Volume I

Research Component: Literature Review and Empirical Paper

"Consistent Inconsistency; The experience of interpersonal relationships from the perspective of residential staff and young people in the looked after system."

Volume II

Clinical Component: A collection of five clinical practice reports.

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A thesis submitted to
the University of Birmingham
in partial fulfilment of the degree of

DOCTOR OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

(ClinPsyD)

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Summary

This thesis is submitted as part requirement for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology to the school of Psychology, University of Birmingham. It is comprised of both research and clinical components. Throughout the thesis all identifying information has been changed or removed to ensure the anonymity of the clients and participants discussed.

Volume I comprises the research component of the thesis. It consists of two papers. The first paper is a narrative review of the qualitative literature on Various Stakeholders Perspectives on Placement Moves for Looked after Children. Research suggests that understanding of placement breakdowns for young people in care is determined by dominant and powerful groups and calls for the voice of marginalised populations to be added to the literature (Unrau, 2007 and Oke 0000). In response to this the review presented here offers an early narrative review of qualitative studies exploring various stakeholders' perspectives on placement moves for looked after children. Placement moves are expressed by young people as a time of loss and trauma which can lead to a lack of trust in adults and systems around them. Young people place themselves at the centre of reasons behind placement moves in terms of their behaviour and being mis-matched to placements. Foster carers and social workers similarly identify young people's behaviour and mis-matching of placements as the reasons behind placement breakdown. Furthermore, foster carers identify the need for young people to achieve a sense of belonging within their family to achieve successful outcomes. As this field of research remains in its infancy, methodological quality of available research is variable.

The second paper is a qualitative study exploring the experience of relationships for looked after children in the context of ongoing loss and trauma. The study applies Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to interviews conducted with young people within the care system and residential staff who support them. The study provides a

voice to this marginalised population and the staff supporting them whose perspectives are somewhat silenced within a literature dominated by more powerful groups. Findings are grouped by participant samples. Findings from the staff participants are grouped into 5 super-ordinate themes; 'the burden of emotional baggage', 'filling the gaps', negotiating unknown territory', 'over and above the professional' and 'the pull of the birth family.' Findings from the sample of young people are grouped into 3 super-ordinate themes; 'the impact of breakdowns', 'the value of positive relationships' and 'always vs never.' Implications for practice are discussed alongside the identified need for further research in this field.

Volume II comprises the clinical component of the thesis. It consists of five clinical practice reports which describe clinical work carried out by the author over the course of training. The first report 'Psychological Models' presents formulation of paranoid schizophrenia for a 29 year old male within a forensic setting from a cognitive behavioural and psychodynamic approach. The second report presents a 'small scale service evaluation' assessing the current level of reported bullying and between patient conflict within a medium secure unit. The third report presents a 'case study' covering assessment, formulation, intervention and evaluation of a 66 year old man accessing a psychology for stroke service with low mood and suicidal ideation. The fourth report presents a 'single case experimental design' evaluating a cognitive behavioural intervention with learning disabilities and autism presenting with angry outburst behaviours. The final report was an oral presentation of a mutli-disciplinary team conference held within a special service for looked after and adopted children.

Dedication

For my Son, my world, my everything.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Louise Pearson, Dr Selina Holmes, Dr Lisa Morris, Dr Kim Golding, Dr Andrew Hawkins, Dr David Hacker and Dr Chris Jones for being constant sources of support and inspiration during my clinical placements. I have learnt so much from each of you.

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Thank you to my wonderful friends and family for wiping the tears, pulling me through the struggles, believing in me when I was unable to believe in myself and most of all, thank you for the laughter. With special thanks to Dr Natalie Byrne, for helping me through the emotional journey of clinical training, and for becoming my lifelong friend. There are no words.

Pops, I miss you every day, I am sorry for your struggles and I am forever grateful for your love and unconditional positive regard. I hope you have finally found peace.

Finally, special thanks to my wonderful Mother, for your love and care towards me and more so, for raising my beautiful son in the months I have dedicated to this work, I love you.

Position Statement

This position statement is a reflective account of my knowledge, skills and qualities acquired from personal and professional experiences leading up to the writing of this thesis and reflection on how these factors may have influenced this research.

I was raised in a family alongside children and young people in the care system as my paternal grandmother was a registered foster carer for more than 20 years. She cared for a number of young people within her own home on both short and long term placements and so I developed close relationships with many of them during my childhood and teenage years until my grandmother retired.

With a growing personal interest in the area of children in the care system and upon completing my undergraduate degree in Psychology, I gained full time employment as a residential support worker with looked after children in residential units run by the local authority. Eighteen months in this role provided me with insight into the complex web of systems and factors impacting upon the lives of these children and young people in both a historical and ongoing context. It also provided me with first-hand experience of the many challenges of working with this population and the various organisations and professionals supporting them.

I then completed a master's degree in 'Applied Psychology' and as part requirement for this qualification I submitted a qualitative research thesis considering the views of looked after children on mental health. This initiated my interest in the area of research and theoretical frameworks applicable to this population.

As part of my doctoral training in clinical psychology I was fortunate enough to complete a specialist placement with a service providing therapeutic support to children and families who were either in the looked after system or legally adopted. This provided me with the experience of working with children and families in the looked after system from a therapeutic angle in applying relevant psychological theory and models to practice.

Collectively, these multidimensional experiences have shaped and influenced my perspective on the lives of these young people and the professionals working with them. I consider myself to have a rich and diverse perspective on these children's lives having been a part of them from a personal family, caring professional, therapeutic and researcher role.

From this, I believe I have developed awareness and understanding of the many challenges faced by these young people, their families and professionals involved and importantly, I feel a strong sense of compassion and empathy for the young people, families and professionals supporting them.

I feel that my familiarity with both the young people and residential staff positions within the context of the looked after system was an advantage in engaging the participants and developing rapport throughout the research process. Furthermore, with an awareness of the many professionals who enter and leave these young people's lives and their experiences of repeated loss and trauma, I felt that it was important for me to not repeat this pattern. I made it a priority to spend time with the young people and staff on an informal basis during some meal times and leisure time activities during the research process. I also made it clear when I would be present on the units and how long I would be involved in their lives in order to provide a predictable ending.

As a qualitative researcher, it is important to consider any bias or prejudice we may bring to data collection and analysis. For the purposes of validity, maintaining objectivity is important within qualitative research, however, as an active participant in data collection and interpretation some level of subjectivity is inevitable and often useful. The key is to be actively reflective throughout the process and increase self-awareness to any bias and influence we may bring.

In attempt to achieve this, I made use of supervision with two research supervisors to reflect openly and honestly about how my previous experiences may impact upon the data. Furthermore, data triangulation was a key part of this supervision whereby my

supervisors could consider the interpretation from a more objective stance, sometimes challenging it and taking the analysis to a deeper level.

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Presentation Summary:

"Consistent Inconsistency; The experience of interpersonal relationships from the perspective of residential staff and young people in the looked after system."

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Volume I

Research Component: Literature Review and Empirical Paper

Chapter 1- Literature Review

How do stakeholders view and experience placement moves of looked after children?

A Narrative Review of the Qualitative Literature

Abstract

The written discourse suggests that understanding of placement breakdowns for young people in care is determined by dominant and powerful groups (i.e. those in positions of writing and disseminating research and policy writers) and calls for the voice of marginalised populations (i.e. those whom placement breakdown truly effects) to be added to the literature. In response to this, the review presented here, offers an early narrative review of the qualitative studies exploring various stakeholders' perspectives on placement moves for looked after children.   Placement moves are expressed by young people as a time of loss and trauma, which can lead to a lack of trust in the adults and systems around them. Young people position themselves as central to the reason behind placement moves, in terms of their behaviour and being mis-matched to those placements. Foster carers and social workers similarly identify young people's behaviour and mis-matching of placements, as the reasons behind placement breakdown.   Furthermore, foster carers identify the need for young people to achieve a sense of belonging within their family, to achieve successful outcome. As this field of research remains in its infancy, methodological quality of available research is variable.

Key Words; Looked after children, interpersonal relationships, attachment, foster care, placement moves, placement breakdowns, residential placements, social workers, residential staff, qualitative.

Introduction

Context of literature review

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) stated that in 2014 there were over 91,000 looked after children in the UK, with a rise of almost 10,000 children in care between 2008 and 2014. The term 'looked after child' refers to a child or young person who is looked after by a local authority and is defined in law under the Children Act (1989). The majority of these children will be placed outside of their biological families, some on a temporary basis and others on a more long term or permanent basis. These children enter the care system when it is deemed by health and social care professionals, to be detrimental for them to remain within their current living situation, normally, the biological family. Reasons for this may include the events (or risks) of neglect and/or abuse, or circumstances in which the main caregivers are unable to provide adequate care for the child. Children aged between 10 and 15 years represent the majority of the looked after population (37%), and more boys than girls are in the care system (56% and 44% respectively). These two demographics are said to have remained stable for 5 years or more (NSPCC). 77% of looked after children are white British with mixed groups and black or black British children making up 9% and 7% of the looked after population respectively. Minority ethnic groups are therefore overrepresented in the looked after system as they make up around 3% of Great Britain's child population.

Upon entering the care system, children are placed within a range of different settings, with some children going on to be adopted. The most recent statistics available (Department for Education, 2012) show that 75% of looked after children are in foster placements (including kinship care), 4% are placed for adoption, 5% are placed with parents, 3% are living independently, 9% are in secure units, children's homes and hostels, 2% are living in other residential settings and 1% are living in residential schools.

Rather than moving from an adverse situation into a placement of stability, it is common for looked after children to experience multiple placement moves during their time in the care system (Unrau, 2007). Children may experience multiple moves between foster carers or may move from living with foster carers to living within residential or secure settings, and

some may return home. Available data suggests that the average number of placement moves a young person experiences whilst in the care system is between 4-5 (Children's Care Monitor Report, 2011).

Placement moves may occur for a number of reasons. The move may be planned or unplanned; unplanned moves are often referred to as a 'placement breakdown.' A systematic review of the literature by Rock et al., (2013) identified the following factors as predictors of placement instability; age of the child, with older children at higher risk of placement instability, placement history, behavioural problems, mental health difficulties relating to the child, separation from siblings, presence of foster carers children/other foster children, carers support, carer-child relationship and social worker relationships. Protective factors were also identified including placements with siblings, placements with older foster carers, more experienced foster carers with strong parenting skills and placements where opportunities were provided for children to develop intellectually.

The more general literature on outcomes for looked after children consistently shows that children in care continue to have poorer outcomes than the wider population – particularly in relation to educational achievement, juvenile criminality and mental health (Munro & Hardy, 2007). Figures suggest that 45% of looked after children have a diagnosable mental health condition (Meltzer et al., 2003).

Rather than improve circumstances for looked after children who have experienced adverse living conditions within the environment from which they have been removed, placement instability and frequent placement moves are said to compound existing difficulties (Rubin et al, 2007). Further research suggests that young people who have experienced multiple placement moves whilst in the care system do not adjust as well to adult life as their peers (e.g. Biehal, 1995; Rock et al., 2013). These placement changes are often marked by ruptures in personal relationships and academic achievement. Each time a child moves placement, they leave behind one set of people, and possibly school, to join another. For some young people, this is viewed as a 'constant state of loss' (Hyde and Kammerer, 2009). Attachment theory can be useful to understand the link between placement instability and poor outcomes for looked after children. Crudely, attachment theory emphasises the

importance of attachment with at least one primary caregiver for social and emotional development to occur to an adaptive level (Golding, 2008). Ideally, the key attachment figure will be responsive and sensitive, which, in turn, leads to the development of secure attachment patterns. Early experiences with caregivers gradually give rise to a system of thoughts, memories, beliefs, expectations, emotions, and behaviours about the self and others. From the development of a secure attachment pattern, individuals are believed to develop an internal working model which guides their perceptions, emotions, thoughts and expectations in later relationships (Bretherton, 1999).

