



“You help children and they move on... but it changes everything”: Stress, coping and enjoyment of fostering among sons and daughters of foster carers

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Abstract

This study aimed to provide a theoretically-based exploration of the experiences of sons and daughters of foster carers, particularly with regard to enjoyment of fostering, stressors and coping mechanisms. Drawing information from a total of 55 participants (aged 7-21) for a mixed methods design, multiple linear regression was used to consider factors which affected fostering enjoyment. Analysis suggested that the age gap between foster children and participants was a significant predictor of enjoyment, as were participants' use of withdrawal coping strategies and active/emotional regulation coping strategies. Qualitative data were also gained from written questionnaire responses and a focus group ($n=8$), in which participants were asked for their views on factors which would make fostering easier and harder for them. Thematic analysis of responses suggested four overarching themes which affected experience of fostering. These themes were systemic factors (such as the impact on family systems and rules); within-foster child factors (such as behaviour, age and gender); personal and situational factors (such as house size and length of fostering placement) and relational factors (the impact of fostering on relationships within and outside the family unit). Focus group participants' descriptions of stressors (events, daily stressors and relational stressors) and coping strategies (escape, withdrawal, social support and 'moving on') are also discussed. The findings are then discussed in relation to theories and other research and practical applications are explored.

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Summary

This thesis is comprised of three complementary sections; a literature review, an empirical study and a critical reflective account. These sections aim to give the reader a sense of the progression of the research process. The literature review is used to guide and inform the research questions and methodology in the empirical article, whilst the research process and results are later considered critically in the reflective account.

Part 1: Literature Review

The literature review aims to provide a broad overview of fostering research, particularly as it relates to the role of the Educational Psychologist, and will also consider ways of thinking systemically about the foster family. It will also review the research about sons and daughters of foster carers and will explore some of the potential stressors which sons/daughters may experience. Research findings about sibling relationships, stress, resilience and coping mechanisms will also be reviewed, before considering how these research findings may contribute to predicting variability in enjoyment, stress and coping for children whose parents foster.

Part 2: Empirical Study

The empirical study provides a detailed account of the research undertaken and its findings are intended to further knowledge in the field. It describes the methodology employed and the research findings; providing an overview of both the quantitative data (in the form of a multiple logistic regression) and of the qualitative data (in the form of thematic analysis of focus group data). The results of the research are then explored and discussed with reference to previous research, the researcher's hypotheses, contribution to knowledge, research limitations and implications for future research.

Part 3: Critical Reflective Account

The critical reflective account provides an overview of the research process and is split into two parts. The first section provides an account of the research practitioner, exploring some of the ontological assumptions behind the research and some of the practical and ethical considerations which influenced research design. The second section is a more detailed outline of the contributions made to knowledge and considers practical and professional contributions to knowledge alongside the contributions made to the research field.

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List of Abbreviations

Birth, adopted and step-children of foster carers (sons/daughters)

Educational Psychologist (EP)

United Kingdom (UK)

Note on Terminology

There is no consistent terminology used across the research literature to refer to sons and daughters of foster parents. They have been referred to as biological children, biological children within a therapeutic foster family, care providers' children, children who foster, foster parent's own children, natural children, sons and daughters of foster carers and unknown soldiers of foster parents (Serbinski & Sholnsky, 2014). Much of the research refers to 'birth children' as a way of distinguishing them from foster children. However, it is not uncommon for foster carers to also have adopted children who are also present in the family home and several participants in the current study were, in fact, adoptive rather than birth children of foster carers. This study will therefore use the term 'sons and daughters of foster carers' or 'sons/daughters' to refer to the birth, adopted and step children of foster parents. Where alternative terminology is used, it refers to a specific research study or finding and uses the terminology adopted by the researchers.

This study will also refer to 'foster siblings'. This term is used to refer to the sibling-like relationship between sons/daughters and the foster children in their parents' care. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of this term, insofar as acknowledging that the 'foster sibling' relationship is distinct from an average sibling relationship, it provides a useful shorthand for discussion. Where it becomes necessary to refer to the birth/adoptive/step siblings of sons/daughters, they will merely be referred to as 'siblings'.



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Part 1: Literature Review

Literature Review

This literature review will begin by considering the importance of conducting research about the experiences of sons and daughters of foster carers. It will then review research related to foster family systems and the sons and daughters of foster carers. It will also draw on research from other areas (sibling relationships, stress, resilience and coping) and will consider the role of the EP in contributing to research with sons/daughters of foster carers. Ideas from these sections will then be used to help inform hypotheses regarding enjoyment, stress and coping for children whose parents foster.

1. The importance of research with sons/daughters of foster carers

In a review of several large-scale studies, it was found that the number of foster carers with dependent children has remained roughly consistent for the past 50 years, with just over half of foster families including dependent children living at home (McDermid, Holmes, Kirton & Signoretta, 2012). Although findings are unclear, some research suggests that the presence of a son/daughter in the foster home can itself be a predictor of placement breakdown (Kalland & Sinkkonen, 2001; Van der Riet, 2009), whilst others suggest that it may be a protective factor against foster care breakdown (Farmer, 2002; Sinclair, Wilson & Gibbs, 2005). However, it does seem clear in the literature that foster carers have a high likelihood of considering quitting if they feel that fostering is having a negative impact on their children or on the parent-child relationship (Merrithew, 1996; Rhodes, Orme and Buehler, 2001). One particular research study found that, of six listed 'events' which foster carers experienced, the one event which had the largest impact on carers' attitudes to fostering and intentions of continuing was 'experiencing a placement that had a negative impact on the family' (Sinclair, Gibbs & Wilson, 2004). Other research suggests that foster carers develop a variety of strategies to help their own children cope with stress and conflict caused by fostering. These included alternating between different types of care (i.e. long-term, short-term, respite) or taking a break from fostering (Nobel-Carr, Farnham & Dean, 2014).

It is therefore evident that the means by which the children of foster carers cope with fostering can have a direct and immediate influence on placement success and on foster carer retention. In promoting long-term and stable placements for children in care, the coping styles and support available for sons and daughters of carers seems to be of particular importance. As well as giving sons and daughters consideration as members of the care system, it is also important to consider them in their own right, as children and young people who, like foster children, live with regular change and uncertainty, often with a lack of stability in their home life and with the 'intrusion' into their home of social workers and strangers. It may be argued therefore, that research which considers the experiences of sons and daughters within the foster care system is doubly important and, as will be shown in Section 3, appears to be a research area in which there are significant gaps.

Throughout this literature review, there will be an emphasis on what the research in this, and related areas, can reveal about factors which affect fostering stressors, coping and fostering 'enjoyment' for sons and daughters of foster carers. The term 'enjoyment' is used in relation to fostering in this literature review and the following study to indicate the extent to which participants feel positive about fostering. Whilst the term 'enjoyment' is, in some ways, problematic (see page 86 for a critical discussion of this), it was believed to be appropriate for the following two reasons. Firstly, theorists from the area of positive psychology consider enjoyment as "engagement in a challenging experience that either includes or results in a positive affective state" (Kapsner, 2009, p. 397). This definition, though brief, encapsulates the idea that fostering has the potential to be both challenging and, in some way, positive. Secondly, the use of the word enjoyment or 'enjoy' has already been used in the established literature about sons and daughters of foster carers. Several researchers have discussed sons' and daughters' 'enjoyment' of fostering (Part, 1993; Pugh, 1996; Van Der Riet, 2009) whilst sons and daughters themselves have used the word enjoyment to refer to their fostering experiences when acting as participants in research (Nobel-Carr, Farnham & Dean, 2014; Rees, 2009; Spears & Cross, 2003). As such, it was appropriate to use a term which

corresponded, in some way, with the experiences of sons and daughters as suggested by the research so far.

2. Foster Family Systems

In psychology, it is generally accepted that human behaviour is most usefully viewed from an eco-systemic perspective which emphasises the complex, interdependent and recurring nature of the links between a variety of contextual, personal, and interpersonal variables.

(Cameron, 2006, p.293)

The following section will consider the foster family through the lens of family systems theory (Dallos & Draper, 2000; Haley, 1971; Minuchin, 1974). It will consider some of the challenges and systemic complexities of a family in which outsiders, incomers, boundaries and roles are uncertain and fluid.

Family systems theory suggests that families can best be understood through observing structures, patterns of interaction and boundaries within and between family members. Consideration of hierarchies, interactions and subsystems can help create a picture of a complex system and its functioning and adaptability (Minuchin, 1974). Family systems theory would suggest that the relationship between two family members has an impact on the relationships between all family members. It is therefore argued that the introduction of a foster child will impact all relationships and family members.

Several researchers have considered the systemic structure of foster families (Erera, 2001; McCracken & Reilly, 1998). Höjer (2007), for example, considers the difficulties with borders, boundaries and privacy. She suggests that the 'public task' of fostering means that the family home loses its privacy and therefore in the act of providing non-institutional, 'ordinary' family care for foster children, creates, for the sons and daughters of carers, a home and a family which is *more* institutional.

In terms of family stress, Minuchin (1974) suggests that family systems that are disengaged may experience a high level of stress before boundaries are breached and support mechanisms are activated. However, in an enmeshed family, the stress of one member has an immediate impact on the other members. Consideration of this idea in terms of the foster family can lead to a greater understanding of some of the stresses of foster care. Eastman (1979) argues that fostering may be a continual balancing act between the forming of secure attachments to foster children (which may lead to enmeshment) and distancing of the foster child from the family in order to prepare emotionally for the child's departure. She also suggests that the foster family must hold in tension the need for both *morphostatis* and *morphogenesis*. Morphostasis refers to the family system's ability to distinguish itself from its environment through maintaining clear boundaries and stability. Morphogenesis refers to the need for the system to be adaptable and flexible in order to cope with change. Successful foster families must have a clear sense of identity developed from boundaries with an appropriate amount of rigidity. However, they must also be able to cope with regular and unpredictable changes in family structure and expectations without compromising the stability of the system.

Family systems theory places a strong emphasis on the ability of the family to adapt when faced with transitions. However, the foster family sometimes experiences several transitions over the course of a year. It may be argued that the constant re-negotiation of roles, boundaries and relationships places an unusual amount of strain on the foster family, both as a system and on the individuals within it. Of course, the structure of the foster family may differ not only from month to month but also from family to family. Some foster placements have been stable and (relatively) conflict-free for many years and all members of the family may be united in considering the foster children as an integral part of the family system. Other foster carers take respite and emergency placements (leading to constant change and regular uncertainty) whilst still other carers specialise in therapeutic or 'treatment' placements. These are both more prescriptive and demanding than 'mainstream' care placements and may lead to the loss of family privacy and boundaries as the family home becomes a public forum for reviews, intensive therapeutic work

with carers and the incursion of other professionals (Shaw & Hipgrave, 1989). Heidbuurt (1995) considered the structure of different foster families systemically and considered the extent to which foster families had open or closed boundaries. She identified four types of foster family; those who included all birth and foster children as family, those where there was partial seclusion of a birth or foster child, those which considered the foster children as outside the solid nucleus of the family and those who selectively integrated some but not all of their foster children.

In conclusion, thinking systemically about foster care leads to a renewed awareness of the complex and collaborative nature of fostering and its impact on the foster family. Considering the foster family as a system highlights the importance of all members of the family, not just the foster carers but also the sons and daughters of those carers. The following section will evaluate the current research literature in this area.

3. Review of Sons/Daughters Research Literature

Not to listen to and support the children of foster carers can only give them the impression that they are less valued than the children who share their homes. And that makes the fostering task all the harder.

(Philpot, 2002, p.35).

The Fostering Network (2008) defines sons and daughters of foster carers as “those children born to or adopted by foster carers, or for whom foster carers have parental responsibility through some other court order” (The Fostering Network, 2008, p.3). In this review of the literature about the sons and daughters of foster carers, electronic resources were used which included PsychInfo, Google Scholar and Science Direct. Search terms entered into the above were: ‘biological child* foster’; ‘son* and daughter* of foster carer*’; ‘son* and daughter* of foster parent’; ‘foster carer* own child’; ‘natural child* foster’; ‘birth child* foster’ ‘impact fostering child*’; ‘foster sibling*’; ‘foster famil*’ and ‘foster famil* system*.’ A hand search of the reference list was also performed on each included article.

It may be suggested that when parents choose to foster, their own children may experience a variety of daily stressors and difficulties; role confusion, guilt, real or threatened violence in the home, uncertainty, loss and separation, to name but a few examples (Spears & Cross, 2003; Twigg & Swann, 2007).

Whilst there has been extensive research into the views and perspectives of children in foster care (Honey, Rees & Griffey, 2011) and into those of foster carers (Brown & Bednar, 2006), sons/daughters are relatively rarely considered in research. It is important, however, to consider the views and the challenges faced by those children whose parents choose to foster other children.

Research suggests that foster carers often state that 'difficulties in relationships between foster children and birth children' are a reason for foster placement breakdown (Rhodes, Orme, & Buelher, 2001). To date, research into the experiences of children of foster carers has largely been limited to qualitative, exploratory studies. For example, Sutton and Stack (2013) interviewed 6 participants about their experiences of fostering and identified four main themes; 'changes', 'teamwork', empathy' and 'endings'. They suggested that further, more specific research was needed to consider the impact of attachment styles and coping strategies on the experiences of sons and daughters of foster carers. Several meta-reviews and thematic analyses have further served to highlight the gaps in this research area. Twigg & Swann (2007), for example, reviewed 14 research papers which aimed to give voice to the experiences of foster carers' children. All of the papers reviewed used data from either a focus group or individual interviews and the majority used thematic analysis to identify topics for discussion. Despite considering the experiences of approximately 232 respondents, Twigg and Swann (2007) were able to summarise the findings of the research under just 4 headings; the benefits of fostering, the impact on carers' children, the children's responses to loss of role and parental attention and the impact of the foster care system.

Similarly, in a more recent thematic analysis of the literature on birth children of foster carers, Thompson and McPherson (2011) identified five key themes (benefits, loss, conflict, transitions and coping) from 12 research studies. The

majority of these studies (8 of the 12) were qualitative in nature, focusing, once again on focus groups or interviews. Of the remaining four studies which had a quantitative element to them, two failed to describe the analysis method used and two used open-ended questions, the answers to which were then coded to provide quantitative data. Whilst these studies were valuable in providing foundational exploratory data, it may be argued that further research in the area is needed to build a theoretical structure upon these foundations. Thompson and McPherson (2011) suggest that the majority of studies in this area have failed to make explicit links between study design, findings and theory. Serbinski (2014) provided a larger and even more recent scoping review of articles in this area which suggests that impetus for research in this area is growing (over half of the 46 research papers found were published since 2000), however, the researcher suggests that research is still limited, both in terms of methodology and scope.

Many of the research studies mentioned in these literature reviews centre around positive and negative aspects of the fostering experience (Diepstra, 2007; Sutton & Stack, 2013). They seem to focus, whether intentionally or as a result of the open-ended nature of interview questions, around significant events or stages in the lives of foster families, such as the decision to foster (Norrington, 2002), the arrival and departure of foster children (Tadros, 2003) or episodes of conflict with foster children (Denuwelaere & Bracke, 2007). As a result, there is only a small amount of empirical information about how sons/daughters' fostering experiences can be improved (Doorbar, 1999). Equally, there is also a lack of information about the day to day stressors and coping mechanisms of sons/daughters.

Having illustrated the common methodologies in this research area, as well as some of the gaps in structure, theoretical basis and content, this section will now consider a number of findings from the available studies which focus on ways in which fostering can be challenging for sons/daughters. It is hoped that this will highlight the importance of research into coping mechanisms and improving sons'/daughters' fostering experiences.

3.1. Reasons for fostering stress as suggested by the literature

3.1.1. Powerlessness. The position of a son or daughter of a foster carer within the fostering system is often cited as one of powerlessness and silence (Sutton & Stack, 2013; Twigg, 1994). Duffy (2013) used semi-structured interviews to consider sons' and daughters' involvement in foster care. She found that there was an element of powerlessness throughout the fostering journey; sons and daughters were generally not involved in the assessment process, in annual reviews or in discussions about the suitability of foster placements. Several other researchers have also commented on the surprising lack of involvement that sons and daughters have in the foster care process (Fox, 2001; Walsh & Campbell, 2010; Wilkes, 1974). This lack of involvement and subsequent powerlessness may be a significant stressor for sons and daughters of carers.

3.1.2. Conflict. Several studies have highlighted the problematic issue of conflict, violence and aggression from foster children as experienced by sons and daughters (Denuwelaere & Brack, 2007; Serbinski, 2014; Spears & Cross, 2003). These three studies alone listed examples of theft and damage of personal possessions, violence committed towards sons/daughters and towards their parents, verbal abuse, threats of violence and feelings that the home was no longer a safe place. Whilst this is obviously not the case with every placement, the experience of violence or perceived threat was not an uncommon occurrence for many of the sons and daughters interviewed for the research considered in this literature review. Watson and Jones (2002) suggest that local authorities sometimes overlook their duty to protect and safeguard the sons and daughters of carers in their eagerness to maintain foster placements. Again, it is reasonable to suggest that potential violence and conflict may lead to significantly higher experiences of stress by sons and daughters of carers.

3.1.3. Loss. Another overarching theme in the research is that of loss. This term is sometimes used to refer to the loss of particular roles, parental time, and familial closeness. However, it usually refers to the loss of a foster child to whom the family has become attached, through the ending of a placement. Foster care placements are often striking in their transience and

many families find that one of the hardest things is the emotional labour of holding the belief that a foster child needs love, acceptance and familial belonging alongside the expectation of imminent separation (Fox, 2001; Rees, 2009). Inclusion of any foster child in the family comes with the risk of hurt, separation and loss (Thompson and McPherson, 2011). It has also been suggested that involvement in a fostering family can have an effect on the attachment style of sons and daughters. Research suggests that the temporary nature of foster care placements and the often abrupt endings of those placements can lead to an element of caution and distance in sons' and daughters' future relationships with friends and romantic partners (Kaplan, 1988; Serbinski, 2014).

3.1.4. Transitions and ambiguity. Linked to the theme of loss is the idea of transitions and the continually shifting sands of foster care for families. Research suggests that changes and regular disruption can be a major source of stress for sons and daughters as well as for their parents (Eastman, 1979; Rhodes, Orme & Buehler, 2001; Sutton & Stack, 2013). More general research into young people's experience of stressors suggests that regularity and routine can help children deal more effectively with their problems (Maccoby, 1983) and that daily uncertainty is a significant predictor of familial distress (Dodgson et al., 2000). The regular uncertainties experienced by some foster families must have an impact not only on their stress levels, but also on their ability to deal with the daily stressors of familial life. It may also be suggested that, with each commencement and ending of a different foster placement, foster carers and their children must renegotiate their roles within the family, house rules and responsibilities, taboo topics and the appropriateness of family-based activities. Research suggests that sons and daughters attribute particular importance to their role and place in the family (Thompson, McPherson & Marsland, 2016) and may struggle with placements in which they feel displaced by a foster child, whether in terms of age, status in the family (*i.e.* youngest) or even name (Rees, 2009). A further source of stress may be the ambiguity of the role of sons or daughters themselves in the foster care home, which is often fluid and indefinite by its very nature. Martin (1993) points out that there may be difficulties when carers' children are expected to relate to foster children as

peers or siblings, but are also expected to be role models and sometimes caregivers; to have more patience and understanding than would be expected from 'normal' peer or sibling relationships. They are also expected to deal appropriately with Child Protection issues and disclosures from foster children. Noble-Carr, Farnham and Dean (2014) found that children of foster carers often had to make judgments about whether information that foster children had shared with them was serious enough to warrant sharing with a responsible adult.

3.1.5. Lack of preparation/disappointment. Serbinski (2014) found an interesting progression in her retrospective interviews with adult children of foster carers; the participants recalled their feelings prior to the arrival of the first foster child as primarily positive (excitement, interest) but their feelings upon the arrival of subsequent foster children were more negative (dread, frustration, anger). This may suggest that sons/daughters' expectations about fostering are not matched by their actual experiences of fostering; a possible indicator of lack of adequate preparation and training for sons/daughters prior to foster care approval and initial placements. Sons/daughters in research conducted by Norrington (2002) reported similar feelings of disappointment and described ways in which they isolated themselves from fostering in order to cope with these difficulties.

4. Review of general sibling research

In that sense, our identity, our notion of who we are, develops in relation to the social interchanges we have with significant others in our social world, and removing them, or being removed from them, is like losing a part of one's self

(Sanders, 2004, p.179)

In light of the gaps in sons/daughters research, the following section will consider research about general sibling relationships in order to lay a theoretical foundation for the research study to be undertaken. In particular, it will draw on research from two specific 'types' of sibling relationship which may mirror

aspects of the relationship between sons/daughters and foster children. The first of these is research published about stepsibling relationships. It may be argued that relationship ambiguity, the potential for differential treatment, lack of parental attention and a lack of shared history are relationship factors which are shared by stepsiblings and foster siblings alike. Indeed, in some research, the phrase 'reconstituted family' is used to refer to any family to which a new, but biologically unrelated, member is added (Robinson, 1980). Thus, foster families and stepfamilies may, to some extent, be comparable across research areas. The other sibling relationships which may share some elements with foster sibling relationships are those between siblings in which one sibling has a disability. It may be proposed that parallel experiences may include increased expectations placed on one sibling in terms of caring and responsibility, differential parental treatment and family taboo over negative feelings towards another member. Research literature will be considered insofar as it helps inform hypotheses about fostering enjoyment, stressors and coping strategies employed by sons and daughters of foster carers.

4.1. Enjoyment

Many research studies which consider sibling relationships focus on the 'quality' of the sibling relationship, using various tools to measure positive and negative indicators (Sanders, 2004). Although not a direct equivalent, this section will consider high enjoyment of fostering by sons/daughters as indicative of a positive or adaptive foster sibling relationship. A major factor which can affect relationships between siblings is the ambiguity of belonging. It may be argued that this is relevant to foster sibling relationships as well as to stepsibling relationships. This ambiguity is demonstrated by Furstenberg (1988), for example, who asked children in stepfamilies to write down who was in their immediate family. He found that 41% of children excluded stepsiblings from their lists. Similarly, Rees (2009) asked birth and foster children to complete 'eco-maps' of their relationships with people who were important to them. 75% of birth children did not include foster children currently living with them, whilst 42% of foster children did not include the birth children with whom they were living. The fostering arrangement lends itself to an ambiguity about family, boundaries and relationships which may also be found in stepfamilies. Family

systems research suggests that ambiguity of relationship boundaries may lessen relationship security and lead to poorer outcomes for children (Wood, 1985).

In terms of relationships between sons/daughters and their foster siblings, research with stepfamilies and adoptive families suggests that the relationship between children who are placed in a sibling relationship without having grown up together may be fundamentally different in nature to average sibling relationships (Rosenberg and Hajal, 1985). Research suggests that, particularly in the first year, warmth and conflict between new siblings are lower than average and rivalry is higher. However, over time, warmth between siblings increases but rivalry remains higher than average (Dance & Rushton, 1999; Sanders, 2004). It may be suggested that this rivalry continues to be an issue as siblings vie for parental time and attention.

A further factor which may affect sibling relationships and sons/daughters' enjoyment of fostering is the interplay between different temperaments and levels of adjustment between foster siblings. Anderson (1999) aimed to consider the link between adolescent adjustment and sibling relationship quality. He found that adolescents with positive sibling relationships were more likely to show higher levels of social responsibility, sociability and self-worth. However, he also found a certain amount of collinearity between siblings' levels of social responsibility over time, suggesting perhaps that having a sibling with high levels of social responsibility leads to a modelling effect; increasing an adolescent's socially responsible behaviours over time. This explanation may be applied to foster siblings in order to argue that the behaviours of one child in placement may have a significant impact, over time, on the behaviour of another child in the same house. This may be in a positive direction, as suggested in Anderson's study, but it may also occur in a negative direction, as suggested by Sanders (2004) who notes that some sibling relationships are established and strengthened through the undermining of parental influence. These findings may be read in conjunction with a suggestion by Nobel-Carr, Farnham and Dean (2014) that some foster carers reported increased behavioural difficulties in their own children as a result of fostering.

