1967) regarded the researcher as a neutral agent engaged in the discovery of external truths. Although in later writings of Grounded Theory, notably Strauss & Corbin's (1990) model they attempted to take account of these criticisms, some researchers argued for a constructionist revision of Grounded Theory (e.g. Charmaz, 1995; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995).

Constructionist revisions of Grounded Theory attempt to capture more clearly the dynamic character of the research process and role of the researcher. Constructionist views of knowledge assert that meaningful relationships 'in' data do not exist independently, but are introduced in the act of interpretation. For example, Charmaz (1995) argues that researchers have a perspective from which they build their analyses. This 'researcher perspective' includes interests that guide the research question, philosophical assumptions, professional perspective, previous experiences, expectations and biases (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997).

The aim of Grounded Theory within a constructionist view of knowledge becomes one of 'generating' theories or forms of discourse from social phenomena

rather than 'discovering' theoretical structures, so that fresh understandings of existing social worlds may be obtained (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Charmaz, 1995). Henwood & Pidgeon (1992) define the generation of theory as being a constant interplay between data and conceptualisation; a 'flip-flop' between ideas and research experience.

There are also methodological criticisms of Grounded Theory. A continuing debate amongst grounded theory researchers surrounds the claim that grounded theory is a purely inductive methodology. This has largely grown out of differences between the original authors' later interpretations of the methodology (McLeod, 2001). Glaser (e.g. Glaser, 1992) has continued to portray induction as the central feature of grounded theory research, whilst Strauss (e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1990) made attempts to formalise the process of 'doing' grounded theory research by developing a specific set of analytical procedures to guide the researcher. Glaser (1992) has argued that this forces the data and is thus more 'deductive'. Stern (1994) suggests that these 'versions' of grounded theory should, in fact be given different names, with 'grounded theory' for the Glaserian school and 'conceptual description' for the Strausserian school.

Whilst this debate is ongoing, some authors regard it as a false dichotomy. Chamberlain (1999) for example, argues this is an oversimplification of the processes involved. She suggests there are elements of deductive testing in the processes of the constant comparative method and theoretical sampling. It is inductive in so far as the researcher develops initial understandings and categories from the data. As the analysis proceeds however, the researcher seeks to develop these understandings in terms of what is going on and how they link together. These ideas are then tested deductively through further data collection and analysis to aid theory development. Pidgeon & Henwood (1997) suggest that in practice, the tasks of delineating a research study and interpreting any form of research data requires some interplay of both deduction and induction.

There are also concerns that certain schools of Grounded Theory are too prescriptive. As noted above. Strauss & Corbin (1990) developed a clear set of procedures for researchers to follow. Silverman (1993) argues that adherence to a

strict set of procedures limits theoretical development, and promotes the idea of a 'correct' way of doing Grounded Theory research.

Another concern surrounds the aim of grounded theory of building comprehensive theoretical systems (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Criticisms have often been levelled at studies that do not end in the development of theory, yet others argue it is not always necessary. For example, Charmaz (1995) and Henwood and Pidgeon (1995) argue that the building of a comprehensive theory may not always be possible, for example due to time or participant constraints, but suggest that new ways of understanding phenomena can still be gained from accounts that have conceptual depth (e.g. see Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995 for further discussion). In order that the account is more than just a description and gains conceptual depth, they emphasise the importance of following the process strategies to ensure the researcher thinks comparatively and abstractly about the data.

Linked to this is a concern that the final theoretical or conceptual account may simply be a representation of the researcher's assumptions (Schwandt, 1994). The researcher, for example, might unwittingly place more emphasis on aspects of the data that are in line with their own assumptions about the topic area. Again however, by employing the process strategies of constant comparison and memo writing, this ensures the grounding of the analysis. Henwood & Pidgeon (1992) also advocate the keeping of a 'reflective diary' in order to make explicit the thought processes behind decisions made during the analysis.

Rennie et al (1988) outline a number of practical concerns at Grounded Theory research. They see the reliance on verbal reports of data as potentially threatening the intrinsic worth of the resulting theoretical account. They suggest that researchers may be misled by participants who misrepresent internal processes (either consciously or unconsciously). Use of the Constant Comparative method may however increase credibility of individual accounts if it is demonstrated that different individuals say the same thing.

Rennie *et al* (1988) also cite the small number of participants as problematic and argue this calls into question the generalisability of findings. Indeed, the findings could be argued to have relevance only to the individual participant at the time they gave their account. Strauss & Corbin's (1990) counter-argument to this however, is that the researcher is striving for theory that has explanatory power, not theory that can necessarily be generalised. One way of addressing this dilemma could be to systematically compare a series of contrasting groups, selecting participants from each group until saturation ensues. It may be that limited generalisability of findings is the price to pay for pursuing the objective of generating detailed theory that is directly tied to the reality of the individual (Rennie *et al*, 1988).

Grounded Theory then is not based on a unified epistemological or methodological concept. It can accommodate many different epistemological and ontological positions, and is not a static method but an evolving one, which can be adapted to serve different purposes according to the perspective of the researcher and the topic under investigation (Chamberlain, 1999). Researchers must therefore be transparent in their epistemological and methodological approach to using Grounded Theory (see Section 2.4.2 for further discussion).

2.3 Use of the Interview with Children

Interviewing incorporates a family of research approaches with one thing in common; a conversation between people in which one person has the role of the researcher (Arksey & Knight, 1999). As noted earlier, use of the interview is common in qualitative research as it enables the researcher to concentrate on distinctive features of situations and events with the intention of exploring meaning. For this reason, qualitative interviews are generally less structured. In the current study, for example, a semi-structured interview was devised in order to hear what participants had to say on the areas identified by the researcher, but where the researcher could improvise follow-up questions to explore meanings and areas of interest that might emerge. Type of interviewing approach can thus be influenced by epistemological assumptions; for instance, a positivistic view may regard interview data as providing access to 'facts' about the world and so would tend to follow very structured interview protocols (Silverman, 1997).

The interview can also be a useful way of obtaining information from children on a wide range of topics. Docherty & Sandelowski (1999) provide a useful review of the factors involved in understanding the development of narrative competence in children and of appreciating the overall developmental age of children. This includes an understanding of the development of memories and scripts. In a comparison of the quality of interview data between primary school children aged between 8 and 9, and adolescents aged 15-16, Amato & Ochiltree (1987) found that children from the age of eight have adequate verbal ability and understanding to cope with an interview about family life, and are usually very willing to discuss upsetting family experiences.

Building on this developmental understanding of children, researchers have sought ways to conduct interviews that best enable children to convey their experiences. Prior to the actual interview, the process of gaining consent is important. Nespor (1998) stresses that researchers must take the time to clarify for the child the purpose of the interview and the role the child is expected to play in the interview. In addition, if the parent(s) is required to give consent for their child to participate, consent must be sought on the understanding that what the child says is confidential and will not be passed on to parents (see section 2.5.1 below).

The development of rapport in an interview is crucial (Hall, 1996). Fostering trust is a continuous process, but this can be difficult given that many research interviews are 'one-offs'. What happens in the opening stage is then especially crucial to the success of what follows (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999). Hall (1996) suggests beginning the interview by leading the child into a free discussion about him or herself. In the current study, the interview began by obtaining some demographic information from participants, followed by some 'warm-up' exercises designed to help put the child at ease whilst also providing useful information (see section 2.5.4 for more discussion). Docherty & Sandelowski (1999) suggest that it is useful to begin with an open-ended question to elicit a spontaneous narrative, followed by more direct questions to fill in the blanks in the narrative.

Whilst this is a brief review of some of the factors involved in interviewing children, the next section provides more detailed information on the participants

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involved in the study. The experience of conducting interviews with children is then explored further in Chapter Four.

2.4   Participants

2.4.1   Situating the Sample

Elliot, Fischer & Rennie (1999) argue that providing descriptions of participants is important in qualitative research because it aids the reader in judging the range of persons and situations to which the findings might be relevant. Descriptions of participants in this study are depicted in Figure One below:

Interview No.	Name of Participant	Age of Participant	Type of Foster Placement
1	'Richard'	15	Short-term, specialist
2	'Daniel'	12	Long-term
3	'Luke'	14	Long-term
4	'Joseph'	11	Short-term
5	'Amy'	9	Long-term

Fig. 1. Description of Participants

Five children took part in this study, and this comprised of 4 males and 1 female. Participants and their families had been fostering for a total of between 6 months to 14 years. In this time, the birth children had had between 3 and 20 foster children residing with them. At the time of the research, the foster children had between 1 to 2 foster children residing with them and their families, and the foster children had been in placement with them for between 2 weeks and 3 years.

2.4.2 The Researcher's Stance

At the time of planning this research, the researcher was a psychologist in her final year of a clinical psychology training course. The researcher had a total of six years of clinical experience, with two of these years spent working with children and families. The researcher had no previous experience of conducting qualitative research or of using a grounded theory methodology.

In preparation for the study, the researcher conducted a literature search of the topic area in order to develop an initial research proposal. Although one of the key proponents of the Grounded Theory approach is delay of the literature review (as outlined on page 27), in practice, it can be hard for a researcher to select a research area without having some understanding of the field. Indeed, the process of research in the completion of a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology determines that a literature review must be done many months prior to data collection, as was the case in this research. Where this is a reality, Chamberlain (1999) points out that the researcher must be alert to this knowledge and any ideas or intuitions must be checked against the data and not be allowed to impose on the developing theoretical account. The literature therefore 'sensitised' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) the researcher to the phenomenon under study and provided a knowledge base in foster family research to date.

The researcher also had clinical experience of working with families who fostered children, although this had taken the form primarily of working with either the fostered child or the parents. Through these experiences, the researcher had developed a particular interest in thinking about the various forms of family life that children often live in, such as step-families, adoptive and foster families, and had a particular interest in understanding how children experienced these forms of family life. In addition, the researcher held strong beliefs that children should be given a voice and that their experiences should be heard.

Linking into this, the researcher reflected on personal experiences of family life. Whilst having no previous experience of living in a foster family, the researcher was interested in children's experiences of family life. Reflecting, for example on her own experiences of sibling rivalry, the researcher was curious as to how this might be

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affected by the placement of another child in the family, with ideas that it would not be positively experienced. The researcher's assumptions of the topic area were therefore influenced by the research literature, professional and personal experience.

In recognition of these influences, the researcher kept a 'reflective diary' (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992) in which expectations were recorded prior to the commencement of the interviews with participants. This diary was maintained throughout the research process to record the researcher's ideas, observations and interpretations. Although as Rennie *et al* (1988) state, it is not possible to be aware of all internal processes pertaining to a topic, this created a paper trail making explicit the process by which the analysis was developed and enabled the researcher to become more aware of her role within the research process.

As outlined earlier, Grounded Theory is not based on a unified epistemological stance. In light of these different developmental lines, the epistemological position adopted by the researcher in the present study was more closely aligned to a critical realist, than constructionist position. Essentially, critical realism asserts "the way we perceive facts, particularly in the social realm, depends partly upon our beliefs and expectations" (Bunge, 1993, p. 231, cited in Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000). The researcher therefore essentially accepted that the accounts obtained from participants would represent their own realities and experiences. As outlined in the above quote however, the position of critical realism whilst based on positivistic assumptions, also admits an inherent subjectivity in the production of knowledge and as such also has much in common with constructionist positions. Related to the current study then, this indicated an acceptance of the phenomenon of the 'family', but that each individual child would perceive this differently. In addition, the researcher also acknowledged that her involvement in the research would impact on the accounts given by participants (Madill *et al*, 2000).

In practice, the researcher primarily followed Strauss & Corbin's (1990) version of Grounded Theory. Although criticisms of this version as being too 'prescriptive' (Silverman, 1992) were acknowledged, it was also felt to provide a useful basic structure for the researcher given it was a first-time venture into doing qualitative research. However, the researcher did also incorporate aspects of other

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versions of Grounded Theory, for example Pidgeon & Henwood's (1997) notion of memo writing. This was found to be useful in maintaining a focus on the role of the researcher, and as a useful aid in taking the analytical process forward.

This chapter will now go on to describe the procedure undertaken in the current study. The process of data collection will first be outlined, followed by the analysis.

2.5   Procedure – Data Collection
2.5.1   Recruitment of Participants

Through a professional link with the local NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), the researcher was introduced to an Independent Fostering Agency in the local area. The agency, Foster Care Associates (FCA) is the largest UK independent fostering agency, and specialises in providing family placements for 'difficult to place' children. A contact name was provided by the CAMH service and the researcher began by sending a letter and Information Sheet outlining the research proposal (see Appendix 6.1 for initial letter to Agency and Appendix 6.2 for Information Sheet for the Fostering Agency).

Following a reply from the Agency (see Appendix 6.3), the researcher met with the team to discuss the project in more detail. Interestingly, the researcher learned that the Agency had a policy of including the children of potential foster carers in preparing the family for fostering and also ran a support group twice yearly for own children.

The researcher was then invited to attend a Foster Carers Support Group, which took place monthly at the Agency. The rationale for informing parents about the project in the first instance was because parental consent to take part in the project was needed for children under the age of 16. At this meeting, the researcher provided Information Sheets about the project for parents (see Appendix 6.4) and also one for children (see Appendix 6.5) which parents were encouraged to take away and talk over with their children. A stamped-addressed envelope was also included for children to return the forms to the researcher if they were interested in taking part.

It was agreed with the Agency that the researcher would then attend a Birth Children's Support Group, to discuss the project in more detail with the children and to check out whether they had received an Information Sheet about the project. This was unfortunately cancelled and so did not occur.

Once a reply was received from a child, the researcher contacted the family and arranged a visit to their home to discuss the project in more detail. This gave both the child and their parents the opportunity to ask any questions about the project. It also felt important that the child had an opportunity to meet the researcher prior to the interview, so that they knew who was going to be interviewing them. At this interview, the issue of confidentiality was highlighted, and the limits to this discussed (as outlined in the Information Sheets to both parents and children, Appendices 6.4 and 6.5). Participants were informed that all names and other identifying information would be changed to ensure anonymity. In planning for every eventuality, a back-up plan was also discussed with the family, whereby if the participant was in any way distressed following the interview, the Family Social Worker would be available for the child to talk with.

A decision was then made about whether the child wished to participate in the project and a consent form was signed by the child, a parent (if they were under the age of 16) and the researcher (see Appendix 6.6). A copy of the consent form was given to the child to keep.

In following this protocol, only two replies were received from children. In order to recruit further participants, the researcher had to re-contact the Agency who then contacted families again, to remind them of the project and enquire whether any children would be interested. The researcher was then given the names and contact details of these families and arranged to follow them up with a home visit. The remaining three participants were recruited in this way.

It is important to note that after conducting five interviews, the researcher arranged two further interviews. Both of these children subsequently dropped out. A sixth participant was then identified and consent was gained to interview them. However, when the researcher arrived at the participants' house to conduct the

interview, the participant had forgotten and gone out. Due to time constraints, the researcher was unable to arrange another time to conduct the interview. Despite efforts on the part of the researcher and fostering agency therefore, it was only possible to recruit five participants into the project (the impact of this is explored further in Chapter Four).

2.5.2   Inclusion Criteria

Children aged between the ages of 10-18 years old were eligible for inclusion in the current study. Drawing on the developmental literature surrounding research involving children, this age range was chosen primarily to provide access to a wide range of ages and experiences (Gabarino & Stott, 1992).

The other inclusion criteria stipulated that children would have been involved in fostering for at least six months. This was primarily to ensure that children had had time to adjust to having a foster child living with them and, in line with the interview guide, would be able to reflect on experiences of what it was like in the beginning and what it was like presently (see below for information on the Interview Guide).

2.5.3   Ethical Approval

As the participant group were not derived from a clinical population within the National Health Service (NHS), ethical approval was sought from the University of Leicester - School of Psychology Ethics Committee. Ethical Approval for the study was granted in September 2003. The research was also registered with the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust Research and Development Office.

Some way through the data collection process, the researcher was required to re-contact the Ethics Committee. A young girl, aged 9 at the time of the research had expressed interest in taking part in the project. Given that there had been no other females recruited into the project thus far, the researcher felt it would be useful to include her as a participant. However, inclusion criteria had excluded anyone under the age of 10. The Ethics Committee was contacted to enquire whether the researcher would need to re-apply for ethical approval. A decision was made that the girl could be recruited into the project without re-submitting for ethical approval.

2.5.4   Interview Guide

As highlighted in the Introduction section, there were no studies that had investigated the present area of interest. The researcher developed a four-item semi-structured interview schedule, intended to include a range of areas to be addressed in the interview, but with flexibility to allow the respondent to initiate new topics or expand on relevant issues (Payne, 1999). The interview guide aimed to seek participants' views on the following areas:

- Family life before fostering
- Perceived involvement in planning and preparation
- Views on living as a foster family – in particular, what it was like in the beginning and day-to-day issues
- Family life now (as a foster family).

As outlined earlier, given that the participants were children, the interview included some 'warm-up' exercises designed to ease the child into the interview and also provided useful visual material for them to refer to during the interview. These included the drawing out of a Family Tree, and a 'Heartstrings' exercise (Hobday & Ollier, 1998), designed to elicit participants perceptions of emotional closeness to different family members. These exercises were also repeated towards the end of the interview, to provide useful contrasting material on how the participants' perceptions and feelings towards their family may have changed over time.

Some basic demographic information was also asked of participants. A sheet with demographic questions was given to the child at the consent meeting in order for them to have time to complete prior to the interview (see Appendix 6.7). This was done specifically in order to engage the child in actively thinking about the interview process leading up to the interview. Questions asked included:

- how old they were when their family first fostered a child
- how many years their family had been fostering
- how many foster children had lived with them altogether
- the ages of the foster children who had lived with them
- how many foster children were living with them now (at the time of the research)

- how old they were
- how long they had been living with them.

2.5.5   Interview Procedure

All five participants were interviewed in their own homes, thus taking place in the 'natural' setting in which the fostering experience occurred (Elliot *et al*, 1999). Upon arrival at the participant's home, a quiet room was located where there would be no interruptions. The participant was reminded of the purpose of the interview and the researcher went through the consent form with them once again. They were then asked if they had any further questions. The researcher provided information on the estimated length of the interview and introduced the tape recorder on which the interview would be recorded.

The researcher then began the interview, starting with the basic demographic information questions the participants had prepared prior to the interview. This was done in order to help put the participants at ease. The general structure of the interview guide (outlined above) was followed, starting with the Family Tree exercise. The researcher did however attempt to ensure this was flexible, in order to follow participants directions, and attempts were made not to constrain the participants in their answers.

The interviews lasted from between thirty minutes, to one hour and twenty minutes. At the end of the interview, the researcher checked that the participant was feeling fine, and thanked them for their participation. The researcher then informed the participant that they would receive a summary sheet outlining the findings when the project was completed.

After leaving the interview setting, the researcher recorded some post-interview notes outlining her initial impressions of the interview, in her 'reflective diary'. An example of an entry is given below, following Interview 4 with 'Joseph':

Fig. 2. Extract from researcher's reflective diary

As outlined earlier, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously in a Grounded Theory approach. In the current study, data collection began in December 2003 and ended in May 2004. Data analysis began following the first interview in December 2003 and continued until June 2004 after data collection had ended. The emerging analysis influenced further data collection, with the interview guide flexible in order to incorporate some of the emerging analytic ideas for further exploration in subsequent interviews. The interview guide was not specifically altered in structure, rather the researcher was sensitised to themes that had emerged in previous accounts. For example, early interviews identified the effort made by participants to make the foster child feel welcome in their homes and so this was explored in further detail in later interviews.

Theoretical sampling in this study was not possible given the limited number of children who expressed an interest in the study, and the added element of a time constraint. However, the third participant ('Luke') did constitute a *negative case analysis*. From the first two interviews, a theme began to emerge around maintaining a sense of their own family as separate from the foster child. 'Luke's' family however had been fostering since prior to his birth and so it was interesting to examine whether he had a sense of his 'own' family or not. This was useful in adding 'depth' to the eventual theoretical account.