For children and young people in the looked after system, repeated separation and loss of these key attachment figures can lead to difficulties with social, emotional and cognitive development. Moreover, it is believed that frequent changes of caregiver which prevent the development of a secure attachment can result in mental health difficulties at some point in later life (Bowlby, 1958). Leading on from this, the 'care matters' white paper (DfES, 2007) emphasises the need for stability in the placement of looked after children.

The literature surrounding placement moves for looked after children is dominated by studies with a quantitative approach reporting on causal factors of placement moves which are often taken from sources such as casework data (Unrau, 2007; Rock et al., 2014).

Case record data which is used to indicate placement moves, are detached from or stripped bare of any context, thus give no stake in the experience of placement moves for those it impacts upon most of all, the looked after child (Unrau, 2007). Furthermore, this study also suggests that we do not see the quality of the move experience or its consequences on foster youth and others involved. In addition to his, Unrau (2007) suggests that the interpersonal relationship between children and the adults who care for them are more important than the individual characteristics of each placement move. Therefore some measure of interpersonal relationships that make up the placement move experience should be incorporated within the available literature.

There are some implications with quantitative data and performance indicators within the literature (Rock et al., 2014). For example, some research has suggested that placement moves might be positive if, for example, children are being adopted or moving closer to

birth families. Reports relying purely on quantitative data therefore, miss the context and experiential content of those involved. Quantitative reports also miss the impact of changes and turnover of staff as caregivers within residential placements and any impact this may have on those involved (Kelly and Hodson, 2008).

Several publications have highlighted the dearth of qualitative research directly with this population and call for the perspectives of those involved to be heard (Unrau, 2007). In response to this, there is a slow growing literature available offering a qualitative approach. This review offers an early narrative synthesis of the available qualitative literature exploring the experience of placement moves from the perspective of those involved, namely young people in care, foster carers, social workers, birth families and policy writers.

Scope of review

This review examines the published literature from a period of twenty years (1994-2014) on qualitative research considering relevant stakeholders' viewpoints on placement moves for looked after children. Stakeholders include the young people themselves, foster carers, social workers, birth family and policy writers. It aims to consider the collective research available which focuses on looking at the way in which placement moves are understood and experienced by those involved. By exploring the multiple experiences of those involved in placement moves, this review will help to identify how young people and those involved in their lives may be further supported at times of transition and placement endings, which play such a significant role in life outcomes for this population.

Terminology

The term 'looked after child' is defined in law within the Children Act (1989). The definition refers to a child or young person living in the care of a local authority for more than 24 hours. The Children Act (1989) breaks this definition down further into four main groups; children who are accommodated under voluntary agreement with their parents (section 20), children who are subject to a care order (section 31) or interim care order (section 38), children who are the subject of emergency orders for their protection (section 44 and 46), children who are compulsorily accommodated and children remanded to the local authority or who are subject to a criminal justice supervision order (section 21). For the purposes of this review, the term 'young person' will be used interchangeably to refer to a 'looked after child.'

The term stakeholder refers to a person who has a vested interest in the issue being addressed. Within the context of this review, stakeholder refers to any individual or organisation who has an interest in the life of the looked after child and looked after children's services. This includes the looked after child themselves, biological parents and families of the looked after child, foster carers, staff employed by residential, educational and health services, social workers, and those involved in the writing of policies relating to the care of looked after children.

The term foster carer and foster parent are used interchangeably throughout the literature. For the purpose of this review, the term 'foster carer' will be used consistently to describe an adult employed by a local authority or fostering agency to care for a looked after child within the foster carer's own home.

The term 'placement move' refers to any change in residency a young person experiences either planned or unplanned whilst in the looked after system.

Search Strategy

Review method

The review includes all published journal articles reporting stakeholder's perspectives on placement moves for looked after children, using a qualitative methodology, in the UK over the past 20 years. Electronic database searches were conducted on EMBASE, EMBASE Classic, Ovid medline and PsychINFO for published research papers. Due to the difficulties with conducting searches for qualitative studies only (Shaw et al., 2004), an initial search was conducted to obtain a wider range of studies before specific inclusion and exclusion criteria could be applied.

Search terms

Table 1. Search terms used in the literature search for articles describing stakeholders experiences of placement moves

Term	Variations
Stakeholders	Foster* AND carer*
	Foster* AND parent*
	Social* AND worker*
	Carer* OR
	Care* AND professional*
	Residential* AND staff*
	Key* AND player*
	Foster* AND Child*
	Foster* AND youth*
	Foster* AND placement*
Placement Moves	Foster* AND Disrupt*
	Permanen*
	Foster* AND placement*
	Placement* AND Breakdown*
	Placement$ AND Success*
	Success* AND Placement*
	Placement* AND Move*
	Placement* AND Stabil*
	Placement* AND Instabil*

* Search included both singular and plural terms e.g. carer and carers

Inclusion criteria.

i) Journal articles published in English between 1994 to 2014 (i.e. excludes dissertations, book chapters etc).

ii) Empirical research studies using qualitative methodology to explore the experience of placement moves from the perspectives of stakeholders (stakeholders include young people in care, adults who lived in the care system as children, birth family of looked after children, foster carers, social workers and policy writers).

iii) Qualitative research which presents participants experiences in their own words (i.e. excludes closed question interviews and purely quantitative methodology).

Search Outcome

The initial search yielded 633 articles, the abstracts of which were then scanned and any obvious outliers not directly related to the aim and purpose of the review were removed. Outliers included studies not covering looked after children, those with a focus on education, those considering social work placements, those focusing on learning disability, physical disability or ethnic minority groups within the looked after system and those focusing on adoption. After removal of these papers, a remaining 158 abstracts were then read in detail and in line with the reviews inclusion and exclusion criteria. Sixteen papers were found to meet these criteria. Duplicates were then removed leaving a total of eleven papers. One of these papers was excluded at this point as the methodology was not clearly reported. References from the remaining 10 papers were then checked for any relevant papers which may have been omitted from the search. A further two papers were identified during this process (Unrau, 2007 and Hyde & Kammerer, 2009). The review therefore considers the contribution of twelve papers.

Overview of Search Findings

Range of studies identified

Twelve Studies were identified in total. Of these, four studies considered the perspective of foster carers only (Beek & Schofield 2002; Brown & Bednar 2006; Brown & Campbell 2007 and Oke, Rosthill-Brookes & Larkin 2011), one considered the perspective of young people currently in the care system only (Hyde and Kammerer 2009), one considered the perspective of social workers only (Norgate & Hayden 2012), one considered the perspective of both social workers and foster carers (Sinclair & Wilson 2003), one considered the perspectives of young people currently in the care system, social workers and biological families (Christiansen, Havik & Anderssen 2010), one considered the perspectives of young people currently in the care system, foster carers and social workers (Rosthill-Brookes, Larkin, Toms & Churchman 2010) and one considered the perspectives of adult participants who had lived in the care system as children (Unrau, Seita & Putney 2008).

Of the remaining studies, one study considered how the literature and relevant discourse views and communicates placement moves (Unrau 2007) and one considered social workers perspectives alongside this discourse (Hollin & Larkin 2011). As the discourse reviewed by these papers is written by policy makers, who are also stakeholders in the lives of looked after children, it was deemed justifiable and beneficial to include these papers within this review.

Methodology

Research including looked after children as participants, whilst adopting a qualitative methodology is very much still in its infancy. As such, the available studies vary significantly in terms of methodological quality. As the review question focuses directly on papers with a qualitative approach, all of those reviewed included this method, some independently (Butler and Charles, 1999; Beek and Schofield, 2002; Brown and Bednar, 2006; Brown and Campbell, 2007; Unrau et al., 2008; Hyde & Kammerer, 2009; Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2010; Oke et al., 2011 and Norgate & Hayden, 2012) and others alongside quantitative methods in a mixed methods approach (Sinclair and Wilson, 2003; Unrau, 2007; Christainsen et al., 2010 and Hollin and Larkin, 2011). With regards to sampling, all studies used a form of purposive sampling in line with achieving a homogenous target sample meeting the criteria of having a stake or interest in placement stability and placement moves for looked after children and being in a position to offer a rich and in depth perspective on this phenomena.

With the exception of Sinclair and Wilson (2003), all studies used either one to one interviews, focus groups or a combination of both as a means of data collection. The paper by Sinclair and Wilson (2003) used open ended questionnaires with the aim of reaching a larger sample of participants. This method of data collection in comparison to face to face interviews and focus groups does somewhat limit the scope for obtaining fuller and richer data within a qualitative context. A number of papers adopt focus groups for data collection (Beek & Schofield, 2002; Rosthill-Brookes et al, 2010; Hollin & Larkin, 2011 and Norgate & Hayden, 2012).   When considering the findings and data gathered from focus groups, the impact of group dynamics must be borne in mind.

Assessing the quality of the studies

In order to assess the quality of the papers reviewed, a Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP; Public Health Resource Unit, 2006) framework tool for qualitative research was applied to each paper. The CASP tool covers three broad issues; rigour (i.e. has a thorough and appropriate approach been applied to the methods used in the study), credibility (i.e. are the findings well-presented) and meaningful and relevance (i.e. how useful are the findings to the reader). A total of 10 questions are used in the CASP framework to assess

the quality of each paper. Please see appendix 1 for how the papers reviewed were assessed by the CASP framework.

Validity of findings varies across the studies due to the differing quality of data analysis used. Two of the papers are relatively weak in their explanation and justification of data analysis (Beek & Schofield, 2002 and Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). Descriptions of the method of data analysis is lacking within these two papers and within the findings sections, results are presented as 'issues' and 'themes' in the absence of a recognised methodological framework. Later studies are more rigorous in their approach to data analysis and employ recognised methodologies in analysing qualitative data. These methods include Thematic Analysis (Butler and Charles, 1999; Brown and Bednar, 2006; Brown and Campbell, 2007; Unrau et al., 2008 and Norgate & Hayden, 2012), Concept Mapping Techniques (Hyde & Kammerer, 2009), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2010 and Oke et al., 2011) and Foucauldian Analysis (Hollin & Larkin, 2011).

It is noted that earlier studies within this review are much weaker in terms of methodological approach and data analysis compared with more recently published studies included in this review. This offers the reader reassurance suggesting that the emerging research in this field is becoming more rigorous. Subsequent literature reviews may therefore be beneficial once the literature has grown over the coming years.

Stakeholders perspectives and experiences

The perspective of the looked after child.

Of the papers reviewed, five included a perspective on how placement moves are experienced and understood by young people (Rosthill-Brookes 2010; Unrau, 2008; Hyde & Kammerer 2009; Christiansen, 2010; Butler & Charles, 1999). The methodology used by these papers includes open ended one to one interviews (Unrau, 2008; Hyde & Kammerer 2009; Christiansen, 2010 and Butler & Charles, 1999) and a combination of interviews and focus groups (Rosthill-Brookes, 2010). Themes from these papers are categorised as the experience of loss and trauma, lack of trust, reasons for placement moves and positive moves and are discussed in more detail below.