4.2. Stressors

Several research studies are suggestive of factors which may lead to increased stress for sons and daughters of carers. General sibling research has found that one of the most significant predictors of adolescent depression and negative sibling relationships is differential parental treatment between siblings (Shanahan, McHale, Crouter & Osgood, 2008). Research suggests that other sources of potential stress in the home; parent-child conflict and child behavioural problems are also linked to differential treatment between siblings (Brody, 2004; Stocker, 1993). Studies in this area are generally correlational and thus any inference of causality is speculative, however, it may be argued that being a child in a foster family leads, almost inevitably, to differential parental treatment and possibly to subsequent detrimental outcomes. The same argument may also be made for stepsiblings (Papernow, 2013) and for the siblings of children with disabilities (Gregory, 1995). In terms of the experience of sons and daughters of carers, research suggests that their needs often become secondary to those of their foster siblings (Höjer, 2004) and the expectations placed on them are greater than those placed on foster children (Rees, 2009). Differential treatment is also a result of the professionalisation of foster care and the expectation on foster carers to 'parent' according to fostering policies and guidelines. Foster carers in Thompson, McPherson and Marsland's study (2016), for example, described changing house rules in order to comply with fostering guidelines about issues such as pocket money and bath-time whilst Rees (2009) mentions that foster children were given their own rooms (according to foster care policy) which, for her participants, often meant that birth children had to share.

These ideas about the private environment of the home being expected to meet the professionalised expectations of foster care also link to a further factor which may influence sons/daughters' enjoyment of fostering. Consideration of 'normal' sibling relationships by Punch (2008) suggests that they are conducted 'backstage', through an uninhibited relaxation of personal 'fronts' and of social rules. She suggests that sibling relationships are generally ones of intimacy and

honesty, situated within a context of shared time, space and knowledge, which leads to closeness but also to regular conflict. Rees (2009) considered this idea in relation to foster families and suggested that fostering means that this 'backstage' atmosphere is impossible when foster children are present. It may be suggested that child protection issues and fostering policies may exclude certain 'backstage' behaviours (such as 'rough play' or coarse humour) and mean that there must always be a certain element of control within the foster home. Research is not clear on the possible effect of this controlled home life for sons and daughters of foster carers. Punch (2008) implies that the prolonged maintenance of a 'front stage' performance would be an incredible strain on individuals and would lead to internalisation problems and stress. Conversely, Rees (2009) suggests that whilst the lack of backstage environment may lead to times of withdrawal, it may also be useful for children to learn to regulate emotional responses and to avoid conflict. Whilst it may be concluded that this altered 'front stage' home environment is different to that in many other homes, there is no evidence available to point to the potential benefits or otherwise of this difference. Further research may be needed which considers the effect of this environment on stress and coping within the family home.

A further distinction between foster siblings and other sibling relationships is the increased expectations placed on one child to care for, or be an example to, the other. Research with both fostering families and families where one child has a disability suggest that there are greater expectations on the sibling to play a caring role (Gamble & McHale, 1989; Nel, 2014; Schulman, 1988). It is suggested that this changes the balance of the relationship between siblings (or foster siblings). Both research areas suggest that caring responsibilities may be beneficial, in terms of providing life skills and encouraging social responsibility, but may also be problematic insofar as siblings may 'miss out' on normal childhood and the increased expectation of caring may lead to increased anxiety (Sutton & Stack, 2013; Vermaes, Susante & van Bakel, 2011; Watson & Jones, 2002).

Research into the difficulties experienced by children within newly-formed stepfamilies suggests that, as in foster families, a main theme in research is that of limited parental time and attention (Cartwright; 2006; Papernow, 2013). Cartwright (2006) suggests that a lack of parental attention after a remarriage (or, arguably, the arrival of a foster child), may lead to parent-child relationships becoming more distant, conflicted and negative, potentially causing another source of stress within the home.

4.3. Coping

Parental and social support are important coping resources for children and young people. However, some research implies that, within the foster family, this is not always possible. Research with sons and daughters of foster carers suggests that they sometimes feel unable to express their emotions fully to parents, particularly those emotions which are negative, because they feel the need to shield their parents from additional stress (Clare, Clare & Peaty, 2006; Fox, 2001; Mauro; 1985). Similarly, there is evidence from research with siblings of disabled children and stepsiblings that child-parent communication is hindered in a similar manner, whereby negative feelings towards a sibling are not voiced or communicated (Featherstone, 1980; Seligman & Darling, 2009). Papernow (2013) suggests that stepparents are reluctant to empathise with their children's concerns about the new family structure out of loyalty to their new partner. Similarly, foster parents may be reluctant to empathise with their son or daughter's difficulties with foster children out of fear of collusion and creating a negative foster care environment. However, research suggests that parental empathy is hugely important for the creation and maintenance of secure parent-child attachment (Hughes, 2007). It may be suggested that skilled parenting and a strong parent-child attachment are among the factors which mediate some of the difficulties experienced by children in both stepfamilies and in families who foster. Interestingly, more general family research suggests that children are able to accurately anticipate and avoid negative parental feedback by sharing problems with others (Bryant, 1992).

However, it would seem that finding 'others' to confide in may also be problematic for sons/daughters. Research with stepfamilies suggests that

concerns about stigma and negative judgements mean that stepfamilies do not always seek support from the wider community (Robinson, 1980). Although some research indicates that foster carers have a broad range of community support (Rees, 2009), other studies suggest that sons/daughters may be reluctant to discuss fostering issues with friends due to similar concerns about stigma and negative judgements (Nobel-Carr, Farnham & Dean, 2014). As such, it may be suggested that sons/daughters are somewhat restricted in the extent to which they seek social support from parents *or* peers; leaving a limited range of sources of social support.

5. Review of research into childhood and adolescent stress, resilience and coping

*It is not solely the amount of stress or the number of crises,
it is also the individual's resources for coping with crises
that determines the long term impact.*

(Patterson, 1983, p. 255)

5.1 Introduction

It has been argued that the area of stress and coping is one of the most widely researched in psychology (Frydenberg, 2014). A review of the research literature about stress and coping as a whole is beyond the scope of this literature review. As such, the following section will begin with a broad, but brief, introduction to theoretical ideas about stress and coping but will then review only the research literature felt to be directly relevant to this particular study; namely, research which considers the coping strategies and resources of children and young people, and research which locates young people's stress and coping within the family system.

Research into coping and resilience evolved from early stress research but has since developed into a discipline in its own right, with theoretical models and extensive research into coping across the lifespan. Perhaps the most dominant model of coping was developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and describes the transaction between a person and their environment as he/she aims to manage demands or stressors. More recent models of coping (Hobfoll; 1989,

2010) have moved away from the view of coping as purely reactive and focus on pre-emptive coping in which an individual uses coping in order to protect and build up resources as a buffer against stress. In this way, it links into the more recent emphasis on positive psychology and to ideas about resilience and improving coping resources (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Zautra & Reich, 2011). Alongside the emphasis on positive psychology, other recent developments in coping research have focused on the role of emotion and emotion regulation (Compas et al., 2014), meaning-focused coping (Folkman, 2011), ideas about social support and dyadic coping (Herzberg, 2013) and the role of culture in coping (Kuo, 2011).

Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2011) in their review of developmental coping research explore some of the difficulties with measuring and conceptualising coping and coping strategies. They identify differences in the categorisation and evaluation of coping strategies as well as broad differences in how they are measured. There is a large amount of variation within the research literature about how best to measure and conceptualise coping. Several researchers (Litt, Tennen & Affleck, 2011; Sorenson, 1993) suggest that diary-based methods are superior to retrospective coping questionnaires in terms of accuracy and validity, particularly when taking into account the finding that affective, autobiographical memory is largely inaccurate and reconstructed (Kemp, Burt & Furneaux, 2008). However, it may be argued that any diary entry is based on a memory which has somewhat deteriorated or changed, unless it is recorded simultaneously as events unfold (Tourangeau, 2008). Thus, other researchers suggest that retrospective coping style questionnaires provide a good measure of children's general coping strategies rather than focusing on recall of one particular event (Holen, Lervåg, Waaktaar, & Ystgaard, 2012) .

5.2 Coping Strategies and Outcomes

A wide range of research has linked the use of particular coping strategies to various social and psychological outcomes for children and young people. The following section will attempt to review some of the findings in this area.

It has been argued that a young person's method of coping with stress is, in terms of outcome, more important than the stressor itself (Olbrich, 1990). As such, 'poor' coping strategies have been linked to emotional and behavioural problems (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), underachievement (Roeser, Eccles & Strobel, 1989) and physical illness (Kraag, Zeegers, Kok, Hosman & Abu-Saad, 2006). It is therefore important to investigate what constitutes a 'poor' coping strategy. Early coping research considered the distinction between active and emotional coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and generally considered emotional coping strategies to be inferior to active ones. However, more recent researchers have judged that 'poor' coping strategies are those which do not actively deal with either the stressor or how one feels about the stressor (Aldwin, 2007). As such, a distinction is made between avoidant coping and 'approach' or problem-solving strategies. Further distinctions are also made between 'approach' strategies which are 'negative' (*i.e.* fighting) and approach strategies which involve 'positive' strategies such as cognitive restructuring, problem-solving or seeking social support (Donaldson, Prinstein, Danovsky & Spirito, 2000). There is still some ambiguity about the positivity or negativity of certain coping strategies in the research literature however. For example, Holen et al. (2012) conducted an exploratory factor analysis for the Kidcope coping strategies, as developed by Spirito, Stark and Williams (1988), in order to try and group the ten coping mechanisms listed into two or three categories. The factor analysis results indicated that one of the coping mechanisms 'wishful thinking' would fit equally well into two different categories. It may be suggested that 'wishful thinking' can be used in a 'positive' way to imagine a preferred future and regulate emotion or in a 'negative' way as a cognitive withdrawal from the stressor. Due to the complexities surrounding this area of research, the majority of outcome studies have made dichotomous distinctions between 'avoidant' and 'problem-solving' strategies.

In general, research with children and young people tends to suggest that avoidant coping strategies (such as withdrawing, not talking about it or self-blame) are associated with poorer outcomes. These include increases in internalising behaviour problems, mental health problems, anxiety and neuroticism and are also associated with poorer performance on measures of

academic performance, optimism, conscientiousness and agreeableness (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Clarke, 2006; Holen et al., 2012; Legault, Anwati & Flynn, 2006). Spirito, Overholser and Stark (1989) suggest that a particularly dangerous strategy for adolescents is social withdrawal (usually grouped under 'avoidant strategies'). They considered the coping mechanisms used by teenagers who had attempted suicide and teenagers who had not attempted suicide. They found that suicide attempters were distinguished from their peers by using more withdrawal-style coping and less 'wishful thinking'.

A final study of interest in this area considered the relationship between coping strategies and placement outcome in teenagers who had been in foster placements. Browne (1998) found that teenagers who had experienced difficult or 'crisis' foster placements tended to use negative coping strategies such as 'self-blame' more than teenagers who had experienced stable foster placements. Browne argues that difficult and disruptive experiences *led* to the development of poor coping strategies. However, it may also be argued that poor coping strategies on behalf of the fostered teenagers in Browne's study may have made them more prone to difficulties associated with placement breakdown and disruption (such as behaviour problems).

A suggestion by Aldwin (2007) does encourage caution when interpreting the above findings however. She suggests that the distinction between avoidant and problem-solving strategies is often inadequate to capture the complexity of coping scenarios. For example, it may be suggested that avoidant strategies may sometimes be used to keep problems from escalating (Tolan, Guerra & Montaini-Klov Dahl, 1997) or to provide some 'time-out' in order to plan or facilitate a problem-solving approach (Aldwin, 2007). In conclusion, therefore, making the distinction between problem-solving and avoidant coping strategies does seem to provide a convenient shorthand for strategies which may be considered as positive and negative but it does not fully encompass the dynamic nature of coping, particularly in terms of context and control.

5.3 Coping, context and control

The research literature suggests that several factors mediate children's use of coping strategies as well as their usefulness or adaptability. Mediating factors such as gender, age and type of stressor seem to have an impact on the type of coping strategy used (Aldwin, 2007). For example, Piko (2001) found that girls were more likely to seek social support than boys, whilst Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2011) found that older children tended to use a broader range of coping strategies more discriminatingly whilst younger participants relied more heavily on a few 'favoured' strategies. The idea that the type of stressor has an impact on the type of coping strategy seems intuitive but there is some disagreement in the literature as to its accuracy. For example, Kristensen and Smith (2003) found that for their 305 participants aged 10-15, different coping strategies were used in response to different types of bullying; participants were more likely to seek social support in response to property damage than to verbal bullying, for example. However, Donaldson et al.'s (2000) large-scale study suggested that patterns of coping strategy were similar across four types of stressors (problems with school, family, siblings or peers) for 768 children aged between 9 and 17 years old. It may be suggested that some of the disparity in these findings can be accounted for by a third variable: the controllability of the stressor.

There is a body of more recent research which suggests that coping cannot be categorised as 'positive' or 'negative' without reference to the stressor itself and the extent to which an individual can do anything about it. Within this argument, a 'positive' coping strategy is not necessarily an 'active' strategy but a strategy which displays an appropriate appraisal of the stressor and its controllability. As such, the use of 'active' coping strategies to deal with a stressor which is beyond a young person's control (such as illness), is seen as maladaptive coping and associated with poorer social competence and behaviour difficulties (Clarke, 2006). Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2011) suggest that the impact of perceived control may also be complicated by developmental factors, whereby cognitions and appraisals become linked to self-awareness and self-esteem in middle childhood and can lead to the adoption of learned helplessness (Dweck,

1999). As such, maladaptive coping strategies may be used as a result of a poor appraisal of the controllability of the stressor.

In conclusion to this section, consideration of the variables which affect coping strategies leads to a realisation of the complexity and difficulties with evaluating coping. These complexities should be taken into account both in the area of research but also when considering coping skills type interventions in schools (i.e. Compas et al., 2014; Kraag et al., 2006). It may be suggested that the teaching of coping skills needs to take into account the controllability of stressors and the age of children before teaching indiscriminate use of active coping strategies. It is for this reason that the following research study aims to take a more nuanced view of coping, using three groups of coping strategies, as suggested by Holen et al. (2012); active or emotional regulation, withdrawal and opposition. It is hoped that the use of three categories may allow for an evaluation of coping which considers overtly 'positive' strategies, overtly negative ones and then withdrawal which, it may be argued, may be either positive or negative depending on the controllability of the stressor.

6. Stress in and from the family system

One characteristic of the family that may have a direct bearing on parenting is the amount of stress experienced by the family as a whole. Developmental psychologists have become increasingly aware of the importance of examining how external environmental stressors affect the capacity of families to foster healthy development in their children.

(Henderson, Hetherington, Mekos & Reiss, 1996, p.47)

The following section considers the ways in which familial and sibling relationships play a role in providing both sources of stress and resources for coping.

6.1. Providing social support: Family as a protective factor

Social support and social networks provide a significant external coping resource for an individual. For children and young people, seeking family

support can be a widely used and effective coping mechanism. Research suggests that a supportive parent or family unit can provide a support network for children to use in response to stressors (Rutter, 1983); a model for positive coping strategies and emotional regulation (Laurent, 2014); and a pre-emptive buffer against stressors by building resilience (Aldwin, 2003; Sandler, Wolchik, Mackinnon, Ayers & Roosa, 1997). Giallo and Gavidia-Payne (2006), for example, found that measures of familial risk and resilience predicted child adjustment more successfully than individual children's experiences of stress and coping. Luthar and Zelazo (2003) reviewed research into resilience and suggest familial and community contexts can have a significant influence on whether a child develops (or fails to develop) resilience and adaptive coping strategies. Indeed, it has been argued that the home environment and parental modelling are so important for children's development of adaptive coping strategies that interventions should focus on improving parental coping skills in order to have a beneficial impact on children (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999; Laurent, 2014).

Walsh (2003) identifies three key processes in her conceptual model of resilience which have an impact on a family's strength or coping strategies. These are listed as family belief systems, organisational patterns and communication/problem-solving. Consideration of the ability of a family to deal with daily stressors associated with foster caring may need to take these factors into account. It is also important to consider research which deals with daily or regular stressors for families. Family resilience research suggests that whilst many families cope well with short-term 'event' stressors, persistent or recurrent challenges may drain familial coping buffers and have a cumulative detrimental effect on family functioning (Walsh, 2003). It may also be argued that having a good relationship with at least one parent can be a substantial protective factor for children dealing with daily conflict or transitions (Rutter, 1983). In conclusion, it is clear that the extent and type of family support available and the models of coping used within the family have a significant impact on children's ability to deal adaptively with stressors from both inside and outside of the family home. The following section will consider research which considers coping and stressors when they come from within the child's family home.

6.2. Draining coping resources: Stress and coping in sibling relationships

Although very little research has been completed which considers the stress and coping of children of foster parents, there has been some research that considers factors that may mediate stress in other sibling relationships. As mentioned in a previous section, the relationship between siblings where one sibling has a disability is, in some ways, comparable to aspects of the relationship between foster children and their foster 'siblings'. It may, therefore be useful to consider several research studies which consider stress and coping in sibling relationships where one sibling is disabled.

A wide variety of research has considered the experiences and adaptation of siblings of disabled children (Gamble & McHale, 1989; Hicks, 2014; Ross & Cuskelly, 2006). In general, research seems to suggest that siblings of disabled children tend to be more psychologically 'at risk' for maladaptive coping but research is inconsistent in terms of outcomes. Some studies indicate particularly poor outcomes such as depression, anxiety and behavioural problems whilst others suggest that there is no significant difference between siblings of disabled children and siblings of typically developing children (Gregory, 1995). It may be suggested that this inconsistency of findings is linked to family-based factors and subsequent individual coping strategy differences. In terms of stress and coping, research in this area suggests several factors which may mediate stress or coping for siblings of disabled children. These factors include the quality of the sibling relationship, whereby siblings with a more positive relationship tended to use more support seeking and cognitive restructuring strategies than those with negative sibling relationships (Gregory, 1995). Fisman et al. (2006) also found that the type of disability appeared to be a factor in terms of the stress experienced; siblings of children with Down Syndrome were less likely to show signs of maladaptive coping and stress than siblings of children diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder. Research by Hicks (2014) suggests that siblings of children with Autism used specific strategies to deal with aggression from their siblings. These strategies

included trying to gain control over the situation, use of interpersonal coping and the developing of positive attributions for aggressive behaviours.

Several of the above studies are restricted by methodological or sampling limitations. It may therefore be useful to consider, in depth, a seminal piece of research in this area in order to consider the methodology, findings and limitations more fully. Gamble and McHale (1989) considered impact of stress, affective response and coping strategies on the quality of sibling relationships and on wellbeing and mental health measures for 62 siblings. Half of these had a disabled sibling and half had a nondisabled sibling. They found that certain styles of coping ('other-directed cognitions') were predictive of lower self-worth and more negative behaviour towards siblings. Although having a disabled sibling did have an impact on some of the coping styles and measures of wellbeing, the main correlational findings as regards coping mechanisms and their impact on wellbeing were true of both groups of participants. It was found that the frequency and type of stressor did not have a significant link to wellbeing, while the affective response and coping mechanism employed in response to the stressor did, whether siblings were disabled or not. It may therefore be argued that the ways that children respond to stress may be more important than the types or frequencies of stressors themselves in predicting wellbeing.

Gamble and McHale (1989) also found that gender was significantly correlated to use of particular coping mechanisms (girls were more likely to use other-directed cognitions). However, when interpreting these results, it is important to have an awareness of some of the methodological and sampling limitations to this research. Firstly, the information on stressors, coping strategies, wellbeing and sibling relationship quality were all gained through self-report measures, as is generally the case in the research studies listed above. Further insight may have been gained through triangulating information from parental sources. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this research only dealt with older siblings. Although this presumably made the research more manageable in terms of matching participants, it disregards the experience of younger siblings and fails to provide any evidence about the impact of ordinal position, age gap or family size on coping mechanisms, wellbeing or quality of sibling relationship.

Family systems theory would suggest that these are all important factors to consider when measuring the experience of familial relationships. However, this research by Gamble and McHale (1989) does lend a framework for thinking about ways of measuring stress in sibling relationships.

7. The role of the EP in thinking systemically about fostering

The ultimate aim of educational psychology is, after all... the welfare ... of the individual child and of the community as a whole which, when all is said, it is nothing but an organisation of individual children who have grown up. (Burt, 1964, p.1)

Traditionally, much of the research with sons and daughters of foster carers has come from the area of social care, however, the following section will argue that educational psychologists also have a contribution to make in this area of research.

Educational psychologists are already heavily involved in the delivery of services to children in foster care and to their carers (MacKay & Greig, 2011). Research by educational psychologists in this area considers educational support for foster children (Peake, 2006), the effectiveness of particular interventions for foster children (Dent & Cameron, 2003), the experiences and opinions of foster carers (Nissim, 1996; Osborne & Alfano, 2011), foster children's experience of contact with birth parents (Quinton, Rushton, Dance & Mayes, 1998) and consultation with teachers of foster children (Peake, 2011). It may also be suggested that EPs' work is becoming focused more in the community and less in the school (Woods & Farrell, 2006), working to deliver interventions for families and to use psychology to impact change in the complex environments of home, school and community. In short, whilst work with foster children (and their carers) continues to lie at the centre of many EPs' work and interests (Osborne, Norgate & Trail, 2009), it is also useful to acknowledge that these individuals are best considered from within the complex system of the foster family. The largely neglected members of that system; the sons and daughters of foster carers, will inevitably influence the system itself, having an impact on the success or failure of the fostering placement. It may be

argued therefore, that EPs, with their in-depth understanding of systems and psychological theories may be well-placed to consider the complexities of foster families and the impact that these systems may have on the individual sons and daughters. In drawing together psychological theories and research and using it to inform a response to the voice and experience of the individual, the EP is ideally situated to hear, understand and support sons and daughters of foster carers.

8. Factors which may predict variance in enjoyment, stress and coping for children whose parents foster

8.1 Age and age differences

There is very little research which suggests that the age of sons and daughters has an impact on their enjoyment of fostering. However, more general research suggests that age has an impact on how well children deal with relational and familial stressors. However, even this research shows mixed results. Some studies suggest that children under 9 cope better with family restructuring (Van-Eeden-Moorefield & Pasley, 2013) whilst others suggest that older children deal with the stress of having new family members better than younger children (Rutter, 1983). As such, the role of age is unclear and it may be that it is not a significant factor in mediating enjoyment of fostering. However, there is some evidence to suggest that age *gaps*, rather than age specifically, may impact birth children's experience of fostering. Thompson, McPherson and Marsland (2016) suggest that foster placements which disrupt established roles and relationships (i.e. the birth child loses his/her place as the eldest) may be less successful and place an emotional strain on individuals and relationships within the foster family. Other researchers propose that having a small age gap between birth and foster children leads to more conflicts and withdrawal on behalf of the birth children (Twigg & Swann, 2007) and that when birth children are younger than foster children, attitudes towards fostering are more negative (Sinclair, Gibbs & Wilson, 2004). Therefore, it may be hypothesised that, for sons and daughters of foster carers, whilst age may not necessarily be a contributing factor, relative age may have a significant impact on fostering enjoyment.