2.6   Procedure – Data Analysis

2.6.1   Transcription

Each tape-recorded interview was transcribed verbatim (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The resulting transcripts formed the permanent textual record, ready for the process of a grounded theory analysis. Given that the focus of the Grounded Theory approach was on the *content* of linguistic exchange rather than on its organisation, transcription conventions were employed to indicate silences and overlaps in conversation (Silverman, 1997); but these were not, for example, timed, as would be the need in some qualitative methodological approaches, such as discourse analysis. An explanatory key to these conventions is provided in the addendum. During transcription, in order to ensure the anonymity of all participants, any identifying information, including names and places, were changed.

2.6.2   Open Coding

'Open' coding constitutes the first phase of transcript analysis. Open coding fractures the data and enables the researcher to begin the process of conceptualisation (Orona, 1997). This is done by firstly examining the data line-by-line and giving a verbal label or *concept* to phenomena occurring in the sentence or paragraph. The researcher asked of the data, 'what is going on here?' and 'what word stands for the phenomena represented in this sentence?' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The concepts are chosen to capture 'active' psychological processes in participants' accounts (Charmaz, 1995). In practice, concepts were indicated in pencil in the margins next to the data on a working copy of the transcript (see Appendix 6.8 for an example of open coding).

Open coding serves two important purposes. Firstly, it deconstructs the data to a least-abstract level of meaning. Secondly, it keeps the analysis 'grounded'; it enables the researcher to get close to the data and to avoid bringing their own preconceptions and biases to bear on the analysis (Charmaz, 1995). An example of this process is given below. taken from an excerpt of Interview 2 with 'Daniel' (for the full transcript of this interview, see Addendum):

"Well, the first one, erm, we didn't know what to expect really. We didn't know what they were like and we'd never had one before, and they just, really, blended in, cos' it was about, the first one was about eleven and erm, when he first come he liked football so I just let him come in my room to play on the playstation football or something and he blended in alright." (2, 160-165).

Here, the researcher noted concepts, such as Uncertainty *('we didn't know what to expect really')*, Encouraging shared interests *('when he first come he liked football so I just let him come in my room to play on the play station football')*, and Fitting into Family *('he blended in alright')*.

As the number of concepts increased, the next step involved grouping together similar concepts and integrating them into broader categories (Giles, 2002). This process is known as *categorizing* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to represent the concepts linked together, categories are named at a more abstract level. This process therefore involves moving the analysis from the descriptive towards a more interpretative level (Giles, 2002). For example, two concepts labelled *'comparing experiences'* and *'evaluating own treatment'* were identified. These were later placed together to form a category entitled *'Making Comparisons'*.

As categories were produced, they were further developed in terms of their *properties* and *dimensions* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). *Properties* are the attributes or characteristics of a category and *dimensions* are the location of the properties along a continuum. Strauss & Corbin (1990) suggest a number of techniques to stimulate this inductive process and enhance theoretical sensitivity. For example, the researcher used the 'flip-flop' technique to think comparatively about a category. This involved turning a category upside down and imagining the very opposite (see Appendix 6.9 for an example). The development of a category in terms of its properties and dimensions is important because it forms the basis for making relationships between categories, and thus provides the foundation for a 'grounded' theory.

2.6.3 Axial Coding

Axial coding involved putting the data back together in new ways, by making connections between categories and their components (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Exploring the similarities and differences between categories and their components ensured the method of constant comparison continued to be employed. This facilitated the process of refining and developing categories further, and beginning to relate categories (Chamberlain, 1999). In practice, this involved collapsing some categories into others, whilst splitting others to make new categories.

Strauss & Corbin (1990) advocate the use of the *Paradigm Model* to facilitate this process. The Paradigm Model provides a structure to enable the researcher to think systematically about data and begin to relate them. In practice, and in line with criticisms of the model as too prescriptive (Silverman, 1993), the researcher experienced this model as stifling to the creative process and so did not adhere as strictly to this model as advocated by Strauss & Corbin (1990). The researcher drew on other techniques, such as *memo-writing* and *writing definitions* (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996) in order to record ideas about links both within and between categories. These were recorded in the researcher's 'reflective journal' (see Appendix 6.10 for an example of writing a definition).

It is useful to recall at this point that process in grounded theory research stipulates that interviewing continues until *saturation* is reached. In the current study however, given the small number of participants, whilst some categories were becoming saturated, this was not always the case (this is discussed further in Chapter Four).

2.6.4 Selective Coding

Selective coding is a similar process to axial coding, but involves taking the analysis to a higher, more abstract level. As categories had been developed, both in terms of density and potential links with one another, selective coding was the process of selecting the *core category*. The core category represents a dominant explanatory theme in the data and integrates as many data categories around it as possible. As Glaser (1978) stated, a meaningful grounded theory comprises a representative concept, along with its constituent categories and the connections between them.

In practice, selecting the core category can be done through first explicating a *story line*, which is essentially a descriptive account of the central phenomenon. Then, just as with open and axial coding, the process needs to move from description to conceptualisation so the story is told analytically. This therefore involves naming the core category with a conceptual label that represents the story it is telling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Again, memo writing in the researcher's reflective diary was important in developing the core category.

In order to ensure that the story told remains 'grounded' in the data, if categories did not seem to 'fit' or felt forced into the storyline, it was necessary for the researcher to re-examine the categories and their components to see if there were alternative ways of conceptualising them.

Throughout this process, the researcher moved between the different stages of the analysis, with emerging analytic ideas used to facilitate the process of theoretical sampling.

2.7 Quality Measures

This chapter now concludes with a look at the quality measures employed in the study. There has been much debate surrounding the issue of how qualitative research can demonstrate that it is of good 'quality'. There is a concern amongst some authors that qualitative research is often evaluated by the standard canons of quantitative research (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996), when these do not fit with the methodological or epistemological underpinnings of the paradigm.

A number of writers have suggested 'good practice' guidelines for the evaluation of qualitative research (e.g. Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Elliot *et al*, 1999). Although there remains a concern that explicit codification of guidelines for qualitative research are fundamentally at odds with the spirit of qualitative research, Elliot *et al* (1999) argue that they can serve four purposes. Firstly, they go some way to highlight methodological rigor. Second, they offer valid standards for good practice. Thirdly, they offer some basic 'quality control' standards, encouraging researchers to exercise greater self-reflectiveness in the carrying out of investigations.

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Lastly, they provide qualitative researchers with common reference points from which to evaluate research. Quality measures employed in this study are discussed below.

Firstly, as highlighted throughout the Procedure, the researcher used the method of *constant comparison* to analyse the data, was able to obtain a *negative case*, and was transparent about the *theoretical sensitivities*, all of which are key components in using a Grounded Theory approach.

Furthermore, the reflexive process by which the analysis proceeded and theoretical account was developed was made explicit (Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994). The researcher maintained a reflective diary which created a 'paper trail' of the entire research process (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). Transparency is an important concept in qualitative research and Rennie *et al* (1988) argue it is a good indicator of quality. What is important is not that another researcher could follow this trail to emerge with the same findings (since the theoretical sensitivities of the researcher and this impact on the analysis will inevitably be different) but that they can follow the *logic* behind the study.

Another measure of quality involves keeping close to the data. This involved providing examples of the 'raw' data to illustrate both the analytic procedures used in the study and the understanding developed in the light of them (Elliot *et al*, 1999). It is of particular relevance for grounded theory studies, as it emphasises good 'fit' between raw data, coding and the abstract categories that contribute to a theoretical account (Rennie, 2000).

In the present study, three forms of grounding material were included. Firstly, a complete copy of the interview transcripts is included in the addendum representing the 'raw' data. Secondly, examples of the coding procedures used during the analysis are included in Appendix 6.8. Finally, the 'Analysis' section provides a comprehensive account of the theoretical account developed and this is supplemented with quotes taken from the interview transcripts.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that qualitative research must also demonstrate 'trustworthiness' in the analysis. This links broadly to the notion of

validity and refers to measures designed to check whether interpretations and the resulting theoretical account are consistent and robust (Stiles, 1993). In practice, this included a number of both internal and external checks. The internal checks employed were all characteristic of Grounded Theory methodology. For example, the constant comparison of concepts, categories and themes identified at each stage of the analysis were continually checked against earlier forms of understanding. This ensured that the analysis remained 'grounded' in participants' accounts.

External checks included efforts to enhance *internal coherence* (Elliot *et al*, 1999). This refers to the extent to which the understanding of participants' experiences is represented in a way that achieves coherence and integration, while preserving meaningful nuances in the data. One way of adding to internal coherence and credibility of the study is through peer debriefing (Flick, 1998). In the present study, this was done through the attendance of the researcher at a monthly support group for final year clinical psychology trainees who were all using qualitative methodology. Prior to each meeting, excerpts from transcripts were circulated to each member of the group for coding at a basic level. This enabled the researcher to discuss with other group members their interpretation and understanding of the data and compare similarities and differences. It also enabled the researcher to lay open her analysis and have to defend decisions made.

Other examples of external credibility checks include *respondent validation*, where the researcher returns to original participants at the end of the research to check whether the interpretation is recognizable to the account they gave. This can be useful, as it serves a further source of data with which to elaborate the developing theory. It is, however, not without its problems. For example, Henwood & Pidgeon (1992) state that there is an inevitable power relationship between the researcher and participant and this may affect the participant's willingness to provide useful feedback. In addition, they may never have thought of their experiences in such abstract terms and so the theoretical account may be unrecognisable to the account they gave. Bearing these concerns in mind, the researcher did not use respondent validation. The researcher did however provide a summary of the research findings to each participant (see Appendix 6.11), with opportunities to meet with the researcher and discuss these in more detail, if requested. In addition, the researcher also

produced a summary sheet of the findings for parents (see Appendix 6.12) and the Fostering Agency (see Appendix 6.13).

Finally, Elliot *et al* (1999) suggests that the reader is the ultimate judge of 'quality'. 'Reader evaluation' refers to the extent to which the theoretical model stimulates resonance with readers and expands their appreciation and understanding of the phenomenon under study. Giles (2002) further suggests that it should impact on the literature and have practical implications. This emphasises that the reader is the ultimate judge of 'quality'. Alongside the need for methodological rigor and transparency of interpretative analysis, as highlighted above, a study must also be able to convey experiences in a way that the participants themselves may find difficult to express and which also offers a useful form of understanding for others' practice (Elliot *et al*, 1999). These issues are addressed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

3.0   **CHAPTER THREE:**

                          ANALYSIS

This chapter provides an account of the analysis of the five interview transcripts. A model made up of one core category and four main categories (themselves consisting of intermediate and lower-level categories) was generated from an analysis of the data, following the analytic procedures outlined in the previous chapter. This model represents one way of understanding how foster carers' own children manage the transition to living as a foster family.

The chapter begins with a brief definition for the reader of the different levels of the model. An overview of the core category and an outline of the four main categories pertaining to the core category are then described. A process model is then depicted to illustrate how the main categories are related to each other. The chapter then goes on to present each main category and the intermediate and lower-level categories within them. Representing the model in this way ensures that the story has conceptual depth and is 'grounded' in participants' accounts. At each stage of the model, direct quotes from the interview transcripts are used to explicate the categories. These are presented as indented paragraphs in *italicised text* and each quote includes the name of the participant and is referenced by line number to its location in the transcript.

3.1 **Defining the Model**

The core category in this model is a higher-abstract conceptualisation derived from the researcher's interpretation of the analysis. It represents an attempt to conceptualise the 'story' contained within each transcript when read as a whole. It is therefore the central phenomenon around which all the other (main) categories are integrated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The main categories represent the key components of the story pertaining to the core category. The intermediate-level and lower-level categories constitute further explication of the main categories.

3.2 **Overview of the Core Category**

The core category generated from the analysis is termed *'Redefining Family'*. This was the focus of the storyline and was comprised of four main categories. These

were 'Awareness of Familial Changes', 'Seeking to Understand', 'Maintaining a Sense of Own Family' and 'Finding a Role'. These four main categories are outlined below.

'AWARENESS OF FAMILIAL CHANGES' as a main category reflected participants' experiences of entering the process of family adjustment to the presence of a foster child, through the noticing of changes within their family:

> *"...when it was just me they put all of the attention onto me, but then there's another, when they came, some of it went to them."*
>
> *('Joseph', 133-135)*

'SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND' as a main category represented participants' attempts to make sense of the changes within their family. This was done through a process of learning about the foster child:

> *"...some of them haven't got a home and it's a bit horrible cos' they want to get back with their mum but they can't."*   *('Daniel', 113-114)*

'MAINTAINING A SENSE OF OWN FAMILY' as a main category encapsulated a process by which participants were able to hold onto a sense of their own family as they experienced change:

> *"...they put me before like the foster caring, this is what they said to me, cos' just in case, they're not having like, I don't know, someone accuse me or something...if I can't put up with it they'll get rid of the person."*
>
> *('Richard', 741-745)*

'FINDING A ROLE' as a main category represented participants' attempts to locate a role for themselves within the family:

"...they've been through quite a lot, cos' Steven and Martin their dad's in jail and their partner's, well their mum's fiancée, he's in jail. So I think it's gonna be a bit upsetting cos' their dad's died now. So I decide to make them feel welcome."   *('Amy', 86-89)*

3.3   A Process Model

The process model, depicted in Figure 3 overleaf, illustrated the interaction between the main categories in enabling participants to redefine their family. Using participants' accounts, the relationship between these categories was formulated as a linear process model. This model was tentative and represented participants' attempts to re-define their family as a gradual process.

The first main category represented participants' developing awareness of familial changes. The second main category represented a phase of attempting to locate an understanding of why these changes had occurred. The third category stood for participants' attempts to hold onto a sense of their own family in the face of change, and the fourth category represented participants' attempts to find a role for themselves in this new family structure. It was understood that the first three categories formed a backdrop enabling participants to locate a role for themselves.

In looking at the model, the black arrows illustrated this linear process. In the analysis, the second main category, 'Seeking to Understand' was shown to have a direct link with enabling participants to 'Find a Role' and so is illustrated here. This meant that, although understood as a linear model, participants could move between stages. The grey arrows represent the fluidity and ongoing nature of this process. By it's very nature, fostering involved children coming and going from participants' families and required participants to go through a continual process of adjustment with each new foster child entering and leaving the family.

3.4   Main Category 1:   'AWARENESS OF FAMILIAL CHANGES'

The first main category of experience identified in the analysis was 'Awareness of Familial Changes'. Figure 4 depicts this category, illustrating the constituent intermediate-level and lower-level categories. This category represents a process in which participants experienced changes within their family. A defining

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The Core Category:

REDEFINING FAMILY

The Process Model:

Awareness of Familial Changes

Seeking to Understand

**Maintaining a Sense
Of Own Family**

Finding a Role
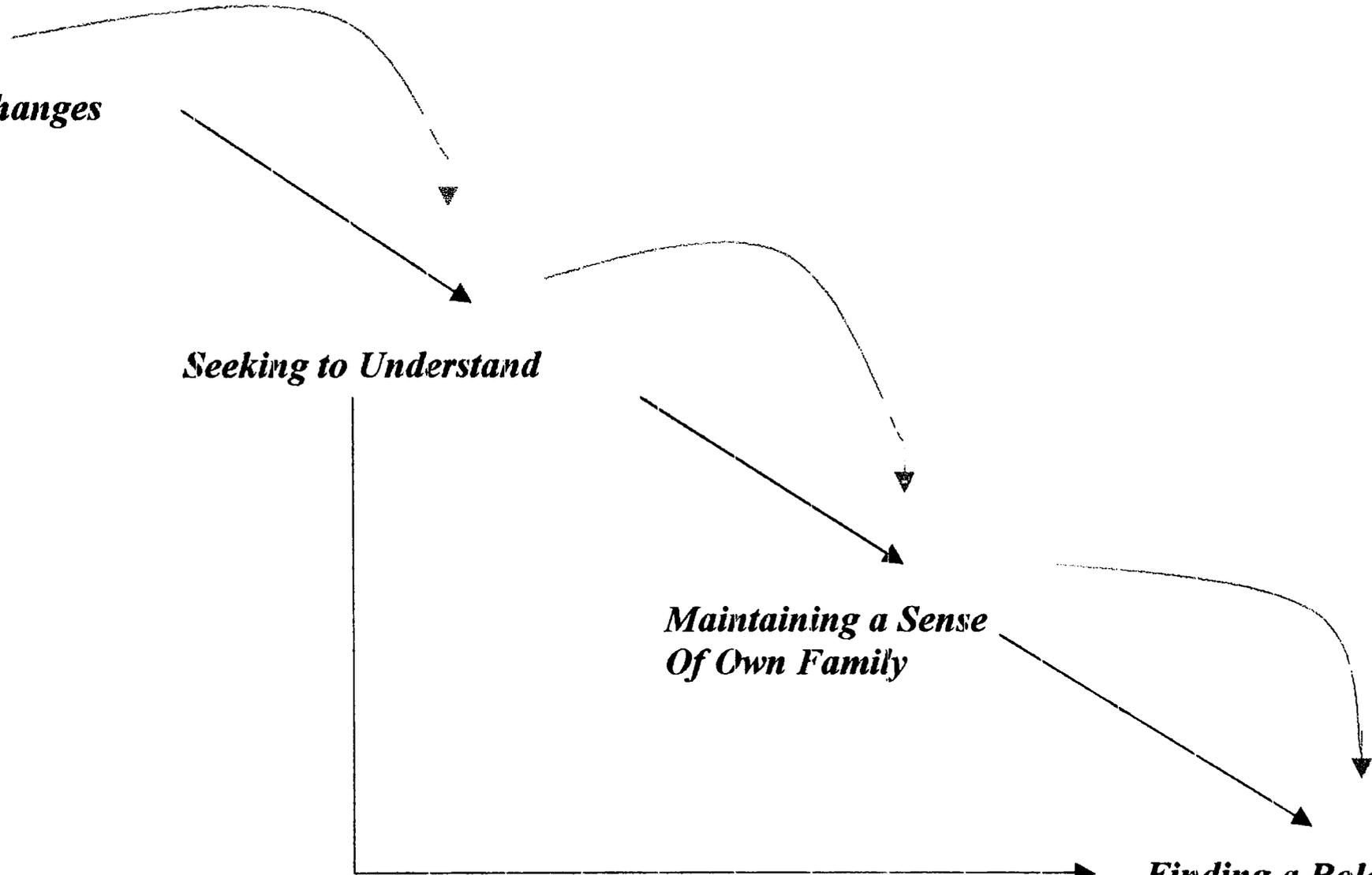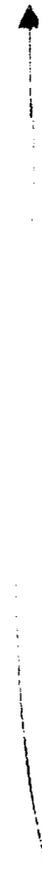
Figure 3: The Process Model
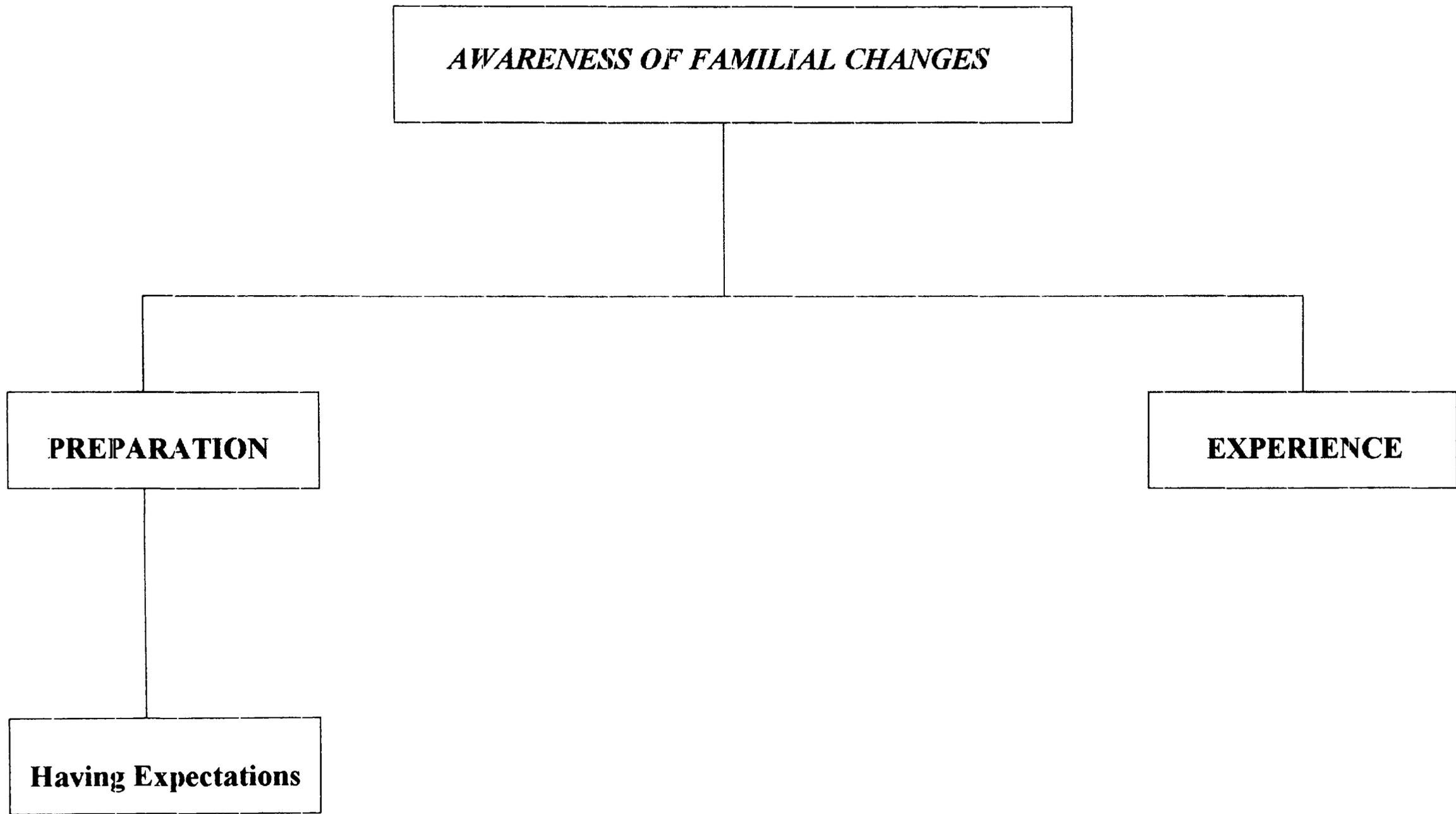
Figure 4: Awareness of Familial Changes

theme of this main category was that this process began from the moment the idea was raised within the family.