   Loss and trauma

The general theme presented across all of these studies was one of placement moves being a time of difficulty and struggle for the young people involved. The majority of young people also remembered placement moves as a time of profound loss. Rosthill-Brookes (2010) suggested that rather than a placement breakdown, young people viewed moves as 'leaving', 'not being wanted' and that moves were primarily unexpected and unwelcomed. Even in circumstances where moves were deemed positive in nature by others, the young people described them as being distressing. This sense of loss was also reported in the study by Unrau (2008). Within this study, loss included a sense of loss of power over one's destiny with a sense of having no control or influence over decisions or events in their lives. Young people reported having little if any information about moves ahead of time and described moves as being "an experience into the unknown" (pp 1259, Unrau, 2008), having to accept "moving as being a part of the whole system" (pp 1260, Unrau, 2008), whilst being left "wondering what you did wrong" (pp 1260, Unrau, 2008).

Another sense of loss described by Unrau (2008) was that of the loss of friends and connections with school, disrupted ties to established friends and also the opportunity to make new friends due to the expectation of placements being temporary in nature. There was also the loss of personal belongings, losing possessions during transitions, possessions being lost and stolen within placements, the significance of which included the loss of the

personal item but also memories and sentimental value associated with that item. Loss of and separation from siblings was also described as significant for young people as their connection to siblings represented some normalcy and familiarity, a connection that was not available when separation occurred during placement moves. Loss of self-esteem was also apparent with a sense of feeling "unwanted" (pp 1260, Unrau, 2008) and internalising this rejection by questioning what was wrong with them or wondering what they had done wrong to cause the move (Unrau, 2008).

Lack of trust

In response to this sense of loss and trauma, the period around placement moves was for some young people described as a time of shutting down emotionally, "giving up" (pp 1262, Unrau, 2008), "disconnecting" (pp 1262, Unrau, 2008) and becoming socially withdrawn. For the young people this then developed into difficulties trusting anyone else and thus impacted upon expectations around future placements (Unrau, 2008). This sense of lacking the ability to trust others was a significant and pervasive underlying theme for most participants (Rosthill-Brookes, 2010; Unrau, 2008; Hyde & Kammerer, 2009; Christiansen 2010; Butler & Charles 1999). Young people described the need to maintain a level of "safe distance" (pp 1262, Unrau, 2008) and not connecting with others. Trust was also talked about in relation to mental health difficulties, descriptions of feeling insecure, unstable, depressed, defensive, resistant and angry (Rosthill-Brookes, 2010).

When discussing placements with foster carers, young people demonstrated a lack of trust in permanency based on their previous experiences of repeated placement breakdowns, the notion of "why should this one be any different?" (pp 1260, Unrau, 2008) was associated with the expectation of being "shipped on" (pp 915, Christiansen, 2010) to the next placement (Christiansen, 2010). For some, this led to intentionally sabotaging relationships because they didn't expect them to work out and held expectations such as "they'll leave me" (pp 1259, Unrau, 2008) "they'll find something wrong with me" (pp 1259, Unrau, 2008). This produced a contrast between some foster carer's viewing placements as a "fresh start" (pp 876, Sinclair & Wilson, 2003) for the young person, yet perceived the young person themselves as wanting to hold on to the past.   With the approach of foster care always as

the past and the temporary present but never the future (Sinclair & Wilson 2003 and Christiansen, 2010).

Young people described feeling powerless to refuse moves to certain placements even if the young person didn't want to move there (Butler & Charles, 1999 & Christiansen, 2010). There was a sense of being lied to by professionals and a sense of feeling trapped due to not knowing what to do in order to return home. It was described that young people often felt goal posts were moved and the idea that young people who "mess up" (pp 918, Christiansen, 2010) have to stay in residential settings and group homes for much longer (Hyde & Kammerer, 2009). The sense of being lied to was reinforced when the young person was informed that an alternative placement would be available if the current placement was not satisfactory but then finding that in reality this was not the case. This discourse around the transferable nature of placements also trivialised the importance of a placement and the significance of a placement move for many young people. This resulted in the perception of placements as something of a gimmick and not to be trusted long term (Butler & Charles, 1999).

Reasons for placement moves

When considering reasons behind placement moves, young people's perspectives fell into five main categories; the young person's own behaviour (Hyde & Kammerer, 2009 and Christiansen, 2010), a mismatch in placement (Hyde & Kammerer, 2009 and Christiansen, 2010), shortcomings in foster carers ability to look after them (Christiansen, 2010), a "step-down" (pp 918, Christiansen, 2010) to a less restrictive placement (Hyde & Kammerer, 2009) and reasons being beyond the knowledge or control of the young person themselves (Hyde & Kammerer 2009 and Rosthill-Brookes 2010).

Some young people viewed their own behaviour as the reason for placement moves sometimes describing themselves as "too much" (Pp 917, Christiansen, 2010) for foster carers to manage (Christiansen, 2010).   This belief that foster carers didn't know how to look after them properly or manage their behaviours was also reported by Hyde & Kammerer (2009) and included the idea that young people perceived foster carers as being unsure of how to respond to their anger, grief and frustration. Furthermore, behaviour was

attributed to earlier breakdowns within foster placements as opposed to residential or specialist placements (Hyde & Kammerer, 2009).

A perceived mismatch between young people and foster carers was another identified factor relating to placement moves, this included generation gaps, differences in religious beliefs, personality differences and foster carers being seen as having limited tolerance for the developmental experiences of adolescents (Hyde & Kammerer, 2009).

Another mismatch in expectations was suggested in terms of middle class foster carers and young people feeling unsure of what is expected of them and unsure of the social "rules" (pp 916, Christiansen, 2010) of fitting into family life (Christiansen, 2010). This is broken down into a dissonance between young people's negative self-image and the superior provision within foster homes. In addition to this, young people believed that they were discriminated against when compared to foster carers own children and often described feeling on the outside of the foster family (Christiansen, 2010). Furthermore, a contradiction between paid and "trained" (pp 917, Christiansen, 2010) parenting vs instinctual parenting was felt by some young people who described viewing placements and foster carers as just "doing a job" (pp 917, Christiansen, 2010) whilst love and care was seen to be offered conditionally based on a young person's conduct (Butler & Charles, 1999).

In relation to this mismatch between young people and foster carers was the notion of certain foster carers being perceived by young people as having short comings in their approach to caring for them, including the belief that foster carers had little understanding about what it meant to be a foster carer (Christiansen, 2010). Some young people expressed the feeling that foster carers pushed too hard with their expectations, as having unrealistic expectations of how children should adapt into their families and how they should behave, being unable to accept them as they were and wanting to create change rather than acceptance. This resulted in some young people describing not feeling listened to by their foster carers (Christiansen, 2010).

The feeling of powerlessness was a common theme within the studies reviewed. When considering reasons behind placements moves, this issue was also pertinent. Some young

people reported having little knowledge as to why a placement had ended and moreover, having little or no control over it and "being forced" (Pp 269, Hyde & Kammerer, 2009) to leave and move to the next placement (Hyde & Kammerer, 2009). This feeling of being kept in the dark and powerlessness within the ending process lead to an intensified vulnerability. This sense of powerlessness was reflected in the perception that sometimes, foster carers decisions were ultimately what ended the placement, usually following an incident or major argument between young person and foster carer (Rosthill-Brookes, 2010).

Positive moves

Amidst the turmoil of placement moves, some positives were identified by young people including a guarded optimism with the chance to get away from a bad placement to start over again and in addition to this, having memories of a caring adult (Unrau, 2008). In relation to this, Christiansen (2010) suggested that some placement endings had provided young people with new opportunities and experiences, as well as other benefits, such as academic achievement. This occurred predominantly where young people felt they had been better matched to foster carers.

Most young people were able to reflect on at least some strengths and life lessons they had learned from placements that had ended. One positive reflection included being exposed to difference which provided a unique viewpoint on family life and opportunities to interact with many different types of people leading to a sense of being more compassionate towards other people and accepting of difference. Further life lessons included becoming more independent, more tolerant and outgoing and developing "survival skills" (Pp 1262, Unrau, 2008). Another positive reflection included the desire to be a better parent themselves, doing the right thing for their children and wanting to provide a more positive caregiving experience to them (Unrau, 2008).

Summary of quality of the papers discussed.

The papers presented above all used well established methods of data analysis including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2010), Thematic Analysis (Butler & Charles, 1999), mapped coding and triangulation (Unrau, 2008 and Hyde & Kammerer, 2009) and Comparative Analysis (Christiansen, 2010). Based on this, the findings and themes presented above can reliably be taken into consideration.

The perspective of foster carers.

Of the seven studies including foster carers as participants, five of them offered a perspective on placement success (Sinclair & Wilson 2003; Beek & Schofield, 2002; Butler & Charles, 1999; Oke et al., 2011 and Brown & Campbell 2007). The methodology used by these papers includes open ended questionnaires (Sinclair & Wilson 2003), focus groups (Beek & Schofield, 2002), interviews (Butler & Charles, 1999 and Oke et al., 2011) and concept mapping (Brown & Campbell 2007). Themes presented include a sense of belonging and reasons for placement moves and are discussed below.

   A sense of belonging

All five of these studies emphasised the importance of young people achieving a sense of belonging and permanence within their family for placement success. Furthermore, these foster carers expressed the desire to fulfil a role within the young people's lives, over and above that of a professional employed on a detached level and beyond financial gain (Oke et al., 2011; Sinclair & Wilson 2003; Beek & Schofield 2002; Butler & Charles, 1999 and Brown & Campbell 2007). Foster carers described a sense of wanting to fulfil a parental role and to parent the young person in every aspect of the child's life. This included feeling a sense of pride in the young person and their achievements (Beek & Schofield, 2002). It was reported that the legal status of the child did not impact upon this but did at times make decision making on the child's behalf difficult (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003).

Foster carers in Brown & Campbell (2007) identified the need for the young person to feel loved and cared for, based on this is the idea that the young person can adjust and feel comfortable within their placement. The foster carers in this study described a sense of knowing that "you are for them" (pp 1017, Brown & Campwell, 2007) and experiencing a sense of joy at watching the young person "grow" (pp 1017, Brown & Campbell, 2007) and achieve success in life.

In the study by Oke et al., (2011) when describing successful placements, foster carers used the term "My child" (pp 6, Oke et al., 2011) and referred to an experience of emotional bonding and a sense of parental commitment to the young person they cared for. They reported going beyond the call of duty and reasonable foster care for the young person

after having "fallen for" (Pp 6, Oke et al., 2011) the child early on in the placement. This special liking, or love, for the child was understood as the initiating factor in bringing out a parental dedication from the foster carer.

Achieving this sense of belonging was understood by the foster carers as providing the child with the opportunity to live as normally as possible and free of stigma associated with being in foster care (Beek and Schofield, 2002). Other studies echoed this whereby foster carers demonstrated a desire to provide young people with normality, security and "a decent home" (Pp 19, Beek and Schofield, 2002) within a "normal family" (Pp 19, Beek and Schofield, 2002) based on the assumption that the young person may not have experienced this previously (Butler and Charles, 1999). Furthermore, foster carers communicated the desire to provide young people with a source of protection with traditional family models. They aimed to achieve this through investing themselves in the young person emotionally and by being valued and appreciated as parents (Butler and Charles, 1999). This sense of family membership and belonging was identified by some foster carers as continuing beyond the age of fostering and into adulthood and independence (Beek & Schofield, 2002). Foster carers within the Oke et al., (2011) study, described the commitment to young people being viewed as "family" (pp 8, Oke et al., 2011) within the household was perceived as long term commitment even after the young person had left care.