8.2. Gender

Once again, research evidence seems mixed in terms of the impact of gender on fostering outcomes and enjoyment. Some research suggests that there is no evidence to suggest that sons and daughters cope differently (Twigg & Swann, 2007); other studies suggest that boys are more likely to engage in conflict with parents (especially fathers) than girls, especially when the foster child is female (Denuwelaere & Bracke, 2007). Other studies suggest that daughters of foster carers are more likely to seek emotional support from mothers (Serbinski, 2015), experience role confusion and anxiety (Pugh, 1996), and take on more caring roles (Nel, 2014).

Application of research from other relevant areas appears equally mixed. General sibling research implies that gender does not have a significant impact on young children's sibling interactions when compared with temperament or temperament mix (Munn & Dunn, 1989). However, it has also been suggested that sisters of disabled children have lower self-esteem and are more vulnerable in terms of psychological adjustment than brothers (McHale & Gamble, 1989; Reed, 1994). King (2009) found that girls were more at risk for poor outcomes following a change in family structure, whilst Rutter (1983) suggests that boys are more likely to use withdrawal coping strategies when family structure changes. General coping research with children and young people seems to suggest, however, that gender does not affect children's use of coping strategies (Spirito, Overholser & Stark, 1989).

Overall, the picture is unclear as regards the probable impact of gender on sons' and daughters' coping and enjoyment of fostering. It is suggested that a more interactional consideration of gender may be useful. As such, gender mix, i.e. whether the foster child is of the same or different gender to son/daughter may be a useful factor for research to consider. Research literature in this area however does not fully support a directional hypothesis.

8.3. Parental support, sibling support and family size

Several studies have suggested that sons and daughters may deal with the difficulties associated with fostering through discussion and maintenance of close relationships with family, particularly mothers (Spears and Cross, 2003). Serbinski (2014) suggests that a particularly helpful coping mechanism for her participants was the use of mother-child emotional co-regulation and parental processing of difficult emotions alongside birth children. This is interesting when compared with the research finding that fostering can lead to a loss of parent-child time, familial closeness and communication (Höjer, 2004; Mauro, 1985; Twigg, 1994) and to misunderstandings between mothers and their own children about foster care (Kaplan, 1988). Serbinski's findings also provide a sharp contrast to Scheifer's (1995) research which suggests that sons and daughters of foster carers experienced increased internalising behaviours between the ages of 11 and 18, when compared with the children of parents who were not foster carers. Whilst discussion with family members may be a useful coping mechanism for children of foster carers, there have been suggestions in the research that children of foster carers do not often go to parents with problems because they are reluctant to add to their parents' stress or worry (Fox, 2001) or because the voicing of any negative feelings is actively discouraged (Wilkes, 1974).

It may be argued, therefore, that the presence of siblings in the foster home could provide a valuable protective factor in terms of coping and interpersonal support. If, as suggested by research cited above, parents are not always perceived to be available or appropriate to seek support from, the presence of other 'allies' in the family home who could provide support may be a predictive factor for children's enjoyment of fostering. Interestingly, there does not seem to be any research which considers the impact of sibling support on sons/daughters' experience of fostering. A small research study considered the influence of fostering on sons'/daughters' relationships with siblings (Younes & Harp, 2007) and found that there were mixed responses as regards sibling closeness. Some participants felt fostering had had no impact on their relationship with siblings, others felt that it had brought them closer and others that fostering had driven them farther apart. Younes and Harp did not, however,

consider whether sibling relationships were helpful in providing an expanded source of coping and support. Research from the area of learning disability and siblings suggests that children who had at least one normally-developing sibling in addition to a disabled sibling appeared to be coping better and were rated as more socially competent (Lobato, 1990). This may suggest that, in this area at least, the presence of siblings is a protective factor for siblings of disabled children. Seligman and Darling (2009) suggest that this may be because the presence of extra siblings distributes the burden of caring for the disabled sibling, provides a confidante for children and means that the burden of fulfilling parental expectations is shared.

These suggestions may also be factors in foster family dynamics, particularly if the systemic view of families is adopted in which the impact of family stress is mediated by the number of people affected (McHugh, 1999). More general research seems to suggest that family size has a significant impact on an individual's coping strategies (Misra, 1999) and it is therefore hypothesised that the size of a foster family will have a significant effect on the coping and enjoyment of fostering as experienced by the sons and daughters of carers.

8.4. Coping strategies

It is probable that sons/daughters react in different ways in order to cope with the stresses of fostering. Research has mentioned various, disparate coping mechanisms aside from relationships with family, such as becoming 'passive-aggressive' (Serbinski, 2014); self-isolation or withdrawal (Clare, Clare & Peaty, 2006); specific support groups for sons and daughters (Spears & Cross, 2003); identification with the role of caregiver (Kaplan, 1988) and separation anxiety as a coping response (Poland & Groze, 1993). However, what current research has not dealt with directly is the extent to which the use of these different coping mechanisms affects the enjoyment of fostering and the experience of stress. Whilst it is generally accepted that some coping mechanisms are more successful than others, there has been no research which considers the possible correlations between enjoyment of fostering and use of different coping mechanisms. Research in the above literature review suggests that coping strategies which focus on active problem-solving or emotional regulation are

generally more adaptive and successful than coping strategies which focus on withdrawal or 'acting out' (Frydenberg , 2014). It is therefore hypothesised that higher use of active problem-solving or emotional regulation coping strategies will have a positive effect on sons and daughters' enjoyment of fostering.

9. Conclusion

Ultimately, difficulties may arise if research tries to consider foster families as a single homogenous group. Variations in family structure, children's gender, age and roles, children's temperaments and coping styles, parental styles and empathy may all have an impact on levels of enjoyment experienced by children whose families foster. Many of these factors are too complex to be measured within the scope of this study, however, this study aims to consider quantitatively the impact of age gap, gender, coping styles and family size on children's enjoyment of fostering. The previous literature review has therefore informed the following main research question and subsequent hypothesis:

Research Question 1: What factors affect sons' and daughters' enjoyment of fostering?

Based on research literature, it is hypothesised that age gap, gender mix, coping style and family size will have an impact on the expressed enjoyment of fostering for participants in this study.

The study will also use qualitative data to further explore the experiences of children whose families foster, particularly as regards enjoyment, stressors and coping associated with fostering. Two further supplementary research questions are therefore posed; the first is partly exploratory and partly theoretically-driven.

Research Question 2: What are some stresses associated with fostering and what coping mechanisms do sons and daughters use to deal with them?

This research question is partly exploratory, since it has not been asked directly in the literature before. However, based on findings from other research, it is hypothesised that stressors will include systemic stressors (*i.e.* family structure

and roles) and stressors which focus on relationship ambiguity, fluidity and loss. It is expected that coping mechanisms will include seeking social support and use of emotional regulation strategies.

Research Question 3: What do sons and daughters think would make fostering easier or harder for them?

This final research question is broadly exploratory but adds to the literature insofar as it appears to be the first time a large cohort ($n=55$) of currently fostering sons and daughters (birth and adopted) has been asked directly for their responses to this question.

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“You help children and they move on... but it changes everything”: Stress, coping and enjoyment of fostering among sons and daughters of foster carers

Part 2: Empirical Journal Article

1. Introduction

Several scoping and meta-reviews of the research which explore the experiences of sons and daughters of foster carers have commented on the limitations of published literature, in terms of scope and sample size (Höjer, Sebba & Luke, 2013), methodology (Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014) and lack of theoretical underpinnings (Thompson & McPherson, 2011). An example of these limitations, as well as the strengths of the research to date may be taken from Duffy (2013). In her exploratory study, Duffy used semi-structured interviews to consider the views of eight birth children of foster carers about the positives and negatives of fostering and their involvement in the fostering process. She found that positives for birth children included 'insight into parenting' and 'altruism', whilst negatives associated with fostering included lack of parental time and feelings of loss. She also found that birth children were seldom included or consulted in the fostering process. Whilst Duffy's research provides an in-depth snapshot into the experiences of birth children of foster carers, it also clearly shares the limitations described above. The small number of participants means that the generalisability of findings is limited and the extent to which the findings are unique is debatable. With few exceptions, published research which considers sons and daughters of foster carers seems to apply broadly similar methodology (focus groups, interviews), use generally small sample sizes (20 or less) and explore very similar themes (positive and negative experiences of fostering). This study, therefore, aims to contribute a larger scale study which considers both quantitative and qualitative data and develops a theoretical basis on which to form hypotheses and research design.

This theoretical basis is explored in depth in the preceding literature review, however, it is largely based on research and theories from the areas of family systems theory; stress and coping and sibling relationships. These research areas provide a rationale for the research questions, particularly in terms of suggesting factors which may influence enjoyment of fostering for sons and daughters. Research from the arena of systems theory, for example, may be used to suggest that systemic changes in family structure brought about by fostering may act as a stressor for sons and daughters (Minuchin, 1988).

Similarly, studies into sibling relationships may be used to suggest that the presence of other siblings provides support for sons and daughters of carers and may thus help mediate stress and lead to greater enjoyment of fostering (Lobato, 1990). Consideration of the literature about stress and coping led to the hypothesis that participants who use problem-solving or emotional regulation as coping strategies will generally show a higher enjoyment of fostering than those who use withdrawal or 'acting out' in order to cope with stress (Holen, Lervåg, Waaktaar & Ystgaard, 2012).

In conclusion, a review of the literature in this area suggests that studies are generally qualitative and exploratory rather than theoretically-based and are often limited by small samples. As such, this study aims to use a review of literature in other research areas in order to inform the following main research question and subsequent hypothesis:

Research Question 1: What factors affect sons' and daughters' enjoyment of fostering?

Based on research literature, it is hypothesised that age gap, gender mix, coping style and family size will have an impact on the expressed enjoyment of fostering for participants in this study.

Two further research questions are also posed; the first is partly exploratory and partly theoretically-driven.

Research Question 2: What are some stresses associated with fostering and what coping mechanisms do sons and daughters use to deal with them?

This research question is partly exploratory, since it has not been asked directly in the literature before. However, based on findings from other research, it is hypothesised that stressors will include systemic stressors (*i.e.* family structure and roles) and stressors which focus on relationship ambiguity, fluidity and loss. It is expected that coping mechanisms will include seeking social support and use of emotional regulation strategies.

Research Question 3: What do sons and daughters think would make fostering easier or harder for them?

This final research question is broadly exploratory but adds to the literature insofar as it appears to be the first time a large cohort ($n=55$) of currently fostering sons and daughters (birth and adopted) has been asked directly for their responses to this question.

2. Method

2.1. Epistemology and Design

A critical realist perspective was adopted which allowed the researcher to acknowledge the probable impact of her own beliefs and social, historical and cultural biases, whilst also holding the belief that there are stratified layers of reality which the research endeavours to explore. A mixed methods design was adopted which allowed the researcher to explore multiple explanations for an empirical experience (enjoyment of fostering). The use of regression analysis for the quantitative data also tied in with the idea that many factors (or mechanisms) may influence a variable (or empirical experience) and thus was consistent with the adoption of a critical realist epistemology (Ron, 2002).

2.2. Participants and Recruitment

2.2.1. Questionnaire

A total of 55 participants were recruited for the study. Participants were aged between 7 and 21 years ($M = 13.53$) and were the adopted or birth sons ($n=18$) or daughters ($n=37$) of foster carers. All participants lived at home with parents who were currently involved in fostering. Participants were recruited via social workers from 8 different local authorities and private fostering agencies ($n=38$) as well as from online foster carer forums ($n=17$). Participants were given the option of completing the questionnaire (Appendix A) on paper ($n=33$) or online ($n=22$). A sample size of 55, with 4 independent variables, is consistent with the minimum sample for multiple regression recommended in Coolican (2009) of $p+50$.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria for Recruitment

Participants were sought who were the biological, adopted or step- children of currently fostering parents, aged 7-21 and who were still living at home with one or more fostering parents. Participants were excluded who had not lived alongside foster children in the parental home for at least a year and who did not have parental consent (if aged under 16).

2.2.2. Focus Group

Social workers who responded to the initial part of the research and who worked in authorities where there was a current, regular meeting of sons and daughters of carers (i.e. a support group) were also asked if their group members might be interested in the second part of the study which involved a focus group or individual interviews. Therefore the members of the 'sons and daughters' group from one Local Authority were asked if they would be willing to participate via letter which gave them a choice between participating in a prearranged focus group or contacting the researcher to arrange an individual interview. All consenting participants chose to take part in the focus group rather than to arrange an individual interview. There were 8 participants involved in this part of the study, aged between 16 and 21 years old (mean = 17.2). All participants for this part of the study were female.

2.3. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought and granted from Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. Data were collected anonymously for the questionnaire participants. An information sheet was provided for parents and sons/daughters (Appendix B) and full informed consent was gained from both participants and their parents for all questionnaire participants who were aged under 16. For participants who agreed to take part in the second part of the study (focus group), data was stored confidentially until it had all been collected, transcribed and linked with initial information (i.e. age, gender etc.). After this point, original data was destroyed and only anonymous data used for the research. Focus group participants were all aged 16 or over so gave full informed consent for their participation after having received the information letter and having been encouraged to discuss participation with their parents (Appendix C). Focus group participants were able to withdraw from the study and have their data discarded up until the point at which the data was anonymised. Following the focus group, a full verbal debrief was given to participants and a sheet giving information about sources of support was distributed. Additional time was included at the end of the focus group so that participants could ask questions or seek support from the researcher or from the group facilitator who was also present.

2.4. Measures

The questionnaire asked parents to complete basic demographic and situational information and then asked sons and daughters of carers to complete further information. Table 1 shows the information sought from parents and from sons/daughters on the questionnaire.

Table 1 – Information sought on questionnaire

Parental Questions	Son/Daughter Questions
Age and gender of participant	Rating of enjoyment of fostering
Participant's place in family (e.g. eldest of four)	Rating of intention to foster in the future
Access to sons and daughters support group	Rating of different fostering situations as "makes fostering easier" , "makes fostering harder" or "makes no difference"
Rating of participant's enjoyment of and coping with fostering	Written response to: Is there anything that would make fostering easier for you?
Age/Gender/Relationship of others in the family home	Kidcope – measure of coping strategies used
Indication of other stressors encountered by family within previous year	
Basic details about fostering situation (age, gender, length of placement)	

Kidcope

The final part of the initial questionnaire used 'Kidcope', a brief list of coping strategies for use with children, developed by Spirito, Stark and Williams (1988). These coping strategies can be grouped and categorized into coping styles. Whilst several researchers have used different techniques to factorise the 'Kidcope' strategies into broader coping style groups, this research used the three-factor model suggested by Holen et al. (2012). Therefore the three coping styles rated by the Kidcope questionnaire were: Active/Emotional Regulation; Withdrawal and Oppositional.

2.5. Procedure

2.5.1. Questionnaire

A gatekeeper letter (Appendix D) was sent to social workers in 25 different foster care providers; 20 were based in a Local Authority and 5 were based in private foster care agencies. A copy of the consent form, information letter and questionnaire were included with the gatekeeper letter. Six Local Authority social workers and two agency-based social workers agreed to disseminate the information to their foster carers who had children living at home. Full questionnaires with stamped addressed envelopes were sent to 160 foster carers. The majority of the returned consent forms and questionnaires were sent directly to the researcher using the stamped addressed envelope supplied ($n=22$) though some participants chose to return their questionnaire via the social worker who had given it to them ($n=11$).

Information about the study, consent letters and a link to the online version of the questionnaire was also posted on eight online forums for foster carers. Twenty-two questionnaires were completed online but, due to the anonymous nature of this method of response, it is impossible to say how many of these responses were gained as a result of the use of online forums and how many were sent from those participants who had received paper copies of the questionnaire but had chosen to respond online.

2.5.2. Focus Group

The researcher contacted social workers who had a support group already running and asked if the members of the group would be interested in participating. Two social workers responded but it was felt that the age range of the first group (16-21 years old) would be more appropriate than that of the second group which had both a younger and broader age range (7-16). Due to the possibly sensitive nature of the discussion and the potential for uncomfortable disclosures, it was felt that participants who were aged 16 or older and who were similar in age to each other would be more appropriate for a focus group. Therefore, all members ($n=12$) of one 'sons and daughters support group' were sent an information letter and consent form, arranging the

focus group for a particular day and giving the option for individual interviews to be arranged as an alternative. Eight participants gave consent and arrived at the focus group venue. Participants were introduced to the researcher by the group leader and the researcher then gained verbal consent for the recording of the focus group. The researcher then asked open-ended questions (Appendix E) designed to allow participants to share their experiences of fostering and their ways of coping. Following the focus group, participants were debriefed verbally (Appendix F) and given some information about sources of support if they felt concerned about fostering (Appendix G).

2.6. Data Analysis

2.6.1. Questionnaire Data

The Kidcope questionnaire data was coded according to guidance from Holen et al.'s (2012) exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the questionnaire items. This was chosen because it was based on a large-scale ($n=1,324$), non-clinical sample and conflated measures for active problem-solving and emotional regulation. Data were inputted into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) and inspected to check for missing and inaccurate information and that the assumptions for multivariate analysis had not been violated. Initial inspection of the data suggested that the outcome variable (enjoyment of fostering) was skewed. The skewness statistic given on SPSS was used to compute a z-score for skew; this suggested a moderate but significant negative skew ($Z_{skewness} = 2.46, p < .05$). Therefore, a transformation¹ of the data was trialled, as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2006). The data transformation was successful in normalising the variance and thus the transformed, more normally distributed data was used in the quantitative data analysis.

Following an initial analysis which suggested that family size, age and gender had no significant effect on the model, a stepwise multiple regression was conducted using a two step model of analysis to predict participants' ratings of

¹ Tabachnik & Fidell (2006) suggest trialling a reflection and square root transformation in order to normalise data with moderate negative skewness. The skewness statistic suggested that the new data was not significantly skewed ($Z_{skewness} = .875$). Field (2013) states that $Z_{skewness}$ scores below 1.96 are not significantly different from normal (p.184).

their enjoyment of fostering. The first step used age gap and gender mix as predictor variables. Age gap was presented as a continuous variable in which the age of the foster child was subtracted from the age of the participant. Therefore, it was unidirectional, coding relationships where the participant was younger than the foster child as negative numbers. Gender mix was coded as a categorical variable in which 1 represented a fostering situation where both children were of the same gender and 2 represented a fostering situation whereby the foster child was a different gender to the participant. The second step of the analysis combined the above factors with further predictors; participants' use of oppositional coping, withdrawal coping and active coping. These were coded as participant scores on the Kidcope questionnaire for each category.

The second research question was explored using the responses to the question which asked sons and daughters to identify fostering situations which made fostering easier or harder for them. The responses for these were converted into percentages of respondents who stated that a given situation would make fostering easier, harder or would make no difference. Participants were also asked to write down any additional thoughts on things which would make fostering easier or harder. Over half of the participants chose to write additional responses to this question so their answers were coded under broad themes using thematic analysis according to guidance from Braun and Clarke (2006).

2.6.2. Focus Group Data

Following the recording of the semi-structured group interview completed with the focus group of sons and daughters of foster carers, the data was then transcribed, anonymised and interpreted using thematic analysis, as suggested by guidelines from Braun and Clarke (2006). Repeated reading and annotating of the dataset led to the generation of 12 recurring subthemes and discussion points (See Appendix H). These were then grouped and organised into broader overarching themes. To increase the validity of the thematic analysis findings, the researcher asked an independent colleague to conduct a brief thematic

analysis on the anonymised focus group transcript. Both coders were in agreement as regards the interpretations of emergent themes and subthemes.

3. Results

3.1. What factors affect sons' and daughters' enjoyment of fostering?

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if gender mix, age gap and coping style significantly predicted participants' enjoyment of fostering. The results of the regression indicated that these five predictors explained 35% of the variance ($R^2 = .35$, $F(5, 49) = 5.23$, $p < .01$). Table 1 shows β values of individual factors within the regression model.

Table 2 – Multiple Regression Analysis for enjoyment of fostering

Model	B	Std. Error B	β
Step 1			
Constant	2.16	0.2	
Gender Mix**	0.31	0.12	.32*
Age Gap	0.02	0.01	.24
Step 2			
Constant	1.97	0.27	
Gender Mix**	0.20	0.12	.21
Age Gap	0.02	0.01	.29*
Withdrawal	-0.6	0.02	-.44***
Regulation	0.03	0.01	.35*
Oppositional	-0.03	0.02	-.19
$R^2 = .18$ for Step 1, ($p < .01$), $R^2 = .35$ for Step 2, ($p < .01$)			* $p < .05$
** Gender Mix coded as '1=same; 2=different'.			*** $p < .005$

Analysis of these factors showed that gender mix and the use of oppositional coping strategies did not significantly predict enjoyment of fostering. However, use of withdrawal and regulation as coping strategies and age gap between foster children and participants did significantly predict participants' enjoyment of fostering. As the age gap between foster children and carers' children increased, sons/daughters' enjoyment of fostering also increased. Secondly, as participants' use of withdrawal as a coping strategy increased, their enjoyment of fostering decreased. Finally, as sons/daughters' use of active/emotional regulation increased, so did their enjoyment of fostering.

3.2. What are some stressors associated with fostering and what coping mechanisms do sons and daughters use to deal with them?

3.2.1. Coping strategies for questionnaire participants

Analysis of responses to the Kidcope part of the questionnaire indicated that the following coping strategies were most and least likely to be used among the sample.

Table 3 – Coping Strategies with highest frequency of self-report

Coping strategy	Example used in questionnaire	Coded as
Problem Solving	I try to solve the problem by doing something or talking to someone	Active/ Emotional Regulation
Social Support	I try to feel better by spending time with others like family, grown-ups or friends	Active/ Emotional Regulation
Distraction	Do something like watch TV or play a game to forget it	Active/ Emotional Regulation
Wishful thinking	I wish the problem had never happened	Active/ Emotional Regulation <i>and</i> Opposition

Table 4 – Coping Strategies with lowest frequency of self-report

Coping strategy	Example used in questionnaire	Coded as
Self Criticism	I blame myself for causing the problem	Withdrawal
Resignation	I don't do anything because nothing could solve the problem	Withdrawal
Emotional expression	I shout, scream or get angry	Oppositional
Withdrawal	I keep quiet about it	Withdrawal

3.2.2 – Stress and coping as described in the focus group

The following themes emerged in the group interview. These will be briefly listed and described in the table below and then explored in more detail in the discussion.