> *"Well, you just, erm, cos' you've got something in your mind, erm, just at the back of your mind saying, "What they gonna be like? Are they nice or are they mean?"* ('Amy', 69-71)

This process was represented in the two intermediate-level categories termed 'Preparation' and 'Experience'. The category 'Preparation' also contained a lower-level category entitled 'Having Expectations'.

Intermediate-level category: *'Preparation'*

The category 'Preparation' was used to stand for the initial process participants went through in getting ready for becoming a foster family. This process seemed to occur prior to the placement of any foster children with the family. Being consulted about their views on fostering facilitated this preparation phase. In the majority of cases, the parents did this, although in 'Richard's' case the fostering agency was also involved.

> *"Well, erm...sort of she seen it in the newspaper...Yeah, and she thought of the idea...and so they talked to me, Sam and Adam* (brothers) *and we, and I said it was alright, Sam said he didn't mind and Adam said, "I'll be fine with it" ".* ('Daniel', 109-117)

> *"Yeah, erm, I chatted with the Social Worker before it just to find out if I had any worries or anything, which I didn't really, no."* ('Richard', 193-194)

'Joseph', the newest of all the participants to fostering, recalled the circumstances surrounding this and, being an only child, vividly remembered his initial reaction to the proposal.

"Err, well, it was one night and me, we were watching a programme
about it I think, and then they said we could do it. And I thought
they were joking at first and then they're not."   (*'Joseph'*, 77-79)

Interestingly, in contrast to this, 'Luke' whose family had been fostering since before he was born, when asked about whether he had ever talked to his parents about his views on fostering said,

"Yeah, they just sort of already know, I don't really mind."   (*'Luke'*, 99)

All of the participants therefore had been consulted about fostering, although this seemed less pertinent for 'Luke' who had been fostering for all of his life. A related component of this preparation phase was that participants engaged in an active process of thinking about what fostering would be like. This was represented by the lower-level category described below.

Lower-level category: 'Having Expectations'

Participants expressed a range of different feelings in response to the idea of becoming a foster family.

"I think it's really exciting cos' you don't know what they're
going to be like or anything."   (*'Amy'*, 60-61)

"Well, well like I don't know say, say if we had like abuse or if
they swore at my mum or something, I don't know how I would
react."   (*'Daniel'*, 145-147)

Feelings were therefore very mixed and there was a theme of participants being uncertain about what fostering would be like. This was also coupled with expectations about what it would be like. This was very much linked to participants' ideas about what it would mean to have a foster child living with them. This was characterised in many different ways. 'Joseph' and 'Daniel' thought they would gain a playmate, whilst 'Amy' looked upon it as gaining a sibling and a playmate. Participants expectations therefore centred on the idea of gaining something.

*"Erm, fun, because I'd have someone to play with, erm, I thought
it would be really fun."*   *('Joseph', 92-93)*

*"Well, me and Anthony thought it was really exciting because we
kept thinking we were going to get a new brother or sister."* *('Amy', 37-38)*

Prior to the foster child's entry into the family then, participants were engaged in actively thinking about what it might be like and had a range of feelings towards fostering. They were uncertain about what fostering would be like but felt they would gain something from it. Interestingly, in some of the participants who had been fostering for some time, this seemed to facilitate in them an ability to predict more precisely what the experience would be like. This was particularly pronounced in the account given by 'Luke' who had been fostering all of his life, and this is encapsulated in the two quotes below.

*"When, all foster kids are like, they're all sort of the same, they get
to know you and stuff and feel, just feel comfortable around you
and all that, but when they first come you don't think they will cos'
they're shy and stuff."*   *('Luke', 107-110)*

*"Cos' we've been fostering more children and I've sort of, I just
know what's going to happen. I'm used to what's going to happen
and things like that."*   *('Luke', 164-166)*

In becoming aware of familial changes therefore, participants went through an initial process of 'preparation' prior to the foster child's arrival. In increasing awareness of familial changes, participants also went through a process of 'experience' once the foster child was placed in the family. This was encapsulated in the second intermediate-level category.

Intermediate-level-category: <u>*'Experience'*</u>

This category represents the process participants went through when the foster child was actually placed in the family, and relates to actually experiencing changes

within the family. Change occurred in many different ways and these are illustrated below. This included for example, a change in activities that participants could engage in at home. 'Daniel' found there was a reduction in the time he spent with his brother, whilst 'Joseph' had to stop certain games he had always played with his father.

"...I'm close, quite close with him and, but we don't do that many things anymore, cos' we used to go out loads, but we don't do anymore....I don't know cos' I go out with Peter (foster brother) *a lot and he don't come back from school 'til about half six and I've gone swimming with Peter or something."* ('Daniel', 461-466)

"Well, when we, like when we didn't have anyone we used to play like fighting games, but now we've got someone we can't really do that." ('Joseph', 44-45)

One of the consequences of this for 'Joseph' was that he initially tried to reverse this sudden change. In asking him how he felt about the fact that he could no longer play fighting games with his dad he said,

"Err, I pestered him, I kept going on, "Please, please, but he said, "We can't." " ('Joseph', 145-146)

Experiencing changes in the activities they could get involved in at home meant that for some, they initially tried to get things back as they were. Participants also noted changes in behaviour within their own family.

"...we have to hide some of the sweets and chocolate sometimes so she doesn't go in there and grab them." ('Joseph', 285-286)

For 'Amy', one of the changes she noticed included,

"We have dinner at the table a lot." ('Amy', 112)

All of the participants noticed changes to other members of their family. 'Daniel' noticed changes in his brother, whilst 'Richard' noticed changes in his mother.

> *"Yeah, she's learned to accept more things, behaviour from*
> *people."*   *('Richard', 677)*

There also seemed to be a noticeable change to relationships within the family. Interestingly, a number of participants said that the fostering experience had either brought them closer to other family members, or the emotional closeness of their relationships had remained the same. None of the participants said it had had a negative impact on relationships.

> *"I probably feel a little bit more close to my mum and*
> *dad because we've got to talk more."*   *('Richard', 740-741)*

Participants also noted changes within themselves. This included examples of *being* different and *doing* things differently. For example, 'Richard' noticed a number of changes within himself.

> *"...I've had to become more tolerant about what people say, how*
> *I behave and things like that with people..."*   *('Richard', 255-256)*

> *"I have to tolerate more. I have to be more helpful as well*
> *sometimes. Like, entertain, well, not entertain, but like get*
> *them videos and that."*   *('Richard', 699-700)*

'Joseph' noticed that he started to do things differently, and this seemed to be based on responding to challenges to acceptable behaviour within his home.

"Well, if I'm playing on my X-Box and she (foster child) *just comes and walks in my room, like, and I like her to ask me if she can just go in there before going in. Before I didn't but now I have to close the door, er, I have to do that which is different. Before I could just like keep it open…Yeah, cos' sometimes she just walks in. It's not very good really, she should ask me, cos' it's my room."*

('Joseph', 306-314)

Finally, participants also experienced physical changes to their home environment.

"Well, we've had the extension at the back of the house cos' we needed it but, I think it was so I could have my own room again."

('Amy', 188-190)

In directly experiencing changes within their families, participants therefore became aware of a number of changes. Initial reactions to some of these changes meant that some participants tried to get their family back to the way it was. A defining theme of this category was that participants not only became aware of changes within themselves, but also in other family members. Of particular interest was that all participants felt they had stayed either as close to other family members as prior to fostering, or had become even closer, and this was attributed to the need for good communication between them. Interestingly, in 'Luke's account', there was much less of a sense that his family had changed, possibly because he had been fostering all of his life. This contrasted with 'Joseph'. He was very aware of the ways in which his family had changed, possibly because he was the newest to fostering of all the participants, and hence, there are many quotations taken from his account to illustrate this category.

Another defining feature of the 'Experience' category was the fluidity of the change process. This meant that when changes occurred within participants' families, this was not one-directional, and many talked about how their families changed again when there were no foster children living with them. For 'Joseph', this meant a return to the family as it had been prior to fostering.

"...when we didn't have anyone, like when Kyle went, our second one, we didn't have anyone for about two weeks and I noticed it was all different again. And then when she came, (foster girl) it was different again."
                                                                    ('Joseph', 241-244)

For others, the change to foster family status meant it felt strange when there were no foster children in place with them.

"...it's a bit weird when they're not here now. When there's no-one in the house, it's like you can leave things open, like certain doors, cos' we have to keep the office door locked, like at night and stuff cos' we found Andrew (foster child) in there one morning messing about with the phones."
                                                                    ('Richard', 401-404)

Summary of Main Category 1

The category 'Awareness of Familial Changes' therefore represented a process in which participants experienced change within their own families as they made the transition to living as a foster family. Importantly, this process seemed to begin from the point at which the idea of fostering was first raised within the family, with participants engaging in a process of having thoughts and feelings about what fostering would be like. They then entered a phase of direct experiencing of those changes when a foster child was placed with them, and this included a wide range of family changes, both to their family home, relationships, and themselves. Importantly, this process of change was fluid, with many experiencing ongoing change, both with each new entry of a foster child, and also when there were no foster children present in the home.

3.5   Main Category 2:   'SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND'

The second main category termed 'Seeking to Understand' represents participants' attempts to make sense of these changes to their families. Locating an understanding of these changes was crucially done through a process of learning about the foster child(ren). The overall structure of this category is presented

SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND

LEARNING ABOUT THE
FOSTER CHILD

Developing a
narrative

Exposure to living
with foster child

Putting behaviour
into a context
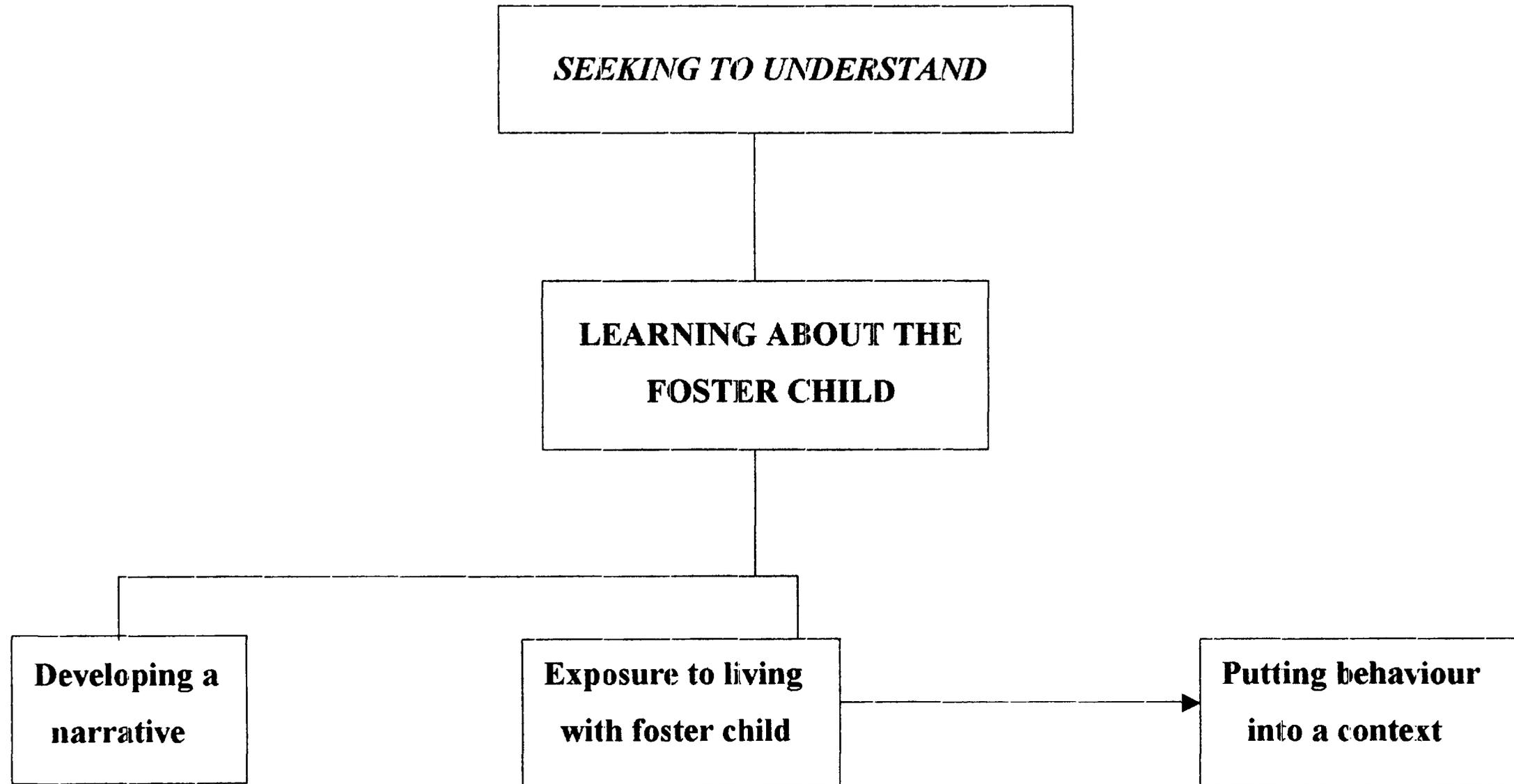
Figure 5: Seeking to Understand

diagrammatically in Figure 5 overleaf. It is represented by one overall intermediate-level category and three lower-level categories.

Intermediate-level category: _Learning about the Foster Child_

Learning about the foster child was achieved through two processes; firstly, through finding out about the foster child's life, and secondly, through day-to-day living with the foster child. This process had important consequences for participants, as it enabled them to locate these changes within an explanatory context.

> **"...most of them have got a special reason for being here."**
>
> _('Richard', 369-370)_

> **"You get to see like other children's backgrounds, how they were living with their mum's and things like that."** _('Luke', 234-236)_

Lower-level category: _Developing a Narrative_

Learning about the foster child involved a process in which participants were able to develop a narrative of the foster child's life. This was done by finding out about their family background and having an explanation for the reason they were in foster care.

> **"It's cos' she, because her mum had too many children, she couldn't handle it, cos' she had six including Vanessa, (foster child) so she had to send Vanessa away for about a year or so and cos' she had this big kid that's moved out now and had the kids on her own, cos' she couldn't really have all six, or all six of them until one of em's moved out, could she?"** _('Amy', 325-330)_

This process was facilitated in a number of different ways. For 'Richard', he and his family were provided with information about the foster child prior to their arrival.

"The first one I was here at a lunchtime, it was in the school day
and the doorbell rang and one of the Social Workers was outside
and she says, "Aaah, I've brought Sara and Lily" and we knew
about them because we'd seen the information about them first.
She was a very interesting girl, cos', err, cos' she'd just come from
a Youth Hostel, well not a Youth, what do you call it?...Prison sort
of thing."   *('Richard', 214-221)*

Participants also found out about the foster child through spending time with them. This involved talking to them and doing things together. When asked how she found out about the foster children, 'Amy' commented,

"Really by just knowing them and everything, and they end up
telling you."   *('Amy', 278-279)*

Doing things with the foster children often helped facilitate communication and this could then become a mutual process of getting to know each other,

"Well, playing on computer, they see us then and say, "Oh I
used to have that game" or something like that and they'll sort of
tell you things and you'll tell them. It's like, get to know each
other more."   *('Luke', 135-137)*

A process of being helped by other family members to understand the foster child also aided the development of a narrative of the foster child's life.

Erm, sometimes my mum, say if I'm just like watching telly, and
I can tell mum on her own, say, "It's horrible having him bang
his head against the wall" and then she just explains why they do
it."   *('Daniel', 221-223)*

Developing a narrative about the foster child's life was therefore facilitated in a number of different ways. Crucially, this involved communication between participants, the foster child, parents, and also in some cases the fostering agency.

There could however be barriers to being able to learn about the foster child. This centred on difficulties associated with verbal communication.

"Yeah, a couple of African girls, like asylum seekers came not too long ago and that was difficult cos' they couldn't really speak English."

('Richard', 484-486)

There were important consequences of being able to find out about the foster child. This surrounded feelings that were subsequently aroused in participants. 'Daniel' and 'Luke' talked about feeling 'sad' at finding out about the foster child's life.

"...It's the way they're brought up, it's a bit sad that though, brought up like that."

('Daniel', 209-211)

"Erm, you feel sorry for them."

('Luke', 248)

For 'Daniel', this led him to compare the foster child's life with his own experience of family life. This was clearly a very powerful process.

"...we've got a good mum and grandma to bring us up and they didn't."

('Daniel', 213-214)

It also led him to re-evaluate the way he was treated within his family.

"...when they come in we didn't know the half of it really, took things for granted...Erm, we thought it was like hard on us if they like just, gave us a punishment or something, but how they, their mum or dad treated them, it was nothing to what they'd done."

('Daniel', 448-453)

Developing a narrative of the foster child's life then, was facilitated in a number of different ways. An important theme of this category was the need for communication between all family members, and showed the mutual process of

helping each other to understand the family changes. Gaining this understanding had important consequences because it enabled participants to develop feelings of empathy for the foster child.

Lower-level category: Exposure to Living with Foster Child

Another related factor in learning about the foster child was exposure to the foster child through living with them on a day-to-day basis. This involved witnessing new, challenging behaviours.

"Like some people do weird things like smashing things...Kyle, erm, once went really mad and started kicking everything and breaking things." *('Joseph', 179-183)*

Participants also learned new information about certain things.

"She was a, well, she was a recovering heroin addict. She was off it at the start but eventually she was back on it, you could tell. But then she ran away and left her baby with us." ('Richard', 238-241)

At other times, participants learned about the foster child's behaviour through the experiences of other family members.