In relation to the notion of foster carers desiring a parental role in the young people's lives, the studies reviewed identified a sense of rivalry felt between the foster carers and the young people's birth family. Butler and Charles (1999) suggested that foster carers often felt second best to birth family and demonstrated a desire for "exclusive parenting" (pp 14, Butler and Charles, 1999). In addition to this, Beek and Schofield (2002) suggested that foster carers experienced anxieties around children returning to birth families under certain circumstances. Similarly, Sinclair & Wilson (2003) reported that foster carers demonstrated wanting a level of distance from the birth family and, where contact remained, for it to be in the child's best interests and not undermining to the placement or position within the family.

Further frustrations were identified around decision making being with birth parents paired with a sense of powerlessness regarding decisions made about their foster child (Butler & Charles, 1999). Following on from this was feeling like their children and families often missed out on things because of delays in waiting for permission from birth families and social workers. This further undermined the sense of belonging for the child in the family due to always having to "check back" (pp 15, Butler & Charles, 1999) with birth family and social workers. Foster carers believed that this may further delay the desired sense of trust and belonging within the family (Beek & Schofield, 2002). Furthermore, foster carers described finding it distressing when children were emotionally harmed by decisions with which foster carers were powerless to intervene with. This was paired with the frustration of social workers and birth family having the final say, even though the foster carers felt they knew the child best and what would be best for them (Beek & Schofield, 2002).

Reasons for placement moves

When exploring reasons behind placement moves and how they are understood and experienced by foster carers, the studies reviewed identified the following key factors; challenging behaviour displayed by the young person (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003; Christiansen, 2010 and Brown & Bednar, 2006), risk to own family (Brown & Bednar, 2006), a lack of fit between the young person and foster carers (Butler & Charles 1999 and Brown & Bednar 2006) and changes in circumstances including foster carers own health (Brown & Bednar, 2006). These areas can be said to fall within three categories; the young person's behaviour, the approach of the foster carer and the importance of matching placements.

The Young Person's Behaviour

Many foster carers identified the young person's difficult behaviour as the key factor in placement breakdowns (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003; Christiansen, 2010 and Brown & Bednar, 2006). Furthermore, foster carers reported that difficult behaviour displayed by the young person as a "deal breaker" (pp 876, Sinclair & Wilson, 2003) if it threatens other children in the household or other relationships within the household (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). Brown & Bednar (2006) identified foster carers as reporting unwillingness to tolerate stealing,

damage to property and the young person repeatedly running away, all of which were reasons for foster carers deciding to end a placement.

Another reason cited by foster carers for ending a placement included the potential for serious physical or sexual harm to others, by a young person in their care and other displays of inappropriate aggressive and sexualised behaviour. In addition to this, if the young person was viewed as "dangerous" (pp 1505, Brown & Bednar, 2006), became involved in crime and violence outside of the home, displayed challenging behaviour resulting in a crisis that foster carers found unmanageable, this often resulted in immediate placement breakdowns (Brown & Bednar, 2006).

The sense of a lack of fit between foster carers and young people was also identified as a contributing factor to placement breakdowns. This included young people's attitudes, behavioural responses and emotional pulls which were heightened by contact with birth family (Butler & Charles, 1999). Brown & Bednar (2006) echoed the concept of a mismatch between the child's needs and the foster carer's abilities as a key factor involved in placement breakdown. Mismatching was also described in circumstances whereby the foster carer felt unprepared to meet the needs of the young person or if the young person was perceived by the foster carer as not wanting to help themselves.

A change in the foster carer's circumstances was reported as another potential factor for a placement to come to an end. This included a career change, retirement, moving area and the foster carer's physical health (Brown & Bednar, 2006). Foster carers claimed that they would consider ending a placement if it was impacting on their health or if their health had deteriorated to such a point that they could not care for the young person as a result of this (Brown & Bednar, 2006).

Foster carers reported an increase in the demands of caring for looked after children which is characterised by an increase in physical aggression by young people, which in turn, is difficult to manage. When describing this, foster carers did not place the blame with young people but understood it in terms of the young people's background and early traumatic life experiences (Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2010).

In the study by Rosthill-Brookes et al., (2010), foster carers reported that caring for other people's children can be unpredictable and volatile and described feeling "burnt out" (pp 10, Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2010) by destructive and rejecting behaviours.   In addition to this they described the high emotional cost of placement breakdowns, feelings of grief, loss and guilt, the sense of having failed to make a difference and feelings of personal failure. The aftermath of placement endings included feeling isolated and having to fend for oneself by way of managing the distress.

Noteworthy is the absence, in any of the studies, of foster carers referring to the emotional impact of placement moves and breakdowns on the young person. Rosthill-Brookes et al., (2010) suggest that this may be a protective factor to make the experience of placement moves more tolerable, or may be a reflection of how adept young people are at disguising their feelings, including strategies such as avoidance, distraction and minimisation to cope with emotional responses.

Summary of quality of the papers discussed.

The findings above need to be considered in light of the methodological strengths and limitations. The studies by Sinclair & Wilson (2003) and Beek & Schofield (2002) are notably weak in terms of methods of data analysis and this should be held in mind when considering their findings.   Other studies used Thematic Analysis (Butler & Charles, 1999), concept mapping (Brown & Campbell, 2007) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Oke et al., 2011) which are well stablished forms of analysis for qualitative data and therefore findings from these studies are more reliable.

The perspective of social workers

Of the studies reviewed, five included social workers as participants (Christiansen 2010; Sinclair & Wilson 2003; Norgate & Hayden 2012; Rosthill-Brookes 2010 and Hollin & Larkin 2011). The methodology used by these papers includes interviews (Christiansen 2010), open ended questionnaires (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003), focus groups and one to one interviews (Norgate & Hayden 2012 and Rosthill-Brookes 2010) and focus groups alone (Hollin & Larkin, 2011). In all of these studies, the angle of the social workers was in considering reasons behind placement moves are presented as three themes; young person's behaviour, foster carers approach and mis-matching of placements.

Young person's behaviour

In line with foster carer's perspectives, the notion of the young person's behaviour as a key factor in placement breakdowns was echoed by social workers (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003 and Norgate & Hayden, 2012). In addition to this, social workers voiced frustration around wanting foster carers to interpret behaviour as a form of communication rather than "acting out" (pp 882, Sinclair & Wilson, 2003).

When focussing on the young person's role in placement stability, social workers reported that the young person should demonstrate a desire to be in the placement in order for it to work and that this motivation is crucial in placement success or failure (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). Leading on from this, social workers suggested that some young people are more "attractive" (pp 875, Sinclair & Wilson, 2003) than others in terms of their endearment and wanting to be loved and cared for by foster carers and wanting to be secure. These attributes are said to bring out a sense of pride in the carer, giving something back to them in a form of being rewarding to care for (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). In addition, social workers in the study by Christiansen (2010) suggested that some young people in the care system are unappealing and somewhat "unfosterable" (pp 917, Christiansen, 2010) due to severity of their behaviours.

Foster carers approach

When considering reasons for placement breakdowns, social workers pinpointed foster carer's reluctance to ask for help when a placement is in trouble, or untimely and poor

communication from foster carers at times leading up to crisis, as to blame (Rosthill-Brookes 2010). They suggested that placements may last longer if increased support could be offered to foster carers when difficulties are initially identified and if the initial matching was more appropriate. Furthermore, social workers in this study saw foster carers as having unrealistic expectations of how young people should adapt into their families and how they should behave. In addition to this, social workers believed that foster carers had difficulty in accepting the importance of the birth families' continuing involvement in the young person's life (Christiansen, 2010).

When referring to the approach of foster carers, social workers suggested that foster carers should have a "role" (pp 2202, Hollin & Larkin, 2011) or "job" (pp 2202, Hollin & Larkin, 2011) rather than be a parent, which is in direct contrast to the findings identifying how foster carers view their role. Furthermore, social workers in this study also suggested that foster carers should have less power than the birth family where appropriate and a role which is determined by the state. Once Again, this is in contrast to the feelings shared by foster carers in other studies who identified distance from the birth family as a contributing factor to placement success (Butler & Charles 1999; Beek & Schofield 2002; Sinclair & Wilson 2003 and Oke 2011).

When reflecting on foster carers' decisions to end placements, social workers in the Rosthill-Brookes (2010) study referred to them as sudden, self-serving and impulsive. Furthermore, they were described as counter-productive for young people, placing a burden on social workers and already over stretched resources. Social workers reported having little empathy with foster carer's urgency to end certain placements.

The importance of matching

In a similar vein to the perceptions of foster carers, social workers identified the need for a good match between the young person and foster carer in order for a placement to be successful. In addition to this, social workers described an alternative type of mismatch in terms of a mismatch between the child's needs and the foster carer's expectations leading to foster carers feeling ill-equipped and unprepared to manage the young people (Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2010). Christiansen (2010) echoed this with social workers reporting their

feelings that foster carers have a lack of understanding of what it takes to care for a child placed within the care system.

In addition to the factor of mismatching being a difficulty, social workers within the Sinclair & Wilson (2003) study gave an honest account of the reality of finding placements for young people. They reported that no real matching takes place for young people and foster carers but rather, it's a case of finding an available carer. They described placements as starting out with ill-equipped foster carers who from the outset were unlikely to cope with the caregiving required by the young people being placed with them. This reportedly often leads to placements inevitably breaking down or being deemed inappropriate and are therefore "temporary" (pp 875, Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). Often therefore, a placement must reach crisis point before the situation is taken seriously and the young person is moved, once again potentially into another "mis-matched" (pp 875, Sinclair & Wilson, 2003) placement.

Social workers in two of the studies provided an account of the emotional impact they experienced around placement breakdowns (Rosthill-Brookes, 2010 and Norgate & Hayden, 2012). They described "being under pressure" (pp 17, Rosthill-Brookes, 2010), having to contain the fall-out from all sides and being blamed or held accountable for breakdowns (Rosthill-Brookes 2010). They also described feelings of being overworked and always responding to crises rather than having the opportunity to plan and provide adequate levels of support during placement moves (Norgate & Hayden, 2012).

Summary of quality of the papers discussed.
Four out of the five papers presenting findings on the perspective of social workers used well established methods of data analysis including comparative analysis (Christiansen, 2010), Thematic Analysis (Norgate & Hayden, 2012), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Rosthill-Brookes, 2010) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Hollin & Larkin, 2011) and are therefore considered reliable in their claims. The study by Sinclair & Wilson (2003) was less rigorous in terms of data analysis and findings from this paper should therefore be read with more caution.

The perspective offered through written discourse

Unrau (2007) and Hollin & Larkin (2011) provide an interesting and alternative perspective. The paper by Unrau (2007) considers how the literature of dominant groups communicates placement moves and breakdowns with Hollin & Larkin (2011) considering the discourse used by policy makers, namely within the Care Matters Paper.

Unrau (2007) suggests that powerful and dominant groups make decisions and influence how placement moves are understood by others, based on their own values and perspectives. Moreover, those in dominant groups have the power to decide how placement moves are studied, evaluated, understood and acted upon by others.

Unrau (2007) identified forty three studies investigating placement moves. Of these, over half the research reportedly relied on case record data to measure placement movement, one third included case workers as participants, one quarter included foster carers, one fifth included foster children and only one study in forty three included birth parents as a data source. In response to this, Unrau (2007) suggested that case record data represents placement moves as an artefact of the system instead of an event experienced by children and other people in the context of the system.