Table 5 – Thematic Overview of Stressors and Coping Strategies

Overarching Theme	Sub-theme	Concepts and references to transcript
Stressors	Event-based <i>(specific, vividly remembered events which had been stressful and emotional)</i>	Witnessing violence and parental distress as a result of fostering ²³⁰⁻²³¹
		Planned placement endings in which participants were disappointed in the outcome (i.e. did not like or approve of adoptive parents) ⁴⁶²⁻⁴⁶⁵
		Post-placement adoption broke down ⁹⁶⁻¹⁰¹
		Placement breakdowns which led to feelings of failure and helplessness ²⁶¹⁻²⁶⁴
		Allegations of abuse being made by a foster child against parents ²³³⁻²³⁵
	Daily stressors	Daily irritants around behaviour, expectations and having others in your living space ²⁰¹
		Daily uncertainty about the permanency of a placement and the length of the relationship/attachment with a foster child ¹⁴⁷⁻¹⁵⁶
		Seeing the impact of daily caring on parents and seeing ageing parents 'worn down' by fostering and foster children's behaviour ²⁰⁶⁻²¹¹
	Relational Stressors <i>(stress on relationships with others)</i>	Difficulties with sharing parental time and attention. ⁴⁷⁶⁻⁴⁷⁸
		Changes in relationships with parents and role in the family. ³⁸⁰⁻³⁸¹
		Foster child's behaviour having impact on others' perceptions of family (i.e. neighbours). ²⁴¹⁻²⁴⁷

Coping	Escape, withdrawal and distraction	Going to stay with friends or family members if the fostering situation at home was too difficult 269
		Distraction/ escape-based activities such as going to the gym ⁴⁰⁴
		Complete withdrawal strategies ²³²⁻²³³
	Support from extended family	Seeking support from family members who lived outside the home (i.e. grandparents, grown-up siblings). They felt more able to talk to someone who was not directly involved in the situation. ⁴³⁰⁻⁴³¹
	Needing to move on emotionally, ('getting on with it')	Using the constant changes in fostering as a coping mechanism. New placements make it imperative to 'move on' emotionally so placements act as a distraction-based coping strategy. ³²¹⁻³²³

3.3. What do sons and daughters think would make fostering easier or harder?

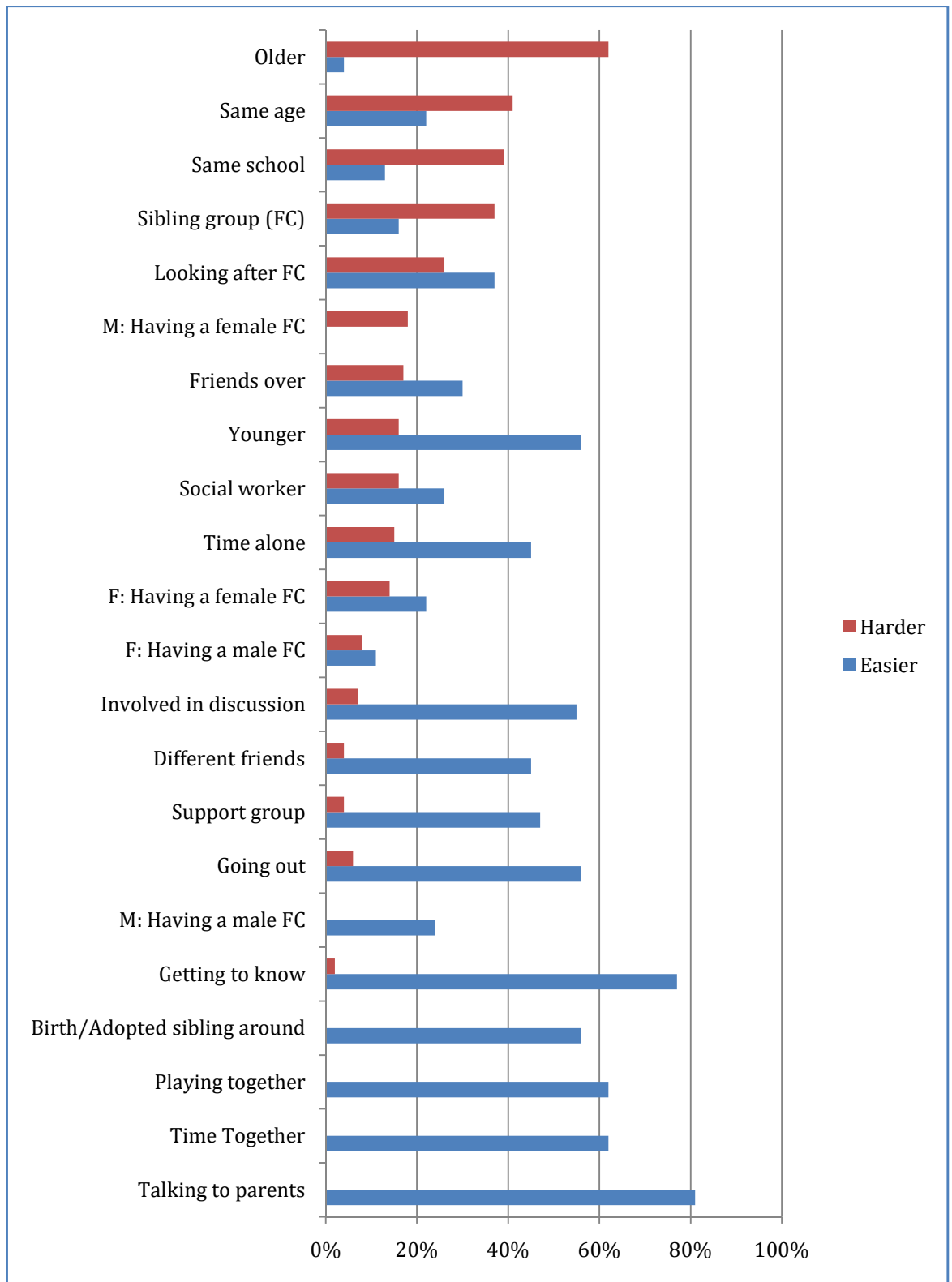
Participants rated 20 different fostering situations as something which would make fostering easier, harder or would make no difference. Full results are listed in Appendix I but the highest scoring items for 'making fostering easier' and 'making fostering harder' are shown in the table below.

Table 6 – Factors which scored highest for 'making fostering easier' and 'making fostering harder'

	Easier	No Diff	Harder
Talking to my parents and friends about fostering	81%	17%	0%
Spending time getting to know the foster child	77%	18%	2%
Family and foster child all spending time together	62%	36%	0%
Playing together with the foster child	62%	36%	0%
Going out/round to friends houses	56%	36%	6%
Having a brother or sister around at home	56%	38%	0%
Having a foster child who is older	4%	28%	62%
Having a foster child who is the same age	22%	32%	41%
Going to the same school as the foster child	13%	43%	39%
Having a sibling group of foster children	16%	39%	37%

Fig. 1 shows the ranked results of all factors in graphic format and shows several interesting points for discussion. Items on the graph where there are two coloured bars indicate that the sample was divided about whether the situation would make fostering easier or harder. Items where there is only a bar of one colour indicate agreement among participants. For example, the vast majority of participants felt that 'being able to talk to parents' would make fostering easier. None of the participants felt that it would make fostering harder. However, in contrast, 'looking after the foster child' was something which 36% of participants felt would be helpful, however, 27% of participants felt that this would be unhelpful.

Fig. 1 – Graph: Ratings of factors which make fostering easier/ harder



Additional responses to RQ3

Both questionnaire and focus group participants had ideas about things which made fostering easier and harder. Additional comments written by 60% ($n=33$) of questionnaire participants and can be found in full in Appendix J. Although the focus group discussion centred mainly around stressors and coping mechanisms, some participants also mentioned things which would make fostering easier or harder. These responses were coded separately but the majority of responses fell broadly under the themes listed in the table below.²

Table 7– Thematic Overview of responses to RQ3: What would make fostering easier or harder?

Over-arching Theme	Sub-themes	Concepts and Quotes
Systemic Factors	Social Workers	More social worker involvement ^{12*} , social workers who are more efficient ^{22*} or understanding. ^{57*}
		Less social worker involvement, difficulties with disruptive visits ^{54*} and parental time wasted in long meetings ^{22*}
		Social workers role as judgemental/ interfering: <i>“it would be better if the social worker got off my mother’s and father’s back and butted out. They do a good job on their own.”</i> ^{24*}
	Rules and boundaries (i.e. information sharing)	Lack of information shared about foster children after placement ending. ^{56*} Fostering made harder when whereabouts/ wellbeing of ex-foster child is unknown ⁴⁴⁴⁻⁴⁴⁶
		Feeling that important information about the foster child was not shared with them ^{22*,23*}
Impact on role	The changing role of the home from private to public	

² Specific references and examples are coded with a superscript number which refers to either the focus group transcript (Appendix K) or the table of responses listed in Appendix J. References to written questionnaire responses will be followed by a * (for example^{32*}) to differentiate them from references to focus group responses.

	and family systems	and the foster child's impact upon the participant's place in the family system. ^{17*,378-379} <i>"Constant visits from social workers meaning that often plans have to be cancelled"</i> ^{54*}
	Not feeling valued or listened to as regards policy or decision-making	Difficulties with certain rules/policies around the ending of placements and asking for support. ²⁶⁹⁻²⁷⁴ Participants did not always feel that they were considered when decisions over policy were made: <i>"You don't sign up to anything [unlike your parents] and you have to live there as well"</i> ²⁹¹
Within-child factors	General Demographics (Age, Gender, Special Needs)	Age and gender were mentioned several times ^{51*, 17*} Detrimental impact of having foster children who were the same age as participants' siblings ^{48*} Having a child who with a disability or special needs made fostering harder ^{31*, 36*, 45*} . <i>"If a child had a severe learning disorder, it is harder to help them ... However, ...even if it would be difficult, I would like to help the best I can."</i> ^{36*}
	Behaviour and Violence	Violence or verbal aggression towards participants ⁶ <i>"If a foster child gets really mean and starts hitting or kicking me"</i> ^{13*}
		Violence towards participants' parents ^{30*} <i>"She [foster child] kicked my mother full force in the stomach. My mother went flying...that's how bad she was"</i> (PPT7, 250-252)
Violence towards family pets ^{32*} and damage to possessions ^{29*}		
Personal and Situational factors	Practical Issues	Having a bigger house ^{5*}
		Being able to go out to the gym ⁴⁰⁴
		Having time to spend with the foster child ³¹⁻³⁴
		Being able to continue with a normal social life ^{53*}
	Being able to speak to parents ^{15*}	
Personal traits	Having a sense of humour ^{10*}	
Type of placement	Long-term placements are easier but only when the ending of the placement was planned and felt to be positive. ⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶	

		<p>Focus group participants found short-term and emergency placements difficult in terms of boundaries and uncertainty about the level of attachment which was appropriate:</p> <p><i>"coz the closer you get to them, the more its gonna be like "Ooh, and now they're going" and you're kind of happy...but you kind of want them to stay if you get too close to them"</i>¹⁵¹⁻¹⁵⁷</p>
Relational Factors	The effect of fostering on participants' relationships with others	<p>One particular participant from the focus group spoke emotionally about the impact of fostering on her relationship with her parents. She felt that her parents' time and energy had been eaten up with looking after a demanding foster child and that their relationship and strength as a family unit had suffered as a result.^{55*, 479-493}</p>
	Bonding with foster children	<p>Fostering is easier when participants could spend time with the foster child^{20*} and were able to find something in common and get along with the foster child.^{26*, 32-34}</p>
	Sense of ambiguity as regards relationship with foster child	<p><i>"[It makes it harder when] Social workers think I need a friend and that is what a foster child can be. It doesn't always work."</i>^{58*}</p>

4. Discussion

4.1 Factors which affect sons' and daughters' enjoyment of fostering

Statistical analysis detected a significant link between age gap and expressed enjoyment of fostering. It may therefore be suggested that the larger the age gap between foster children and sons and daughters, the more likely sons and daughters are to enjoy fostering.³ This finding is consistent with suggestions from previous research (Sinclair, Gibbs & Wilson, 2004; Twigg & Swann, 2007) and supports the original hypothesis that age gap would have a significant effect on expressed enjoyment of fostering. It may be useful to consider this finding alongside the idea expressed in the comments that it is not always helpful to consider the relationship between foster children and sons and daughters as one of friendship.^{58*, 151-3} Family systems research suggests that familial relationships which show weak hierarchy but high proximity are linked to psychological dysfunction for children (Wood, 1985). Thus, in the context of these research findings, it may be suggested that foster placements in which there is no clear hierarchy of control/nurturance (i.e. a small age gap) and in which high proximity is encouraged (i.e. high levels of contact time/encouragement of friendships) could lead to poorer outcomes for sons/daughters.

Results also suggest that the use of active/regulation coping strategies has a positive effect on expressed enjoyment of fostering, whilst use of withdrawal strategies has a negative effect on enjoyment of fostering. This is, again consistent with previous coping research which suggests that active or emotional regulation strategies tend to be more adaptive and lead to better outcomes than withdrawal strategies (Frydenberg et al., 2014). However, very little research has considered the link between coping and enjoyment of fostering for sons/daughters so this finding offers a significant addition to the research literature.

³ As mentioned previously, the age gap was directional, insofar as where participants were older than foster children, enjoyment was higher and increased as the gap between ages did. However, the reverse was true for participants who were younger than foster children.

The use of opposition as a coping strategy was not a significant predictor of fostering enjoyment.. Quantitative findings did not support the hypothesis that gender mix has an impact on fostering enjoyment, nor did they support the hypothesis that family size would lead to more social support and thus higher enjoyment of fostering. However, findings from the qualitative parts of this research may offer reasons for these non-significant findings.

In terms of gender mix, it would appear that participants were divided about whether a foster child of a different gender would make fostering easier or harder. Results from the questionnaires suggested that male participants were more certain that having a male foster child would be easier and more enjoyable (none of them said that having a female foster child would be easier). However, when female participants were asked the same question, there was a greater range of responses, with roughly equal numbers of participants suggesting that fostering another girl would be easier as those who thought it would be harder. Responses may be linked to particular experiences rather than to gender specifically but the split between male and female participants' responses is striking and would benefit from further investigation. In this research, gender mix was coded across two categories, according to whether the foster child's gender was the same or different to that of the participant. However, future research may wish to use four categories to code gender mix, in order to explore whether this difference is found in other samples.

It was hypothesised that family size would be a significant predictor of fostering enjoyment for sons and daughters. It was suggested that those in larger families may have more social support upon which to draw. This hypothesis was not supported statistically but findings from the focus group discussion suggested that participants were more likely to seek support from family members who were not living at home. It may be suggested that the questionnaire's original definition of family as those living at home was too narrow and that wider familial support networks should be taken into account. The implications of these findings for future research and practice will be discussed in a later section.

4.2 Stressors and coping mechanisms associated with fostering for sons and daughters

4.2.1. Stressors

Stressors described by focus group participants were categorised as event-based stressors, daily stressors and relational stressors.

Event-based stressors included placement endings and large-scale conflicts, allegations or violence. The sources of these event-based stressors generally came from the disruption of established relationships (i.e. loss of a foster child through placement ending) or feelings of fear, disappointment and failure (as in the case of witnessed violence or placement breakdown). These stressors are broadly similar to those listed in previous research with sons and daughters of carers (e.g., Twigg & Swann, 2007).

Daily stressors included low level incidents of behaviour and conflict, as well as a discussion of daily irritants linked to the foster child not fitting in with family expectations (i.e. behaviour at a restaurant¹⁹⁴⁻⁶). There was also a discussion of the impact of daily uncertainty about placement permanence and boundaries of attachment with the foster child.¹⁴⁹⁻⁵¹ Family systems literature suggests that this fluidity and uncertainty may be particularly stressful because it can cause disequilibrium, instability and possible loss of family cohesion (Dodgson et. al., 2000). Another subtheme mentioned by focus group participants was the difficulty of seeing the daily impact of caring on their parents, particularly as those parents were getting older.²⁰⁵⁻¹⁰ This is not an issue that has generally been mentioned by other researchers working with sons and daughters of foster carers. Several researchers mention that sons and daughters appreciate that fostering is stressful for their parents but generally this is given as an explanation for not confiding in parents with their own concerns (Van der Riet, 2009; Younes & Harp, 2007). Family systems theory would suggest however that the stress of one family member can influence all family subsystems (Minuchin, 1974), a suggestion which is supported by the finding in this research that daughters of foster carers listed parental weariness as a contributor to their own stress.

Relational stressors overlapped with some of the stressors listed above, such as the relational impact of placement breakdown or parental weariness. However, this theme also included ideas about family structure and roles within the family. Whilst some focus group participants framed a change in role as a benefit of fostering³⁵⁴⁻³⁶⁰, others felt a sense of loss for their role as the 'baby of the family' for example³⁷⁸⁻⁹. This supports the hypothesis that loss or ambiguity of family role may be a source of stress for sons and daughters of foster carers, (Erera, 2001). A further stressor mentioned by participants was the impact of fostering on their relationships with others. Although it was not mentioned with any great regularity, there were two particular participants who described incidents in which outsiders' perceptions of them or their families had worsened as a result of foster child behaviour^{137, 240-2}. This finding is interesting and warrants further consideration, especially when read in conjunction with the suggestion that sons and daughters of carers may not seek support from friends for fear of negative judgments about their family situation or their foster sibling (Nobel-Carr, Farnham & Dean, 2014). This potential reluctance to seek support from friends or outsiders may be supported further by the finding in this research that participants were divided on the usefulness of 'having friends over.' Whilst approximately 50% of participants felt it would make no difference, the remainder of the participants' responses were split over whether having friends into their home would be helpful (30%) or unhelpful (nearly 20%). Participants' views about the helpfulness of going out to friends' houses was not divided in the same way, suggesting that there may be feelings of stigma attached to fostering, an unwillingness to further 'make public' the foster family home or uncertainty about friends' levels of understanding about the family situation. It is possible that this difficulty may be exacerbated by the aforementioned concept that sons/daughters sometimes feel coerced into a friendship with similarly aged foster children. In these cases, sons/daughters may feel that they need to safeguard boundaries around their own 'chosen' friendships by keeping those friends away from the family home and its potential as a site of imposed friendships.

4.2.2. Coping

In terms of coping, the strategies most likely to be used by the questionnaire sample were problem-solving, use of social support, distraction and wishful thinking. The strategies which participants reported using the least were self-criticism, resignation, emotional expression and withdrawal. These trends are very similar to those reported in previous sibling coping research (Ross & Cuskelly, 2006). This provides some justification for generalising findings from general sibling research to research which considers sons/daughters of foster carers. It is also reassuring insofar as the most-commonly used coping strategies were focused on problem-solving or emotional regulation; strategies which are consistently linked to more positive outcomes for individuals and their relationships (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Holen et al. 2012).

Focus group participants mentioned several different types of coping strategies but the strategy mentioned most frequently was escape/withdrawal. It appeared that removing oneself geographically from the situation was seen as a primary coping strategy; although this was often followed by emotional regulation focused strategies (i.e. leaving the house, *then* seeking social support or distraction). This finding is interesting when considered alongside more general research findings that withdrawal can be a particularly detrimental coping mechanism for mental health outcomes in teenagers (Spirito, Overholser & Stark, 1989) and that, in this study, withdrawal was negatively associated with fostering enjoyment. However, it may be argued that, for many stressors related to fostering, sons and daughters are powerless to change the situation (Duffy, 2013). As argued by Aldwin (2007), one of the most important factors when considering coping styles is that they are flexible and reactive to different contexts and perceived control. Therefore, in the case of sons/daughters, it may be argued that withdrawal-type strategies may sometimes be emotionally regulating or adaptive.

4.3. What do sons and daughters think would make fostering easier or harder for them?

4.3.1. Easier

Encouragingly, the majority of participants rated four factors linked to spending time with the foster child and getting to know them as helpful (62-77%). This was supported by several written responses from participants who said that having time to bond with the foster child made fostering easier for them. There was most agreement between questionnaire participants that talking to parents and friends about fostering would make fostering easier (81%). Going out, having a brother or sister around and having a younger foster child were also listed as things which participants felt made fostering easier. The idea that having a younger foster child makes fostering easier is also supported by the finding that directional age gap had a significant impact on fostering enjoyment.

4.3.2. Harder

Ranked responses to this question (as well as several written comments) suggested that foster children of the same age or older made fostering problematic for participants. Sons/daughters also objected to attending the same school as a foster child and to having a sibling group of foster children. In terms of written responses, many of the expressed difficulties were with the rules, systems and procedures of the foster care system (for a discussion of attitudes towards social workers, see below). It seems that rules around information sharing, placement endings and placement length generally made fostering more difficult for sons and daughters. This supports Höjer's (2007) suggestion that it is the professionalisation/institutionalisation of foster care which can be problematic for sons/daughters. Particular difficulties arose when a placement ended and, either through policy or neglect, participants were not informed of how their foster siblings were doing. This added to the feelings of loss and abrupt endings found in previous research (Nel, 2014; Thompson, McPherson & Marsland, 2016). Nearly a third of the written responses to this question centred around behaviour or violence. Again, this is in keeping with previous research findings (Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Spears & Cross, 2003).

4.3.3. Factors with no apparent agreement between participants

Several of the listed factors seemed to 'split' participant responses in terms of whether it was felt that they would make fostering easier or harder. Discussions of the role of foster child gender and having friends over can be found in previous sections. However, other factors which were particularly remarkable insofar as they prompted polarised responses were spending time alone; having a role in looking after the foster child; and having visits from the social worker.

Both the written responses and the ranked answers suggest a certain amount of ambiguity towards social workers and their role. Almost half of the written comments mentioned social workers and the extent to which participants felt their input was necessary, sufficient or effective. In general, comments were negative, with sons and daughters of carers seeming to resent perceived interference and judgements of their family situation^{24*}. They also objected to the amount of time their parents spent in meetings with social workers, feeling perhaps that already scant parental time was being wasted, or resenting the fact that they were excluded from meetings which were taking place in their own homes. These feelings have also been voiced, to a lesser extent, in previous research (Doorbar, 1999; Twigg, 1994). What was surprising in this research however, was the vehemence and emphatic language used by sons/daughters to describe social workers.^{11*, 38*, 44*, 57*} It may be suggested that the majority of previous research has had a slight bias away from this particular difficulty as a result of it having been conducted by researchers from within the field of social work. This research suggests that supervising social workers may need to reconsider their relationships with sons and daughters of foster carers and to think about changing practice to help them feel more included, represented and understood.

4.4. Limitations to research and implications for future research

4.4.1. Retrospective self-reports of coping and use of Kidcope

A limitation of this study is, perhaps, the use of a brief, retrospective and self-reported scale to assess coping strategies. Although widely used, the Kidcope scale (Spirito, Williams & Stark, 1988) is limited insofar as it relies on

accuracy of recall and honesty of response from participants. As such, responses may be prone to social desirability bias (Brenner et al., 2006) or to inaccurate recall (Torangeau & Yann, 2007). The brevity of the Kidcope questionnaire is a major strength and was one reason why it was chosen for this research. However, as suggested by Blount et al. (2008), this brevity is gained at the price of less detailed data. It is suggested that, whilst for this study, the use of the Kidcope questionnaire was appropriate in order to minimise participant demand, future researchers may wish to overcome these limitations through a more in-depth measure of coping.

Perhaps an interesting direction for future research with sons/daughters may be the use of diary studies in which participants are asked, at set points during the day to assess positive and negative experiences of fostering and their own coping. Litt, Tennen and Affleck (2011) suggest that the use of electronic diaries which can record participants' thoughts on stress and coping in 'real time' may be more able to shed light on the complex and dynamic process that is coping. Use of this methodology may lend itself to a more accurate assessment of coping, daily stressors and the complexities of familial relationships for sons and daughters. It may also help to overcome a further limitation to this study which has not controlled for type of stressors in assessing the suitability of coping strategies.

4.4.2. Coping, control and withdrawal

Some research suggests that coping strategies are only adaptive insofar as they 'fit' the stressor in question (Aldwin, 2007). It is argued that the use of active coping responses to uncontrollable stressors may be just as unhelpful as the use of withdrawal strategies in response to a controllable stressor (Clarke, 2006). Although this research aimed to partly control for this by grouping 'active problem-solving' with 'emotional regulation', it may be argued that a limitation of this research is that the evaluation of coping strategies did not take into account the controllability of the stressor for participants. Sons and daughters in this research were simply asked to think of a "time when fostering annoys or upsets you" (Appendix A) and then to rate their own use of particular coping strategies. As such, they may have been thinking of controllable or uncontrollable

stressors. This difficulty should be considered particularly in the light of previous research which suggests that many sons and daughters of foster carers do not feel that they have control or voice over the fostering process (Duffy, 2013).

Whilst a diary study may help overcome the methodological limitations of the research by enabling coping strategies to be linked to the controllability of stressors, the questions around sons/daughters, control and 'voice' may also benefit from further research. Psychological theories and research support a hypothesis that sons/daughters who feel that they are active partners in foster care and who are supported to develop affiliation and autonomy within a foster care context may report higher enjoyment of fostering (Deci & Ryan, 2000; McClean, 2009). It may also be hypothesised that sons/daughters' feelings of agency and control would also influence their coping styles (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2011).