"The most interesting thing was Sara. She'd erm been to the hospital with my dad, saying something about a really horrible headache and my dad was there and Sara stood there and someone, I don't know who it was came up to her and said, "Have you got them yet?" My dad just stood there, and she was going, "Shh shh", telling him to be quiet, and he said err, something about have you got the, whatever the drugs were, and she goes quiet and shut up about it then. My dad just didn't say anything. That was interesting." *('Richard', 581-588)*

Exposure to living with the foster child meant that participants witnessed new and often challenging behaviours, as well as gaining an education into areas such as

drugs and violence. Again, the importance of family members helping each other to learn was important.

Participants therefore learned about the foster child through developing a narrative of their lives and through living with them on a day-to-day basis. An important consequence of this process was that participants could then put the foster child's behaviour into a context.

Lower-level category:<u>Putting Behaviour into a Context</u>

This involved using the understanding they had gained about the foster child to generate an explanation for certain behaviours, and also enabled them to make sense of the changes that had occurred within their families. This was encapsulated in 'Luke's' comment,

> *"You just see why they act like they do, like if they wanted to get*
> *attention, it's probably because they never got it when they lived*
> *with their mum...Normally if like, see if they need attention they're*
> *like running around cos' they want you to like tell them to behave*
> *and all that and they'll get attention."*   *('Luke', 238-245)*

Within this, participants were able to accept the need for the foster children to be treated differently from themselves.

> *"...it has to be really because we got like this child called Connor*
> *who smoked and everything and he swam in brooks and erm, like,*
> *took drugs and he had to be treated differently, and then another*
> *child had like mood swings and he, he had to like, you had to just*
> *send him up to his room to calm down or something, and like that.*
> *We'd get like, we'd just have to sit on the chair, but you can't*
> *exactly send them onto a chair, you have to send them to their room*
> *to calm down."*   *('Daniel', 194-201)*

It also enabled them to accept the need for new rules in the home, but with an acknowledgement that they did not necessarily have to stick to them.

"It's not so much that I have to do them, I don't have to sign the book to say when I'm coming in or going out, which they have to do just in case they go missing or anything, so it's documented, or run off, like some, well, several of them have done."   *('Richard', 331-334)*

Putting the foster child's behaviour into an explanatory context was an important process. Whilst it was dependent on being able to have an understanding of the foster child and their life, it was crucial in enabling participants to have explanations for the foster child's behaviour, and also helped them to understand why the foster child was sometimes treated differently to them. It therefore helped them to hold onto an idea that they themselves were different from the foster child.

Summary of Main Category 2

The category 'Seeking to Understand' therefore represented a process participants went through in an attempt to understand the changes they experienced within their families. This was centred on learning about the foster child and was done through the development of a narrative of the foster child's life coupled with learning through exposure to the foster child. Importantly, this formed a backdrop for participants to locate these changes within an explanatory context.