In contrast to this, it is suggested that studies which included young people as a data source, reported both positive and negative aspects to the placement move experience. This understanding gained from insights from young people, challenges the underlying assumption of most research definitions that are based on case record data; that being, that placement events are absolutely negative and therefore should always be avoided. The understanding that any placement move has potential to be both helpful and harmful to children in their journey through care, is an important dimension to build into definitions of a placement move (Unrau, 2007). The contrast in information presented by dominant groups and that presented by looked after children is understood by Unrau (2007) as foster children and foster alumni describing their experiences without concern for rules, procedures, accreditation standards, law suits, professional roles and other constraints that might otherwise affect the standpoints of people that are employed by the system or people interested in maintaining current system affairs.

Hollin & Larkin (2011) reported that the Care Matters document consistently uses the term foster *carer* rather than foster *parent* and the role of foster carer is depicted as professional rather than familial. Within this discourse, foster carers are described as having "careers" (pp 2202, Hollin & Larkin, 2011) with the potential for promotion, skills, qualifications, registrations and are noted as a key part of the workforce akin to social workers and teachers within the looked after child's life. The document supposedly views the social worker as "corporate parent" (pp 2202, Hollin & Larkin, 2011) to the looked after child on a day to day basis and furthermore, is depicted as the primary caregiver and parental figure within the paper. Justification for this is based on the social worker being seen as a more consistent role due to changes in foster placements. Hollin & Larkin (2011) state that the paper acknowledges that significant attachment relationships can develop between foster carers and young people in their care, however, this is seen as a positive outcome rather than an identified aim of placements.

In slight contrast to this, Hollin & Larkin (2011) highlight the way in which the Care matters paper suggests that foster carers should possess key competencies and knowledge of child development, attachment theory, separation and loss.   Furthermore, placement breakdowns are depicted using an attachment discourse which somewhat contradicts the notion of foster carers as in a purely professional role.

Discussion and Implications for further research

Discussion of review results

The literature around looked after children is peppered with statements highlighting the need to provide this marginalised group, and those who support them, with a voice within the research literature (Unrau, 2007 & Hyde and Kammerer, 2009). Furthermore, it is suggested that the impact of placement breakdowns cannot be fully understood without considering the perspective of all key stakeholders (Wilson, Sinclair and Gibbs, 2000). In response to this, there is a growing literature which includes looked after children, and those involved with their lives, as participants. It is key to note that this field of research utilising a qualitative methodology, remains in its infancy and thus the number of available studies is somewhat limited. This may be in part due to the many complications and challenges in engaging this population in research (Unrau, 2007). Of those studies which are available, there is some variation in quality of the research in terms of methodological rigour and credibility. Earlier studies lack methodological rigour in terms of using unestablished forms of data analysis for qualitative research (Beek & Schofield, 2002 and Sinclair & Wilson, 2003) and this is markedly improved within later studies reviewed (Brown & Bednar, 2006; Brown & Campbell, 2007; Unrau et al, 2008; Norgate & Hayden, 2012; Hyde & Kammerer, 2009; Rosthill-Brookes et al, 2010; Oke et al, 2011 and Hollin & Larkin, 2011).

There is no doubt that the collective findings in this review suggest that the experience of placement moves is a time of much turmoil for those involved. For the young people, placement moves are described as a time of profound loss regardless of the nature or reason behind the move. For some, this sense of loss and trauma was internalised and played a role in the young person's measure of self-worth (Rosthill-Brookes et al, 2011). Alongside the development of low self-worth, repeated loss and the absence of a secure attachment figure has been linked to impairments in social, emotional and psychological development (Golding, 2008). The experiential content of placement moves thus adds to the formulation around why many young people may develop mental health difficulties both whilst in the care system, and during adult life (Unrau, 2008). The presence of a supportive and secure attachment figure has also been shown to increase

resiliency in the face of adversity and mental health difficulties (Golding, 2008). The absence of such an attachment figure therefore further increases the vulnerability of young people in our care system whom experience repeated moves. Thus, it is not surprising that findings from this review suggest that young people experiencing repeated moves express difficulty in developing trust within interpersonal relationships. The experience of loss and trauma should be considered by foster care professionals and caregivers in every instance of a placement move. Without the opportunity to grieve separation and loss, a young person's ability to cope with change and attach to future caregivers becomes compromised. This is reflected in the findings which suggest looked after children a lack trust in others and have difficulty in managing interpersonal relationships (Unrau, 2008). It has been suggested that young people often struggle with coming to terms with unexpected transitions leading to emotions being silenced or disguised with a focus on moving forward and not looking back (Rosthill-Brookes et al.,2011). This may be due to young people not being at a developmental level to apply emotion oriented coping strategies or that articulating their feelings is unproductive. It has also been suggested that young people report feeling unheard when expressing their feelings and feeling a lack of emotional support (Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2011). If professionals and foster carers view a placement move as a fresh start or a positive move, this may interfere with the natural grief process necessary for a child to move on from those losses. This therefore highlights the importance of professional development for carers to improve their knowledge of attachment and child developmental stages, signals of loss, trauma and grief. In doing so, they may be better equipped to support young people in processing lived trauma and be in a position to develop secure attachments within new placements.

When considering reasons behind placement moves, young people, foster carers and social workers across the studies reviewed, described the behaviour of young people as a contributing factor. This is in line with findings across the quantitative literature (Rock et al., 2013). Children within the looked after system have often been exposed to multiple adverse life circumstances including abuse, neglect, social deprivation, domestic violence and separation and loss. It is reported that these early life experiences can often lead to significant emotional and behavioural difficulties (Golding,

2008). A review of the quantitative literature regarding causal factors in placement moves, reports that placement stability is improved when foster carers demonstrate the importance of setting limits but are also able to tolerate behaviour within the context of children's difficulties (Sinclair et al., 2005). This would suggest that in the face of caring for young people displaying challenging levels of behaviour, increased support and guidance for carers on tolerating such behaviours in the context and formulation of their past history is paramount for placement stability.

Another causal factor identified in placement moves by all stakeholders was mis-matching of young people with foster carers. Social workers have reported the challenges of matching placements in the context of placements often ending in crisis, leading to young people being placed on the basis of availability rather than suitability of placements (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). This holds the implication of young people being placed in poorly suited placements which inevitably end in breakdown and further loss. The alternative would be for a young person having to wait too long for a suitably matched placement to become available which holds further implications.

Foster carers expressed the need for young people to achieve a sense of "belonging" (pp 6, Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2011) within their families in order to increase the likelihood of success and to obtain positive outcomes. For some foster carers, this often followed the experience of a "click" (pp 6, Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2011) or "connection" (pp 6, Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2011) with the young person (Rosthill-Brookes et al., 2011). The implications of this include the consequences for those young people who don't experience such an initial connection with foster carers either due to mis-matching of placements, or the presence of a young person with an avoidant attachment style which has been shown to reduce carer's experiences of connecting with young people emotionally (Golding, 2008).

It has been suggested that the way in which powerful and dominant groups communicate about placement moves within the discourse can influence the wider understanding of how such moves are further studied and acted upon by others (Unrau, 2007 and Hollin & Larkin, 2011). The findings from this review somewhat contradict

those communicated by such groups. An example of this contradiction is the way in which those in a caring role are placed in relation to the young people for whom they care. Whilst the dominant discourse places foster carers within a professional role, the foster carers and indeed the young people within this review demonstrate the desire to form attachments with each other based on acceptance, care and achieving a sense of belonging. With secure attachments identified as key for social, emotional and psychological well-being (Golding, 2008), findings from this review suggest that foster carers should be supported in offering this role to the young people they care for over and above their professional identity.

Review Conclusions

The findings within this review are consistent with the existing quantitative literature reporting general negative consequences of placement moves for young people in our care system (Rock et al., 2013). The current review's focus on qualitative studies provides additional insight and aids interpretation and applicability to practice. Furthermore it collates the emerging studies which offer a voice to this marginalised population and those who support them. It also provides insight into the psychological dynamics present during the process of placement moves. The qualitative approach reveals previously minimised aspects of placement moves, including success stories of stable placements and placement moves and the importance of achieving a sense of belonging.

It is key to hold in mind that there will inevitably be other causal factors leading to difficulties experienced by young people within the care system.   Although the experience of repeated loss through placement moves is highly significant, this cannot be isolated as the sole contributor to how individuals perceive their past experience and current difficulties (Unrau, 2008). The life of the looked after child is vastly complex and the experience of other adverse childhood events such as abuse and trauma will inevitably contribute to the development of life struggles, even for those who have experienced relatively stable and secure placements within the care system.

It is hoped that as more evidence becomes available it will provide a better understanding of placement moves, which will in turn help with the development of formulations of at risk placements.

Suggestions for further research

Due to the qualitative literature on placement moves remaining in its infancy, there is a call for further research in this field and consequently a follow up review of this additional literature would be useful.

In general terms, qualitative research with ethnic minorities who are over-represented in the looked after system is required and outcomes for older children in unstable placements also requires further investigation (Rock et al., 2013).

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Chapter 2- Empirical Paper

Consistent Inconsistency. The experience of interpersonal relationships from the

perspective of residential staff and young people in the looked after system.

Abstract

Long term outcomes and life opportunities for looked after children are known to be significantly poorer than their counterparts who grow up in their birth families. Children within the care system often have histories of abuse and neglect within the context of interpersonal relationships. Entry into the care system has been found to further compound these difficulties and repeat the experience of trauma and loss. This pattern of relational disruption and multiple transitions has been associated with social, emotional and developmental difficulties. Furthermore, the presence of secure and stable relationships has been found to increase resiliency in the face of adversity. This research aimed to explore how young people within the care system experience relationships within the context of ongoing trauma and loss. Interviews were conducted with young people living in residential settings and residential staff supporting them. Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Identified themes for young people came under 3 super-ordinate themes; 'the impact of breakdowns and endings', 'the value of positive relationships' and 'always vs never.' Identified themes for residential staff came under 5 super-ordinate themes; 'the burden of emotional baggage', 'filling the gaps', 'negotiating unknown territory', 'over and above the professional' and 'the pull of the birth family.' Implications for practice are explored.

KEYWORDS: Looked after children, interpersonal relationships, attachment, foster care, placement moves, residential staff, residential placements, interpretative phenomenological analysis, qualitative.

Introduction

Understanding the social and psychological consequences of living in care

The term 'looked after child' refers to a child or young person who is looked after by a local authority and is defined in law under the Children Act (1989). The majority of looked after children will be placed outside of their biological families, some on a temporary basis and others on a more long term or permanent basis. These children enter the care system when it is deemed by health and social care professionals to be detrimental for them to remain within their current living situation, normally, the biological family. Reasons for this may include the occurrence of, or imminent risks of neglect and or a form of abuse.

In 2013, there were over 92, 000 looked after children in the UK (NSPCC). This figure has increased steadily from 2008 and statistics suggest that children are remaining in the care system for longer periods, with 13% remaining in the care system for 5 years or more.

Research suggests that outcomes for looked after children are much poorer than those of their counterparts raised within their birth families. Poorer outcomes have been identified as low academic achievement (Couling, 2000 and Evans, 2003), juvenile criminality (Alltucker et al., 2006 and Southall, 2007) and increasing levels of mental health diagnoses under the age of 18 years (Millward, 2006 and McAuley, 2006). Furthermore, up to 75% of looked after children are at risk of developing severe and complex mental health problems in adult life (Richardson and Joughin, 2002).

Why do relationships matter for psychological wellbeing?

When considering risk and protective factors for mental health difficulties, it has been suggested that close and supportive interpersonal relationships can be a strong protective factor (Collishaw et al, 2007). The significance of interpersonal relationships can be understood through the concepts of connectedness and belonging.