4.4.3. Family, friends and social support networks

Finally, an initial limitation of this study was the narrow measure of family size used in the questionnaire, which only considered family members who lived in the family home. As discussed earlier, focus group participants spoke about using extended family from outside the home as a valuable coping resource. The value of these family members was partly their objectivity but also the feeling that they were not already 'burdened' by living in the foster home and so participants felt able to seek support and share their stressful experiences without guilt.⁴³⁰⁻² Previous research supports the assertion that sons and daughters may not wish to burden immediate family members (particularly parents) by seeking support from them (Clare, Clare & Peaty, 2006). Therefore future research may wish to consider sons/daughters' use of extended family and community networks. This research may also consider the finding that some sons and daughters feel a certain protectiveness or defensiveness over fostering, meaning that they are reluctant to seek support from friends or to invite friends round to the house. The extent to which these concerns are shared by foster carers and other sons/daughters may be an interesting and useful avenue for future research.

4.4.4. Conclusion

Despite the limitations mentioned above, this study has been the first to link coping strategy use to enjoyment of fostering among sons and daughters of foster carers. It has also provided empirical support for the oft-cited idea that having a larger age gap between carers' children and foster children often leads to a more successful placement (Twigg & Swann, 2007). It has been the first study to directly ask currently fostering children about factors which would make fostering easier or harder for them and to focus on stressors and coping. As such, this research has found particularly interesting results as regards the use of withdrawal and escape, support seeking from extended family and relationships with social workers. The findings from this study are largely very positive, with the majority of participants reporting high enjoyment of fostering and high use of adaptive coping strategies. This study has added to the small, but rapidly growing, area of research literature about sons/daughters of foster carers and its findings have suggested several avenues for future exploration and research in this field.

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“You help children and they move on... but it changes everything”: Stress, coping and enjoyment of fostering among sons and daughters of foster carers

Part 3: Critical Reflective Account

The following reflective account aims to provide a critical overview of the research process and findings. The first section will consider the impact of the researcher's ontological and epistemological stances and also the practical and ethical considerations which influenced the research process. The second section of this account will then consider the influence of the research itself in terms of contribution made to knowledge, study limitations, relevance to educational psychology practice and future directions for related research.

Critical Account of research practitioner

1. Inception of research question and influence of researcher's experience

The inception of the research question began from an initial interest in the maintenance of foster care placements and adoption stability. University sessions on systems theory and family therapy had allowed me to think systemically about families who foster or adopt and to consider whether a systemic viewpoint provided additional ways of understanding placement stability and breakdown. Whilst on placement with an Educational Psychology Service in years one and two of my course, I completed several pieces of casework which emphasised to me the importance of supporting foster care placements and adoptions; using psychology to give them as many chances at success as possible. This led me, therefore, to an inspection of the literature around the support that Educational Psychologists offered to foster carers and adoptive parents. Several special issues of *Educational Psychology in Practice* and *Educational and Child Psychology* provided a good foundation for initial reading and idea formation. Norwich, Richards and Nash (2010) provided a structure for thinking about EP work with Children in Care, suggesting five main areas in which EPs work alongside the foster care system (supportive, training, promoting achievement, multi-agency work and overview). Further reading led to an article by Ruth Nissim (1996) where repertory grids from the area of Personal Construct Psychology were used as tools to elicit foster carers' and social workers' views about successful fostering placements. The use of a direct psychological tool such as repertory grids led to the discovery of important themes which had not been highlighted in other research, for example, foster

carers and social workers were in agreement that female foster children were easier, however, they disagreed about the extent to which information sharing was linked to placement success.

Reflecting on the differences and similarities in the voices of the foster carers and social workers led to a consideration of the other voices present in foster care research. The voices of looked after children have been elicited using interesting methodologies and psychologically informed theories (Barrett, Dent & Rodgers, 2011; Honey, Rees & Griffey, 2011). However, I began to wonder about the voices of sons/daughters of foster carers and whether there might be a place for research which used psychological tools and/or theories to elicit their views. An initial review of the literature available revealed phrases such as 'unknown soldiers of foster care' (Twigg, 1994) and 'hearing quiet voices' (Sutton & Stack, 2013). There was an apparent scarcity of literature focusing on the voice of sons/daughters in fostering situations which suggested that there may be a gap in the research which could be explored. This was further established through several helpful meta-reviews (e.g. Thompson & McPherson, 2011; Twigg & Swann, 2007), all of which suggested that there was scant literature which gave a voice to sons/daughters and that which did was mainly qualitative and exploratory in nature. This led to reading around the subject and the formulation of my research questions which considered the factors which affected sons and daughters enjoyment of fostering, made fostering easier or harder for them and the stressors and coping mechanisms experienced by them as part of fostering.

Whilst my interest in this area originally sprung from a consideration of sons and daughters of carers as part of the equation which can lead to placement maintenance or breakdown (Farmer, Lipscombe & Moyers, 2005; Rhodes, Orme & Buehler, 2001), my attitude has evolved through completion of the research, to recognise the importance of sons' and daughters' experiences in their own right, appreciating them as the 'other' children in the care system, with different, but no less valid experiences to looked after children themselves.

Whilst the researcher's ontological and epistemological position will be explored in depth in the following section, it may be important to state, at this point, that a critical realist stance has been adopted and, therefore, it is considered useful to outline the researcher's background in relation to the research topic. This allows acknowledgement that the researcher is not a blank slate but that the research process has been influenced by prior experience and assumptions (Elder-Vass, 2015). As well as a professional interest in the area of foster care and family structure, as informed by casework on placement and in university sessions, the researcher also has a personal interest in foster care, being herself a daughter of a foster carer. Although my own experience of living within a fostering family is minimal (due to living away from home), the experience of sons/daughters has been the experience of three of my siblings. Therefore, despite coming to this research area in a traditional way, through noticing gaps in the literature, I have also a personal, familial experience of the participant group who I have been studying. My personal observations of my own siblings have influenced my development of theoretical factors which impact enjoyment of fostering, as well as my reading within the research literature.

2. Critical reflection on the term 'fostering enjoyment'

As mentioned earlier, in the literature review, the researcher chose to use the term 'enjoyment of fostering' throughout this research. The reasons for this decision, briefly, were the existing precedent for the use of this term in the literature and that the word 'enjoyment' had also been used by sons and daughters directly in the published research. It was also considered that 'enjoyment' captured an aspect of the process of foster care and the idea that positive emotions can be gained from and through challenging experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). However, it is necessary to critically reflect on the use of this term and to consider some of the drawbacks to its use as well as the reasons why it may be appropriate for this research. The term 'enjoyment' may be problematic insofar as it is perhaps too broad and lacks a clear definition within the area of psychology. Researchers are divided as to whether enjoyment is synonymous with 'pleasure' or whether it is, in some way, a more meaningful experience which can lead to personal growth (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Kapsner, 2009; Wankel, 1997). Although this research used the term

enjoyment to mean a process, through which a sense of contentment and accomplishment is felt as a result of investing attention in a particular activity (i.e. fostering), it was perhaps more important to think about the ways in which the term used lent clarity and ease of understanding to the participant group. Primarily, I wanted to use a descriptor of fostering which had meaning for the participants. Enjoyment was a concise and relatively clear descriptor of positive feelings towards fostering as held by sons and daughters. Other potential terms to describe positive feelings towards fostering were felt to lack either the clarity or the simplicity or the positivity of 'enjoyment' as a term, particularly when bearing in mind the potentially young age of my participants. Since this research had an emancipatory as well as academic goal, it was felt that the thesis title and simple research descriptions should be couched in language which was accessible and relatively clear to as many people as possible. Therefore, the benefits of using a term that had already been used by sons/daughters, and which is in common, everyday usage, were felt to outweigh the problematic nature of defining the term psychologically.

3. Influences on research design: Ontological and epistemological positions

Darlaston-Jones (2007) argues that it is essential for the researcher to acknowledge her own ontological position (about the theory and nature of being and reality) and epistemological position (about the theory and nature of knowledge and sense-making of reality) as linked to her chosen methodology. For me, the adoption of a critical realist stance afforded a middle-ground between two other possible ontological positions. A positivist stance may suggest that reality is universal and quantifiable and that an individual's experience has more to do with passive experiencing of reality than his or her active perception or construction of those experiences. On the opposite end of the spectrum, social constructionism is concerned with how individuals and groups experience and construct meaning (Burr, 2003). It is suggested that there is no meaning or reality in its own, objective right, only that meaning and fact are constructs of the individual or group as a way of making sense of experience.

Critical realism, for me, draws together some of the strengths of these two viewpoints, providing a model which acknowledges some objective reality but accepts the complexity and difficulties of measuring and exploring it. Critical realism acknowledges the impact of historical, social and cultural context upon the perspective taken by the researcher. It promotes a 'stratified ontology' (Archer, Sharp, Stones & Woodiwiss, 1999, p.12) whereby reality is viewed across three layers; that which exists, whether experienced or not, including causal powers and structures (the *real*), that which exists in the form of events and happenings caused by mechanisms from the 'real', (the *actual*) and that reality which we experience (the *empirical*). This approach allows for an ontology which accepts the potential existence of causal mechanisms beyond our direct experience.

The standpoint of critical realism was particularly appropriate for this research for two reasons. Firstly, it views the world as an open system, acknowledging the plurality of causation. In this case, it may acknowledge that enjoyment of fostering (outcome) may be affected by many different factors, interacting in different ways, depending on different circumstances and contexts (Archer, Sharp, Stones & Woodiwiss, 1999). Secondly, critical realism is foundationally linked to an emancipatory approach to research – that is the idea that socially situated research can provide an objective or alternative critique of social beliefs which can motivate social change and empower others (Collier, 2013; Oliver, 1992).

My interest in research which encourages critical reflection on social structures has also stemmed from readings in liberation psychology. In the case of this particular piece of research, it was felt that adding to the literature about sons/daughters was giving them a voice within a system that does not always recognise that they exist or have an impact. This research may be suggested to be liberatory insofar as it “contributes to the humanisation of people” (Martín-Baró, 1994, p.39) in valuing the voice of the son or daughter and recognising that it has a significant role to play in helping to co-construct the discourse around fostering for all those involved within the system (carers, social workers,

looked after children). It is recognised that the attitudes and voice of the sons and daughters of carers matter, not just because they can impact the stability of the care placement but also because their voices should be heard in their own right as children and young people.

4. Influences on research design: Practical and ethical factors

The following section will consider practical factors which impacted the research design and findings, as well as the process behind the adoption of the methodology used. It will conclude by reflecting on any methodological changes which future researchers in this area may wish to consider. For the purposes of clarity, the ethical considerations will be considered separately to the practical factors and all influencing factors will be briefly described in a table before some of the more influential ones are discussed in more depth in the text. This is intended to allow the reader to gain an immediate overview of all the factors influencing the research, both ethical (Table 8) and practical (Table 9).

4.1 Ethical Considerations

Table 8 – Ethical considerations which influenced research design

Study Section	Ethical Concern	Influence on Design
Questionnaire	<p><u>Emotional Distress</u></p> <p>The subject of the questionnaire was potentially distressing and, once sent, the researcher would have no control over the environment in which it was completed.</p>	<p>*It was decided to keep the questionnaire content fairly general and to avoid any questions which were, in and of themselves, emotionally loaded.</p> <p>* Participants (and their parents) were fully informed of their right to withdraw at any point and were encouraged to seek support if they felt upset or worried about fostering and/or the content of the questionnaire.</p>
Questionnaire	<p><u>Research Burden</u></p> <p>Felzmann (2009) suggests that the length of a questionnaire</p>	<p>In terms of the questionnaire length, brevity was prioritised over the researcher's own wish to have as</p>

	<p>should be balanced against an awareness of placing too many demands on participants.</p> <p>Research with the participant group suggests that they may already have many other demands on their time (Nuske, 2010)</p>	<p>much information as possible. Thus, the Kidcope (Spirito, Stark & Williams, 1988) scale was used as opposed to other, more in-depth measures of coping. (See Section 5 for further discussion).</p>
Questionnaire	<p><u>Confidentiality/Anonymity</u></p> <p>Completed questionnaires would be returned with signed parental consent forms which would mean that they were, at least initially, not confidential. If these were returned via social workers, as originally intended, participants may feel that social workers could read and identify responses.</p>	<p>Social workers were removed from the questionnaire return process. Participants were provided with stamped addressed envelopes in which to return their questionnaires and were also given the option of completing the questionnaire online, thus ensuring anonymity. See section 3.1.1. for further discussion of this issue.</p>
Questionnaire	<p><u>Informed Consent and Gatekeepers</u></p> <p>There was concern over the extent to which using social workers (those who supervised participants' parents) to deliver the questionnaire may have placed pressure on participants to complete the questionnaire.</p>	<p>It was made very clear in the letters to parents and gatekeepers that participants should be under no pressure to take part in the research. See Section 3.1.2 for further discussion of the ethics of the recruitment process.</p>
Focus Group	<p><u>Emotional Distress</u></p> <p>It was felt that a discussion of experiences of fostering with a particular emphasis on stress and coping would need careful planning to reduce the risk of emotional distress for participants.</p>	<p>*Focus Group participants were accessed through a 'sons and daughters support group' which was already meeting and thus participants had a support structure already in place.</p> <p>*Participants were given the option of being interviewed individually rather</p>

		<p>than taking part in the focus group.</p> <p>This allowed for any participants who wanted to be involved but did not want to discuss their feelings with peers.</p> <p>*A debrief sheet was provided which gave several different support networks (in person, online, telephone) which participants could access following the focus group (see Appendix G).</p>
Focus Group	<p><u>Age appropriate discussion</u></p> <p>The initially proposed age range of 7-21 was felt to be too broad and there was a concern that older participants may discuss things which were not appropriate for younger participants.</p>	<p>The age range for the focus group was narrowed to 16-21 years old. This ensured that the discussion remained age appropriate for all participants.</p>
Focus Group	<p><u>Presence of other adults</u></p> <p>It was felt to be necessary to have another adult present in the focus group to provide a point of contact and the option for participants to withdraw. However, the role of that adult in relation to other participants needs careful consideration.</p>	<p>See section 3.1.3 for further discussion of this issue.</p>

The following three ethical considerations arose from the involvement of social workers as gatekeepers in recruitment and data collection. It was practically necessary to involve social workers in this process but the ethical implications of using supervisors of participants' parents and the steps taken to overcome these concerns will be explored below.

4.1.1. Confidentiality

Although completed questionnaires were intended to be anonymous, they were generally returned attached to consent forms which held parental

signatures. It was my original intent for questionnaires to be returned via social workers/gatekeepers. Careful consideration of this process led to the realisation that social workers may have been able to look at the questionnaires and would have had sufficient information to identify the participants from their responses. This was felt to be ethically problematic, as well as potentially lowering participant numbers. This difficulty was further emphasised to me when, during my literature review, I came across the idea of 'blacklisting'. This was suggested by Anderson (2013) as foster parents' belief about the willingness of a fostering agency to withhold placements as a result of carers complaining or having experienced difficulties with social workers (p.52). As I reflected on this belief, I realised that using social workers as go-betweens to receive and return questionnaires to me would have removed any carers with a mistrust of social workers from my sample. Research suggests that, even when assured of confidentiality, questionnaire participants do not always believe that their data will be kept confidential (Singer, von Thurn, & Miller, 1995). It was therefore decided to remove social workers from the questionnaire return process. The provision of stamped addressed envelopes was both time consuming and expensive, however, it was felt to be ethically important for all responses to be held anonymously, and, perhaps more importantly, to be seen to be separate from the system of social services and fostering agencies.

4.1.2. Informed consent and multiple gatekeepers

Due to the need for both parental and child consent, it was practically necessary to include social workers in the process of facilitating contact between the researcher, foster carers and sons/daughters. However, the social worker's role in the research process may have been seen by participants or parents as a continuation of his or her role as a supervisor with some level of authority over foster carers. It was therefore made clear in both the gatekeeper letter and the parental letter that there should be no expectation or pressure placed on carers or their children to complete the research. Consideration of the returned questionnaires suggests that those participants who responded had recognised the research as separate from their social worker, however, this should be a consideration for future research and, in hindsight, the involvement of an authority figure as a point of contact would, ideally, have been avoided.

4.1.3. Presence of another adult during focus group

It was felt to be necessary to have the group facilitator present at the focus group to provide a familiar face for participants and to allow for the eventuality that individual participants may have wished to withdraw or temporarily leave the focus group. However, the group facilitator was, in fact, a social worker who knew many of the participants' parents/home situations. Although they had agreed to confidentiality, it is felt that the presence of a social worker may have limited the ability of the participants to share freely, particularly if they wanted to make a statement which could be construed as critical of social services. Whilst it was practically and ethically helpful to have a group facilitator present, future researchers may wish to consider the ethical implications of having a facilitator present who is known to participants.

4.2. Practical Factors

Table 9 – Practical considerations which Influenced the research design

Study section	Practical Consideration	Influence on Design/ Findings
Questionnaire	Research by Baruch and Holtom, (2008) suggests that response rates for mailed questionnaires to general population samples are around 44.7% (SD = 21.8). The response rate for paper questionnaires in this research was 20% (33 responses from 160 questionnaires).	<p>The researcher made the following research design decisions to try to increase response rates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of a questionnaire less than 4 pages long (Yammarino, Skinner, & Childers, 1991) - Provision of stamped addressed envelopes (Robson, 2011) - The use of personalisation, colour and the university logo on the information letter (Dillman et al., 2009) - The use of a contact who already has an established connection with participants (Porter, 2004) <p>See section 3.2.1 for further exploration of the impact of low response rates on the research findings.</p>

Focus Group	<p><u>Sampling</u></p> <p>Recruitment was through an opportunity sample, using one particular sons and daughters group in a Welsh Local Authority. This led to clear sample bias.</p>	<p>Although limited and potentially biased by the following factors (small age range, female only, fostering for the same local authority), the focus group participants had had a broad and varied set of fostering experiences. It should also be taken into account that focus group participants were already accessing a support group and thus were arguably better supported, more attuned or perhaps more vulnerable than a random sample of sons/daughters of foster carers.</p>
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4.2.1. Response rate and sampling

The response rate for paper-based questionnaires was approximately 20% (33 responses from approximately 160 questionnaires). This was relatively low and may not be representative. It is felt that the low response rates may be explained partially by the sensitive nature of the study and partly by the number of gatekeepers who were involved in distributing the questionnaire. Using Local Authority gatekeepers and supervising social workers to help distribute questionnaires led to difficulties with tracking questionnaires. Thus the researcher had no way of knowing how many of the 160 questionnaires actually reached participants, and how many, despite initial enthusiasm from social workers, were forgotten in the stress and demands of day to day social work (Baginsky et al., 2010). However, despite low response rates, questionnaires were collected up to the point necessary for statistical power, so whilst cautious generalisation of results is necessary, it is also important to recognise that statistical power was adequate.

5. Mixed methodology

Researchers have suggested that positivist, quantitative research asks the 'what' questions of human existence, whilst constructionism seeks to understand the 'why' and 'how' questions (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). Whilst it was felt that there was a gap in the research in terms of positivist research, I also

wished to expand on some of the more in-depth, experiential information available through qualitative methodology. To use this analogy, I wanted to ask both *what* impacted enjoyment of fostering as well as *how* and *why* those factors had (or didn't have) an impact. The adoption of a mixed methodology tied in with a critical realist ontology in exploring several mechanisms across different strata of reality (Collier, 2013). This allowed the research to acknowledge the impact of 'real' factors from biological (gender), social (family size) and psychological (coping mechanisms) strata on the empirical domain (enjoyment of fostering). In moving between critical realist 'layers' of reality, it was felt that the research would be more able to create a deeper, more holistic model of fostering enjoyment.

It is felt that the mixed methodology employed in this study has allowed the different aspects of the research to complement each other and inform ways forward. For example, questionnaire data suggested that family size had no impact on enjoyment of fostering, contrary to my hypothesis. However, it was found during the focus group that participants used extended family who lived outside the home as a support network, rather than those in the home. Since the questionnaire asked only about family who lived at home, the qualitative data provided a possible explanation for an apparently surprising result in the quantitative data.

6. KidCope scale and data analysis

As part of the quantitative part of my research, it was decided to use a published, psychologically-based measure of coping, since it was felt that this would complement some of the more qualitative measures and would provide a sound theoretical base for any conclusions drawn. Coping in children may be measured using a variety of different scales and several considerations were taken into account when choosing an appropriate scale. Firstly, the age-appropriateness of the scale was considered. Since the research involved participants aged between 7 and 21, it was necessary to find a scale that was accessible for this age group. This consideration 'ruled out' some of the coping scales which were aimed solely at teenagers (Ebata & Moos, 1991). There are also several scales used which use predetermined stressors or stressors

selected by the researcher. It was however felt to be important that the participants thought of a specific stressor which was relevant to their experiences of fostering, therefore it was necessary to choose a scale which allowed for this, unlike some vignette-based or specific stressor scales available (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987; Quittner, Tolbert & Regoli, 1996). Consideration was also given to brevity and ease of scale completion; it was felt that participants could not reasonably be asked to complete a 68-item scale alongside the other parts of the questionnaire, excluding scales such as the Ways of Coping Scale (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). The Kidcope scale (Spirito, Stark & Williams, 1988) was therefore selected as being accessible and easy to use, having only 15 items and allowing for a self-selected stressor. Widely used in paediatric populations, the Kidcope scale owes both its popularity and some of its weaknesses to its brevity (Blount et al., 2007). It was considered, for this research, that the loss of detail/depth was a necessary compromise in order to use a scale which looked easy and was participant-friendly. The conflation of individual coping strategies into groups of coping styles further simplified the model but was a way of making the research and participant numbers manageable within the timeframe of the research.

During the data collection phase, several items of data were collected which were not used in the final analyses. For example, parents were asked to detail the length of time for which the family had been fostering and to identify the occurrence of other familial stresses which had happened in the previous year. However, these data items were not used in the final analysis, due to the fact that a group of almost 20 parents had completed the consent forms but had only completed partial parental questionnaires. This meant that there were fewer participants with which to run these analyses. It was also felt that, due to the comparatively small number of participants (n=55), it may not be appropriate to run further statistical tests (using the additional demographic data or by splitting the sample by age or gender) due to the increased likelihood of a Type I error. Running multiple statistical tests on the same data set can lead to an increased risk of rejecting a true null hypothesis and 'finding' a relationship in the data where there is none (Gavin, 2008). It may be possible in future research to use some of the unused data from this study and, using a Bonferroni correction for multiple testing, to run further statistical analyses.

However, within the scope of this particular research study, it was felt necessary to focus on the main findings of the data and to explore those in an in-depth manner.

Contribution to Knowledge

7. Rationale for study, gaps in literature review and subsequent study aims

The literature review for this study considered several areas of research which were either directly or indirectly related to the experiences, stress and coping of sons and daughters of foster carers. Due to a lack of published, peer-reviewed research which directly considers the experiences of sons/daughters, I also decided to explore some research areas which could provide a potential theoretical basis for further research about sons/daughters. Therefore research from the following subject areas was considered in the literature review: the experiences of sons and daughters of foster carers, the foster family system and the role of the EP, research related to relationships between siblings (including stepsiblings and siblings with disabilities) and research related to stress and coping in childhood and adolescence. The breadth of this literature review allowed me to draw on multiple theories and ideas from other areas of study and consider how they might help inform the design and development of my research topic. However, it may also be argued that the attempt to include so many different areas of research into one literature review meant that some of the more in-depth exploration of specific areas of research had to be excluded. In trying to manage the balance between breadth and depth of the literature review, it was decided to focus a large section on the specific research about the sons and daughters of carers. This allowed for the exploration of the prevalent research methodologies in the subject area and for the particular gaps in current published knowledge. In order to allow for this, it was necessary to keep other sections of the literature review brief and to omit in-depth exploration of research methodologies or limitations. In particular, it was felt that the research area linked to coping strategies and mechanisms was particularly rich and the researcher had to be very selective in deciding what to include. In retrospect, it may have been useful to include a deeper exploration of the

literature around models of coping, particularly in light of the research findings of the qualitative part of this study which highlighted coping as a significant predictor of fostering enjoyment.