3.6   Main Category 3:   'MAINTAINING A SENSE OF OWN FAMILY'

The third main category identified in the analysis was 'Maintaining a Sense of Own Family' This category represents participants' attempts to hold onto a sense of their own family in the face of change. A defining characteristic of this category was that involvement of other family members, primarily parents, was important in enabling participants to maintain a sense of their own family. This was therefore a very family-oriented category. This category is depicted in Figure 6. It includes two intermediate-level categories and a lower-level category pertaining to each.

```
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   MAINTAINING A SENSE   │
                    │     OF OWN FAMILY       │
                    └────────────┬────────────┘
                                 │
              ┌──────────────────┴──────────────────┐
    ┌─────────┴─────────┐                 ┌──────────┴──────────┐
    │ HAVING TIME-OUT   │                 │  HAVING A SHARED    │
    │                   │                 │    EXPERIENCE       │
    └─────────┬─────────┘                 └──────────┬──────────┘
              │                                      │
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    │ 'special' time    │                 │                     │
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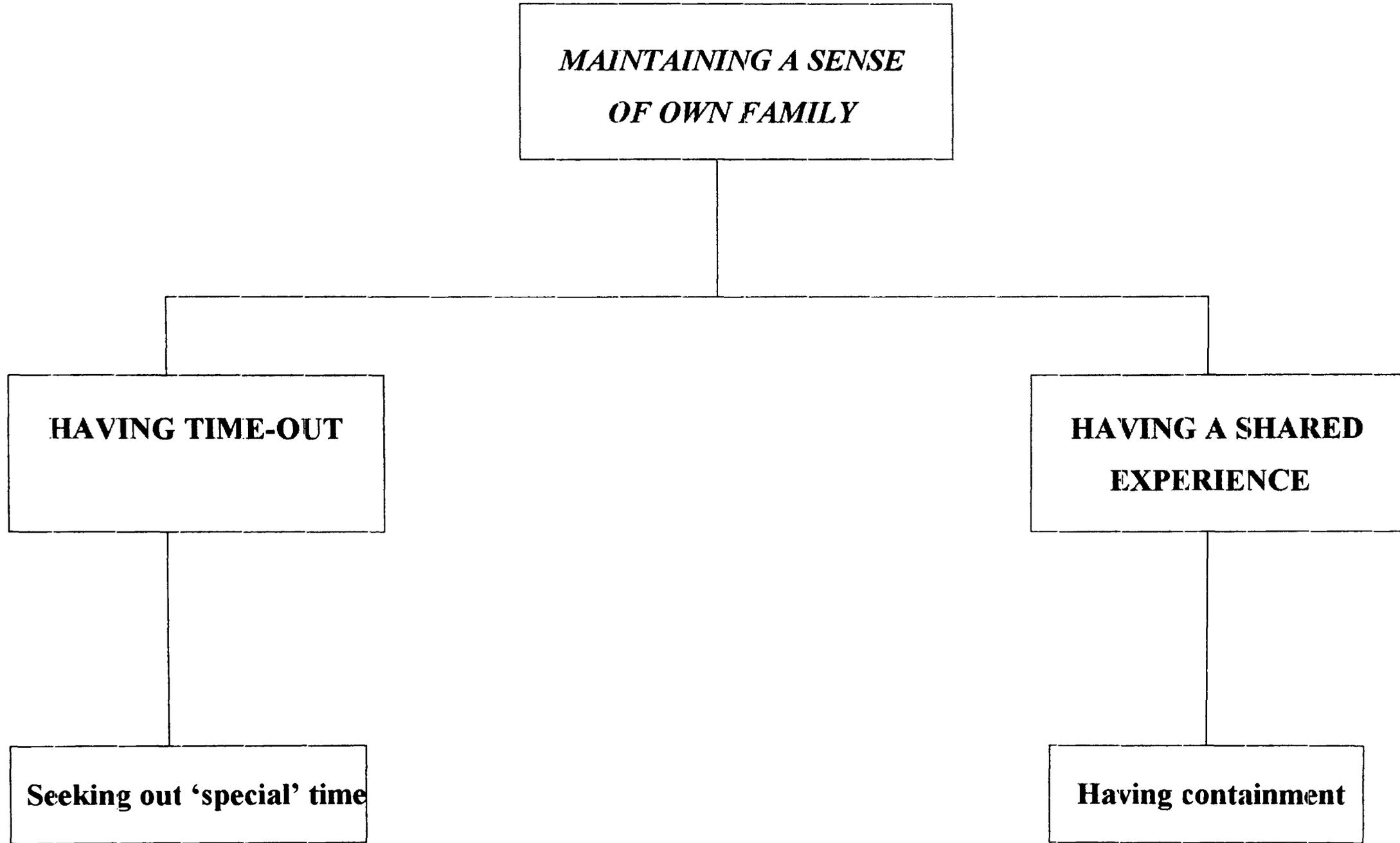
Figure 6: Maintaining a Sense of Own Family

Intermediate-level category: __Having Time-Out__

This intermediate category represented participants' having 'time-out' with their own family. It was characterised by a wish to have time away from the foster child.

> **"Yeah...cos' I'm not being horrible to them** (foster children) **but**
> **I don't want to be with them all the time and everything, I want**
> **to be with my family sometimes."** *('Daniel', 387-389)*

This was achieved in different ways and had different meanings for participants. This is illustrated in a lower-level category below.

Lower-level category:__Seeking out 'special' time__

This represented a process of identifying a time in which participants could be alone with parents or other family members. Since his family had started fostering, 'Daniel' had extra time in the evenings alone with his older brother, mother and grandmother after his younger siblings and the foster children had gone to bed.

> **"...they like go to bed about nine o'clock and we, I go bed about**
> **half nine and that's changed, and that's, we do that because erm**
> **we want like just like half an hour on our own or something."**
> *('Daniel', 343-346)*

Time alone with their own families served a number of important purposes for participants. For 'Daniel', this extra half an hour was useful for several reasons.

> **"Just like time to yourself and you know you can talk about**
> **things really."** *('Daniel', 360-361)*

For 'Joseph', time alone in the evenings with his parents gave him the opportunity to play the games with his dad that he had had to stop when foster children came to live with his family.

"Erm, same things as when they're here, but we do play
fighting games."   *('Joseph', 265-266)*

Periods of 'respite' in which the foster children went to different foster carers for a short period of time was also an opportunity for participants to spend time alone with their family.

"Erm, where you have like the, Peter and Paul, the foster boys
go erm away to another foster carer for like two weeks and we
sometimes go on holiday then, together and just like have a
holiday on our own, and that's alright."   *('Daniel', 411-414)*

'Daniel' was able to see the impact a period of time-out could have on other family members.

"   *...we're a bit more relaxed and my mum and grandma*
aren't worrying about them and everything."   *('Daniel', 419-420)*

One of the key themes of having 'time-out' with their own families was therefore of enabling participants to hold onto a sense of their own family as different to the family when the foster child was present. Whilst they did not seem to resent the foster child, this was however important to them. Being able to put mechanisms like this in place served a number of different purposes and was used by participants in different ways. Furthermore, this was not only important for participants but also for other family members.

Finding opportunities for time alone however, was dependent on the age of participants and foster children.

"When the first foster boy came he was twelve so we went
bed at the same time, but then, Kyle was eight so I got to go
bed later than him, and she's six (current foster child), so I
go bed quite a lot later."   *('Joseph', 260-263)*

This was interestingly absent in 'Amy's' account, for whom all the foster children who had lived with her family had been older than her. Whilst having 'time-out' was important, there were also therefore barriers to setting this up. Age was a pertinent factor and meant that for participants who were younger than the foster child living with them, this was not possible.

Another avenue that facilitated a process in which participants attempted to hold onto a sense of their own family included the communal nature of the experience, and is depicted in the second intermediate-level category below.

Intermediate-level category: _Having a shared experience_

This category represented a process in which participants and their families experienced changes in the family, as a family. This was characterised by a number of different processes. Primarily, this involved recognising that others in the family were having a similar experience to themselves.

"We've all had to change I suppose quite a bit, cos' of the way we behave around them, well, not around people but just the way we behave in the house..."   ('Richard', 724-726)

"Err, I do certain things, I do like the same as my mum and dad, say things different."   ('Joseph', 305-306)

'Luke' talked about his family pulling together to help the foster child settle into the family.

"We just all act the same (.) Sort of help them to get used to it, like to get to know us and stuff."   ('Luke', 118)

For 'Daniel', it also involved being able to continue with family activities that took place prior to fostering.

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"Yeah, we always went out for meals and like Drayton Manor
(theme park) *and my grandma and Tom would erm, just go off*
to the gardens at like Alton Towers and it were good." ('Daniel', 53-55)

↓

"...we do go out for meals and go out on day trips and we all
enjoy it. We still go out on them."   *('Daniel', 302-303)*

For 'Joseph', who was very aware of the changes his family had gone through since they had started fostering, he seemed vigilant to situations which reminded him of his family as it was prior to fostering,

"Well, sometimes, if they're quiet sometimes, or watching telly
or something it just seems like it's just me, my mum and my
dad again. Just how it was."   *('Joseph', 330-332)*

This process highlighted the shared nature of the fostering experience. It was important for participants to perceive that they were going through similar experiences to their parents and that they, as a family, were adjusting to fostering together. For those new to fostering, they tried hard to notice times when it felt like their own 'family' again. An important component within this process was one of having 'containment', explicated in a lower-level category.

Lower-level category:Having Containment

This category characterised a means by which participants held onto a sense of their own family. It was facilitated through a process of participant involvement in decisions with parents, particularly those centred around the setting of family boundaries in relation to fostering. In 'Daniel's' family, there was clear boundary setting around the placement.

"...we don't want anyone really above Sam's age (older brother)...
agreed from the start really."   *('Daniel', 506-508)*

Participants having a clear understanding of the family boundaries seemed to facilitate the process of feeling contained and being clear about what was acceptable within the home.

"Well, my parents, for a start, before we had anyone said that they don't have secrets here and they tell people we can't have secrets in this house."   *('Richard', 521-523)*

A consequence of this for 'Richard' was that when placed in a difficult position, he was very clear within himself about what he had to do.

"When I came, I went on a Duke of Edinburgh weekend camping. I came back and my mum said, "Erm, it's been interesting this weekend" cos' Sara had gone hospital for some reason and Simon had gone. Simon went on the train, they'd been planning it for a while. I actually heard something about it before they did it as well and I told my parents about that."   *('Richard', 503-508)*

It also enabled him to be honest with his parents when he found a situation hard to cope with.

"...when I said that I couldn't really stand it at one point, and they said, "Well, if you can't do it then it's okay, we can get rid of her, but if you think you can stand it we can carry on." "
                                                                              ('Richard', 749-751)

Having a shared experience as a family was therefore an important process for participants. Sharing the experience of adjusting to foster family life, changing together and being clear as a family about what was acceptable and what was not helped participants hold onto a sense of their own family.

Summary of Main Category 3

The category 'Maintaining a Sense of Own Family' therefore represented a process in which participants attempted to hold onto a sense of their own family. For participants, this was done through two processes. Firstly, through the creation of 'time-out' with their own family; and secondly, in going through the experience of fostering as a *family*. This was done in a variety of different ways and held different meaning for participants and other family members. This category was distinct as a process in which other family members, primarily parents, played an active role in enabling children to maintain a sense of their own 'family'.

3.7   Main Category 4:   'FINDING A ROLE'

The last main category identified in the analysis was termed 'Finding a Role'. Figure 7 depicts this category, illustrating the constituent intermediate-level and lower-level categories. This category represents a process in which participants attempted to locate a role for themselves within the family following the transition. It was understood that the previous categories formed a backdrop enabling participants to find a role for themselves within this new family structure.

The analysis identified two main roles that participants assumed for themselves. These included a perception of themselves as a responsible family member; and of initiating the foster child into their family. These are depicted below in the two intermediate categories.

Intermediate-level category: Perception of Self as a Responsible Family Member

This category represented a process in which participants assumed a role of responsibility as a family member. This entailed dealing with difficult situations and of helping around the home.

> *"...Andrew, well, not too long after he was here he ran away*
> *and I was, I think it was a Saturday night and dad reported him*
> *missing and I think I was one of the last people to see him before*
> *he ran out to remember his clothes and everything. I had to*
> *describe what he was wearing."*   *('Richard', 570-574)*

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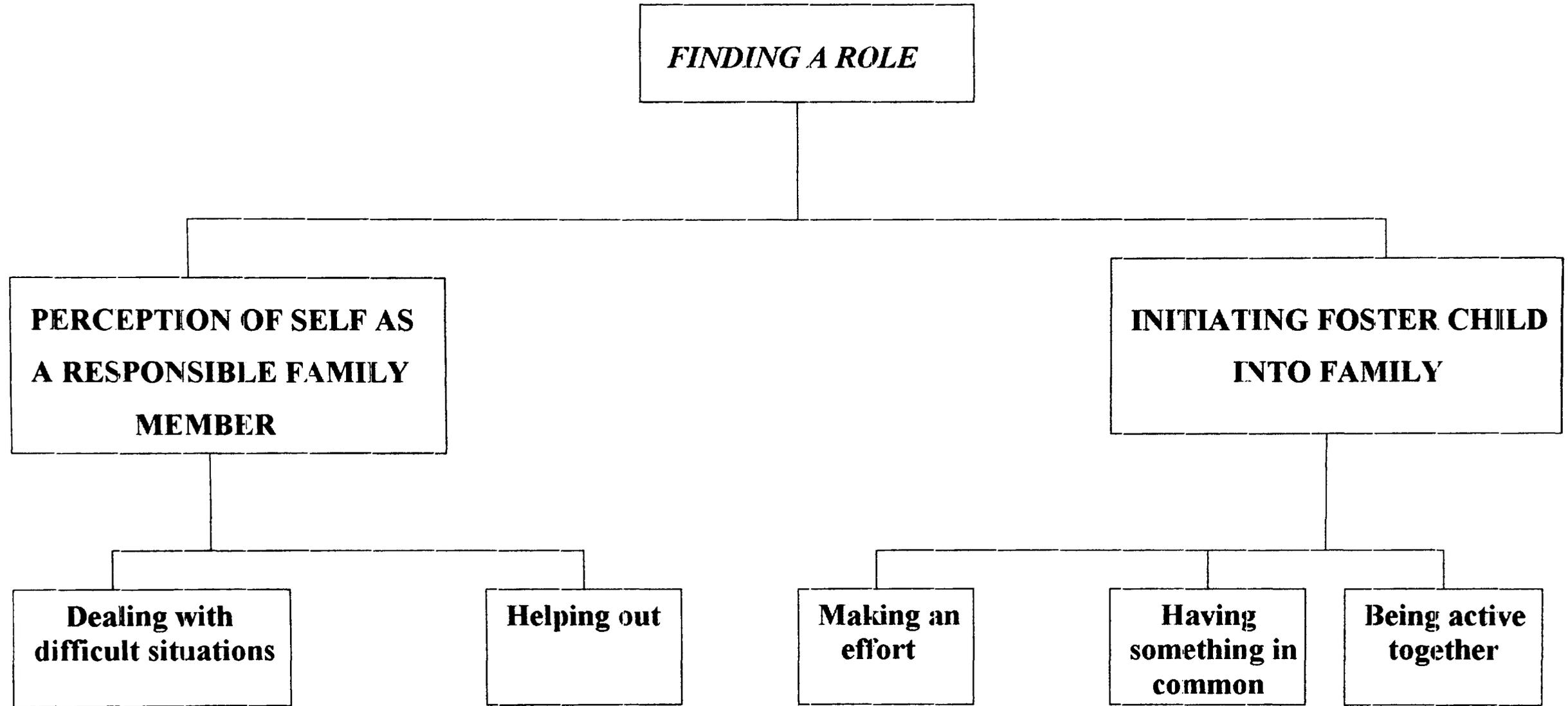
Figure 7: Finding a Role

Lower-level category: <u>Dealing with Difficult Situations</u>

This involved a process in which, being exposed to difficult situations, participants seemed to take on a role of responsibility for dealing with difficult behaviour.

"...one other time, she tried to split me and my girlfriend up by telling my girlfriend that I went in to her and told her I was going to dump her, which is something I had to handle....I was quite angry at first but I didn't say anything to her. I told my parents about it."

('Richard', 363-368)

For 'Amy', one of the difficult times she recalled was when she and one of the foster children ('Martin') kept arguing. In talking about how she dealt with it, she said she did not talk to anybody else about it, but tried to deal with it herself.

"Well I just tried not to argue and everything."   *('Amy', 146)*

At other times, participants actively intervened to manage difficult behaviour.

"Err, see like, we had this kid called Kyle and he could be really naughty sometimes, start throwing everything, and to stop him from throwing everything I had to sometimes just hold him so he wouldn't do anything, and like to calm him down and everything."

('Joseph', 164-167)

In asking where they learned these management strategies 'Joseph' replied,

"...I just did it, to, well, help more than anything." *('Joseph', 171)*

An important characteristic of this category was of participants having their own strategies in place for times when it all became too much.

"If I can't take it in my stride I either go up to my bedroom cos'
they're not allowed on my floor, I'm on the very top floor and
it's just got my bedroom and another living room...I'll either
go up there or just go out, and then I can get away from it and
cope with it."   *('Richard', 617-623)*

In taking on a role of dealing with difficult situations, this involved not only actively intervening to manage behaviour, but also of having to deal with difficult emotions aroused by these situations. A characteristic theme of this category was that participants attempted to do this alone and seemed to place an onus on themselves to cope. Perceiving themselves as responsible family members was further illustrated by the way in which participants helped out at home. This is explicated in a second lower-level category.

Lower-level category: Helping Out

This involved a process in which participants helped out around the home. This took many different forms. For 'Richard', this involved maintaining a safe home environment.

"...well, now I'm used to locking my bedroom door when I go
out, cos' if my parents are downstairs they don't know what the
kids are doing upstairs, so I keep, I keep my bedroom door locked."
                               ('Richard', 726-729)

'Joseph' helped his parents in carrying out certain tasks for the foster children.

"...If they're here sometimes we have to like rush around a bit
like, cos' if they want something to eat we have to make it for
them..."   *('Joseph', 272-274)*

'Richard' also talked about supporting his parents.

"Being around sometimes when one of your parents is here

and they need someone else here, sometimes...when we've

just had to have two people in the house all the time..."

('Richard', 631-635)

For 'Daniel', he and his brother stopped having pillow fights in the evening because they didn't want to disturb the foster child ('Peter') in the room next door.

"...because erm, cos' Peter's next door and we can't do that

anymore, we had like, we just like when we were playing, like

I'd shout or I, because like erm, they're asleep we don't want

to wake them up, so don't do that anymore."   *('Daniel', 373-377)*

Participants therefore seemed to see themselves as having a role in dealing with difficult behaviour displayed by the foster child and in helping out in the home. Helping out around the home involved participants assuming many different roles and this was centred on being of practical support to their parents. The taking on of this particular role was least apparent in 'Luke's' account and there are several possible hypotheses for this. In particular, since 'Luke' had been fostering for all of his life, there was perhaps historically less emphasis on performing a 'helpful' role within the family.

Intermediate-level category: Initiating Foster Child into Family

A second 'role' that participants took on was one that came out very strongly in participants' accounts, and involved making an effort to help the foster child settle into the family. The assumption of this role related to the participants' understanding of the foster child (depicted in main Category 2).

"...they've been through quite a lot, cos' Steven and Martin their

dad's in jail and their partner's, well their mum's fiancée, he's in

jail. So I think it's gonna be a bit upsetting cos' their dad's died

now. So I decide to make them feel welcome."   *('Amy', 86-89)*

Three lower-level categories are described to explicate this category.

Lower-level category: Making an Effort

'Making an effort' represented a process of initiating contact with the foster child when they first arrived.

> *"When they first come, I say "Hello" and be nice and friendly*
> *and everything, make them feel welcome."*   *('Joseph', 190-191)*

This was coupled with an acknowledgement of how the foster child might feel upon arrival.

> *"Most of them are really a bit shy before getting to know you."*
>
> *('Amy', 54)*

Participants also talked of doing things to try and help them settle into the family.

> *"Sort of like, if it's dinner and they're like too shy to come*
> *to the table or something, I'll go with them or something."*
>
> *('Luke', 121-122)*

There was also an element of participants' wanting to make the stay enjoyable for the foster child(ren) and also to make them feel part of the family,

> *"...if they like playing with other kids erm, I'll do it, I'll play*
> *with them, give them a good time."*   *('Daniel', 256-257)*

> *"Yeah, and we got these body boards and we went on the sand*
> *dunes and went down them and Adam let, he's always hanging*
> *around with Paul and Peter* (foster children) *on holiday, he lets*
> *them have a go with a lot of things now, cos' we got a surf board*
> *for Christmas and he let Peter and Paul have a go on that, and I*
> *will and hopefully Sam will, let them all have a go so they enjoy*
> *it...Don't want them to feel left out."*   *('Daniel', 331-338)*

Making an effort to help the foster child settle into the family was therefore a very active category in which participants took on a role of responsibility for initiating communication with the foster child and of being sensitive and thoughtful to situations they might find difficult. Despite wanting to maintain a sense of their own family, they did want to make the foster child feel part of the family and took on the responsibility for trying to ensure their stay was enjoyable.

For some however, the effort they made seemed to be dependent on what the foster child was like.

"... if like they haven't got a good personality or they just like doing things on their own, I leave them to it."   *('Daniel', 254-256)*

For 'Daniel', there was also an element of wanting to get something out of it for himself.

"Er, I don't know, it just depends if like they're talkative a

lot really or they're just quiet. I go out with people who are

talkative cos' the quiet ones won't be that funny, will they?"

     ('Daniel', 259-262)

Therefore, although participants made a lot of effort, there was also a sense that they wanted to get something out of the experience as well.

There were important consequences of making an effort to get to know the foster child. For 'Richard', he got found out that getting to know him had helped the foster child feel less worried about the placement.

"I just sat and chatted with her and everything, and later on

when she was here she was telling me that she was worried

for a start cos' she didn't know how it would be, but getting

to know me like, made it easier."   *('Richard', 223-224)*

Taking on the role of making an effort therefore, put some participants in the position of assuming another role of being confided in by the foster child.

Lower-level category: Having Something In Common

A related part of this process was having something in common with the foster child. This seemed an important factor in *facilitating* the process of getting to know one another. This was facilitated in one of three ways: being the same age; being the same sex; and having the same interests. Being the same age for some, was an important factor in getting to know the foster child.

> ***"If they're about the same age as me, I have things in***
> ***common with them and so it's alright, get along, yeah."***
>
> *('Luke', 209-210)*

Some participants highlighted the benefits of having foster children who were of the same age.

> ***"...if you have like people your age, you'll adapt with***
> ***them well and you'll go out with them a lot."*** *('Daniel', 486-487)*

'Daniel' talked about the consequences for both himself and the foster child if they were not the same age.

> ***"Cos erm you can't go out with them or anything and***
> ***you just feel like you're alone still or something, cos'***
> ***you have to go out with your friends, so if you want to***
> ***spend time with your brother or something or your foster***
> ***brother, you can't because they're not old enough, or you're***
> ***too young for them."*** *('Daniel', 492-496)*

For 'Amy' whose fostering experience had always involved foster children who were older than she, being the same sex was important. She talked about getting a 'big sister' and the benefits of this for her.

> *"...having a big sister, it's really a lot more fun cos' they*
> *like more stuff that I like...Well, probably because we get*
> *along better, easier if it's just the, you know, girls. Cos' girls*
> *get along better with girls, don't they?"*　　　　　　*('Amy', 235-236)*

Linking in with these factors, finding shared interests was also useful in getting to know each other. 'Daniel' talked about having shared interests as important in helping the foster child 'fit into' the family,

> *"...when he first come he like football so I just let him come*
> *in my room to play on the playstation football or something*
> *and he blended in alright."*　　　　　　*('Daniel', 163-165)*

Having something in common was therefore quite a powerful factor in getting to know the foster child, with consequences for both participants and the foster child if this was not the case.

Lower-level category: Being Active Together

Following on from the above category, being active together was a process in which participants made the effort to do things with the foster child. This enabled them to get to know each other and helped the foster child settle into the family.

> *"Like in the summer, we'll go in the garden, play with them,*
> *the neighbours might come round and play with them as well..."*
> 　　　　　　*('Luke', 175-176)*

> *"Yeah, cos' we used to always go swimming and they just fit*
> *in now really, and they come with us..."*　　　　*('Daniel', 311-313)*

'Richard' made an effort to include the foster children in his wider circle of friends.

"...I'm just trying to think, mainly the people I've well,
associated with like Sara and Simon, and Louise who was
the most recent one, we used to go out with some of my
friends, we used to take them park and stuff, take the babies
to the swings and things like that."   ('Richard', 349-353)

For 'Amy', the prospect of doing things together could be exciting at times, and she had happy memories of times she had spent with previous foster children.

"Yeah. Exciting, cos' something good might happen really
that's good, cos' you actually, you might go to Alton Towers
(Theme Park) *and places like that. Cos' when we were with*
Vanessa, we went to France, it was really nice there."

                                        ('Amy', 345-348)

Summary of Main Category 4

The category 'Finding a Role' therefore represented a process in which participants attempted to locate a role for themselves within the family, following the transition to foster family status. Two key 'roles' were identified in the analysis. The first one involved participants perceiving themselves as a responsible family member in which they made attempts to deal with difficult behaviour and help out around the home. Participants appeared to assume this role themselves, rather than being told by others. The second 'role' that participants assumed was one of actively helping the foster child to settle into the family. An important backdrop to this seemed to be centred on having an understanding of the foster child. Participants made a concerted effort to welcome the foster child into their home and many made attempts to engage in shared activities with the foster child. In some cases however, this was dependent on what the foster child was like, and whether participants would get anything back in return. Having something in common facilitated this process, in particular being of a similar age to the foster child, being the same sex and/or finding common interests. For some, making an effort to get to know the foster child enabled them to be confided in by the foster child about their feelings towards being placed with the family.

3.8   Summary

In the transition to living as a foster family, the analysis generated from participants' accounts identified a process they went through in attempting to re-define their family as it went through this change. This involved an initial awareness and experience of these family changes and an attempt to generate an understanding of these changes. They also looked for ways to hold onto a sense of their own 'family' and this formed a backdrop in enabling them to find a role for themselves in the family.

4.0   **CHAPTER FOUR:**

                                        DISCUSSION

This chapter focuses on a critical discussion of the findings of this study and
of the process of the research. It begins with an interpretative look at the theoretical
account developed from the analysis of data, with reference to the literature outlined
in Chapter One. A section on the clinical implications of these findings is discussed at
the end of each main category. Methodological considerations of the study are then
outlined, followed by researcher reflections on the research journey. The chapter
identifies implications for future research and ends with some concluding points.

4.1   Interpretation of the Analysis

The aim of this study was to examine the way in which carers' own children
managed the transition to foster family status. The transcripts of interviews with five
children were analysed using a grounded theory approach and a core category and
process model was generated. Four constituent main categories were identified to
explicate the 'story line'. This model is explored in detail below.

4.1.1   The Core Category and Process Model: 'Redefining Family'

For participants in the present study, the transition to foster family status
changed the nature of their existing 'family' and led them into a process of
'redefining' their family. Participants played a central *active* role in trying to redefine
their family. The defining characteristics of this adjustment process included a search
for an explanatory framework with which to understand the changes, and then
locating both their own 'family' and themselves within this changing family structure.
Participants attempted to do this alone but accounts also demonstrated that they relied
on help from others within the family to make the adjustment. This supports the idea
that the process of family transitions involves the whole family (Hetherington *et al*,
1998).

Another defining characteristic of this process was the search for some sense
of sameness versus the inevitable change the transition brought upon the family.
Whilst participants defined themselves through the location of new roles within the

family, an important part of locating their own family was finding that they still had reminders of their 'own' family as it was prior to fostering.

The process model described in Chapter Three understood this process of redefining family as a linear process in which participants moved through a stage of *noticing* change, through to locating an *understanding* of the change, which then enabled the *locating* of oneself and family within this change. However this process was not a rigid one. This was ongoing, with each new entry into and exit of a foster child from the family. This therefore could be understood as a continual transitional process.

In locating this model within existing literature, it adds a new dynamic to both the foster care and family transitional literature. Within the foster care literature, as shown in Chapter One there, is a good understanding of the impact that fostering can have on carers' own children and their likes and dislikes about fostering. This study shows the dynamic process of interaction between carers' own children, their own family and the foster child in the adjustment to living as a foster family. In relation to the transitional literature, whilst there is a good understanding of the factors important in helping children adjust, it again demonstrates a dynamic process through which participants in this study made the adjustment.

4.1.2   Awareness of Familial Changes

A first stage in this transitional process was that participants became aware of changes within the family. This had two distinct phases for participants: a preparation and experiential phase. In the preparation phase, participants talked about being consulted about the idea of becoming a foster family. In the majority of cases this was done by parents, except for 'Richard' who also talked about being consulted by a Social Worker from the fostering agency. This reinforces the findings of Pugh (1996), Ames (1997) and Fox (2001) who found that it is parents who are often left with the responsibility of educating their own children about fostering, and that own children are rarely involved in any formal preparation undertaken by the fostering agency. Indeed, for 'Richard', 'Joseph' and 'Amy', all recalled their parents going for training, but none talked of receiving any training themselves. Interestingly, this preparation and consultation phase was less distinct for 'Luke' and it is hypothesized

that this may have been because he had been fostering for all of his life and this was the 'norm' for him and his family.

In drawing on the transitions literature, however, what this process showed was that there was a good level of communication between parents and their children. As Herbert & Harper-Dorton (2002) summarize, one of the key 'protective' factors for children going through a family transition is communication about the transition (Walczak & Burns, 1984).

In looking at 'Joseph's ' account, the newest of all participants to fostering, it was apparent that the idea of becoming a foster family was especially difficult to accept, particularly since he was an only child. He and other participants expressed a range of concerns about what the experience would be like. However, it seemed that for those who had been fostering for some time, they were better able to predict what the experience would be like. This was particularly so for 'Luke'. This links to the findings of Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) who, although talking about divorce, found that the passage of time was an important factor in facilitating adjustment and in enabling the child to gain a more realistic, less fear-dominated view of the change.

When the foster child was placed in the family, the accounts of participants illustrated the range of changes that participants experienced within their families, impacting on behaviour, activities, relationships and the home environment. A particularly interesting theme to emerge was of some participants stating that the experience had brought them closer to their parents or other family members. In no instances did participants feel it had created distance between themselves and other family members. This supports the very early literature on carers' own children in which Ellis (1972) and Wilkes (1974) talked about the experience of fostering as strengthening family relationships and communication. More recent literature contradicts this finding however, with some finding a loss of family closeness (Twigg, 1994).

Another defining feature to emerge from this phase was the continuous nature of the transitional process, in which participants talked about their families changing with each exit and entry of a foster child. Again, this was less pronounced for 'Luke'