Baumeister (1995, pp 501) describes the concept of belonging as the following;

"human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships. Satisfying this drive involves two criteria; the need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people and second, these interactions must take place in the context of a temporarily stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each others welfare. Interactions with a constantly changing sequence of partners will be less satisfactory than repeated interactions with the same person(s) and relatedness without frequent contact will also be unsatisfactory."

In a similar vein, Phillips-Salimi et al., (2012) suggest that the need or desire to connect with others is an innate human characteristic that is fulfilled when people experience consistent interactions that are nurturing and supportive. Connectedness has thus been defined as "a person's perception or belief that he/she is cared for, respected, valued and understood" (pp 5, Phillips-Salimi et al., 2012).

Furthermore, it is suggested that "In social relationships, connectedness is the degree to which a person perceives that he/she has a close, intimate, meaningful and significant relationships with another person or group of people. This perception is characterised by positive expressions such as empathy, belonging, caring, respect and trust that are both received and reciprocated through affective and consistent social interactions." (pp 5, Phillips-Salimi et al., 2012).

It has been suggested that achieving a sense of belonging and connectedness has important implications for mental health and well-being and that disruptions in people's connectedness can contribute towards psychological, biological and social disturbances (Townsend and McWhirther, 2005). In addition to this, parent and family connectedness are viewed as being a particularly important factor in preventing risky and health compromising behaviours, emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Townsend and McWhirther, 2005).

The impact of belonging and connectedness

Studies considering the effects of connectedness on well-being in adolescents, have suggested that when adolescents indicated that they felt cared for, respected, valued and understood as a result of connectedness, researchers associated these affective qualities with psychosocial outcomes such as enhanced well-being and fewer risk taking behaviours (Phillips-Salimi et al., 2012).

Connectedness has further been associated with a variety of positive psychosocial outcomes in other studies including higher self-esteem, enhanced psychosocial emotional adjustment (less anxiety and depression), adaptive interpersonal skills and improved health status and well-being, higher academic achievement and diminished risk-taking behaviours (Collishaw et al, 2007).

Connectedness has also been associated with increased levels of resiliency in young people experiencing abuse and neglect (Collishaw et al, 2007). Resilience can be understood as a capacity that develops over time and in the context of a supportive environment, and rates of resilience have been found to be considerably higher among adults reporting the presence of at least one parent perceived as very caring (Collishaw et al., 2007). Child abuse is considered to be a serious risk factor for adult psychopathology including recurrent depression, suicidal behaviour, PTSD and substance abuse (Collishaw et al., 2007). Disruptions in interpersonal relationships, and hurdles to obtaining a sense of belonging and connectedness, are therefore of crucial importance for understanding the effects of child abuse on mental health outcomes (Collishaw et al., 2007).

Following on from this, Collishaw et al., (2007) suggest that understanding the processes whereby relationships are developed and maintained constitutes an important goal for future research on resilience in individuals exposed to abusive experiences, and may be a core target for clinical research and interventions.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory grew out of a request made of psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, John Bowlby to write on the topic of difficulties presented in childhood. Bowlby titled the paper

'Maternal Deprivation' and in it he addressed difficulties presented by homeless and orphaned children following World War II. The basic concept of attachment theory outlines the need for infants to be provided with sensitive and responsive interactions by a consistent caregiver. Bowlby suggests that this attachment figure provides the child with a 'secure base' from which they can safely and confidently explore their environment and return to for comfort and security when required (Bowlby 1988). Furthermore, Bowlby suggests that the experience of this secure base leads to an 'internal working model' which guides the person's perceptions, emotions and expectations of relationships in later life (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby's follow up work and research laid the foundations for attachment theory.

Further research by developmental psychologist Mary Ainsworth in the 1960's introduced the concept of different attachment patterns, secure, avoidant and anxious with the development of a fourth, disorganised, identified later (Ainsworth, 1967).

Attachment theory is now considered the dominant approach to understanding early social development and is the dominant framework used by researchers and clinicians cited within this paper. In particular, Kim Golding leads the service providing psychological and therapeutic support to children and families within the local authority in which this research was conducted. This service framework offers a consultation model which centres around the psychological concept of the four attachment patterns.

When developing the research question within this paper, the rationale is based on the emphasis and importance of a secure base leading to the development of internal working models for future self-esteem and emotional well-being. When applied to the population of looked after children, repeated loss and separation from attachment figures makes the application of attachment theory highly relevant.

The role of early life experiences in the pathway of young people in care

Prior to entering the care system, looked after children may have experienced caregiver relationships as frightening, dangerous and/or unavailable. These adverse early experiences have been shown to impact negatively upon patterns of attachment and consequent social, emotional and cognitive development (Golding, 2008). Attachment theory can also be helpful in understanding the significance of early relationships. Bowlby (1958) suggests that a person's early experience of attachment relationships leads to the development of an

internal working model of how relationships work; this model is further influenced and modified by later relationship experiences.

Infants are born biologically predisposed to form relationships from which they can experience security and comfort (Golding, 2008). This then forms the building blocks for social, emotional and cognitive development. When children experience sensitive and responsive relationships they are likely to develop secure attachments. This framework leads to a sense of positive regard for themselves, leading to the development of independence and autonomy and positive expectations of other people, with the ability to draw on close relationships and support from others when needed.

Disrupted relationships and repeated transitions have been found to be associated with difficulties in drawing on relationships and others for social support and emotional regulation (Unrau et al., 2008).

Relational disruption in the lives of looked after children

Upon entering the care system, children are often placed within extended family, foster placements or residential units. For young people in residential settings, long term outcomes are reported to be particularly poor (Meltzer, 2002 & Unrau, 2008). Children may experience numerous placement breakdowns and moves during their time in the looked after system. Shaw (1998) identifies the risk of breakdown of placements in foster care as anything between 40-60%.

Placement moves or breakdowns may occur for a number of reasons. The move may be planned or unplanned, unplanned moves are often referred to as a placement breakdown. A systematic review of the literature by Rock et al., (2013) identified the following factors as predictors of placement instability; age of the child, with older children at higher risk of placement instability, placement history, behavioural problems, psychopathology relating to the child, kinship vs. foster care, with kinship care having better outcomes, separation from siblings, presence of foster carers children/other foster children, carers motivation to foster, personal qualities of foster carers, carers support, carer-child relationship and social worker relationships. Protective factors were also identified including placements with siblings,

placements with older foster carers, more experienced foster carers with strong parenting skills and placements where opportunities were provided for children to develop intellectually (Rock et al., 2013).

Relationships in the lives of young people in care

Richardson and Joughin (2002) suggest that the theme of loss of significant relationships is almost always to be found in the story of the child in care. Oosterman (2007) suggests that young people in residential settings are likely to have experienced the highest level of previous placement breakdowns. This pattern of disrupted relationships and repeated loss and separation in early life is associated with difficulties drawing on social support and emotional regulation (Unrau, 2008).

Golding (2008) suggests that these early and continued disruptions in placements and attachment can lead to difficulties with social, emotional and cognitive development. Furthermore, Golding (2008) suggests that the development of immature emotional functioning combined with low self-worth means that friendship and relationship formation for these young people can be extremely difficult. During adolescence the young person may appear hostile, untrusting, controlling, independent or highly needy leading to difficulties in maintaining relationships.

In addition to caregiving relationships, young people within residential units are often placed alongside peers with similar vulnerabilities and needs. Meltzer (2002) however, reports disproportionate difficulties within peer groups of looked after young people when compared with their counterparts living within natural family settings.

Rationale

The presence of secure and stable relationships is believed to be a key resiliency factor for young people facing adversity (Golding, 2008). The vulnerability of many young people within the care system is therefore compounded by the fragility and temporary nature of caregiving and peer relationships they experience.

Little research is available within the literature with looked after young people as participants, indeed the voice of the looked after child is relatively unheard within the literature. Furthermore, very little is known generally about the experience and personal meaning of relationships for young people in the care system (Unrau, 2007).

Unrau (2007) conducted a review of the available literature in order to consider the extent to which the voices of looked after children are presented within the literature. The review suggested that case record data dominates the sources of most findings and that moreover, young people in the looked after system are a marginalised group when it comes to research and literature reporting on aspects concerning their lives. Furthermore, Unrau (2007) suggests that this case record data are used to indicate that placement moves are detached from, or stripped bare of, any context, thus giving no stake in the experience of placement moves for those it impacts upon most of all. Furthermore, this study suggests that we do not see the quality of the move experience or its consequences on looked after children and others involved. Unrau (2007) suggests that what is presently known about placement moves is influenced by social hierarchy since dominant groups are afforded more opportunity to share their perspectives than marginalised groups. In addition to this, Unrau (2007) suggests that the interpersonal relationships between children and the adults, who care for them, are more important than the individual characteristics of each placement move. Therefore some measure of the interpersonal relationships that make up the placement move experience should be incorporated within the literature.

Aims

The current study aims to gain insight into how young people in residential settings who have experienced numerous placement disruptions and repeated loss of attachment figures, make sense of past and present relationships and how to draw on them for support. The research aims to address this by considering the perspectives of both the young people and the residential staff supporting them.

As the primary caregivers of these young people whilst in residential settings, it seemed pertinent and extremely valuable to include the perspective of residential support workers and their views on the unique nature of relationships within these young people's lives. Research has identified the importance of the relationships between young people in residential settings and residential support workers (Mullan et al., 2007). Another aim therefore is to consider how residential staff experience relationships with young people and also, the perspectives of residential staff on pertinent issues regarding relationships for these young people and placement moves.

It is hoped that the aims will be achieved through considering the phenomenology of relationships for young people in the care system and the residential staff supporting them within the context of repeated loss, separation and trauma.

Semi structured interviews will be used on a one to one basis with young people and residential staff. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) has been chosen as the method of data analysis. The aims of IPA are to obtain insight into a person's understanding and how they make sense of a particular phenomenon. IPA will be used for the purpose of this study in the hope of obtaining insight into the way young people and residential staff experience and make sense of relationships. It sets out to achieve this by exploring claims and concerns of participants as an insight into their current experience within the context of the world around them (Smith, Larkin & Flowers 2009).

As an active participant in IPA, the researcher plays an important part in the process of analysis by taking an interpretative stance in making sense of these different perspectives.

The findings of this study will be discussed in terms of how services supporting these vulnerable young people might nurture the development and more so the maintenance of protective relationships as a way of improving resiliency for a population facing repeated loss, trauma and ongoing adversity.

<center>**Method**</center>

Context

The research was conducted with a local authority in a semi-rural community within the UK. Young people and residential staff from two residential units within this local authority made up the sample of participants. These two residential units were identified by the operational manager as being most suitable for recruiting participants in terms of age of the young people and perceived current level of stability within placements. One of the residential units was eight bedded, medium to long term for male and female children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). The second unit was an eight bedded medium to long term, mixed sex unit, but was split between four beds for young people with EBD and the other four beds for young people with autism and moderate to severe learning disabilities. Young people from the EBD side of this unit and the staff team supporting them were included in this research.

Other residential units within the same local authority were deemed inappropriate to take part in this research as they were either short term crisis units or units designed purely for young people with learning disabilities.

Design

The research takes on a multiple perspective design by using two groups of participants, young people and residential staff. One off, one to one interviews were conducted following a semi-structured topic guide (Appendix 2).

Recruitment and sampling

Purposive sampling was used to obtain two selectively homogenous sub samples. The first sub sample recruited young people living within the care system who were placed within one of the two residential units. The second sample consisted of residential staff employed by the same local authority and working within one of the two residential units at the time of recruitment.

By prior arrangement with individual unit managers, the researcher visited the residential units prior to conducting the research interviews in order to distribute information booklets to young people (appendix 3) and the staff team (appendix 4) and to be available to discuss the research and answer any arising questions. The researcher then revisited each unit to arrange interview slots with individuals interested in taking part.