In terms of research with sons and daughters of foster carers, the literature review highlighted a general dearth of published research by psychologists with this participant group. With a few exceptions (Kaplan, 1988; Thompson, McPherson & Marsland, 2016), the research in this area has been written from a social work perspective rather than from a psychological one. Several studies have suggested that the field of social work tends to focus on constructivist (Anderson-Meger, 2013), exploratory and qualitative research (Gringeri, Barusch & Cambron, 2013). It is therefore unsurprising that many of the published findings in this area take the form of explorations of positive and negative aspects of the fostering experience (Spears & Cross, 2003) and of sons' and daughters' experiences of significant fostering events (Denuwelaere & Bracke, 2007). There seems to be very little research which provides suggestions on how the experience of sons and daughters can be improved. There is also a lack of research in this area based on the application of psychological theory to sons and daughters of foster carers.

This study therefore aimed to draw upon concepts from family systems theory, psychological research based on sibling relationships and theories about stress and coping in order to inform hypotheses about factors which affect sons and daughters' enjoyment of fostering and their experiences of fostering stressors and coping mechanisms. To my knowledge, this is the first study to specifically use a quantitative measure of coping with a large sample of sons and daughters of foster carers. It also appears to be the largest study to have directly asked currently fostering sons and daughters about things which would make fostering easier and harder, as well as about stressors and ways of coping.

8. Contribution to knowledge in research area

As mentioned above, this study approaches research with sons and daughters from a slightly different perspective to the majority of the published research available. It considers stress and coping directly and seeks to voice the opinions

of sons and daughters about factors which make fostering easier and more difficult for them. This study also uses a relatively large sample for this research area (in the most recent and thorough scoping review by Serbinski and Shlonsky (2014), the average sample size was 44.3 across the 39⁴ studies considered. Of these 39 studies, only 7 had a sample of more than 50 participants). As such, the sample size, whilst being relatively small in the field of quantitative psychological research, is actually comparatively large within the literature relating to sons/daughters of foster carers.

The results of this study contributed to the literature by showing the importance of coping style as linked to enjoyment of fostering for sons and daughters. Results suggest that sons and daughters who use emotional and/or active regulation to deal with stress are more likely to enjoy fostering. It also suggests that withdrawal coping and small age gaps between sons/daughters and foster children are linked to poorer enjoyment of fostering. This has implications for practice in terms of supporting sons and daughters to develop adaptive coping strategies, as well as providing a contribution to the research literature.

Findings from this study also add to research by Doorbar (1999) which considers ways to improve support for sons and daughters and suggests that training, increased opportunities for participation and sharing their feelings would help improve the experiences of sons and daughters of carers. This study adds to Doorbar's findings, considering not only the things which might improve sons' and daughters' experiences (spending time together as a family, chance to share feelings) but also considering the situations or factors which sometimes diminish enjoyment of fostering. Results suggest that these factors are mainly linked to placement suitability of the foster child; with sons and daughters suggesting that having an older or similarly aged foster child may be problematic and having a sibling group of foster children or a foster child who attends the same school as them may also make fostering harder. These

⁴ Serbinski (2014) considered 46 research papers (both published and unpublished) but duplication in publications from several individual studies meant that the scoping review represented 39 different studies with different samples. Therefore, this percentage is based on the number of separate samples represented, rather than the number of research papers published.

findings contribute to practitioner knowledge and may be useful for social workers considering placement suitability. They also contribute to the literature overall and have implications for further research in this area.

9. Contribution to the researcher's own knowledge and practice as an EP

The process and findings of this research have contributed to my own knowledge and development, both as a practitioner EP and as a researcher. The process of carrying out this study has allowed me to develop a greater understanding of some of the methodological and ethical issues involved in research with children and young people. It has enabled me to reflect particularly on the issue of response rates and participation, and has led me to be more cautious about how I interpret research findings and to think more critically about the extent to which published results are skewed by sampling bias; whether through sampling methodology, geography, researcher access or demographic variables.

The knowledge I have gained as a researcher about participant response rates and engagement has, in turn, influenced how I engage with families as a practising EP. Traditionally, in my placement work, families and parents have been contacted through school staff and asked to attend a meeting with the EP in school. Whilst this empowers the school in facilitating their own consultations, it may also have led to some instances of parental disengagement. It may be argued that, while it is necessary to involve the school in EP meetings in order to facilitate the consultative process, some parents may respond better and may even be more inclined to engage if they are contacted directly by the EP. In this research, some participants expressed mistrust of social workers and thus the use of social workers as a point of contact may have led to lower response rates. Similarly, parents with whom it would be helpful to engage may have a difficult relationship with school staff and thus be unwilling to attend EP consultations if invited by school. Adopting a more reflective attitude towards how meetings are arranged has led to me taking a flexible approach to arranging parent meetings; sometimes asking the school to arrange but, at other times, making initial contact with the parents myself and engaging them in the process.

The results of this research have further influenced my professional development as an EP when thinking about empowering children and young people in processes which directly affect them. The finding that the participants in this research felt that decisions were being made by professionals about their homes and families in which they had no voice or control made me reflect on the role of the EP as an advocate for the child (Boyle, 2007). In my practice as an EP, it is always my intention to have the best interests of the child at the heart of the decisions I make and the guidance I give. However, conducting this research has made me reflect on the value of empowering the child or young person to find and use his or her own voice rather than trying to elicit the views of the child so that I can relay them to others. It may be suggested that it is not only important to elicit and report the views of the child, but to allow that child/young person to feel that he or she has some control in the process. Hillsman and Garber (1995) suggest that perceived competence and control can have a significant effect on children's ability to cope with stress and to overcome adversity. As a practitioner therefore, I am now more reflective about times when I can appropriately empower a child or young person to voice his or her own opinions in a process and therefore allow him or her perceived control and the related benefits to well-being and confidence (McLean, 2009).

9.1. Implications for the work of the EP

In terms of possible implications for EP practice in general, I feel it is important for EPs to be aware of the role of sons and daughters in the foster home and to engage in awareness-raising among school staff so that support may be available from professionals within the school. Focus group participants in this research seemed to generally see school as an additional stressor rather than as a source of support. It may therefore be useful for EPs to consider ways in which schools may be encouraged to be aware of the difficulties which sons and daughters of foster carers may face and to provide support where necessary.

EPs may be involved in the development and delivery of training, for example, which aims to support foster carers to support their own children in dealing with

the stresses associated with fostering. A particularly valuable focus may be on the importance of overt communication between foster parents and their children about fostering and coping mechanisms. EPs are well-placed to be able to assist with family-based training for foster parents and their children in order to facilitate discussion of some of the practical and emotional benefits and stressors associated with fostering. Foster parent training may also cover aspects of coping and the importance of modelling helpful coping strategies for their sons and daughters.

It may also be interesting to consider the finding that parental ratings of enjoyment did not, in this study, correlate with the child or young person's rating of enjoyment. Although the extent to which this finding can be generalised is limited, it does highlight the need for the EP to consider the context of the family in a consultation and to engage, where possible, in family consultations rather than just speaking to one or both parents. For me, this finding emphasised the role of the EP in adopting a systemic and contextual model of situations (Cameron & Monsen, 2005) rather than a single, problem-focused view. EPs are able to apply broad, systemic thinking to individual situations, using tools such as family systems theory in order to identify and describe the complex interactions between individuals within families, schools and communities.

10. Contribution to knowledge for practitioners

10.1 Social Workers

The findings from this research may contribute towards social workers' professional practice in terms of voicing the difficulties experienced by sons and daughters of foster carers and some of the things which they felt made fostering more difficult for them. The majority of participants felt that having older foster children and having foster children who were at the same school as them would make fostering difficult. Whilst this cannot necessarily be generalised to all sons and daughter of carers, it is felt that social workers may wish to consider the situation carefully and consult with both foster carers and their children before placing a foster child alongside a carer's child who is younger or who attends the same school. It may also be useful to consider the idea that placements are easier when there are clear boundaries between children and when

sons/daughters are not 'expected' to form friendships with the foster child. Supervising social workers, particularly those involved in the training and recruitment of new carers and their families may also wish to consider the finding that sons and daughters of foster carers made heavy use of familial support networks outside the home. Further research may be needed to consider how widely used this coping mechanism is for sons and daughters and for foster carers themselves.

It may also be important for social workers to consider the resentment towards social workers voiced by many of the participants. Whilst it may be that social workers are blamed for flaws within the social care system, or that participants have difficulties with particular social workers, it is felt that further exploration and research may be needed to consider the views of sons and daughters and the attitudes held towards social workers by carers and their families which may affect working relationships and, ultimately, placement stability. Again, research or interventions which encourage open discussion between social workers, foster carers and their children may be particularly useful.

10.2 Foster Carers

Some of the results from this research may make a particular contribution to the knowledge of foster carers themselves. In particular, it may be suggested that sons' and daughters' use of withdrawal-type strategies and the mismatch between child and parental ratings of fostering enjoyment may highlight the importance of overt discussions about fostering in foster caring families. It is suggested that regular parent-child time in which fostering enjoyment and stressors and coping can be discussed may help reverse the apparent trend in this study for sons and daughters to withdraw and not share problems with parents for fear of burdening them.

11 Limitations of findings and potential for further research

The following section will discuss some of the limitations to the findings of this research that have not already been mentioned in earlier sections. Limitations to the research which have been mentioned in earlier sections are the use of

Kidcope (Section 5), the relatively small sample and subsequent problems with generalisation of results and potential sampling biases (Section 3.2.).

The questionnaire for this research used self-report measures for data such as enjoyment of fostering and use of coping mechanisms, therefore it may be argued that data from the questionnaires may have been distorted or skewed through social desirability bias. Since some of the questions asked were sensitive and personal, participants may have either not responded because they found the questions intrusive (thus potentially skewing the sample) or may have answered in a way that presented themselves in a more socially acceptable way (i.e. underreporting use of less socially acceptable coping strategies such as "I shout, scream or get angry"). Torangeau and Yann (2007) suggest that asking sensitive questions (or questions which participants view as sensitive) can affect overall response rates, item non-response rates and response accuracy. A discussion of overall response rates for this research study can be found in section 3.2.1. In terms of item non-response rates, once online questionnaires which had been discontinued halfway through were discounted, all returned questionnaires had responses for the questions which were felt to be most sensitive. Therefore, a key consideration for this study is the response *accuracy* for sensitive self-report items. It is suggested that social desirability effects are lessened when the interviewer is not present (as in this research) but that the presence of others (such as parents or peers) can have a significant impact on the use of socially desirable responses (Brener et al., 2006). In this study, it is impossible to tell whether parents were present when participants were completing questionnaires. However, if they were, it would be reasonable to suggest that participants were less likely to report a dislike of fostering when parents were present. The privacy of the questionnaire completion environment may be an important consideration for future research.

A further limitation of this research is that the coping strategies part of the questionnaire asked children to think of times when fostering "annoys or upsets you" and then to rate their own use of particular coping strategies. Since participants completed questionnaires without input from the researcher and were not asked to report the particular stressor they were thinking of, there was

no way of controlling for the type of stressor referred to by participants. Reflection on the research results, particularly the use of withdrawal as a coping strategy, suggests that the particular stressor to which participants were mentally referring may have had a significant impact on their coping style, as well as on the adaptability of that coping style. It would be helpful for further research to consider specific stressors and the extent of control that participants have over them, alongside coping styles and their impact on fostering enjoyment.

Despite the limitations to this study and the broad and varied potential for further research, it is felt that the findings have extended the sons and daughters research literature to show the impact of coping style on enjoyment of fostering. It has also provided an initial exploration of factors which have an impact on participants' enjoyment of fostering alongside their experience of fostering stressors and coping mechanisms.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Questionnaire

Initial Questionnaire for Parents of Children who Foster

Please fill in questions with as much detail as possible. Continue on a separate piece of paper if necessary. If there are questions which you do not wish to answer or which are not relevant, please feel free to leave blank.

Questions about Child identified for project

First Name only:

Age:

Gender:

Birth Order (i.e. eldest, youngest, middle child etc.) _____

Does your son/daughter access a 'kids who foster' group? _____

How much do you think your son/daughter enjoys fostering?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all									Loves it!

How well do you feel your son/daughter copes with the stresses associated with fostering?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Doesn't cope well									Copes very well

Questions about your family

Who else in the family is living at home?

1. First Name: _____

Relationship to Child (i.e. mother, father, sister) _____

Age: _____

2. First Name: _____

Relationship to Child (i.e. mother, father, sister) _____

Age: _____

3. First Name: _____

Relationship to Child (i.e. mother, father, sister) _____

Age : _____

4. First Name: _____

Relationship to Child (i.e. mother, father, sister) _____

Age : _____

Continue overleaf if necessary.

Have you as a family had to deal with any of the following events in the past year? (please tick as many as appropriate)

	Bereavement (family or close friend)
	Change in family structure (new members/people moving out/divorce/adoption etc)
	Breakdown of a foster placement (unplanned)
	Ending of a foster placement (planned)
	House move
	Serious Health Problems/Injury of family member
	Change in work circumstances (retirement/change of job/return to work)
	Move in school for child identified
	Major conflict between birth children/foster children
	Other change/stressful event (please specify)

Questions about fostering

Current placement(s)

Gender:

Age: _____

How long has this child been living with you? _____

Does the foster child attend the same school as your child(ren)? _____

Gender:

Age: _____

How long has this child been living with you? _____

Does the foster child attend the same school as your child(ren)? _____

Past fostering




How long have you been fostering? _____

Roughly, how many foster placements have you had? _____

Initial Questionnaire for Children whose Parents Foster

I'm doing some research about children who have a mum or dad who fosters other children. I want to find out whether there are any ways to make fostering easier and whether there are things which have an effect on how much you enjoy fostering. If you are happy to complete this survey for me, I'd be really grateful but if you don't want to or if you want to miss some questions out, that is fine too.

"I really enjoy fostering"

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
									
NO WAY!									YES, DEFINITELY!

"I think I might do fostering when I am an adult"

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
NO WAY!									YES, DEFINITELY!

3. Here are some sentences about different fostering situations. Look at each sentence and decide whether you think this would make fostering easier or more difficult for you or whether it would make no difference at all.

If it would make fostering easier for you, put a BLUE dot next to the sentence.

If it would make fostering harder for you, put a RED dot next to the sentence.

If it would make no difference to you, put a GREEN dot next to the sentence.

Having a foster child who is lots younger than me	Having a foster child who is the same age as me	Spending time on my own away from everyone	Spending time looking after the foster child and doing things for them	Meeting up with other children whose parents foster
Having a foster child who is lots older than me	Spending time with my family and foster child all together	Going out/ going round to my friends houses	Spending time getting to know and understand the foster child	Having the social worker come round regularly
Having a (diff gender) foster child	If the foster child went to the same school as me	Having my friends round to play	Being more involved in discussions about foster child and meeting with the social worker	Having a brother or sister at home
Having foster children who were a sibling group	Having a (same gender) foster child	Having different friends to the foster child	Having a foster child who I would play with	Being able to talk to my parents or a friend about fostering
			Having a foster child who I could look after	

Can you put a star next to the things that have happened to you? So, if you have had a foster child who has been to the same school as you, you can put a star in that box.

Can you think of any other things which do/would make fostering easier for you?

Can you think of any other things which do/would make fostering more difficult for you?

4. Sometimes having other kids around can be annoying or stressful. What ways do you respond when a foster child annoys or upsets you? Look at the ways of reacting to the problem below and show how much this sounds like something that you do when you are annoyed/upset/worried by fostering.

	I always do this	I do this a lot	I do this sometimes	I do this a little bit	I never do this
I just try to forget it					
Do something like watch T.V. or play a game to forget it					
I stay by myself					
I keep quiet about it					
I try to see the good side of it					
I blame myself for causing the problem					
I blame someone else for causing the problem					
I try to solve the problem by thinking of answers					
I try to solve the problem by doing something or talking to someone					
I shout, scream or get angry					
I try to calm myself down					
I wish the problem had never happened					
I wish I could make things different					
I try to feel better by spending time with others like family, grown-ups or friends					
I don't do anything because nothing could solve the problem					

Thank you for answering these questions - it's going to be really useful for my research. If you have any questions or are worried and want to talk about fostering, please email emma.c.birch@gmail.com, or you could talk to your parents or their supervising social worker.

Appendix B - Parental Consent Form (Questionnaire)

Please read the following statements and circle your answers.

I have read and understood the information sheet.	Yes	No
I understand that my participation in this project will involve myself and my child filling in the attached survey about our fostering experiences or completing the survey online. I understand that my child may then be invited to take part in a further part of the study if he/she is involved in a sons/daughters support group.	Yes	No
I understand that mine and my child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.	Yes	No
I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time (contact details can be found on the information sheet).	Yes	No
I am also free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Dr. Simon Claridge, research supervisor (contact details can be found on the information sheet).	Yes	No
I understand that the information I provide will be held anonymously, such that the researchers cannot trace this information back to me individually.	Yes	No
I understand that, once sent, I will not be able to withdraw my data since it will not be identifiable as mine.	Yes	No
The anonymised information will be retained for up to 4 years when it will be deleted/ destroyed.	Yes	No

I, _____ (NAME) consent to my child participating in this study conducted by Emma Birch School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr. Simon Claridge.

Signed:

Date:

Please return this form with your completed questionnaire to Emma Birch, ADDRESS or by email to: BirchEC@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix B INFORMATION LETTER – PARENTS - Questionnaire

Dear Parent,

I am a postgraduate trainee in Educational Psychology in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my doctorate, I am hoping to carry out a study about factors which affect stress and coping mechanisms for children whose parents foster. I am writing to enquire whether you would be interested in/willing to participate in this research.

I have asked a professional who works with you to ask if you would be interested in the research and to pass the initial survey on to you. This survey is for foster carers who have birth/adopted children (aged 7-19) living at home. The first part of the survey is for you to complete and the second part of the survey is for your child to complete. If you have more than one birth/adopted child aged 7-19, you can ask the professional for additional copies of the survey. The survey can be completed on paper and sent back to me or can be completed online at www.surveymonkey.com/SSC123, using the password: foster5urvey. Information gained will be held anonymously once consent forms have been checked and destroyed.

It is hoped that information gained through the surveys and diary study will help to inform placements in the future and to identify any particular areas where birth children of foster carers may be better supported. However, participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you will not receive any benefits or consequences regardless of the decision you make. This project has been approved by Cardiff University's Ethics Committee.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please feel free to contact me if you require further information.

Regards,

Emma Birch
Trainee Educational Psychologist
PHONE NUMBER
BirchEC@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr. Simon Claridge
Research Director and Supervisor
School of Psychology, Cardiff
ClaridgeS@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix C - Consent Form and Information Letter for Focus Group Participants

Please read the following statements and circle your answers.

I have read and understood the information sheet. I am a son/daughter of a foster carer who is aged 16-21 years old.	Yes	No
I understand that participation in this project will involve discussing my experiences of fostering and ways of coping with the 'sons and daughters' group which I normally attend or, if I would prefer, with a researcher on an individual basis. I understand that this discussion may be recorded but that recording will be held confidentially and deleted by December 2015.	Yes	No
I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.	Yes	No
I understand that my parents or I am free to ask any questions at any time (contact details can be found on the information sheet).	Yes	No
I am also free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Dr. Simon Claridge, research supervisor (contact details can be found on the information sheet).	Yes	No
I understand that the researcher will only share what I discuss anonymously (without linking it to my name). The only exception to this would be if I shared that myself or another young person was being harmed or at risk of being harmed. In this case, the researcher would share my details with an appropriate safeguarding officer in order to keep me or another young person safe from harm.	Yes	No
I understand that the information I provide will be held confidentially, such that only the researcher can trace this information back to me individually.	Yes	No
I understand that any data given will be anonymised (transcribed by the researcher prior to deletion of the original recording) by December 2015 and that after this point, no-one will be able to trace the information back to me.	Yes	No
The anonymised information will be retained for up to 4 years when it will be deleted/destroyed.	Yes	No
I understand that I can ask for the information that I have provided to be deleted/ destroyed or I can request access to the information at any time up until the data has been anonymised (until December 2015).	Yes	No
I understand that my informed consent will also be gained verbally at the beginning of the sons and daughters group on [DATE] or at the start of the interview and that if I chose to withdraw at this point (or at any point during the focus group/interview), there will be an alternative activity available for the remainder of the session.	Yes	No

I, _____ (NAME) consent to participating in this study conducted by Emma Birch School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr. Simon Claridge.

Signed:

Date:

Please return this form to Emma Birch, ADDRESS or by email to: BirchEC@cardiff.ac.uk. Alternatively, you may return it to the facilitator of the sons and daughters group [NAME and CONTACT DETAILS] if you would prefer.

Appendix C - INFORMATION LETTER

Dear 'Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers' and Parents

I am a postgraduate trainee in Educational Psychology in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my doctorate, I am hoping to carry out a study about factors which affect stress and coping mechanisms for young people whose parents foster. I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing to participate in this research.

I have arranged with [NAME] who runs the 'sons and daughters of foster carers' support group, to attend the group meeting due to take place on [DATE] at [TIME], in order to facilitate a focus group in which attendees will discuss positive and negative aspects of fostering and talk about how they cope when fostering feels difficult. The research is for birth or adopted children of foster carers, who are aged 16-21. Please be aware that both parents and young people must be completely happy to take part in the research before participating. There should be no pressure on anyone to complete this research, it is only for those who wish to support the research and are happy to share their experiences. Please feel free to discuss this research together and consider whether you might be happy to contribute. If you decide together that this is something that they would be happy to be involved in, please complete the attached consent form and return it to myself or to [NAME of group facilitator] by [DATE]. Alternatively, you may contact [NAME] by phone to indicate your consent and to inform her that you will be attending, before bringing the completed consent form along to the group.

As well as the focus group, the researcher is also available for individual interviews for those who either cannot attend the focus group or for participants who would be more comfortable discussing their experiences on an individual basis. Once again, feel free to discuss this option together before you decide whether you would like to contribute. If you would like to be involved but would prefer to talk to the researcher in an individual interview, please feel free to contact the researcher on the contact details below to arrange a time that would be convenient for an interview (prior to December 2015). You may then bring the consent form along on the date arranged.

Prior to commencing the focus group or interview, you will be asked for your verbal consent and will be given the opportunity to withdraw from the discussion and take part in an alternative activity. You may withdraw from the discussion prior to the beginning of the focus group/interview or at any point during it. The discussion will also be recorded (with your consent) so that the researcher can later transcribe and analyse what was said. The recording of the discussion will be kept confidentially by the researcher and, after it has been anonymised (any names removed) and fully transcribed, will be deleted. The deleting of the recording will happen in December 2015. If, at any point before this date, you wish to withdraw your data from the study, you may do so by contacting the researcher. After December 2015, your data will be completely anonymous so may not be withdrawn from the research. In the case of a disclosure of a child protection issue (i.e. if a young person shared something that indicated that they or another young person was at risk of harm), the researcher would be obliged to pass this information along with the details of the young person on to an appropriate safeguarding officer. However, apart from in this instance, the researcher would not share any data except in the research itself, in which case, it would be shared anonymously (i.e. "Participant 5 said...")