possibly because it was something he had grown up with. The transition then does not end as soon as the child is placed with the family but is simply a first step in a dynamic and evolving relationship between the foster child and foster family (McCracken & Reilly, 1998). In terms of process, this phase therefore is one that participants are likely to return to frequently.

In summary, the accounts of the five participants demonstrated that they were consulted, in most cases by their parents, about the idea of fostering. This highlighted a good level of communication between participants and their parents, but little involvement of social work support. Whilst having a range of feelings and thoughts about what fostering would be like, the passage of time seemed to be an important factor in being able to predict more clearly what the experience would be like. For participants in this study, closeness to other family members was maintained and in some cases improved, and this refutes the findings of previous studies. Finally, participants highlighted the process of transition to foster family status as one that is continuous in nature.

Awareness of Familial Changes: Clinical Implications

If the accounts of the five participants have accessed general processes in children's experiences of foster family transition, this has a number of important clinical implications. If, as demonstrated here, children engage in an active process of wondering what it will be like, of having feelings, thoughts and concerns, this could provide a real opportunity for fostering services to become involved at this preliminary stage. Useful information on what to expect could be provided, including what might happen in those first few days. After all, one of the factors linked to placement outcome identified by Berridge (1997), was pre-placement preparation of the foster family. McCracken & Reilly (1998) advocate the use of a systemic approach to foster family assessment. They suggest a six-session assessment structure using a systemic framework arguing that a systemic approach is useful because one can gain a fuller understanding of foster family relationships as well as offering a framework that recognises that individuals do not function in isolation but rather as part of a highly organised system.

Given that the fostering agency involved in the present study ran a twice-yearly support group in which own children met to do activities together, they could also set up a mentoring system whereby those who have been fostering for some time could 'mentor' those new to fostering. Whilst children would be a useful resource to each other, it is however important to ensure that children are not burdened solely with this responsible task. However, they could very usefully play a part in a preparation phase managed and carried out by fostering services. This could be important in addressing any worries or concerns of this group of children.

4.1.3 Seeking to Understand

'Seeking to Understand' represented a process in which participants attempted to make sense of the changes to their family. This was crucially done through a process of learning about the foster child. For participants this was done via two means: through the development of a narrative of the foster child's life; and through exposure to living with the foster child. This enabled participants to be able to locate these changes within an explanatory framework.

In looking at the previous literature, there is very little focus on the ways in which carers' own children make sense of the changes within their families as a result of the transition to foster family status. Yet, for participants in this study, it formed a very important part of being able to re-define their family. Pugh (1996) hinted at this process in her discussion about how the children in her study seemed to show a striking concern for the foster children, and she suggested an awareness of complex emotional issues beyond their years. In this study certainly, irrespective of the age of participants, they developed a comprehensive understanding and explanations for the foster children's behaviour. This was particularly evident in 'Amy's' account, aged 9 at the time of the interview. This shows that even quite young children have the ability and are motivated to understand family changes. In some cases, participants were able to take this a step further and appreciate the need for different treatment between themselves and the foster child. Exposure to the foster child's behaviour also links to Pugh (1996) in which she talked about these children being exposed to areas of life from which most parents would want to protect their children.

For 'Joseph' although he clearly gave examples of being exposed to new and challenging behaviour, there was less evidence that he had developed an understanding of the foster child's background. It is interesting to speculate on why this was absent in his account, and may have been due to the limited amount of time in which he had been fostering. If so, it hints once again to the passage of time as an important adjustment factor.

There were many avenues through which participants developed this understanding. This included for example, having prior information provided by the fostering agency. In 'Daniel's' case this involved being helped by other family members to understand. This suggests the importance of the involvement of others, both within and outside of the family in aiding children's understanding of the process of change.

Developing an understanding had important consequences for participants. It engendered feelings for the foster child with some saying they felt 'sad' and 'sorry for' the foster child. Developing feelings for another is important if someone is to invest in the building of a relationship with another, and there were clear links between having an understanding and of participants making a concerted effort to make the foster child feel welcome within their family. For 'Daniel', this also led him to compare the foster child's life to his own experience of family. This reinforces the finding of Spears & Cross (2003) and Wilkes (1974) who suggested that fostering enables own children to develop a greater appreciation of their own family.

In summary, the category identified as 'Seeking to Understand' provided insight into the process by which participants developed an understanding of the changes that had occurred within their family. In linking this to existing literature, it provides a closer look into the dynamics of the foster placement and interactions between participants, an area identified by Prosser (1978) and Berridge (1997) as lacking in the foster care literature. It is clear that in many instances the claim made by Pugh (1996) is further reinforced in the accounts given in this study, with participants demonstrating an awareness of complex emotional issues that could be argued to be 'beyond their years'. At the same time, however, there is a body of research suggesting that having 'meaning' for an experience like this plays an

important role in 'resilience-building' (for further discussion, see McCubbin,

Thompson, Thompson & Futrell, 1999). In addition, it highlighted the important role

of others in aiding the search for and development of an explanatory account for these

changes.

Seeking to Understand: Clinical Implications

This process, coupled with findings from previous studies, suggest that

children do seek to actively understand changes that take place within their family.

The involvement of others in facilitating this process was shown to be important, and

therefore suggests a very crucial role for adults to undertake in helping this group of

children to adjust. This includes both parents and the professionals involved in

fostering services. For 'Richard', he did receive prior information from the fostering

agency, but this did not seem to be the case for others. Whilst there is a fine balance

between the issues of maintaining confidentiality and informing own children, if this

was done sensitively, then it may better equip children to be prepared for and tolerate

the entry of foster children into the family (Martin, 1993). After all, this study

suggests that children will search for explanations; by being more formally involved,

parents and the services can assume some control over this process.

4.1.4   Maintaining a Sense of Own Family

'Maintaining a Sense of Own Family' represented participants' attempts to

hold onto a sense of their own family in the face of change. This was done through

having 'time-out' with their own family and also in experiencing the changes as a

family. This included involvement in decisions, particularly around the setting of

family boundaries.

A defining characteristic of this process was that involvement of other family

members, primarily parents in this study, was important in enabling participants to

maintain a sense of their own family. This builds on the notion emerging in the

previous category of the involvement of others as necessary in helping children to

manage the transition. The findings of Hetherington, Bridges & Insabella (1998)

support this, in their conclusion of the parent-child relationship as crucial in mediating

the effects of major family transitions. Accounts given by participants suggest it is the

maintenance of a sense of their own family that is an important factor. This category

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suggested therefore that whilst change was evident in participants' families, this needed to be balanced with some semblance of 'sameness'.

The seeking of 'time-out' was one way in which participants were able to have time alone with their own family without the foster child(ren). However, accounts given by participants also suggested that the ability to facilitate this had several potential barriers. Those who talked about having time alone with other family members once the foster child(ren) had gone to bed were older than the foster child(ren). Thus, age was a facilitating factor in being able to have time-out in this way. It is interesting to note that this was absent in 'Amy's' account for whom all the foster children placed within her family had been older than her. Given the ambiguous nature of the literature regarding age-gaps between foster and own children, it is hard to locate where this finding lies, but one tentative conclusion could be that where foster children are older than carers' own children, this may impact negatively on one way in which own children are able to maintain a sense of their own family.

In 'Daniel's' case, he also talked about having time alone with his own family when the foster children in his family went into 'respite care' for a short period. Respite care is predominantly used in long-term and specialist fostering placements, but not all participants' families undertook these types of fostering at the time of the study. Again then, placement type could potentially be a facilitating factor or act as a barrier in enabling participants' and their families to have time-out together. When time-out periods did occur, participants could see the benefits of this not only for them but also for other family members. This was particularly so in 'Daniel's' account.

Experiencing the transition as a family was another way in which this process was facilitated, and participants expressed an awareness of experiences suggesting that not only they but also others in their family were having a similar experience to themselves. This reinforces the argument outlined in the Chapter One that it is the *family* who fosters (Martin, 1993). Interestingly for 'Joseph' whose account shows his acute awareness of the changes his family had gone through since they had started fostering, he was vigilant to situations that reminded him of his family as it was prior

to fostering. It seems therefore that these children may look out for situations which serve as reminders of their family as it was.

For 'Luke' his account showed that he had much less of a sense of his 'own' family compared to other participants. It is possible to speculate that since he had been fostering for all of his life, he did not have such a strong sense of what his 'own' family was because he had always lived with foster children in the family.

In summary, participants in this study showed efforts to try and hold onto a sense of their own family in the face of change and the ability to do this was dependent on the involvement of other family members, particularly parents. Participants expressed a number of different ways in which this was done, along with potential barriers. Maintaining a sense of their own family not only had benefits for participants, but it was also suggested that this could benefit other family members as well. The accounts of participants provide speculation that being able to maintain a sense of family is somewhat dependent on the length of time the family has been fostering and the age of carers' own children, with 'Luke' whose family had been fostering since he was born, having much less of a sense of his own 'family'.

Maintaining a Sense of Own Family: Clinical Implications

One way to view this attempt to hold onto a sense of their own family could be as a 'protective' factor for carers' own children. Clearly, participants gained from maintaining their 'own' family. Interestingly, one of the participants recruited into the study but who pulled out prior to interview, had experienced a recent placement breakdown within her family. In talking to the Family Social Worker during the initial recruitment process, it seemed that one of the reasons the placement had broken down was because the entry of the foster child into the family had caused huge changes within the family, including the erosion of particular family routines in which the carer and her own child spent time together when she returned home from school. Whilst this can only be speculated upon, it perhaps suggests that being able to maintain a sense of family may be an important factor in helping carers own children adjust to and sustain the placement. If so, then being able to maintain as sense of one's own family may indeed act as a protective factor. It would then be important for

professionals working in fostering services to work with foster families on this issue and put in place mechanisms to ensure the continuation of the 'family'.

4.1.5 Finding a Role

'Finding a Role' represented a process in which participants attempted to locate a role for themselves within the family following the transition. It was understood that the previous categories formed a backdrop enabling participants to find a role for themselves within this new family structure. This supports Satir (1967) who stated that whenever a new member enters a family, existing members need to make adaptations to their own role. Two 'roles' were identified in the accounts of participants. The first was a family-oriented role involving a process in which participants assumed a role of responsibility as a family member. This entailed dealing with difficult situations and helping around the home. The second identified role was one in which participants helped the foster child to settle into their family. This involved making an effort and doing activities together. Having something in common with the foster child was an additional factor in facilitating the building of a relationship between participants and the foster child.

In taking the first role, there is some evidence in existing literature linking to the idea of carers' own children assuming a role as a responsible family member. In some of the accounts given by participants, they talked of actively intervening to manage difficult behaviour displayed by the foster child. Spears & Cross (2003) found that some children in their sample talked of learning how to 'parent' by watching the strategies used by their parents, and some felt it was their role to 'parent' too. It may be therefore that children do feel a responsibility to help parents out even when this may not openly be expected of them, and that observing parents is one way in which they learn to do this. Certainly, for 'Joseph', he talked of wanting to help his parents out when he intervened to stop one of the foster children being aggressive.

Another important theme to emerge, and particularly prevalent in 'Richard's' account was the need to also have strategies to help himself cope. This seems very important but was not apparent in all accounts. This can be linked to existing literature, for example, evidence that this group of children are at risk themselves of becoming disturbed (Ellis, 1972) through exposure to experiences such as violence

(Part, 1993; Pugh, 1996). There is therefore a real need for children to be able to look after their own well-being. For 'Richard' it seemed that his family had provided him with his own 'space' within the household, which the foster children were not allowed to go into. Although this may not be practical for many families, there appears to be a real need for carers' own children to have strategies to help them cope with the foster placement.

Accounts also showed that participants acted as a support to parents, whether this was helping them in managing difficult behaviour or just being around at home. This reinforces the findings of Pugh (1996) and Fox (2001) of own children acting as a form of practical and emotional support to their parents.

The second role identified in the accounts of participants was one in which participants took on a role of helping the foster child to settle into their family. This was linked to participants' understanding of the foster child's life. Whilst this builds somewhat on the conclusions of Pugh (1996) that carers' own children do make an important contribution to the fostering experience, this particular role has not been previously discussed in the literature. The assuming of this role is perhaps not surprising given that carers' own children are the family members most likely to spend the most time with the foster child, either through the sharing of bedrooms or through the expectations of 'companionship' (Part, 1993). Nevertheless, this highlights a further role that participants undertook and provides insight into the dynamic process that takes place between carers' own and foster children.

The link between having an understanding of the foster child's life and making an effort to help them settle into the family is an important one and again points to the importance of helping this group of children to have an explanation for why the child is in foster care. After all, this could have potential implications for the progress of the foster placement. If for example, children do not have this background knowledge, it could be hypothesized that they may make less of an effort to welcome the foster child into the home and get to know them. This could have a negative impact on the placement. This reinforces the idea that the experience of a fostered child can be greatly affected by the response of carers' own children (Hill, 1999).

Within this, the analysis highlighted a number of other factors that could affect how this process occurs. 'Daniel' talked about how the personality of the foster child was important in determining how much effort he made; others talked about being the same age or sex and having shared interests as important factors in getting to know the foster child. This links with the idea of 'matching' in placements where, in an ideal situation foster children's needs are 'matched' with a placement that is suited to meet those needs. This may therefore also include matching the foster child with carer's own children in terms of some of the factors described above. In reality however, this can be difficult to do, particularly for example, where availability of placements can be limited and the need for a placement can be immediate (Triseliotis, 1980).

In addition to this, the account given by 'Richard' suggested that there could be consequences to performing this role. For him, he seemed to become a 'confidante' in which the foster child confided her worries about being placed with the family. This relates to Pugh (1996) and Macaskill (1991) who argued that carers' own children can act as a 'bridge' between the foster child and carers, and may be confided in regarding disclosures about abuse. Thus, taking on a role of this nature could potentially place these children in a further role of responsibility.

In summary then, from the accounts of participants in this study, carers' own children assumed roles of responsibility, both in seeing themselves as a responsible family member and also in helping the foster child to settle into the family. They appeared to take these roles on willingly and become both peers and quasi-carers at the same time (Martin, 1993). Whilst existing literature highlights the positive and negative impact of fostering on these children, many studies have focused on the latter. What was particularly striking with participants in this study was the effort they put into understanding the foster child and the roles they subsequently assumed.

Finding a Role: Clinical Implications

If, as the literature and findings of this study suggest, children do willingly take on roles of responsibility within the foster family, then this has important clinical implications. Foremost is the need for these children to have support mechanisms in place. One way in which this can be achieved was highlighted in 'Richard's' account

through the setting up of strategies to help them cope with the foster placement. Whilst this appeared to have been arranged informally by 'Richard' and his parents, this could also be done more formally at a service level. Attendance at a support group for carers' own children could also be helpful. In Chapter One, Pugh (1996) outlined the benefits of such support groups (p17). Taking this need to a wider level, this reinforces the need for carers' own children to be involved in training and given information about the profiles of children entering foster care along with some preparation of what the experience of fostering may be like. Services must acknowledge that, as shown by participants in this study, children do assume roles of responsibility willingly. Whilst this can have clear benefits for the foster child, services must safeguard carers' own children and take steps to monitor the potential impact on them of assuming such roles.

For the Clinical Psychologist, present in many looked-after children's (LAC) services today, and working alongside other services, such as Social Services, they have a crucial and valuable role to play in this field. Firstly, the study adds valuable knowledge to the processes children can go through when dealing with family transitions. Secondly, since many families present at these Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) when there are difficulties or when placements are at risk of breakdown, Clinical Psychologists have specialist skills in systemic models and thus are able to consider the impact of fostering on the whole family and can incorporate the needs of all family members into clinical work; for example, in situations where serious emotional or family problems may arise. Furthermore, there is an important role in training and raising awareness of these issues among other professionals in the field and to those directly involved in caring for foster children (DCP, 2004). After all, good psychological preparation is an important factor in helping to prevent breakdown (Berridge, 1997).

In linking all of these implications to a policy level, they clearly fit into the principles underpinning both the Children's Act (1989) and the emerging National Service Framework (NSF) for children and young people that will soon to be introduced within the NHS. The Children's Act (1989) stipulates clearly that the welfare of the child is paramount and that children should be protected from harm. This research reinforces the findings of other studies and demonstrates that carers'

own children can be exposed to difficult and disturbing behaviour from foster children. Furthermore, it states that children should be informed and included in decisions about them, and this relates to inclusion in plans to become a foster family. With an emphasis on prevention, early intervention and child-centred care in the NSF, this calls for children to be involved in training and in gaining support if they are to cope with foster placements. This is particularly important in the knowledge that children do take on responsible roles within the family.

4.2   A Methodological Critique

There are a number of methodological issues arising from this study that warrant consideration. This includes an examination of the employment of grounded theory strategies, locating the sample, the impact of the researcher on the analysis and finally, issues surrounding research with children.

4.2.1   Using 'Grounded Theory'

The analysis of the data and ensuing model were based on the accounts of five participants. The study was limited to a number of five due to a difficulty in recruiting participants. Whilst this started with responses from two children following the recruitment process (outlined in Chapter Two, section 2.5.1), the researcher then had to keep re-contacting the fostering agency, who had to go through a process of re-contacting families about the project. This difficulty in gaining access to participants along with time constraints meant that the method of *theoretical sampling* could not be applied in this study. Of the participants involved in the study, this did include variation in the sample and a negative case analysis was identified in 'Luke'; however, it is recognised that the resulting theoretical account and many of the categories identified within it, did not contain as much variation and richness that would have ideally been the case if theoretical sampling techniques had been employed.

Another consideration surrounds the nature of theoretical *saturation*. As noted in Chapter Two, the end-point of a grounded theory study should ideally be determined by the theoretical saturation of data categories, that is, the point at which new data fails to give rise to new ideas in the development of the analysis (McLeod, 2001). Proponents of grounded theory have suggested that theoretical saturation

generally begins to occur after the analysis of 5-10 cases (Rennie *et al*, 1988). The analysis in the present study was based on five cases and it is acknowledged that many categories did not reach saturation point. More interviews would be necessary in order to claim for theoretical saturation.

An additional factor concerns the debate outlined in Chapter Two (see section 2.2.5) surrounding whether or not the ultimate aim of a grounded theory study should be to build comprehensive theoretical systems. As Charmaz (1995) and Henwood & Pidgeon (1995) point out, when conducting research the reality of constraints surrounding time and access to participants can mean that this is not always possible. However, important insights and understanding of phenomena can still be gained from accounts that have conceptual depth. In this study therefore, whilst a claim cannot be made for the development of a comprehensive 'theory', the model developed from the data analysis gives useful insight into a previously unresearched area. Indeed, this study highlights a range of factors that may be important for children going through the transition to foster family status. In linking this to existing literature in the field, it forms an important springboard for future research in this area.

4.2.2 Locating the Sample

It is also interesting to look at the resulting sample in the context of sample populations used in previous studies. In this study, the sample was derived from an independent fostering agency. In reviewing the accounts of previous studies involving foster carers' own children, this has involved a mixture of samples taken from both local authority and private or independent fostering agencies. In many of these previous studies, authors have talked about the lack of involvement of carers' own children in the assessment and preparation process. In the present sample, the assessment protocol followed by the fostering agency did include consideration of these children, with a section designated to asking them their views about fostering. They also ran a support group for carers' own children that took place twice-yearly. Whilst this did not necessarily come up in the accounts participants gave, it is important to locate the emergent findings within this context of inclusion.

In addition to this, the recruitment process followed meant that participants opted into the study voluntarily. Interestingly however, only the first two interviewees responded in this way. The remaining three participants were followed up through the fostering agency and then by the researcher and could therefore have potentially felt more 'encouraged' into taking part rather than responding through their own initiative. The three interviews that fell through were also recruited via this latter process. Following attendance at the Carers' Support Group to talk about the project, the researcher had planned to attend the Birth Children's Support Group however this was subsequently cancelled. Had this taken place, it would have given the researcher more direct contact with this group of children to discuss the project and may have resulted in a different response rate. There was also an imbalance in the gender of participants, with four males and only one female. It would therefore have been useful to be able to include more females in the study.

Participants recruited into the project were also all involved in ongoing foster placements at the time of the study. This suggests that it might be harder to get access to children in families where placements have broken down. This would have been useful in get a contrasting account as it would have provided a negative case analysis and more variation in data categories. This is particularly interesting given that one of the children recruited into the project had recently experienced a placement breakdown within her family, but subsequently decided she did not want to take part in the project.

4.2.3   Impact of Researcher on Analysis

In taking on board the idea that the researcher has an impact on the research process, the researcher was aware of resonating with some interviews more than others. This was particularly the case with 'Daniel' and 'Richard' and may have been because of the comprehensive nature of the accounts they gave. In conducting the analysis, the researcher reached a point in which a model had been developed, but felt concerned that it was mainly representative of these two interviews. Aware of this, the researcher went back through the analysis and re-examined the data to attempt to develop a model that more broadly represented all of the accounts obtained. In the final model, the researcher did draw on both 'Daniel' and 'Richard's' accounts quite

heavily, but felt they made the most conceptual sense and were thus used to 'unlock' the accounts of the other participants.

4.2.4 Conducting Research with Children

There are also a number of important factors to consider in conducting research with children. Firstly, the recruitment process is an essential first step in encouraging children to take part in research. The recruitment process in this study was quite comprehensive. Talking about the research with parents was an essential first step particularly given that all participants were under the age of 16, indicating that parents would need to give consent for their children to participate in the project. This enabled parents to take away an Information Sheet about the project for their children to talk it over with them, and then have an opportunity to meet with the researcher to discuss any concerns before giving consent to take part. At this meeting, it was important for the researcher to be clear with participants that they themselves were not an employee of the fostering agency and also to be clear about the dissemination of findings. This was important in ensuring they knew that nobody would find out exactly what they had said. Whilst this process was useful, it also had its limitations. In going through the parents as a first point of contact about the project, the researcher was reliant on parents discussing the project with their children. It can be hypothesized that if parents were not very keen on the idea of their children becoming involved, this may have influenced the way they talked to them about the project, and may be reflective of the poor response rate.