Participants

The study includes two sets of participants. The first set of participants consists of four young people all under the care of the same local authority and currently living within residential units within that local authority. This sub-sample consists of two males and two females aged between 12 and 17 years at the time of recruitment, all of whom were of white British origin. The young people had been in the care system for between 12 months and 12 years and had been in the current residential unit for between six months and two years. The second sub-sample consists of five residential staff all of whom were employed by the local authority taking part in the study at the time the interviews were conducted. Four members of staff were of white British origin and one was white European, four were females and one was male. The age of staff participants was not recorded. The number of years the staff participants had worked within residential settings ranged from 10 months to nine years.

Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct this research was submitted via formal proposal to the University of Birmingham ethics committee and the operational manager of the local authority within which the research was conducted. Full approval from both parties was obtained prior to contact being made with individual residential unit managers.

Informed consent

All participants were provided with full details about the research at least 48 hours in advance of interviews being conducted. Where the young person was under the age of 16, signed consent was obtained from both the respective unit manager and the young person's social worker (appendix 4). Young people aged 16 or over and staff participants provided signed consent.

Potential harm to participants

Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were informed of the boundaries and limits of confidentiality and informed that information relating to the risk to self or others would be passed on to relevant parties in the interests of keeping them and other people safe. Participants were also made aware that they were not required to discuss or share any information which they find upsetting or distressing and were free to choose not to answer certain questions or discuss certain topics during the interview.

It was agreed during consultation with the Operational Manager of the local authority involved in the research that in the event of a risk issue arising (e.g. a participant becoming distressed or upset during or following an interview or making a disclosure) the issue would be managed by the staff team through the local authority's relevant policies and procedures.

Right to withdraw

Within the written information and consent forms, participants were notified of their right to withdraw from the research. This explained that participants would be able to withdraw from the research at any point prior to, or during the interview. In addition to this, it explained that participants had seven days to withdraw their data from the research after the interview had taken place. Furthermore, it explained that participants could contact the researcher to express any concern about information they provided and would be given the opportunity of viewing their anonymised transcript, and discussing with the researcher any worries about the content, how it would be presented, or who might see it. Following this, any participant wishing to withdraw their data would be given the opportunity to withdraw sections of their data, or their entire transcript. Following the interviews, none of the participants chose to withdraw and none of them contacted the researcher with any concerns.

Participants were informed that once the interview had been completed, no identifiable information would be used and that results reported would remain entirely anonymous.

Table 2: Participant demographics and context, Young People in care sample

Participant number	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Context
001	Jade	17	Female	White British	Entered the care system aged 3 years. Placed for adoption aged 4 years. Adoptive placement broke down aged 15. Moved through 3 foster placements and 1 previous residential unit before being placed in current residential unit 12 months ago.
007	Kerry	17	Female	White British	Entered care system aged 3 years. Remained in long term foster placement until the age of 14 years. Moved through several foster placements and one other residential until prior to being placed in current residential unit 6 months ago.
008	Max	12	Male	White British	Entered the care system and current residential placement 12 months ago when birth mother was sent to prison. Since entering the care system work was being carried out for planned return to live with birth father and step mother with whom little contact had been previously had.
009	Reece	14	Male	White British	Entered the care system aged 3 years. Moved through numerous placements both foster placements and residential placements up until being placed within current residential unit 2 years ago.

Table 3: Participant demographics and context, Residential staff sample

Participant number	Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Context
002	Joe	Male	White British	Worked as a residential support worker for nine years across several different settings within both the private and public sector. Recently joined the current team as a senior support worker.
003	Sally	Female	White British	New to role as residential support worker (10 months). Previously worked in educational settings for children with learning disabilities and challenging behaviours
004	Rita	Female	White European	Worked as a residential support worker within this setting for 5 years.
005	Molly	Female	White British	Worked as a residential support worker within this setting for 3 years.
006	Karen	Female	White British	Worked as a residential worker for several years. Worked within current setting for 5 years.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted by the researcher within a quiet room at each residential unit for the convenience of participants. An open ended interview topic guide was used (Appendix 2). For the purpose of engagement, a set of art materials was used with young people in order to create a tangible representation of individual important people in their lives of whom they referred to during the interviews. With the signed consent of each participant, interviews were digitally recorded using a digital Dictaphone. Interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes.

The quality of the interviews with young people was varied. Two were of good quality whereby the participants were well engaged with the interview and there was good rapport between interviewer and interviewee and lengthy responses were given by the interviewees. The other two interviews with young people were of reduced quality. These two participants, although engaged and motivated, provided minimal responses to questions and remained markedly quieter than their counterparts during the interviews. Notably, these participants were both male and younger in age.

Data organisation

Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were made identifiable by only a participant number and later, a pseudonym assigned to each participant. Each transcript was line numbered to aid analysis and extraction of quotations.

Convention of presentation excerpts

Data excerpts are identifiable by italicised text and referred to by individual pseudonyms. The start and end line numbers of each excerpt is also referenced.

Data Analysis

Procedures within the framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2003) were used to analyse the data. The stages of this data analysis were developed to uniquely fit the aims of this study and are outlined in table 3 below.

Table 4: Stages of data analysis

Stage	Process and Procedure
1	Interview transcripts were analysed individually. The transcripts of young people were analysed first, followed by the transcripts of staff. The first transcript was read whilst listening to the recorded interview in an attempt to 'bring the data to life'.
2	The same transcript was then re-read several times to increase familiarity with the text and any identified areas of interest were underlined and commented upon in the margin. This included comments on the descriptions given by participants, questions it raised in the researchers mind and general reflections.
3	The same transcript was then re-read and more interpretative notes were made of the data and of the initial notations (See appendix 5 – example of transcribed transcript).
4	Emergent themes within this transcript were then identified and recorded.
5	Stages 1-4 were then applied to the next transcript and so on, until all transcripts had been completed.
6	A selection of transcripts were reviewed by two supervisors who made additional notations and interpretations in some circumstances.
7	For the remaining stages of analysis, data were separated into their respective sub-groups i.e. young people and staff, and treated as two separate sets of data.
8	Emergent themes across the set of data from the young people sample were drawn together into 'clusters' defined by shared meaning or concept. This process was completed by the researcher and a selection of clusters of themes were reviewed by two supervisors for the purpose of validity.
9	Specific example quotations were drawn directly from the transcripts in line with identified clusters.
10	Stages 8-9 were then applied to the staff sample of data.
11	The researcher and one supervisor grouped clusters together to produce a set of super-ordinate themes for each sub-group by drawing together

	common concepts and individual or contrasting concepts.
12	These super-ordinate themes were then reviewed by the second supervisor.
13	The end result was a set of super-ordinate themes for the two sub-groups of participants (tables 5 & 6).

Findings

Findings are presented by participant group, findings from the staff group are presented first, followed by findings from the young people group.

Table 5: Identified Themes within Residential Staff Data

Super-ordinate themes	Sub themes	Summary
1. The burden of emotional baggage.	a) Emotional baggage – The Impact of repeated loss, separation and trauma. b) Consistent inconsistency - Feeling let down. c)Reduced resiliency – The Impact on current and future relationships	This theme considers the staff perspective on how the young people's history and background has impacted upon them. This includes the experience of trauma, repeated loss and separation and the idea that young people feel 'let down' by past relationships. It develops further by considering how these experiences impact upon current presentations and the ability of young people to form new relationships. The stance of staff is empathic, understanding and accepting of underlying emotional experience. Staff demonstrate their ability to formulate difficulties and that they are psychologically minded.
2. Filling the gaps.	a) A need for boundaries and consistency. b) A need for YP to re-learn missed experiences. c) Different staff/different needs.	This theme suggests how the staff team believe they meet the needs of the Young People they work with. It explores the idea that boundaries and consistency are needed in order to help the Young People feel contained and safe within relationships. This need is described in terms of missed experiences and the need to be 're-parented'. In terms of individual need, the staff suggest that Young People are able to identify and access certain relationships for different needs and that individual staff approaches are key.
3. Negotiating unknown territory.	a) Unusual focus on relationships with adults. b) Rivalry/Jealousy. c) Fighting to 'fit in'. d) Difficult peer relationships.	This theme explores the idea that staff view Young People as having an unusual focus on their relationships with adults. This is discussed in terms of rivalry and jealousy within the group and fighting for the attention of staff. Linking into this, staff suggest that Young People struggle with peer relationships, maybe as their focus has been predominantly on attaining a secure base from adult relationships. Also the 'uncertainty of fit' within peer groups due to missed learning of social rules and relationships with caregivers as providing the building blocks and schema for future relationships.

4. Over and above the professional.	a) More than just a job role – wanting a connection/relationship. b) Rewarding. c) Importance of time and investment. d) Challenging.	This theme suggests that staff have a desire for their relationships with young people to be more than just a job role, they want to provide an attachment, play a caring parental role and meet more than just the young people's practical needs. When this is achieved the job is more rewarding and a sense of pride is felt by the staff and of the young people. It suggests that their job is made easier when working with young people with whom they 'connect' and identify with somehow. There is an emphasis on the time and investment made by the staff team, they believe that they know the young people best, there is a protective stance with indirect suggestion of 'ownership' over the young people. The role is depicted as being hard work and challenging.
5. The pull of the birth family.	a) YP ongoing pull towards birth family. b) BF and contact discussed using professional language.	This theme discusses the idea that staff find the pull and draw young people have towards their birth family frustrating and difficult to make sense of. There is a suggestion that this draw is confusing given the circumstances and background history. Staff try to make sense of this from the standpoint of their own morals, values and expectations. When discussing their role in facilitating relationships with birth family, the tone changes to the use of more formal and professional language (perhaps as a defence).

Analysis and interpretation of Super-ordinate themes

The burden of emotional baggage.

The Impact of Young People's experiences of repeated loss, separation and trauma within key relationships.

Staff describe young people as entering the care system carrying the burden of emotional baggage from their past. This burden is constructed as an inevitable consequence of the experience of abuse, neglect and loss and it is assumed to be an issue for young people in care across the board. Furthermore, it is inferred that the move into the care system followed by repeated moves within that system, further compounds trauma through the significance of repeated loss and separation. The assumption is that the impact of this trauma will also, inevitably impact on all future relationships for these young people. This is captured by Rita, below:

> *Yeah, definitely and like if you, I don't know, if you've been in so many placements or even like at home, like anybody should have a right to feel safe at home, so if you don't feel safe at home and then you're moving on and you're placed here, there, anywhere, obviously it scares you, you know, you don't know what's happening with your life, especially if you're like eight, nine years old, you don't understand and like all you remember was, I don't know, you were either hungry or hit or you witnessed somebody hitting your Mum or like lots of shouting going on, you know, it's awful, awful experience. So obviously, to build relationships, they do struggle, full stop.*
> *RITA.*

This creates an image of young people in a state of fear, followed by a torrent of being moved around repeatedly creating further fear around the unknown and uncertainty. The suggestion is that the focus is on day to day survival as opposed to the building of relationships.

This is developed further by the perspective of the next participant, Joe, who suggests that the impact of the past on these young people leads to them becoming extremely vulnerable to change, including what the system might view as positive change;

Everything does impact on them, even if it's positive things, you know, sometimes, 'cause a lot of them, they haven't had positive things, so even a positive move, like they could come out of residential care to foster care, that could be as traumatic as being moved to another residential placement, because now they've been moved on, now they've got a little bit of freedom, they've got a little bit of responsibility of their own, you know, that is quite traumatic.   JOE.