It is hoped that information gained through the focus group and interviews will help researchers to better understand issues about placement and relationships between children and developing positive support mechanisms for birth children of foster carers. However, participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you will not receive any benefits or consequences regardless of the decision you make. This project has been approved by Cardiff University's Ethics Committee.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please feel free to contact me if you require further information.

Regards,
Emma Birch
Trainee Educational Psychologist
PHONE NUMBER
BirchEC@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr. Simon Claridge
Research Director and Supervisor
School of Psychology, Cardiff
ClaridgeS@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix D¹ – GATEKEEPER LETTER (QUESTIONNAIRE)



Dear

I am a postgraduate educational psychology trainee in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my doctorate, I am hoping to carry out a study about Factors which affect Stressors and Coping Mechanisms for Children whose Parents Foster. I am writing to enquire whether you would be interested in/willing to participate in this research.

I am contacting several local authorities to ask if professionals who work with foster carers would be willing to give out surveys for foster carers who have birth/adopted children (aged 7-19) living at home. The first part of the survey is for parents to complete and the second part of the survey is for the children of foster carers to complete. The survey can be completed on paper and sent back to me or can be completed online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7NCRCKP>, using the password: foster5urvey. Information gained will be held anonymously once consent forms have been checked and destroyed.

It is hoped that information gained through the surveys will help to identify any particular areas where birth/adopted children of foster carers may be better supported.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please let me know if you require further information.

Regards,

Emma Birch

Trainee Educational Psychologist

School of Psychology, Cardiff University

PHONE NUMBER

BirchEC@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr. Simon Claridge

Research Director and Supervisor

School of Psychology, Cardiff

PHONE NUMBER

ClaridgeS@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix D² - GATEKEEPER LETTER (FOCUS GROUP)



Dear

I am a postgraduate educational psychology trainee in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my doctorate, I am hoping to carry out a study about Factors which affect Stressors and Coping Mechanisms for Children whose Parents Foster. I am writing to enquire whether your group, [GROUP NAME], which supports sons and daughters of foster carers would be interested in/willing to participate in this research.

I am contacting several 'sons and daughters' support and social groups to ask if I could attend a meeting and facilitate a focus group and/or some individual interviews which focus on positive and negative aspects of fostering and ways of coping with stressors. Please be aware that both the parent(s) and the young person must be completely happy to take part in the research before participating. There should be no pressure on carers or their children to complete this research, it is only for those who wish to support the research and are happy to share their experiences. Please find attached an information letter and consent form for parents and their sons and daughters(aged 16-21) who would normally attend your group. It is hoped that the focus group/interview may be recorded, so that the researcher may transcribe all the data prior to deleting the original recording. This means that final data in the research will be an anonymised transcription of the discussion. The recordings will be held confidentially (so that only the researcher can access them) and then deleted after they have been transcribed and analysed (this will happen in December 2015). Participants may withdraw their data from the research at any point up until December 2015 at which point it will be held anonymously and the researcher will not be able to distinguish one participant's data from another.

It is hoped that information gained through this focus group will help to inform placements in the future and to identify any particular areas where birth children of foster carers may be supported.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please let me know if you require further information.

Regards,

Emma Birch

Trainee Educational Psychologist

School of Psychology, Cardiff University

[CONTACT NUMBER]

BirchEC@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr. Simon Claridge

Research Director and Supervisor

School of Psychology, Cardiff

CONTACT NUMBER

ClaridgeS@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix E – Focus Group/ Interview Questions

- If you think back over the past month, can you think of any things that have happened that have made you think “I really enjoy fostering”?
 - (extra prompt questions) What are some good experiences about fostering? In what ways do you find fostering rewarding?

- If you think back over the past month again, can you think of any incidents or things that have happened that have made you really annoyed or stressed or upset about fostering?
 - (extra prompt questions) Do you think that it's the day to day little things which are most stressful or the big events like a placement ending which make fostering hard? What are the things that make fostering difficult?

- When it does get tough, what are some things that you've found are helpful or useful ways of dealing with the stress?
 - Can you think of things you've done, either to deal with the problem or deal with how it makes you feel that have helped? What did you do when (example from answer to previous question)? Did it help?

- Has anyone had an experience where you've got foster children at home and you think of them more like a brother or sister? How is the relationship different?
 - (extra prompt questions) What are the main differences between having a foster child around and having a brother or sister around?

 - Was fostering as you expected it would be? Is it easier or worse than you thought it would be? In what ways?

Appendix F - Verbal Consent and debrief for Focus Group Participants

Verbal Consent Checking

Thank you for coming here today. My name is Emma and I'm doing some research about how sons and daughters of foster carers feel about fostering. I'm interested in the good parts about fostering but also in the times when fostering gets tough. I also want to know about what you do to cope when fostering gets tough.

So today, I'm hoping to have a chat with you [all] about those things. You've already all given me completed consent forms but I just want to run through it again quickly before we start. If you change your mind at all, now or during the discussion, that's fine, just let me know. I'm hoping to record the chat if that's ok, to help me remember what you said but also so I can write it all down afterwards and take all the names out so that when I use it in my research, no one will know who said what. I won't tell anyone what you said in the discussion [and we'll make an agreement beforehand that no one should share what anyone else says either.] The only time I would share what you say and let someone know about it, would be if you told me something that made me think that you or another child or young person was at risk or in danger. Then I would have to tell someone so we could try and sort the problem out and keep you safe. But otherwise, when I write about what you've said, no one will know that it was you that said it.

If you're happy to go ahead with this, that's great. If I ask any questions you don't want to answer, you can just keep quiet and shake your head if that's easier. If you're thinking "I'm not actually too sure about this, I'd rather not do it", that's fine too. [We have [ACTIVITY] going on next door if you'd like to go and join in with that instead.] If you want to ask me any questions now or during the discussion, that's fine too, just let me know. And if you are part way through the discussion and decide you don't want to be involved anymore, you can just let me know and then (we'll stop recording)[go and join in with [ACTIVITY] next door.] Is that ok [with everyone]? [Does anyone want to go and do [ACTIVITY] instead?][Does anyone] (Do you) have any questions before we start? OK, I'll just put the recorder in the middle and we can pretend it's not there and start the questions...

NB. Script in [square brackets] indicates script for focus group only. Script in (round brackets) indicates script for individual interviews only.

Debrief

Thank you so much for that discussion, it was really interesting. I think it's really going to help with my research. Remember, if you want me to delete what you've said, that's fine but you need to let me know before Christmas because that's when I'm going to delete the whole recording and I won't know who said what after that. I think that we spoke about some quite difficult feelings today. If you're still feeling a bit bothered or upset by them, this is a list of support groups and people you could talk to about it. Sometimes just chatting to another person about how you feel can make you feel loads better. So thanks again for helping me with my research about what makes fostering good and bad for you and how you cope when it gets tough.

Appendix G – Support Resources for Participants

If you're feeling fed up or upset by what we've discussed today, you could contact one of the following people to talk about it, or even have a chat to your parents!

Have a chat in person....

- GROUP FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS
- Any Local Authority-specific support mechanisms will be detailed here

Or online....

- There is a forum for sons and daughters as well as lots of information on: <https://www.fostering.net/all-about-fostering/foster-carers/sons-and-daughters>
- If you're feeling a bit stressed and anxious, there's loads of top tips for coping with stress on: www.anxietybc.com
- Childline has a great website where you can get information and chat to a counsellor online about anything that's bothering you...
<https://www.childline.org.uk>

Or on the phone...

- CHILDLINE is a service for when you're down, upset or stressed and want to talk to someone. It's private and confidential – 0800 1111
- Get Connected is a free confidential helpline for young people under 25 who need to chat and maybe get some advice. They are open from 1pm-11pm everyday – 0808 8084994

Or by text...

- Get Connected have a free text service, they'll text you back within 24 hours if you need advice or support. You can text them on: 80849.

Appendix H – Thematic Analysis – Sample of coding and table of themes

Sample of coded transcript (lines 184-209)
Enjoyment Stressors Coping

Coder 1
comments

Coder 2
comments

Rewarding,
good outcomes

Moving on,
getting
perspective in
hindsight

Keeping in touch

Daily stressors
and irritations

Behaviour and
expectations

Stressor:
problematic
behaviour and
impact on
parents

PPT5: I dunno. It's kind of afterwards, they kind of kept in contact with us and to see how happy they are now, it's kind of the best thing for them so yeah, that's what's really rewarding.

SW2: Sometimes it's difficult isn't it, having a foster child living with you in the house, you can't see that and when they've left, you sort of become good friends and you continue keep in touch and you can see all the good things then, isn't it?

EB: I thought it was really interesting what you were saying about the lad and how he was actually really irritating to begin with and he just wouldn't shut up

PPT7: Sometimes like it's not the big things about 'oh gosh this child might leave,' sometimes it's the day to day little things that can really...

PPT6: When he first come to live with us, we would like take the mick out of him for...he come to us and he was trying to act all thing and he settled in and become the annoying self he is now! It's mad how some of the little things drive you [unclear]...

EB: Can anyone think of any incidents or things that have happened that have made you really annoyed or stressed or upset about fostering? [PPT1], you look like "well... where do I start?"

PPT1: It's just behaviour, it is, more than anything. You can see the impact on your parents. I think all the teenagers we've had have had their own problems....

Rewards
afterwards,
keeping in
touch

Close
relationships
after placement

Small things on
a day to day
basis that can
irritate

At the time, it's
the small things
that are most
irritating, rather
than worry of
them leaving

Negative
impact of
child's
behaviour on
parents/family

Enjoyment/ What makes fostering easier?

Coder 1 subthemes identified	Coder 2 subthemes identified	Overarching Theme
<p><i>Impact on role and family systems</i></p> <p><i>Information shared about whereabouts and wellbeing of ex-foster children</i></p>	<p><i>Adding to the family</i></p> <p><i>Being allowed to keep in contact/ knowing what has happened to foster child</i></p>	Systemic Factors
<p><i>Being able to spend time with foster child and finding a shared activity</i></p> <p><i>Feeling you've made a difference</i></p> <p><i>Age – younger foster children easier</i></p>	<p><i>Having a close relationship with the foster child</i></p> <p><i>Seeing positive impact you've had on foster child</i></p> <p><i>Younger foster children</i></p>	Within-child factors
<p><i>Feeling you've made a difference</i></p> <p><i>Bonding with foster child</i></p> <p><i>Being about to go out to gym</i></p> <p><i>Longer term placements (when ending is planned and positive)</i></p>	<p><i>Rewarding for self</i></p> <p><i>Having time to spend with foster child</i></p> <p><i>Being able to take a break (go to gym)</i></p> <p><i>Longer term placements</i></p>	Personal and situational factors
<p><i>Effect of fostering on participants relationships with others</i></p> <p><i>Less ambiguous relationship with foster child</i></p>	<p><i>Rewarding for parents</i></p> <p><i>Means parents have someone else to look after</i></p> <p><i>Having foster children who you can look after, rather than be like siblings</i></p>	Relational factors

Stressors

Coder 1 subthemes Identified	Coder 2 subthemes identified	Overarching Theme
<p><i>Planned placement endings in which participants were disappointed in outcome</i></p> <p><i>Post-placement adoption broke-down</i></p> <p><i>Placement breakdowns leading to feelings of failure/helplessness</i></p> <p><i>Witnessing violence and bad behaviour directed at parents</i></p> <p><i>Allegations of abuse made about parents</i></p>	<p><i>Not agreeing with potential adopters</i></p> <p><i>Placement ending on negative note</i></p> <p><i>If you send foster child back (coz of behaviour), you feel that you've failed</i></p> <p><i>Placement ending – 28 days notice can make behaviour worse</i></p>	Event-based

<p><i>Daily uncertainty about permanency of placement and length of relationship with foster child</i></p> <p><i>Daily irritants around behaviour, expectations and having others in your living space.</i></p> <p><i>Feeling that your opinions aren't listened to</i></p> <p><i>Seeing impact of daily caring on parents, feeling that ageing parents are 'worn down' by fostering and foster child's behaviour.</i></p>	<p><i>Not knowing when child will leave – unknown timescale</i></p> <p><i>Not wanting to get too close to child in case they leave</i></p> <p><i>Irritating, daily things</i></p> <p><i>Alterations to everyday life</i></p> <p><i>No one really listens to sons/daughters views on fostering</i></p> <p><i>Seeing impact of foster child's behaviour on parents</i></p>	<p>Daily stressors</p>
<p><i>Foster child's behaviour having a negative impact on others' perceptions of family</i></p> <p><i>Changes in relationships with parents and role in the family</i></p> <p><i>Difficulties with sharing parental time and attention.</i></p>	<p><i>Vulnerable to teasing by peers</i></p> <p><i>Bad behaviour can be embarrassing in front of others</i></p> <p><i>Pressure on existing relationships in family e.g. mother and daughter</i></p>	<p>Relational Stressors</p>

Coping

Coder 1 subthemes Identified	Coder 2 subthemes identified	Overarching Theme
<p><i>Going to stay with friends or family members if fostering situation is too difficult</i></p> <p><i>Distraction/escape-based activities such as going to the gym</i></p> <p><i>Complete withdrawal</i></p>	<p><i>Leaving the house</i></p> <p><i>Going out and distracting yourself at the gym</i></p> <p><i>Locking yourself in room</i></p>	<p>Escape, Withdrawal and Distraction</p>
<p><i>Seeking support from family members who live outside the home (i.e. grandparents, grown-up siblings)</i></p> <p><i>Talking to someone who isn't directly involved in the situation</i></p>	<p><i>Talking to brother</i></p> <p><i>Going to see Nan</i></p> <p><i>Easier to talk to someone who isn't there all the time</i></p> <p><i>Venting at someone close</i></p>	<p>Support from extended family</p>
<p><i>Using regular changes as a coping mechanism – new placements make it imperative to 'move on' emotionally so they act as a distraction-based coping strategy</i></p>	<p><i>Can be an upsetting process but you need to focus on new foster child, not previous one</i></p>	<p>Needing to move on emotionally</p>

Appendix I – Numerical data relating to RQ3

Percentages of participants responding to factors as making fostering easier or harder

Table 1

	Easier	No Diff	Harder
Family and foster child all spending time together	62%	36%	0%
Spending time alone	45%	39%	15%
Having regular visits from social worker	26%	54%	16%
Having my friends over	30%	49%	17%
Going to the same school at the foster child	13%	43%	39%
Having a foster child who is the same age	22%	32%	41%
Spending time looking after the foster child	37%	34%	26%
Having a sibling group of foster children	16%	39%	37%
Going to a sons and daughters support group	47%	47%	4%
Playing together with the foster child	62%	36%	0%
Going out/round to friends houses	56%	36%	6%
Having a brother or sister around at home	56%	38%	0%
Being more involved in discussions about the foster child	55%	36%	7%
Having a foster child who is older	4%	28%	62%
Having a foster child who is younger	56%	24%	16%
Spending time getting to know the foster child	77%	18%	2%
Having different friends to the foster child	45%	49%	4%
Talking to my parents and friends about fostering	81%	17%	0%
Male participants: Having a male FC	24%	76%	0%
Male participants: Having a female FC	0%	82%	18%
Female Participants: Having a female FC	22%	63%	14%
Female PPTs: Having a male FC	11%	80%	8%

Appendix J – Additional Comments written on questionnaires

Easier	Harder
<p>1. To know what problems the children have before they arrive</p> <p>2. Social worker being helpful and seeing me more often</p>	<p>29. Stealing my stuff or breaking it</p> <p>30. Children swearing or hitting me or my parents</p> <p>31. Having children with behavioural problems i.e. ADHD, temper tantrums</p> <p>32. Being cruel to my pet dog</p> <p>33. Smashing up our house</p>
<p>3. Be spoken to regularly by my parent's support workers, it helps me to vent and talk about things</p>	<p>34. When foster children misbehave or disrespect my parents it can be very stressful</p>
<p>4. Fostering isn't an easy thing to do but after a while it becomes natural and things become much easier. I wouldn't say that there's anything that could make it easier or harder, it just takes times to get used to it.</p>	<p>35. I think having older children in the house could make things more difficult for me</p>
<p>5. Having a bigger house</p>	<p>36. If a child had a severe learning disorder, it is harder to help them make progress in school. However, it's a great thing to be able to do and even if it would be difficult, I would like to help the best I can.</p>
<p>6. If someone could come round and help when a foster child says and does nasty things to me</p>	<p>37. Always having other people around</p> <p>38. Rubbish social workers</p> <p>39. Really annoying children</p> <p>40. Too many girls</p>
<p>7. Doing things together</p>	<p>41. If a foster child gets really mean and starts hitting or kicking me</p>
<p>8. Trips together</p>	
<p>9. Similar interests</p> <p>10. Sense of humour</p>	<p>42. Not getting on with the foster child</p>
<p>11. That the social worker would listen when we say short terms, we don't do long term</p>	<p>43. Disabilities</p>
<p>12. Being able to have conversations with just the social worker</p>	<p>44. When they insist on giving us older girls, it never works</p>
<p>13. They already have 'support' groups set up for children of foster carers but I do not attend as I believe it is not suitable for my age – always organised for younger children in play centres. Would help if it was organised better for teenagers.</p>	<p>45. Having a foster child who is severely special needs</p>
<p>14. Good relationship with foster child</p>	<p>46. Some children's behaviour can be disruptive in making it difficult to complete any coursework at home. This can put vast amounts of pressure on the family as a whole.</p>

FOSTER CARERS' CHILDREN: STRESS, COPING, ENJOYMENT

15. Speaking to parents	47. Having children around exam times 48. Having children the same age as my siblings
16. Going to the gym to relieve stress	49. I'm away with work a lot and by the time I get home the child we have is in bed so I don't get to bond with the child
17. To have some one the same age so I can play with them. Hope it's not other boy as I am the only girl.	50. Exams
18. Social worker talking to me and not just the boys	51. Same age – clash
19. Not really.	52. Having foster children around exam times
20. Get to know them before they come. Hard when child comes and idont know they are coming	53. Makes it difficult to carry on with my normal social life (especially with teenagers)
21. Maybe if they went to the same school. Want to meet their siblings that lived with different foster carers.	
22. Easier - Details of foster childs previous home/foster placement - More proactive social workers, fewer long meetings, more putting things into action	54. The main thing that I think makes fostering a lot more difficult is the constant visits from social workers. Meaning that often plans have to be cancelled and children disturbed from the day to day routine
23. If we could get to know the child before they came to live with us, it would be easier.	
24. it would be better if the social worker got of my mothers and fathers back and butted out. They do a good job on their own.	
25. a children's social worker to tell me how they are getting on would make it easier	
26. Talking about things we have in common if we were the same age then maybe do something we both like.	55. More difficult if I couldn't have my friends round or if I don't know why they are sad so I can help.
27. I like fostering	56. not knowing what has happened to the children and not seeing them ever again makes it harder
	57. Social workers listening to my opinion rather than assuming how I feel. 58. Social workers thinking I need a friend and that is what a foster child can be. It doesn't always work.

Appendix K – Focus Group Transcript

1 **EB: My first question is, if you think back over the past like month(ish),**
2 **can you think of anything that has made you think, “ah I really enjoy**
3 **fostering”, have there been any incidents or things that have happened.**
4 **Or even, you know, further back in the past where you’ve thought “yeah,**
5 **this is really good, this is... why we do it”.... Don’t all rush at once!**

6 SW1: Go on [NAME], you say.

7 PPT 3: Um well, I’ve got a son whose 14 months and my mothers got a 14
8 month old in placement and they’re like twins, they do everything together so I
9 love that fact of it. He enjoys it and I can see he enjoys it coz he’s got a friend
10 with him so I love that aspect of it.

11 EB: So in that kind of sense, that’s a really good kind of match. Anyone else
12 got any particularly good experiences of fostering?

13 SW2: [PPT5] You had, you know the girl before this one...

14 PPT5: We had a girl not so long ago who when she came to us she was not in
15 the best state, she wouldn’t talk to anyone, she’d ... she was just really
16 reserved...she didn’t do anything. But then by the time she had gone back.
17 She eventually went back to live with her mother which was great but then by
18 the time she had gone back she was outgoing, she enjoyed taking part, she
19 was a lot more lively. She’d go and speak to anyone. If you put her in a room
20 with children at the beginning she wouldn’t interact with anyone, she’d sit
21 there, she wouldn’t say anything towards the end, she’d come out of her shell
22 a bit, she’d talk to everyone, she’d interact, she’d go play with them. So that
23 was great to see the transition between that.

24 SW1: And did you see the part you played in that as well? Did you feel hands
25 on with that girl...

26 PPT 5: I babysat for her quite a bit. I sort of...like... In the house I’d play with
27 her, if I had free time and she waslike my mam was busy or my dad was
28 busy I’d occupy her for a bit so ... yeah... I suppose so.

29 SW2: you used to do her hair and all these things...

30 PPT 5: Yeah coz when we had her, I was in school so I had time in the
31 mornings so I'd be up earlier and so by the time she was going to school, I'd
32 do her hair... and help her get ready. So I sort of bonded with her quite a bit
33 so yeah to see her eventually go back to her mother was great.

34 SW1: Sounds like a job well done and you could all feel proud of yourselves
35 for making that change for her, isn't it.

36 EB: Yeah, a really good outcome seeing the progress thereI guess is quite
37 rewarding.

38 PPT 6: We had a boy in the first few years we started fostering, a long
39 time..quite a bit ago but like he still comes up the house to see us every
40 week... it's mad how to see like he's got his own family now and all that...
41 he'll always say "Ah, if it weren't for Mam and Dad..." uh He calls 'em Mam
42 and Da, "if it weren't for Mam and Da, I wouldn't be where I am now" it's just
43 nice to see how much of an impact us as a family had on his life and how
44 much [unclear] we changed his life. So it's nice to see how he is now and he's
45 got a good job and his own kids like, it's lovely to see. And especially to see
46 how he is with his little 'un coz when he first lived with us, my sister's littl'un
47 He wouldn't ...he was a bit like "oh no I'm scared to go near the... kid" like.
48 And now this ...you see how he is with his own sons and he's uh...

49 SW1: How old is he now [PPT6]?

50 PPT 6: He's twenty-three now...

51 SW1: So he's obviously older than you then... in different

52 PPT6: Yeah. He always comes back 'oh [name]' [unclear] ..., he drives me
53 mad...he's like my brother now, I just put up with him now coz he's my brother
54 an' all. I... I remember when he first come to live with us, me and my brothers
55 used to argue...all the time, if we had to go on a car trip or we had to go for a
56 meal.... Who would sit by [NAME] in the car coz he just wouldn't shut up!

57 SW1: So it's really gone full circle then...?

58 PPT6: Yeah, when he first came to live with us, he used to drive me and my
59 brothers up the wall. It's not so much that he was nasty or anything, he was
60 just like wouldn't shut up (laughs). ...

61 SW1: He went from being irritating to being ..

62 PPT6: -proper family then. He's probably one of the ones I thought would just
63 go and I never really thought like much would come from it

64 EB: Right

65 PPT6: It's strange...

66 SW1: It's funny how people's lives do change with fostering though...(yeah) I
67 don't foster but you know from doing this role for like 10 years I been doing this
68 now, people come into it thinking they're gonna do this and then their lives
69 change so much from what they set out to be doing. Your family's probably
70 like that as well, isn't it? But it grows for some families... your family or your
71 extended family grows or can grow, isn't it? I don't think people really expect
72 that to happen. You know, they help children and they move on... but it
73 changes everything, yeah....That's a good outcome though, isn't it?