A second crucial part of the recruitment process is gaining consent. It was important to take time to fully explain the purpose, process and intended outcome of the project to participants and seek their consent on that basis (Lindsay, 1999), as well as clarify the role the child was expected to play during the interview (Nespor, 1998). This was to ensure that as far as possible children gave *informed* consent. Again however, if a parent is also required to give their consent for the child to participate in the research, they therefore know that the child has taken part and also know the focus of the research. Natural curiosity and concern could potentially lead them to question the child or researcher about what was said, and this could put pressure on the child. Again therefore, it was important to address these issues when gaining consent. Consent was sought on the understanding that what the child said would not be passed

onto parents and that parents would receive a *general* summary of the themes emerging from the data. The recruitment and consent processes are therefore very important when doing research with children.

Despite a careful and comprehensive recruitment and consent process, the researcher was however aware of a power imbalance in the interviewing relationship. This was particularly felt in 'Luke's' account. At the initial consent meeting, 'Luke's' mother had commented to the researcher that her son might be very negative about the fostering experience because at that time the family were experiencing some difficulties with the foster child in placement with them. Whilst the researcher reassured her that participants could say whatever they wanted to, the researcher was surprised at the interview given by 'Luke', particularly the lack of 'negativity' in the account. It is interesting to speculate on why this might have been. Hall (1996) argues that children can be intimidated in interview situations and may attempt to please the interviewer. Cole (1986) and Saarni (1984) argue that children of all ages will withhold emotion-laden information and try and mask negative feelings. Whilst this contradicts with other research (see Amato & Ochiltree, 1987), this nevertheless has important implications when involving children in research.

A third factor to consider in doing research with children is the interview itself. In this study, a wide age range of children were interviewed, ranging from 9-15 years old. Although one interview structure was devised, executing the interview with participants felt different with children of different ages. In particular, despite thinking carefully about the wording of questions, the interviews highlighted that participants did not always understand the questions. This was particularly evident in 'Amy's' account who was the youngest of all participants. The researcher attempted to use a wide range of open-ended questions to allow participants to raise any issues, and closed questions to gain more specific responses about matters raised (Hall, 1996). At times however, the researcher felt that she had to prompt a lot more than may be the case if interviewing adults, and consequently spoke quite a lot in the interviews. Amato & Ochiltree (1987) acknowledge that children can find intensive questioning difficult and can have more difficulty understanding questions than adults. Furthermore, in terms of using quotes as the key component of a grounded theory analysis, participants did not always give long verbal quotes.

4.2.5 Dissemination of Findings

In terms of dissemination of the findings, participants were not asked to give feedback in light of the emerging theory. Some of the concerns surrounding respondent validation were discussed in Chapter Two and it was felt that attempting to obtain participants feedback would prove difficult due to the inherent power balance between the researcher and participants. However, the researcher produced a summary of the findings (Appendix 6.11) with covering letter that was subsequently sent to participants, with the opportunity to meet with the researcher to discuss them if requested. This was not taken up by any of the participants. In addition to this, a summary of the findings was sent to parents and the fostering agency (Appendices 6.12 and 6.13). As part of this dissemination process, the researcher arranged to attend a Foster Carers' Support Group meeting to present the findings of the study to parents and also to attend a Birth Children's Support Group to discuss the study with carer's own children. These two feedback sessions have been planned to take place in July and August, following submission of the research for examination.

4.3   Reflections on the Research Journey

As noted earlier, this was the first time the researcher had undertaken qualitative research. This section describes some of challenges faced by the researcher in carrying out a qualitative study and ends with some reflections on the impact of the process on the researcher.

4.3.1   Challenges

A key aspect of the Clinical Psychologist's role involves the use of the clinical interview to assess each individual client. This involves building rapport with the client through the use of 'active' listening skills that include summarising and reflecting back information. Whilst this process is important in research settings, the research interview is somewhat different in emphasis. With a Grounded Theory study in particular, where there is focus on the meaning of verbal content it is especially important that the researcher does not summarise what the participant is saying into their own 'professional' language. Summarising and reflecting however remained important for the researcher in communicating to participants that she had understood what participants were saying, and this is evidenced throughout the transcripts. The

researcher found it much harder than expected to switch in emphasis from a clinical to a research interview.

There were also a number of practical challenges to conducting a qualitative study. The task of managing a process that was by definition, non-linear was challenging for the researcher. Moving from one stage to another, back and forth from data analysis to further data collection meant that at times it was very difficult to hold onto a sense of the project as a whole whilst attending to the various different parts of the study. Within this process, the researcher found it difficult to initially think abstractly about the data. This was partly due to being new to the process but also linked to a concern about getting it 'wrong'. Whilst acknowledging there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers in qualitative research, the researcher found it difficult to challenge this assumption and it took time to accept that one needed to take a 'leap of faith' and believe in what one was doing. Using the method of constant comparison however, was employed to try and ensure the developing account remained 'grounded' in the experiences of participants.

Giles (2002) suggests that the popularity of a Grounded Theory approach is down to its intuitive nature. Certainly, the development of a 'model' was found by the researcher to be a very creative process. By drawing on a range of techniques, such as memo-writing and using the 'flip-flop' technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), this enabled a process of unblocking thoughts and developing and integrating emerging ideas from the data. Qualitative researchers talk about the need to 'immerse' oneself in one's data. Whilst this was an essential part of the process, the researcher often found it hard to then re-emerge from the data, and the use of regular supervision and access to a Qualitative Support Group was essential in being able to check out ideas about ones data and in ensuring that these ideas were 'grounded' in the accounts given by participants. A further difficulty for the researcher was in getting what was essentially a 'process' down on paper, and telling a story that represented all of the accounts as a whole whilst retaining meaningful nuances of individual accounts. There were therefore a number of practical challenges that the researcher experienced in carrying out a Grounded Theory analysis.

4.3.2 Researcher Reflections

The nature of qualitative research is such that it requires the researcher to "own one's own perspective" (Elliott *et al*, 1999). Thus, the process of self-reflection is necessary in order to identify one's assumptions, opinions and expectations. This was outlined in the Methodology section (see 2.4.2). In going through the research process, the researcher found this had an important impact on her prior assumptions, opinions and expectations. For instance, initial assumptions were based on an idea that the transition to foster family status would be negatively experienced by participants. The researcher was surprised to learn from participants that, whilst this transition did change their family in many ways and they were faced with many difficult situations, they made a real effort to understand the foster child's life. The researcher was surprised at the effort they put into welcoming the foster children into their family and in helping them to settle in. This left the researcher with an acknowledgement that just because a situation could be hard, this did not mean it had to be a wholly negative experience for these children.

This challenge to prior assumptions was also evidenced throughout the analysis of the data. As soon as the coding phase began, ideas about the negative impact of fostering on participants did not emerge as had been anticipated. Thus, although the researcher entered the project with ideas about the negative impact of transitions on children, she was drawn to, and surprised by categories that had nothing to do with these assumptions.

The researcher also felt the research process highlighted a point made by Pryor & Rodgers (2001) that children's views and experiences of change can differ significantly from the assumptions made by adults, as evidenced here through the researcher's assumptions. At times for example, the researcher was surprised by the responses of participants. An example of this came in 'Amy's' interview where she spoke about having to give up her bedroom when a foster child was placed with her family. In asking how she felt about having to share with her brother, the thing that had bothered her most was that the colour scheme in her brother's bedroom was not to her taste! This response served as a reminder to the researcher that children are not always necessarily concerned with the same issues as adults.

Finally, it was important to link the lessons learned with the researcher's role as a clinician. In working with children in services where families often presented with their child because of some difficulty or problem either with the child or within the family system, it highlighted that, as a clinician, one can obtain a skewed view of the negative impact of many different life experiences on children. What the research sensitised the researcher to was a reminder that children can be very resilient and adaptive in the face of difficulties and changes within their life, and this had an important impact on the researcher's ensuing clinical work in trying to hold onto a more balanced view of children's responses to a range of situations and experiences.

4.4   Future Research Implications

The present study informs potential areas for future research in a number of ways. The suggestions put forward here centre predominantly around a notion of family-based research. This follows the interests of the researcher but is also in recognition of ideas set out in Chapter One: in a climate of the recognition of having child-centred care, this calls for the need to have clearer understanding of the experiences of children living in various family structures so that services are more informed of the child's perspective and can tailor services to meet their needs.

Firstly, due to some of the practical constraints of the study described earlier, it would be useful to extend the present study and seek to do more theoretical sampling to gain more variation and conceptual depth within categories, and also to develop categories to 'saturation' point.

There are also a number of interesting themes to emerge from this study that could be usefully studied in greater depth in further studies. Of particular interest is the idea of participants' maintaining a sense of their own family as a potential 'protective' factor in the transitional process. Further exploration could focus more closely on the meaning of this for carers' own children and on what happens in situations where this might not be present. In addition, research could look at the impact of this process of the maintenance of 'own' family as different from the 'foster' family on the *foster child*. One might hypothesize that this could have an effect on the level of integration they are able to make into the foster family. Linked into this, it would also be interesting to focus on the function of respite care for foster

children. This seems to act as a very clear message that the foster child is in some way a separate entity to the family. It would therefore be interesting to examine foster children's constructions of respite care.

All of the participants in the present study were involved in ongoing foster placements. It would therefore be useful to conduct a similar study involving children in families where the placement has broken down. This could provide insight into whether children in these families follow similar processes to participants in this study or not, and would provide important insight into the dynamic process of own children's experiences of foster placement breakdown.

Given the emphasis in the present and previous studies on the importance of a *family* approach to fostering, it would also be interesting to conduct a family-based study involving both parents and their children to see how perspectives may differ on factors involved in the transition to foster family status.

This study identified that the transition to foster family status is not a static, but rather an ongoing and evolving process. This concurs somewhat with the experience of being a child living in foster care, for example, they may be placed with several different families. The nature of foster care today is also characterized by the fact that many foster children are eventually reunited with their birth families. In a similar sense therefore, the transitional process for them is also a continuous one. It would thus be interesting to undertake a study looking at their constructions of adjustment to family transitions to see whether this has any concurrence with the processes identified in this study.

Finally, it has been shown in this study that the factors important for children in the transition to foster family status have some concurrence with the factors important in marital transitions. It would be useful to take these findings and look at whether other forms of family transitions share similar factors, for example adoptive families.

4.5   Conclusions

The present study has highlighted a range of factors that may be important for children going through the transition to foster family status. For participants in this study, this centred on going through an active process of attempting to 'redefine' their family. In particular, they attempt to understand these changes and to find a role for themselves and their own family in this new family structure. The involvement of other family members is crucial in helping these children to manage the transition, emphasising the need for a *family* approach to adjustment. This study supports the findings of previous research and shows that this group of children do play an important role in fostering, placing themselves in responsible positions within the family by becoming both peers and quasi-carers to foster children (Martin, 1993).

This study adds further knowledge, of a qualitative nature, to the foster care literature, by providing more detailed understanding of placement dynamics and the interactions between family members. It also adds insight into the way children experience and make sense of this particular family 'transition'. The accounts given by participants in this study suggest that children can show great resilience and adaptation in the face of quite considerable change (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001) and that they are able to convey their experiences to adults. This demonstrates that research involving children is both possible and useful.

The clinical implications of this mean that children's services need to more clearly involve this group of children in training and preparation for living as a foster family. Taking a family-based approach to assessment could effectively do this (e.g. McCracken & Reilly, 1998). Coupled with the messages from public policies, this emphasises the need for services to take on the responsibility of safeguarding the emotional and psychological well-being of these children by putting in place comprehensive support packages.

This poses a number of challenges to the way services are set up and to the practice of clinicians. It remains to be seen whether they are able to incorporate these messages into their practice.

5.0   **REFERENCES**

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9th June 2003

Dear Ms. *(Team Leader)*,

I recently spoke with *(Social Worker)* about a research project I am currently planning and she advised me to put my ideas in writing to you as Team Manager. I understand she may have already spoken with you about the proposed project.

I am a Trainee Clinical Psychologist currently undertaking my Doctorate in Clinical Psychology Training in conjunction with the University of Leicester and Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust. As part of my training, I am required to plan and undertake a research project. Arising from my experience of working with children as part of my training, I am particularly interested in the different forms of family life in which children often live.

In looking at the research that has been done on foster families, there appears to have been a lot of emphasis on examining the experiences of those children placed in foster care, and more recently, research into the stresses and strains experienced by carer's themselves. There appears however, to have been little emphasis on the experience of fostering from the perspective of carer's own (birth) children. This is interesting, since placements with foster families where carers own children are present appear to be a common occurrence.

I am therefore proposing to undertake a study looking specifically at the experience of fostering from the perspective of carer's children. Please find enclosed an Information Sheet outlining my research proposal in more detail. I have attempted to address some of the questions I am sure you will have, and given an outline of the proposed process. This is an initial draft and so is not yet set in stone! I would therefore very much appreciate your comments on this.

In short however, I am proposing to interview a small sample of children (approx. 8-10 children in total) whose family have a foster child in placement with them. I am primarily interested in getting an understanding of how they experience having a foster child in their family and how this impacts on family relationships. The project is aimed at getting an account of their experience only, and no questions would be

asked about the foster child in placement. If possible, I would like to interview children aged between 10-18 years old. Although the age gap is wide, I think it would be useful to get the perspectives of a wide age range of children, as I wonder whether the situation would be experienced differently for children of different ages.

I am therefore writing to enquire whether it would be possible to access birth children through your agency for participation in this project. When I spoke with *(Social Worker)*, I was very encouraged to hear that you currently run a group for birth children.

I would be most grateful if you could spend some time reading through my proposal to see if your agency would be interested in becoming involved. I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this project further and address any questions or concerns. If necessary, I am able to provide a letter from the University confirming my training status and their approval of the project. Prior to commencing the course, and given that I work with children as part of my training, I underwent a police check and am also able to provide confirmation of this if necessary.

I can be contacted at the university address at the top of the letter or alternatively, have provided my email address and mobile number.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Young (Miss)

THE CHILDREN OF CARERS:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THEIR EXPERIENCE OF FOSTERING

INFORMATION SHEET

What is the research about?
This research is interested in finding out about the experience of fostering from the perspective of foster carer's own (birth) children.

Why?
Placements with foster families where the children of carers are present are a common occurrence. In looking at the foster care literature, there has been a lot of research examining factors that seem to be associated with a placement being successful or not. Indeed, one of the recurrent findings has been that foster placements are more likely to break down when fosters carers are looking after their own as well as foster children.

Children who are placed in care are there for a diverse number of reasons. These may include experiences of parental deprivation, whether from inadequate and/or abusive parenting, or tragic circumstances, such as loss or death. For carers, the decision to foster means opening their home to other people's children. In doing so, they and their family, must go through a process of adjustment to accommodate the foster child and enable him or her to feel part of family life.

Foster children themselves have been the subject of much research and attention and there have been many studies examining their experiences of being in foster care. Equally, there has been some research looking at the experience of carers and the stresses and strains they experience. There is however, very little written about the experience of fostering from the perspective of carer's own children.

Why are these children important?
Foster carer's own children play a crucial role in the foster placement. For instance, the experience of a fostered child will undoubtedly be affected by the response of the carer's own children. A positive response from their own children will encourage foster carer's to persist, whereas unhappiness or resentment may, at the very least, evoke doubts about whether it is worthwhile. In this way, they therefore have the potential to exert a powerful influence over the progression of a placement. In addition, they may act as a role model and form a 'bridge' between the foster child and carer. They may even become the first recipients of a disclosure if children have been abused. Also, they often act as a support to their parents, both at an emotional and practical level.

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What will the research involve?

The research will involve doing an interview with each child who participates in the study. It is envisaged that 8-10 children will be interviewed in total. In order to get a wide range of views, it is hoped that children between the ages of 10-18 years old will be included. The interview will last for approximately 40 minutes - 1 hour.

Each child will be asked about their experience of having a foster child enter their family, and how this impacted on them and their relationships with other family members.

What will happen to the research?
Confidentiality

Each interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed. During transcription, all identifying information will be changed to ensure anonymity of the participant. All tapes and transcripts will be kept in a secure location and all information held on computer will be password protected. Access to data will be restricted to the principal researcher and supervisors.

Consent

For each child who would like to take part in the project, consent will be sought from both parents and child. They will have the opportunity to meet with the principal researcher to discuss the research and address any questions they may have. If they decide to take part, each will then be asked to sign a consent form.

If, at any stage during the research, participants no longer want to be involved, they can withdraw from the research project. Any data collected from them at that point, will be destroyed.

What will happen once the research is completed?

Once the research has been completed, a written summary of the findings will be sent to each participant who took part. Parents will also be provided with the opportunity to receive a summary of the main findings. An opportunity to discuss them with the principal researcher will be offered to all. A report will also be provided to the Fostering Agency from which participants were accessed. It is envisaged that the project will be submitted for publication to a relevant journal.

6.3   Letter from Foster Care Associates

⊿FCA
Foster Care Associates
ANGLIA

Miss Helen Young
University of Leicester
School of Psychology
Clinical Section
104 Regent Road
Leicester

23rd July 2003

Dear Helen

Thank you for your letter.

I have discussed your proposal with The Director of Foster Care Associates, and we feel that a Research Project in this area would be beneficial. We would need to speak to the carers initially, to see how they felt about participating with the project.

I would like to meet with you to further discuss your proposal. May I suggest Thursday 7th August at 2:00 pm. If this time is inconvenient, please contact me on (0116) 2854833 to arrange a more convenient time.

Yours sincerely

TEAM MANAGER

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS

The Children of Carers:
An Investigation into their Experience of Fostering

What is this project about ?

This project is about finding out what it is like for your own children to have a foster child come and live in their family.

Why are your children important ?

We know that your own children play a very important part in fostering. We know that the reaction of your own children to the foster child can affect the placement in many ways. A positive response from your own children may encourage you to persist, even when things are difficult, whereas unhappiness or resentment may, at the very least, evoke doubts about whether it is worthwhile. Your own children can sometimes act as a role model for the foster child. They may even be the first person a foster child turns to and makes a disclosure if they have been abused. We know your own children often also help you out, both practically, in looking after the foster child, but also as a source of emotional support. Your own children therefore play an important part in fostering!

Encouraging your child to tell their story...

It is important to continue improving services for foster families and foster children. To do this, it is crucial to understand what influences a placement to continue or cease. It is therefore important to understand how fostering affects everyone in the family. One of the recurrent findings from previous studies involving foster families, is that services have, at times, underestimated the stresses placed on the *whole* family when a foster child comes into the home.

We know about the important part your own children play in fostering, however, we still know very little about what it feels like for them on a day-to-day basis to have a foster child living with their family. THIS IS IMPORTANT! By encouraging your child to tell their story, it can help foster care services to understand how to involve your children in planning and know what kinds of support they may need. It can also help you as parents gain insight into how fostering affects your children and help you to think, as a family, about how each of you may react to fostering.

What will ` ` ject involve ?

Your child will be asked to take part in 1 individual interview.

Who can take part?

8-10 children will be interviewed altogether. In order to get a wide range of views, both boys and girls between the ages of 10-18 years old will be interviewed. The interview will last for about 1 hour. Where possible, it would be useful to interview children who have had a foster child living in their family for about 6 months, so that they have had time to adjust to this change.

What kinds of questions will be asked?

Your child will be asked to talk about how it feels for them have a foster child live with their family, and how they think this has affected them and their relationships with other family members. The interview is interested in their experience only, and no questions will be asked about the foster child in placement.

Whilst the experience of each child will be different, the aim is to identify any common themes or issues that emerge that appear to be important to this group of children.

Where will the interview take place?

You and your child can decide where you would like the interview to take place. For example, this can be at home, or alternatively, a room can be booked at the fostering agency.

What will happen to the information?

Confidentiality

Each interview will be audiotaped. This is to aid the interviewer in remembering everything that your child has said. Each interview will then be transcribed. This means it will be typed out word for word. During transcription, all identifying information will be changed to ensure anonymity of your child. All tapes and transcripts will be kept in a secure location and all information held on computer will be password protected. Access to data will be restricted to the interviewer and supervisors of the project.

What your child has said in the interview will remain confidential between your child and the interviewer. However, there is an exception to this: If your child says something that raises child protection concerns, then this cannot be kept confidential. This might occur, for example, if your child said that they were being bullied by the foster child or alternatively, if they said they were bullying the foster child. *Anything that implies a risk to them or someone else cannot remain confidential.* This will be discussed with your child prior to them agreeing to take part in the interview. If something like this does arise, it will

be discussed with your child, you, and your supervising Social Worker at the fostering agency.

Gaining consent

For each child who would like to take part in the project, they will be asked to sign a 'consent form'. This is a written agreement recording that they understand what the project is about and that they would like to take part. This is also signed by the interviewer. For children under the age of 16 years old, you will also be asked to sign the form giving your consent for your child to take part. Prior to signing the consent form, you and your child will have the opportunity to meet with the interviewer and address any questions that you may have.

If, at any stage during the research, you or your child change your mind and decide you no longer want to be involved, you can withdraw from the project. Any information collected from your child at that point will be removed from the study.

What happens if your child becomes upset after the interview?

It is important to plan for every eventuality. If, for instance, your child becomes upset after taking part in the interview, there is an agreement with your fostering agency that your child will have the opportunity to meet with the supervising Social Worker for the family.