74 PPT6: It's like his littl'un now is coming up 2 and to his little 'un now, I'm like
75 the little 'uns aunty. And you know, he'll still speak to his sisters and I speak to
76 his real sisters a lot and everytime I see them... I go out for food with them a
77 lot, you know. But he's still got his biological family but I was speaking to his
78 sisters and she messaged me and she was saying how umm...like something
79 like... she was saying I'm his biological sister but you're his sister ... for her to
80 say that... you're his sister, not me like"No, *you're* his sister" (laughs)...

81 SW1: (joking) Was he after something?

82 PPT6: With the baby and that, with his biological sisters-we're all friends.

83 SW1: That's quite unusual, that, to be so accepting of one another, that's
84 unique.

85 **EB: I guess that's one of those things... because he was with you**
86 **presumably quite a while he became more like a brother than like 'this**
87 **foster child that's kind of here' What are people's ...?Has anyone else**
88 **had that experience where you've got foster children at home and you**
89 **think of them more like a brother or sister?**

90 PPT4: We got to now. Our Mam adopted one, so we gotta call him our brother
91 now. (Laughs)

92 EB: Did you find that transition a bit weird from like 'this is my mum's foster
93 child to 'this is my brother'?

94 PPT4: We grew up with him, didn't we so...

95 PPT3: Yeah, he was our first baby placement but then he got adopted and
96 that adoption broke down near enough a year after. So he come back to us
97 and...ummm... he was like a feral child basically. He was off the wall but he
98 eventually settled in and, you know, was normal again and we saw the trauma
99 that happened from that year... and my mother... well, we all decided we
100 couldn't let him go again so we adopted him. He's 10 now and we had him
101 when he was 3 so ... (laughs) a few years (laughs).

102 SW1: That's how I ...sort of... you know I remember your mother and my
103 memory is that she was like "he's been messed around enough, he's staying
104 with us now". You know, "that's it." He came back to us and I'll be responsible
105 for him now type thing.

106 PPT4: We couldn't really let him go again. If like another adoption could fail
107 like his last one...so...

108 SW1: And those are the things that people don't plan to do but then...

109 PPT4: It changes

110 PPT 3: No that was never the plan ...to come into this... to be an adoptive
111 ..yeah. But we got a brother now so... (laughs)

112 SW1: But I mean obviously, he's so much part of your family now and that's
113 great he's come on so much and that's brilliant. But ...I think... tell me if I'm
114 wrong but I think your mother's got quite a lot from that aswell coz of the links
115 she's made and she's ...you know... she's almost part of another gang. And
116 as well as being a foster carer she's part of the adopting gang aswell.

117 PPT3: Yeah. Yeah. Because she's a foster carer and adopter, she can see
118 both sides. You know, she can relate to the adopters and stuff. But she's
119 still...a carer.

120 SW1: I don't think she went into it for herself, I know she didn't, she did it for
121 your brother but... yeah...but I think it's been rewarding for her, I don't think
122 it's something she regrets in any way but I think it's given her something as
123 well. And hopefully it has for you too as well you know... I... it makes your
124 family a little bit different as well like with an adoptive brother... similar to
125 [NAME]'s mind (laugh)

126 PPT8: Better watch out, once they start they don't stop! (laugh)

127 SW1: It led neatly into that then.... I could see the question was going that
128 way.

129 EB: [PPT1] you were nodding as well when I was saying about foster children
130 moving from being foster children to like 'this is more' like...a kind of brother
131 sister relationship.

132 PPT1: Yeah, there was a boy that stayed with us and I was quite young when
133 he came so I always grew up with him like It's always been the same. And
134 I remember being in the same high school with each other and no one knew
135 that we weren't brother and sister and um someone who was in primary
136 school with me obviously knew the situation and told someone who was in his
137 year in school and he was devastated that everyone found out. But we've
138 always been like brother and sister... he's the only one I think though really
139 (laughs).

140

141 **EB: For the rest of you, or for the other foster children that haven't felt**
142 **like brothers and sisters, what would you say is different. What are the**
143 **main differences between having a brother or sister around and having a**
144 **foster child around? What are the main differences in how that feels?**
145 **[PPT2]'s going "Dunno!"**

146 PPT2: I'm an only child.

147 PPT8: For me it's like the temporary thing and my mum did a lot of short-term
148 stuff which, as some of you know, can be short-term like 2 weeks or can be
149 short term like 2 years which is quite a big difference in that. I guess there's
150 always that...I found there was always an element of uncertainty about how
151 long this child was gonna stay and so...for me... it was like how close do I get
152 to this child coz the closer you get to them, the more it's gonna be like "ooh
153 and now they're going" and you're really happy that like they're going back to
154 their mum or their getting adopted or they're going into a long-term placement
155 or whatever but equally there's that... you kind of want them to stay if you get
156 too close to them. I don't know if anyone else has found that particularly or
157 whether it's just me...?

158 PPT1: When I was younger I obviously didn't know any different but with the
159 boy that stayed with us I grew up with him so that was like a brother but he

160 didn't see anyone in his family. Whereas the girls that are with us now, they
161 see their parents so I was like that's the difference for me. He didn't see any in
162 his family so we were all he had whereas like with the girls now it's kind of like
163 they're old enough to know their family and they know the difference so I know
164 the difference type of thing and I'm older so it's kind of like I see the difference
165 in that way.

166 SW1: [PPT5] you know with you now, coz you're a little bit newer to fostering,
167 , you've got some experience now but coz you've only done short term, that
168 lasted...how long was it? Like a year?

169 PPT5: 15 months,yeah.

170 SW1: So did you ever feel like you know ... and I'm not thinking you *should*
171 feel like they were your brother and sister coz they weren't so I'm not looking
172 for that answer but was there any point when it felt like that or did it always
173 feel different...?

174 PPT5: Yeah well, I think at the beginning coz there was such a different age
175 gap because obviously my younger sister's 11 and they were only 3 and 4 so
176 it was just completely different and it was like they were the foster children
177 and we were like... the older ones looking after them. But then towards the
178 end they did become part of our family and then coz they were our first
179 placement we did become really attached to them so it was really hard to see
180 them go but... yeah.

181 SW1: Did you have something rewarding about that 1st placement?
182 Something that you would pick out as you enjoyed that moment?

183 PPT5: I dunno. It's kind of afterwards, they kind of kept in contact with us and
184 to see how happy they are now, it's kind of the best thing for them so yeah,
185 that's what's really rewarding.

186 SW2: Sometimes it's difficult isn't it, having a foster child living with you in the
187 house, you can't see that and when they've left, you sort of become good
188 friends and you continue keep in touch and you can see all the good things
189 then, isn't it?

190 EB: I thought it was really interesting what you were saying about the lad and
191 how he was actually really irritating to begin with and he just wouldn't shut up

192 PPT7: Sometimes like it's not the big things about 'oh gosh this child might
193 leave, sometimes it's the day to day little things that can really...

194 PPT6: When he first come to live with us, we would like take the mick out of
195 him for... I remember the first week he lived with us, we would go for a meal
196 and we went to Frankie and Benny's and we all had ribs and he was eating
197 them with a knife and fork and how trivial it is but still to this day we take the
198 mick out of him for that and I don't know why but it was just the fact that he
199 was trying to be all this posh and all that and he just weren't (laughs)... he
200 come to us and he was trying to act all thing and he settled in and become the
201 annoying self he is now! It's mad how some of the little things drive you
202 [unclear]...

203

204 **EB: Can anyone think of any incidents or things that have happened that**
205 **have made you really annoyed or stressed or upset about fostering?**

206 **[PPT1], you look like "well... where do I start?"**

207 PPT1: It's just behaviour It is, more than anything, You can see the impact on
208 your parents. I think all the teenagers we've had have had their own problems
209 in some sort of way and like especially at the moment there's a lot of problems
210 in there and like as my parents are getting older it's harder to see like more
211 than anything. It's just the behaviour that's put onto your parents as well. It's
212 not nice to see.

213 EB: Yeah and I guess if it's upsetting your parents and you see your parents
214 upset then it's upsetting for you. Like is there something that you feel is helpful
215 to do when that happens or not particularly... (PPT1 shakes head) no.

216 PPT7: Sometimes you just don't know what to do.

217 SW1: Your basic instinct is probably gonna be to all want to protect one
218 another isn't it. You don't wanna see anyone hurt in any shape or form um...
219 it's hard.

220 PPT6: Your natural instinct is always to protect... You're like "That's my
221 mother.

222 Back off."

223 SW2: I think [PPT8] had a similar sort of thing, didn't you?

224 PPT7: Yeah, we had a teenager not so long ago ... I say not so long ago...it
225 was like 2 or 3 years ago and she was 2 or 3 years younger than I was so she
226 had...

227 (PPT1 leaves in tears, SW2 goes with her)

228 PPT7: ... we had a girl about 2 years younger than I was and with everything
229 she'd been through you could understand why her behaviour was the way it
230 was but it wasn't til the end when we found what had happened to her coz she
231 was abusive towards my parents. I mean she would physically beat my
232 mother she would scream all hell at my parents. I didn't know what to do so I
233 would lock myself in my room and kind of stay out of it. She'd phone the police
234 and at one point I had the police at my door coz she'd phoned the police 5
235 times within 3 minute claiming that my mother had beaten her and that my
236 mother had abused her in different ways and whatever. But we found out later
237 it was coz of what she'd been through, she'd been told "if anything is wrong if
238 you're upset in any way, phone the police". So you can understand why she'd
239 phone the police so many times. But it was all over little things. Anything
240 would set her off. Like it could've been saying how she couldn't watch
241 something on TV. She'd completely like scream the house down. We couldn't
242 take her away. We took her to the caravan in Tenby and next to us there's like
243 2 families who are both related so we're in the middle of 2 families and I
244 remember one night she was kicking off so much, it was about 11/12-ish at
245 night, we could hear them complaining about us the next morning coz that's
246 all they could hear. So, hearing about that, coz we'd been down there for so
247 long, hearing everyone complaining about the child we had with us was pretty
248 upsetting. But like you said, your first instinct is your mother..."It's my mother,
249 don't do that". To see her... she physically kicked my mother in the stomach
250 at one point, she was sat on the stairs 3 steps up, my mother was at the
251 bottom trying to calm her down. She kicked my mother full force in the
252 stomach. My mother went flying.... My mother ...if she was pregnant, she
253 would have lost the child like that, that's how bad she was. And I've never
254 seen my mum cry and I walked in on her the one day after she'd been playing
255 up and my mum was bawling. So that made me pretty upset, it made my dad
256 pretty upset. So we couldn't cope and so we had to give notice on her

257 eventually but when she had left we sort of did miss her coz it was quiet and
258 that sounds horrible I know but it...coz it was so quiet, we did miss having
259 someone there.

260 PPT6: When you put notice in for someone you feel like you've failed.

261 PPT8: Yes, definitely.

262 PPT6: That's what I always feel like.... you've failed that child and some kids
263 ... you feel like... they... is nothing you can do they're been through too much
264 but you just always have that thing in the back of your head like 'oh we've
265 failed then' like. And I think there are some situations where the notice thing is
266 stupid like some situations where I don't think...Is it 20 days?

267 SW1: 28 days yeah.

268 PPT6: It drives me mad... especially when you have like teenagers and they
269 know they're going so they play up more in that 28 days and there's been
270 situations where I've gone up my nan's for like those 28 days coz I just don't
271 wanna be near that was with a child who went to my school again, another
272 one who moved to my school... and that was like he knew he was going, so
273 he was being worse and I couldn't, just couldn't get away from it at all.

274 SW1: If you... I'm not pretending we can do anything about that right,
275 particularly, but I do think that if we get a firm group off the ground here then
276 when they're consulting with people about various things, I think there might
277 be scope for you to have a voice to feed in to certain things like that coz there
278 are reasons why we make it 28 days largely because when you get that
279 phonecall you can't just come up with something immediately and sometimes,
280 quite a lot of times to be honest with you, in the heat of the moment, people
281 will say they'll give notice and it's a bit like quitting smoking I think, sometimes
282 you change your mind...and within the 28 days, people and things calm down
283 and maybe we can put in certain things that'll help and people change their
284 minds so sometimes it's like a cooling off period.

285 PPT6: But sometimes the 28 days is actually really good but in other
286 situations it's just, like, bad.

287 And perhaps we ought to be taking more notice of the impact on you lot when
288 we're imposing things like that ... coz it's one thing when it's just 2 adults in
289 the house and you've come forward to foster and it's your wish to do that coz

290 at the end of the day people make a choice ...to be foster carers. Nobody has
291 to be foster carers but, and those are the conditions that they sign up to. But
292 you don't sign up to anything so and you have to live there as well. So maybe
293 we ought to be a bit more considerate of those things. So it could... I'd like to
294 think if this group became a strong group then when they are making
295 decisions and feeding back on things then we can say "hang on come and
296 talk to the sons and daughters group coz they've got views on this and that.
297 So as a sort of a sideline but that was one of the thoughts in the back of my
298 head that they do look to consult with various groups when they set things up
299 so.... But anyway, I'm going off point...

300 We've never really asked anybody what they feel about that, you know, a son
301 or daughter about that... that's our rule and its just a given so it is quite
302 interesting for them to hear that...

303

304 **EB: Can I ask then, [PPT2 and PPT5], I know you're kinda fairly new to**
305 **fostering but thinking about that first placement, was it as you expected,**
306 **were there things that were harder than you thought or better than you**
307 **thought?**

308 PPT2: Umm, I had a 15 year old girl, she was only there for 4 days, I was only
309 there for 1 day so...(laughs) it were really easy. She came in from school,
310 went out, came in, went to bed and that was all I seen of her and she went the
311 next morning so it was easy!

312 PPT5: I didn't know what to expect, so it was kind of, both my aunties are
313 foster carers so I kind of knew what was going on coz I'd obviously had an
314 input in their placements but I didn't know what to expect on our own. It was
315 completely different and it did completely change everything but I'm glad that
316 we're doing it. Even after that first placement, I always thought that when they
317 were coming up for adoption, I thought I don't wanna do this anymore and
318 after they did get adopted, I was, I can't do this anymore but then obviously
319 with this second placement now, it's going well so yeah.

320 PPT6: I don't think I can remember our first placement, I been sat here trying
321 to think what our first placement was... too long ago... I think when you have
322 another child, you ...it's not so much you forget, especially if you've formed a

323 bond with the child before but it's like you ...gotta focus on them now. Like with
324 me, I don't know if I'm the only one who's had this but with the child's
325 background, I never wanna know. I don't know if it's just me but

326 PPT4: No I'm the same, I don't wanna know.

327 PPT6: I can't .. I

328 EB: Coz it's too upsetting or-?

329 PPT4: Yeah.

330 PPT6: No, it's just I never wanna know coz I don't wanna change my actions
331 or the way I am with that child based on that thing. Like I don't wanna come
332 across fake and be tiptoeing around them. I don't know, I don't wanna change
333 the way I am with everychild think you gotta treat them all the same.

334 EB: No that's interesting. So it's not very helpful to know the background.

335 PPT6: Sometimes it can be but I just never wanna know..

336 PPT7: Feels a bit like... I guess the foster kids don't get told our
337 background...

338 PPT6: Yes. Exactly. So why should I...? I think when they come here it's a
339 new start for them and I don't wanna base a new start on them worrying about
340 what their past was like.

341 SW1: I suppose in a way it's a good thing for them if you look at it in a certain
342 way, coz you're not like pre-judging them...

343 PPT6: That's what I mean, I don't wanna make no judgement yeah

344 SW1: ... saying "oh poor them" or "that's shocking what happened"

345 PPT6: Sometime I don't wanna be sympathetic to them especially when it was
346 teenagers, I found if you were sympathetic towards them like sometimes
347 they'd be like "oh they're just pitying me". I just don't want them to think that
348 I'm being that way because of their past. I'm being that way because I'm trying
349 to get them involved ...I'm being nice coz I wanna be nice and coz I want the
350 placement to work, not because I feel sorry for them.

351 SW1: In a way it's like accepting them for who they are and as they are
352 presentin front of you ...

353 PPT6: I want them to make ... their first impression of me is their first
354 impression of me and I want my first impression of them to be...you know
355 what I mean. I don't want to base my ideas of them on their past.

356 EB: No, that's really interesting.

357 PPT2: It sounds awful but I'm quite excited for my mum to have a placement, I
358 know it's bad coz of what they've been through and stuff but I also am quite
359 excited for my mum to have someone. Coz like I'm 20 years of age now and
360 I'm an only child and it's like my mother will not let me go she is just... she is
361 so protective of me, she's like "text me when you get there", "text me when
362 you get back", "what time are you going?" I'm just like,.. I want her to have
363 someone now so she's got...

364 SW1: That won't change!

365 PPT6: She come outside yesterday morning to tell me that you father had
366 rung and there was traffic...

367 SW1: I need to see what you're like in 6 months to see what's happened to
368 you.

369 PPT2: I know, I'll be like "my mum's had someone for like a year now and she
370 still texts me and she still won't let me go...!"

371 SW1: [unclear]

372 PPT2: I'm quite excited for her to have someone so I can be like "bye, you've
373 got some other responsibility now, let me grow up!" She is a nightmare
374 honestly!

375 She needs someone to look after, she gets bored so she'll just text me like
376 "what're you doing?" It's like, "you know what I'm doing" ...
377 "what time are you home?" "you know what time I'm home". She's a
378 nightmare.

379 I'm just like she needs someone now...

380 General babble and laughter [unclear...]

381 PPT6: That's what I thought when my mother gets litt'uns. "Ah, they're the
382 littl'uns now, I'm not the baby anymore..."

383 She's a nightmare.

384 [Unclear] Chit-chat, break.

385

386 29m50s -34m:Doughnuts...

387

388

389 PPT5: I cried like a baby when they went but it was pretty comical coz what
390 was supposed to be like a 2 minute thing of them driving off the driveway
391 ended up being like half an hour coz they couldn't get off the driveway. And
392 they ended up driving into the gate.

393 PPT7: No way!

394 PPT5: So we ended up standing there crying and waving for ages!

395 SW1: You've like got a big electric gate and they ended up

396 PPT5: ...they completely smashed it up!

397 Chit chat...(34:40-34:56)

398 PPT6: The two we got now *were* up for adoption but they're with us long term
399 now. But I hated the idea of them going; I was literally praying they weren't
400 going, we had them like 3 years, and I didn't want them to go... And it was
401 more the fact that a judge had put a date on it, saying if they weren't adopted
402 by this date they'll stay with you ... and it was like a countdown to that date
403 hoping they weren't going... I don't know I just hated the idea of them going.
404 But, they're not the first young ones we had, they were the first ones I actually
405 bonded with so it's like... I just don't want them to go.

406 **EB: When it does get tough, what are somethings that you've found are**
407 **helpful or....You mentioned going to live with your nan for 28 days!**

408 PPT4: Gym.

409 SW1: Going to the gym, that's a good one.

410 PPT4: Yes. I always go to the gym, in year 10, I literally lived in the gym, didn't
411 I?

412 PPT3: Yeah.

413 PPT4: I was there like 4 times a week. And some weeks I went there
414 everyday.

415 EB: Wow! And that's-

416 SW1: And that's because of the emotional stress of fostering?

417 PPT4: Partially fostering, partially school but if you mix it in together it's a
418 head stress. I'm a very stressful person actually so...

419 PPT3: Yeah!

420 SW2: Your sister confirms that.

421 PPT6: I think speaking to my brothers... it helps as well. Coz I'm one of four.
422 They're all older than me, I'm the youngest one so, like 2 of them moved
423 out...[unclear] Just speaking to them. I mean like my one brother he's
424 awesome. He's moved out now to get married, all that crap, but just speaking
425 to him, I don't know why, it just helps. He's not around as much as me but
426 speaking to him helps.

427 PPT7: Is that coz it's someone who kind of understands where you're coming
428 from and kind of knows...what the situation is.

429 PPT6: Kind of yeah, I just vent at him.

430 PPT6: It's useful to have someone to vent at. I think its nice coz he sees it in a
431 different way to me as well coz he's not there 24/7, he's sees it differently and
432 it just opens your eyes then you think am I being a bit selfish and all that.

433 **EB: [PPT3 and 4] You were saying that fostering was an emotional drain**
434 **or was a bit stressful... What was it that made you find fostering**
435 **stressful?**

436 PPT4: We had [child name]... I think that was stressful. I think the most
437 draining part is knowing ...or thinking they're gonna stay and they don't.

438 PPT2: [unclear]

439 PPT4: But I don't know, its; just. He's a hard one explain. He was...We
440 thought he was disabled, kind of. And we thought there wasn't a chance he
441 was gonna get adopted and as my mum being a foster carer, she was just like
442 just give him the chance see, he deserves a mam or a dad, and umm it was
443 getting closer and closer to-...we give him up to his second birthday and if he
444 weren't adopted... it was getting closer and closer and it was about 2 weeks
445 before his birthday was it?

446 PPT3: No he went in the Easter time and he was 2 in the summer...

447 PPT4: And adopters came up and ...

448 PPT3: But we were planning and were discussing over the Christmas holidays
449 room arrangements and stuff for if he was to stay long term. You know.

450 PPT4: We took him on family holidays with us as well like we always have
451 them memories of him. We have loads of photos of him and stuff. But now we
452 don't see him at all, just over Skype or whatever. It's hard.

453 SW1: I hope it's ok to share this now, I know at the time I was visiting because
454 I had a little bit of a wake up call as well because...you were a bit upset when I
455 was there... that was around...who we'd picked as well...this person had
456 come forward at the 11th hour ...to have him. I think you would have liked
457 somebody different, younger...? And I don't know.

458 PPT4: If I'm honest, I think the foster carers should have a say in who the
459 adopters are. Like I know that sounds quite...like I don't know... but I...we
460 know the child best and we know who suits them

461 PPT6: I remember one of the girls was up for adoption who was with my
462 mother and I said to my mother "I don't think she's right for the girls" and my
463 mother was like "well it's not your choice actually". I'm like "I don't care,, if I
464 don't like them, they're not going"...

465 PPT4: It is hard.

466 PPT6: I hated the idea of 'they don't even know this child' and they don't
467They're gonna live with them.

468 PPT4: When you think... like, we had a baby...when you think about adopters
469 for them, they're young, active who can do all the stuff that babies want to and
470 ...go to the park, go for a walk somewhere... and then when you meet them
471 and your expectations are so high...and then you're just like "uh...uh..."

472 PPT7: "Great"

473 PPT6: I think it's more about ...with that child...you know them better and you
474 don't get a say in the decisions for them like...

475 SW1: And I don't think we can argue with that. Coz you do, you do know them
476 better.

477 PPT6: And like on paper, it might seem like they're the perfect people,

478 PPT4: But they're not the perfect one for your child.

479 [Unclear]

480

481

482

483 ADDITIONAL RECORDING

484 PPT1: I feel like since the latest 2 have been around, the youngest one
485 [child's name], the youngest one is really demanding and takes up all my

486 mums attention and my mum finds it really hard work so my mum doesn't
487 really have the time for me anymore.

488 And I feel like it's having an effect on my relationship with my mum. Like I still
489 love her and stuff but I went round my friends house and I saw how they were,
490 like how her and her mum were and they were like having fun and I thought I
491 wanted to be like that. And it made me feel really sad. Like it sounds really
492 bad but me and my mum aren't like that coz she has to spend all of her time
493 with [child's name].

494 It's hard on my mum, and the house is a tip and she's getting older you know,
495 than like she was when I was a kid and she can't get down on her knees and
496 be fetching stuff out from under the bed anymore. So I help her and that but
497 it's like hard. And coz the girls ...the youngest one is such hard work, all of my
498 mum's time is taken up with her so she doesn't like have ... I don't wanna be
499 selfish but she doesn't have anytime for me and anytime for my dad and we
500 used to be really close as a family and really strong and it kind of feels like
501 we're not like that...anymore. My parents aren't close to each other anymore
502 and it's because so much time and energy goes into looking after [child's
503 name].