What will happen when the project is completed?

Following the interview, your child will be contacted within a month by the interviewer. This meeting is important in checking out with your child that the interviewer has understood everything that they have said and not misinterpreted any information.

Once all the children involved in the project have been interviewed, the research will be written up and a summary of the findings will be sent to your child for them to keep. As parents, it is important that you also receive some feedback on the project. Whilst the specific comments of each child will be anonymised to ensure confidentiality, you will receive an overall summary of the main findings. An opportunity to discuss them with the interviewer will be offered, or alternatively, the interviewer can arrange to attend the Carer's Support Group to feed back.

A summary report will also be provided to Foster Care Associates, the fostering agency involved with your family. This is important because the stories your children have told about their experiences of fostering will provide valuable information in helping them to look at ways of improving the service they provide to your family!

ATTENTION...WE WANT YOUR HELP!

A Project to look at how you feel about Fostering

Lots of parents who decide to foster children
have children of their own to look after, like you.
We want to find out what it is like for you to have a foster
child live with you and your family. This is your chance
to tell us your story!

your views are important

We want you to tell us how to make it better

We think you play a really important part in fostering. We want to hear your story
because we want to understand what it feels like for YOU to have a foster child come
and live with your family. By telling us what it is like for you, this will help us to find
ways of improving the way that foster care services involve you in fostering.

So, if you are:

Aged between 10 and 18 years old
and
Have a foster child living with your family for at least 6 months

We want to hear your story!

What will you have to do?

We want you to take part in one individual interview. This will last for about 1
hour. You can choose where you want to do the interview. This can be at home or
we can book a room at the fostering agency. IT IS UP TO YOU.

Who is doing it?

My name is HELEN YOUNG and I am from the
UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER. I will be the person who interviews you. I am coming to
your next support group so that you can meet me. If you would like to take part, I will
arrange to come and see you so that you can ask any questions you might have about
taking part. We will then arrange a time to meet and do the interview.

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Do your parents need to know if you want to take part?

If you are under 16 years old, you will have to tell your parent(s) you would like to take part. They have also been given some information about this project. After talking about it with them, if you all think it would be a good idea for you to take part, then that is great!

If you are aged between 17-18 years old, you do not need to get your parents consent, but you may decide you want to tell them about it anyway.

'Consent' means agreeing to take part in the project. If you agree to take part, then you, your parents (if you are under 16) and me (Helen Young) will sign a 'consent form'.
BUT
You can change your mind at any time. This means that if, at any point, you decide you no longer want to take part that is fine.

What will happen to what you say?

What you say in the interview will be recorded on audiotape. This will help me to remember everything that you say. It will then be typed out and saved on a computer disk. When it is being typed out, your name will be changed to make sure that everything you have said is confidential. 'Confidential' means that nobody will find out exactly what you have said.

Once it is finished, I will write to you to let you know what I have found. If you think it would be a good idea, I can come and talk at your Support Group. Your parents may also want to know what has happened. They will be given a summary of what people have said. Remember, because all of the names will be changed, nobody reading the report will know who has said what. I will also write to the foster care agency involved with your family to tell them about the findings. Based on what you have said, this will help the agency think about ways in which they can improve or change the way they involve you in fostering.

SO, IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN TAKING PART:

1. Show this sheet to your parent(s) (if you are under the age of 16) and talk about it with them
2. Fill in the information on the next page and send it back to me in the envelope provided.

Once you have sent the form back to me, I will call you and arrange to come and meet you (and your parents if you are under the age of 16).

A Project to look at how you feel about Fostering

Date: _____

1. My Name is: _____   Age: _____

2. My Address is:_____

   _____

   _____

   Tel. No: _____

3. Please circle Yes or No:

   I HAVE talked about this with my parents   YES / NO

   I HAVE NOT talked about this with my parents   YES / NO

4. Please write down any questions or worries you have about taking part. (This will
   help me to prepare for when I come and meet with you):

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

CONSENT FORM

A Project to look at how you feel about Fostering

Interviewer:	**Helen Young**
Based at:	**School of Psychology - Clinical Section,**
	University of Leicester, 104 Regent Road, LE1 7LT

I have read the Information Sheet about this project.

I have met with Helen Young, the interviewer. The project has been explained to me, I have had the opportunity to ask any questions, and I understand what I will be required to do.

I understand that the interview will be audio-taped. I understand that the tape will be kept in a safe and secure place and the information I give will be used for this project only.

I understand that the information I give will be treated as confidential. However, I also understand that there are certain things that cannot be kept confidential and these have been explained to me.

I understand that I can change my mind and pull out of the project at any time if I want to.

I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS PROJECT.

(1) Signature of participant .... Date ....

    Name in BLOCK CAPITALS ....

(2) Signature of parent (if participant under age of 16) ....

    Name in BLOCK CAPITALS .... Date ....

I confirm that I have explained the nature of this study, as detailed in the Information Sheet, in terms which, in my judgement are suited to the understanding of the participant.

(3) Signature of researcher: .... Date ....

    Name in BLOCK CAPITALS ....

Information I need to bring to the interview.

- How old I was when my family first fostered a child

- How many years my family has been a foster family

- How many foster children have lived with me and my family altogether

- The ages of the foster children who have lived with me and my family

- How many foster children are living with me and my family at the moment

- How old they are

- How long they have been living with me and my family

6.8   Example of Open Coding

Interview 2: 'Daniel'

155   H: Ok. So if you could think back to erm, three years ago when you

156   first became a foster family

157   D: Yeah

158   H: can you remember what it was like when a foster child first came to

159   live with you?

160   D: Well, the first one, erm, we didn't know what to expect really/We   *Uncertainty*

161   didn't know what they were like and we'd never had one before,/and   *Not Knowing*

162   they just, really, blended in, cos' it was about, the first one was about   *Settling into family*

163   eleven and erm/when he first come he liked football so I just let him   *Encouraging shared interests*

164   come in my room to play on the play station football or something/and

165   he blended in alright.   *fitting into family*

166   H: Ok. Alright then. And how did everyone react when, when he first

167   came?

168   D: Erm, a bit different, cos' we didn't know what to do or anything.   *Not knowing how to behave*

169   H: Mmm. So what did you notice about everyone that was a bit different?

170   Did people behave differently?

171   D: Yeah, they behaved differently because they didn't know what his   *Change in behaviour due*

172   background was like or anything, so you behaved differently around   *to uncertainty*

173   them.

174   H: Ok, so what kinds of things did they do differently?

175   D: They erm, like, I don't know, erm, they didn't like, you know if they'd   *Parental*

176   done something wrong, they didn't like lift their voice that high/cos'   *change in behaviour to own child*

177   sometimes if we do something really bad, shout at us or something,

178		but we don't mind.

Being reprimanded

179	H:	So they, they didn't do that?

180 D: No, because they didn't know what the child would have been like/ *Consideration of foster child*

181 cos' they might have been scared a bit/ *Predicting reactions*

182	H:	Right, so was that shouting at the child or shouting at you?

183	D:	Shouting at us.

184	H:	Right, ok so that was a bit different.

185 D: They wouldn't shout at the child really cos' we know his background. *Knowledge of child in different reactions*

186 H: Ok, so maybe, it sounds like they were maybe doing something a bit

187 different in the way that they dealt with you?

188	D:	Yeah.

189	H:	To the way they dealt with the foster child?

190	D:	Yeah.

191	H:	What was that like?

192	D:	Erm, erm, really because one, erm, I don't know.

193	H:	Did it feel like you were being treated differently?

194 D: Yeah, a little bit but it has to be really/because we got like this child *Accepting differences*

195 called Connor who smoked and everything and he swam in brooks *Behaviour determining treatment*

196 and erm, like, took drugs and he had to be treated differently/and then

197 another child had like mood swings and he, he had to like, you had *Behaviour strategies*

198 to just send him up to the room to calm down or something/and like

199 that. We'd get like, we'd just have to sit on the chair, but you can't *Understanding need for differences*

200 exactly send them onto a chair, you have to send them to their room to

201 calm down.

202 H: Right, so if you were getting told off you would be told to sit in a

203		chair?

204 D: Yeah, cos' we wouldn't like be, we had this kid called Philip who used *Describing behaviour*

205 to knock his head against wooden things and walls and everything. He

206 was naughty as well/So they had to just get him in his room to just lie *Handling behaviour*

207 on the bed and just settle down really.

208 H: Mmm. And how was that to see a child banging his head? *Recalling feelings*

209 D: It was, erm, it was really horrible to see, I didn't like it. Horrible/It's

210 the way they're brought up/it's a bit sad that though, brought up like *Having an explanation (for behaviour)*

211 that. *feeling sympathy*

212 H: Mmm. So, how did that make you feel then?

213 D: A bit bad because we've, we've got a good mum and grandma to *Seeing differences in upbringing*

214 bring us up and they didn't/and they, they can't see their mum for *Understanding from foster child's point of view*

215 about ten years or more.

216 H: Mmm, so how did, when you felt quite bad about that, were you able

217 to tell someone if you were feeling like that?

218 D: No. I told my brother sometimes, it was horrible having to see him like *Confiding*

219 that. Yeah.

220 H: And anybody else you could talk to or not?

221 D: Erm, sometimes my mum, say if I'm just like watching telly, *Time alone with mum to talk*

222 and I can tell mum on her own/say, "It's horrible having him bang

223 his head against the wall" and then she just explains why they do it (_)/ *Getting an explanation*

224 H: So she kind of explains to you.

225 D: Yeah, she just explains why they behave like that. *Being helped to understand behaviour*

226 H: And is that helpful?

227 D: Yeah, it is.

6.9 Example of using 'flip-flop' technique

Category 1: 'Making an Effort'

Not making an effort _____ Making an effort

What does not making an effort involve?	**What does making an effort involve?**
Not being interested	Being interested in the other person
Not communicating / talking with them	Initiating communication
Keeping self to self	Thinking about the other person
Not spending time with them	Trying to find out about them – so, being open
Not finding out about them	Asking questions
Not sharing information about self	Finding out about interests
	Spending time together
	Finding shared interests / common ground *

→ Therefore about initiating, trying to engage. about being active

* Does having shared interests facilitate the development of the relationship? Therefore, does this link with Category 16: Having something in common?

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6.10 Example of Writing a Definition

20/3/04   <u>Category: Having Time-Out</u>

What is 'Having Time-Out' about? It seems to be about having time alone with other family members; time without the foster children when participants can be with their own family; doing things as a family without the foster children – so, having a break. With the help of their parents, participants seem to set up a time when they can be alone with their family. Some of them have an extra half an hour in the evening when the foster children have gone to bed. This time can be spent just relaxing with their own family or talking about things. Sometimes participants and their families have 'time-out' when the foster children go into respite care and this provides an opportunity for the family to maybe go on holiday. This time alone is clearly important to participants and they perceive that it not only benefits them but also other family members, for example, others being more relaxed. There do, however, seem to be limits to being able to put this mechanism in place. In particular, if the foster children are older than participants then it is unlikely that participants can have extra time in the evenings with their family.

Having 'time-out' seems then to be linked with an idea of maintaining a sense of participants' own family unit. So, in a way, there are two families: one that includes the foster children and one that does not. The family is noticeably changed when foster children arrive in the family, yet it seems important to have times when, in a sense, it reverts back to what it was. So, having time-out could be a way of coping with the change.

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20th June 2004

A Project to look at how you feel about Fostering

Dear *(name of participant)*

Thank you for taking part in the above project. You may remember that I came out to interview you in *(month of interview)* about what it was like to have foster children come to live with you and your family. I have now finished the project and so am writing to let you know the findings. I have included a summary sheet with this letter and this goes through in detail the information that came out of all the interviews that I did.

You all showed that you tried really hard to understand the changes that occurred in your family when a foster child came to stay and showed that you play a really important role in fostering!

It was really useful to come and talk to you. I have talked to the staff at Foster Care Associates and this has helped them to think about training and support that they can give you.

If when you read the summary sheet you have any questions or comments, either you or your parents can contact me by email at: HLY3@le.ac.uk and I can arrange to come and talk to you. Thank you again for taking part!

Yours sincerely,

Helen Young

⎮ Project to look at how you feel about Fostering

UNDERSTANDING MY NEW FAMILY

For all of you who took part in this study, when foster children came to
live with you, you all tried really hard to understand your 'new' family.
From all of your interviews, there were 4 stages that you all seemed to go
through in getting used to living as a foster family:

(1) Noticing my family is different

Many of you said that your parents were the first people to talk to you
about the idea of becoming a foster family.
Following this, you had lots of ideas about what it would be like. Some
thought it would be like having a new brother or sister. Others thought it
would be like having a new friend to play with.
You also had lots of different feelings about the idea. Some of you
thought it would be exciting and fun. Some of you thought it would be
interesting because you would get to meet new people, but some of you
were also a bit worried that the foster child might be nasty to your
parents.
When the foster child came to live with you, you noticed that lots of
things changed at home. This included not being allowed to play some of
the games you used to play and not having as much time together with
your parents or brothers or sisters. Some of you also felt that you
changed and had to become more helpful and deal with some of the things
the foster child did. Some of you said it made you feel closer to your
parents, because you had to talk to each other more.

When you noticed your family was changing, you all tried really hard to understand why it had changed.

One of the ways you did this was to learn about the foster child. Some of you were given information about them before they arrived, and some of you learnt about them by just sitting and talking to them.

It was important for you to understand why they were in foster care, and many of you found out about what their families were like. Sometimes this made you feel sorry for the foster child and realise that you were lucky to have such a nice family.

Once you got all of this information, it helped you to understand why the foster child behaved in certain ways and sometimes had to be treated differently to you.

(3) Keeping my family

Even though you all noticed that your family changed and understood why it had changed, it was really important for you to remember your own family.

With the help of your parents, many of you made sure that you had time without the foster child when you could spend time with your parents or brothers or sisters. Sometimes this happened at night, where you would stay up for a bit longer when the foster child had gone to bed, but this only happened if the foster child was younger than you.

For some of you, you could have time alone with your family when the foster child went into respite care.

Other things that helped you remember your own family included noticing that other members of your family also had to change when a foster child was living with you. Therefore, you learned that you all had to change together in some way.

Lastly, you also knew that you were different to the foster child and that sometimes when new rules had to be made at home, you knew they were usually for the foster child, and that you did not have to stick to them all of the time.

(4) Finding a new role for myself

You all found a new role for yourselves in your family when you began to live as a foster family.

Some of you took on a really responsible role and tried to help your parents by dealing with difficult behaviour that the foster child displayed. Many of you also helped out a lot more at home.

You all made a real effort to help the foster child to feel welcome in your family. You were nice and friendly when they first arrived because you knew they might feel a bit shy when they first came. You also wanted to make sure they had a nice time whilst they were staying with you. Sometimes, it was easier to get to know them if they were the same age as you. For some, it helped if they were the same sex. It also helped if they were interested in the same things as you.

You also enjoyed doing activities with the foster child, and sometimes you let them come out with you and your friends.

SO, YOU HAVE SHOWN THAT:

You make a real effort to understand the changes that occur in your family when you become a foster family.

You play an important role in fostering and often take on responsibilities for dealing with difficult behaviour and helping the foster child to settle into your family.

Even though you welcome the foster child into your family, it is important for you to still have the opportunity to spend time with your own family.

THIS IS IMPORTANT! You have helped your parents and the fostering agency to understand what it is like for you to have foster children come and live with your family. This helps them understand that you need training and support.

THANKYOU FOR TAKING PART!

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20th June 2004

The Children of Carers:
An Investigation into their Experience of Fostering

Dear *(name of parents)*

You may recall that I came and interviewed your *(name of son/daughter)* in *(month)* about their experience of living as a foster family. I have now completed the project and so am writing to you to let you know the findings of the project. I have enclosed a summary sheet outlining the findings in detail for you to read. I have also sent a letter and summary sheet to *(name of son/daughter)*. I hope you find it of interest.

I interviewed five children in total and have tried to highlight the main processes that these children go through in managing the transition to living as a foster family. Overall, they have shown what an important role they play in fostering. I have been in touch with the staff at Foster Care Associates and met with them to talk about the findings. Importantly, it has helped them to think about the training needs and support that birth children require when living with foster children.

If after you have read the summary sheet you have any questions or comments, you can email me at: HLY3@le.ac.uk and I will be happy to arrange a time to come and meet with you. Thank you again for allowing *(name of son/daughter)* to take part in the project.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Young
Trainee Clinical Psychologist

The Children of Carers:
An Investigation into their Experience of Fostering
Redefining Family

For all children in this study, the transition to living as a foster family changed the nature of their existing 'family' and led them into a process of trying to 'redefine' their family. There were four key components to this process:

(1) Awareness of changes within the family

All children said that it was mainly parents who talked to them about the idea of fostering. There were many different ideas about what fostering would be like. Some thought they would gain a new brother or sister; others thought it would be like having another playmate; and some thought it would be interesting because it meant they would get to meet new people.

There were lots of different feelings about fostering. Some were excited and thought it would be fun, whilst others were worried that the foster child might be nasty to their parents.

When the foster child arrived, the children noticed lots of things that changed at home. This included not being able to play some of the games they used to play, and doing things differently, e.g. having new rules. Many noticed changes in other people and also within themselves. Some said they had to become more tolerant and help more around the home. Many also said that it actually made them feel *closer* to their parents, because they had to communicate and be more open with each other.

(2) Seeking to Understand

When noticing all of these changes, the children attempted to make sense of why these changes had occurred. This was crucially done through learning about the foster child. This included finding out why they were in care and also finding out about their family backgrounds. This was achieved in a number of ways.

Some were given information about the foster child from the fostering agency prior to their arrival, others found out by just talking with the foster child. Others were helped to learn by their parents sharing information with them. In addition, children learned about the foster child by living with them on a day-to-day basis.

Learning about the foster child was really important because it helped the children understand why the foster child behaved in certain ways and also helped them to understand why the foster child sometimes had to be treated differently to them. HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ABOUT THE FOSTER CHILD IS THEREFORE REALLY IMPORTANT FOR YOUR CHILDREN.

(3) Maintaining a sense of own family

One of the really important things for your own children was that, in the face of change, they were able to hold onto a sense of their own family. This involved, for example, carrying on some of the activities you did as a family before fostering. For some children, having time alone with their own family without the foster child was really important. This often took place in the evenings once the foster child had gone to bed. For others involved in long-term fostering, respite care provided an opportunity for the family to spend some time together. Having a 'shared' experience, for example, noticing that other family members were having similar experiences to themselves, also helped the children to see that this was a 'family' experience.

One of the really important findings here was that parents played a really important part in helping children to hold onto a sense of their own family. Therefore as parents, helping your child set up times when they could have a bit of 'time out' with you or their siblings was really important to them.

(4) Finding a role

In this 'new' family structure, all the children found different 'roles' for themselves. Often, these were quite responsible roles and children seemed to take these roles on willingly.

Firstly, some children took on roles as responsible family members. This involved helping out more around the home, and some talked about trying to support their parents. Others actively tried to intervene to manage difficult behaviour displayed by the foster child.

Secondly, all of the children made a real effort to try and make the foster child feel welcome in their family. This involved being friendly towards them when they first arrived and making an effort to get to know them. Some of the factors that facilitated this included being of the same age, the same sex, and/or having similar interests. Many of them also did activities with the foster child.

SO, WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS?

(1) Your children do play an important part in fostering.

(2) They actively try to understand the changes that occur within their family and parents have a really important role in helping them to do this.

(3) Whilst the family inevitably changes with the entry of a foster child, it is important for these children to hold onto a sense of their own family and again, parents have an important role in helping children to do this.

(4) Children do take on responsible roles within the family. Whilst this can be helpful and also beneficial to the foster child, children need to be protected and supported. This needs to come from both parents and fostering services.

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20th June 2004

Managing the transition to foster family status: The experience of carers' own children

Dear *(Team Leader)*

I have now completed the above project and am sending you a summary sheet outlining the main findings. I interviewed five children in total and have tried to highlight the main processes that these children go through in managing the transition to living as a foster family. I hope you find it of interest to read.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Young
Trainee Clinical Psychologist

Managing the transition to foster family status:
The experience of carers' own children

(1) Awareness of familial changes

(2) Seeking to understand

BECOMING A FAMILY

(4) Finding a role

(3) Maintaining a sense of own family

Managing the transition to foster family status: The experience of carers' own children

Redefining Family

For all children in this study, the transition to living as a foster family changed the nature of their existing 'family' and led them into a process of trying to 'redefine' their family. There were four key components to this process:

(1) Awareness of changes within the family

All children said that it was mainly parents who talked to them about the idea of fostering. There were many different ideas about what fostering would be like. Some thought they would gain a new brother or sister; others thought it would be like having another playmate; and some thought it would be interesting because it meant they would get to meet new people.

There were lots of different feelings about fostering. Some were excited and thought it would be fun, whilst others were worried that the foster child might be nasty to their parents.

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(2) Seeking to Understand

When noticing all of these changes, the children attempted to make sense of why these changes had occurred. This was crucially done through learning about the foster child. This included finding out why they were in care and also finding out about their family backgrounds. This was achieved in a number of ways.

Some were given information about the foster child from the fostering agency prior to their arrival, others found out by just talking with the foster child. Others were helped to learn by their parents sharing information with them. In addition, children learned about the foster child by living with them on a day-to-day basis.

Learning about the foster child was really important because it helped the children to understand why the foster child behaved in certain ways and also helped them to understand why the foster child sometimes had to be treated differently to them. HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ABOUT THE FOSTER CHILD IS THEREFORE REALLY IMPORTANT FOR THESE CHILDREN.

(3) Maintaining a sense of own family

One of the really important things for carers' own children was that, in the face of change, they were able to hold onto a sense of their *own* family. This involved, for example, carrying on some of the activities they did as a family before fostering. For some children, having time alone with their own family without the foster child was really important. This often took place in the evenings once the foster child had gone to bed. For others involved in long-term fostering, respite care provided an opportunity for the family to spend some time together. Having a 'shared' experience, for example, noticing that other family members were having similar experiences to themselves, also helped the children to see that this was a 'family' experience.

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Secondly, all of the children made a real effort to try and make the foster child feel welcome in their family. This involved being friendly towards them when they first arrived and making an effort to get to know them. Some of the factors that facilitated this included being of the same age, the same sex, and/or having similar interests. Many of them also did activities with the foster child.

SO, WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS?

(1) Carers' own children do play an important part in fostering.
(2) They actively try to understand the changes that occur within their family. Both parents and fostering services can help them to do this.
(3) Whilst the family inevitably changes with the entry of a foster child, it is important for these children to hold onto a sense of their own family. Fostering services could play a vital role in helping families to put mechanisms in place to facilitate this.
(4) Children do take on responsible roles within the family. Whilst this can be helpful and also beneficial to the foster child, children need to be protected and supported. This needs to come from both parents and fostering services.

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