This theme suggests that young people experience placement moves as being traumatic, regardless of reasons behind the moves or current life stages. This is related to the idea that experiencing change is difficult as a result of a lack of positive life experiences.

Consistent inconsistency - Experiences of feeling let down.

Most of the participants shared perspectives on young people in care as feeling a sense of being 'let down' by adults.

The participant below, Joe, provides an example of this and describes young people as experiencing repeated episodes of being 'let down' and this is used to aid the staff understanding around why young people may present with certain behaviours;

So it's just kind of confirming what they already thought, you're going to let me down, you're going to let me down and you're going to let me down, which obviously impacts on their behaviour, impacts on how they respond when they come in this setting, how they're going to respond to you to start with, 'cause in their head, you're going to let them down anyway, so why do they need to make any effort, they don't need to make any effort.   JOE.

It also suggests that this repeated sense of being 'let down' may lead to young people approaching relationships in a certain way, in particular, with a reduced investment in future relationships. The perspective staff have is suggestive of the young people as sensitive and vulnerable to the effects of further and repeated loss.

The theme of being let down and staff views on how this impacts upon the young people further develops within the account by another participant, Sally. Sally portrays the young person as internalising the notion of being 'let down' and the development of this to a further stance of 'letting others down' themselves;

> *Some young people always feel that they're being let down, that they've let people down, which is why they're being told to move on. They don't necessarily see them as positive moves all the time, you know, I mean, going from here to foster care is a positive move, 'cause it's that next step forward to independence, but they sometimes see it as, oh, I've let somebody down, I've let myself down, I've not achieved what I was supposed to achieve, what have I done wrong, so it ends up meaning that when they go on to foster placements, those placements break down before they've even had chance to work.   SALLY.*

This is discussed in terms of impacting upon even positive events in the young person's life and suggests a pattern of setting themselves up to fail. Sally takes an empathic stance whilst exploring the notion that the young person may internalise an element of guilt and self-blame for the feeling of repeated let down and disappointment.

Reduced resiliency – The impact on current and future relationships.

The following accounts from Karen and Molly, use a discourse around attachment theory in understanding how the experience of repeated loss, separation, trauma and the notion of being 'let down' can impact upon the young people's ability to build relationships;

> *I think it makes it harder for them to form attachments later in life, 'cause they just think that, what's the point really in investing, 'cause that's going to move on.   KAREN.*

I think if a young person from a young age doesn't have those positive attachments, it dramatically affects their sort of growth in later life, their trust of other people, their relationships, their friendships. MOLLY.

This presents a formulation around early attachment history being associated with a young person's ability to trust and invest in future relationships and in turn, these difficulties with attachment impacting upon developmental growth.

The response of young people to the experience of being repeatedly let down is constructed by the staff in terms of a functional defence mechanism that the young people use as a way of protecting themselves from further hurt and loss. It is described by Rita below as a conscious process used by the young people to respond to their experience of environments and relationships which are temporary and unreliable;

We've got a child who had, I don't know, 20 odd placements before he moved here, will he trust us or will he think, oh, it's another, I don't know, week placement or two weeks placement. To protect himself and we all have got this mechanism in us, to protect himself, he was withdrawing himself or block the emotions or press the buttons, he would know that that would break the placement and stuff.   RITA.

Here, Rita suggests that this young person intentionally behaved in a way to end a placement through negative behaviours in anticipation of it ending prematurely and within his control. This is reflective of the perspective of several staff participants who constructed the notion of young people adapting their behaviour in response to their environments.

Summary

The staff participants provide a perspective which suggests that, in their view, upon entering the care system, young people carry with them the burden of past trauma and that this ultimately impacts upon their expectations of relationships and their ability to form and utilise future relationships effectively. Life within the care system is then portrayed as a time of young people reliving that trauma through repeated separation and loss, the notion of consistent inconsistency is depicted as further compounding the difficulties faced by these young people. The impact of which is understood in terms of emotional difficulties such as internalised blame and unique ways of relating through the use of both conscious and unconscious defence mechanisms as a process of protecting themselves from further trauma and the development of an adept method of ensuring at least some of their needs are met by available adults.

Filling the gaps

A need for boundaries and consistency.

A common thread throughout the interviews with staff was the idea that young people in care naturally gravitate towards members of staff who make them feel secure through the implementation of consistent boundaries. This is based on the assumption that young people have in mind a model and presence of a secure adult.

The perspective of the member of staff below, Joe, is that young people view adults who provide clear and consistent boundaries as being predictable and containing for uncertain situations;

> *R: everywhere I've worked, yeah, there's always been someone who's been really strict, yeah and the kids have always hated that member of staff, but whenever they've had to go on an activity, they've always chose that member of staff to take them.*
> *I: Okay, what's that about?*
> *R: Well, I think it's because they know that member of staff will look after them or keep them in line, will make sure that they do everything that they're supposed to do. Yes, they might go about it in a very regimental and very kind of, you know and say, oh, he's harsh, you know, well, why did you ask him to take you then, you knew he was going to be like that, they don't say, but nine times out of 10, if you're quite, I mean, you don't have to be strict or regimental but as long as you stick to the boundaries and the routines and they know where you draw the line, you know and they'll moan about you, where somebody who like gives them a little, you know, there's always someone who'll go, yeah, go on, I'll let you do that but, you know, they don't want them because they won't keep them safe.   JOE.*

The suggestion is that young people are able to make a conscious decision about what type of person will keep them safe and help to contain them emotionally.

Staff responses further suggest that this consistent approach is the bedrock for building trust and positive relationships with young people in care. Furthermore, clear communication regarding the rationale for implementing such consistent boundaries is viewed as key as reassurance for young people in a wild and scary world as described by Rita below;

So I think the consistency is the key as well, to be consistent, to give the reassurance to the young person. I think that helps to basically, yeah, start building trust because, you know, it must feel that the world out there is a wild, scary world basically, so if we're consistent, obviously we set out boundaries, it's not that they're walking all over us and you know, they do anything they want, we set out boundaries, but we give the reasons as well, explanations, it's not that you have to do it because you have to do it, it's like we try to explain why we expect this behaviour or why we're setting [inaudible 0:12:35]. RITA.

The development of predictable and safe relationships based on consistency and clear boundaries was described by staff as the key factor in improving the young people's behaviour.

In contrast, the staff participants suggested that a lack of boundaries can be risky, causing difficulties in relationships between staff and young people and are very much needed to help keep young people and staff safe in a somewhat otherwise unpredictable environment. Ultimately, within the environment this predictability will also help the staff team to feel contained and more relaxed.

A need for young people to re-learn missed experiences.

When discussing the needs of young people, staff participants often characterised them as emotionally much younger and more vulnerable, with the needs of a much younger child. In response to this, staff identified a need for young people to be nurtured and contained emotionally, something which it is assumed young people in care have missed. This is captured in the below extract;

He's so vulnerable and so, 'cause he's still, he's only 11, but really you've probably got to treat him like a six year old, he still likes the nurture, the cuddles, the settling time at bedtime, stories, watching telly.   SALLY.

Respondents viewed replacing this missed experience of being nurtured within relationships is viewed as providing the building blocks for learning appropriate behaviour and the foundation for making positive life choices. Staff therefore perceived their role in making up for this as an essential part of the young people's development. This is described nicely by Molly, below;

It's the first place they've felt at home, safe within their own environment, they can trust people, they can have fun, they can be sad and it's okay, they can fall out with somebody and they can repair that, so it's a massive part of their lives, I think and especially if they're here for up to something like five years, that's a huge chunk out of a child's life and if they feel safe within that environment for that period of time, I think they'll always remember that. So for them, it's an important place for them and those staff members, who've played such a massive key role in their lives and perhaps has at times taken them away from those dangers and those scary places, to then come somewhere like this.   MOLLY.

This extract emphasises a real need for the experience of this quality of relationship consisting of positive attention and a sense of being made to feel valued and important in another person's world, which in turn, provides a sense of security.   There is also an emphasis on the need for young people to experience a typical home environment, one which they may not have had the experience of previously and one which it is assumed as essential for succeeding in 'real life.'

Different staff/different needs.

Staff suggested that, in their experience, young people are able to seek out different relationships for different needs. This would suggest that the young people have a well-developed idea in mind of what particular attributes or what particular relationship is beneficial and effective in meeting those needs and furthermore, that young people might

seek out certain relationships as a way of replacing those they have missed out on previously. An example of this is offered by Sally;

The boys tend to go for the older men, 'cause a lot of their backgrounds haven't got Dads in their lives, so I think the older men are seen as Dad figures. I tend to be seen as like the fun young one sort of thing and got all the energy and you want to go out in the garden and just muck about and you don't mind getting yourself dirty sort of thing. Then you've got the older ladies that are more the Mums for bedtime stories and nurturing, so again, I think even down to age and gender for certain things.
SALLY.

The seeking out of these relationships by young people is perceived by some members of staff as an acquired skill. It is suggested that young people in care are put into situations whereby they need to work people out and learn a set of strategies in order to ensure that their needs are met. Some staff described this as quite a challenge for young people in care to have to actively work out which relationships will best meet their needs on a somewhat conscious level. Other staff participants viewed the young people's selectiveness with relationships for different needs on a more emotionally led rather than basic needs led basis.

Summary

This theme explored the notion that staff perceived the need to provide young people in care with consistent boundaries within relationships in order to help them to feel safe and contained perhaps for the first time in their lives. This is viewed by staff as the bedrock for developing positive relationships on which the young people are able to draw upon and have their needs met appropriately. In providing these consistent relationships, staff believe they are fulfilling a key missed experience which is essential or the young people's future development and ability to form positive relationships in the future. Young people were positioned as astute in seeking out particular relationships for particular functions and needs.

Negotiating unknown territory.

     Unusual focus on relationships with adults.

When discussing relationships between staff and young people, staff described a view that young people in care have unusual relationships with adults in terms of their focus and preoccupation. This is discussed initially in terms of the relationship young people have with their keyworkers. The participant below, Sally, describes this relationship as the young person having a sense of ownership over their keyworker. Following on from this, she identifies a clear need for the situation to be managed on a professional level through communicating that the young person cannot access that person for their needs on demand;

> *If you're their key worker, you're kind of, you're theirs, they like to say, that's mine, that's my key worker, they can't help anybody else but me sort of thing and again, that's another thing that we try and say, well, no and they are pretty good, it depends. If they want them for a happy reason or if they want them for a negative reason, we usually try and say, actually, you know, they're busy, you'll have to make do.* SALLY.

Following on from this, participants suggested that the bond is not always necessarily mutual and that the impact of the relationship is felt more so by the young person because of the role the key worker plays in their life from the beginning of placement and throughout.

The next participant, Karen, offers an example of this;

> *R: You get sometimes, also you get the child that will come in and go, 'hi', and you'll go, 'this is your key worker', and they go, 'oh' and they think, it's like overly, like they've, you see it quite a lot in, I think in foster placements as well…*
> *I: Kind of immediate…*

R: It's like, 'hi, Mummy', yeah and kind of just transfer, yeah, that's quite an odd phenomena you see here sometimes, that's what you see with key workers, it's like, 'alright, okay, you're my Mum', kind of thing, it's kind of like that…

I: Immediate, quite…

R: Immediate and it doesn't strike you as being a properly formed and developed relationship, it just seems like a, that's what I'm supposed to do, you know, you're the object that's going to meet those needs as a mother, rather than having that connection.   KAREN.

The inference is that the relationship is not genuine but rather, is an immediate superficial attachment to an adult whom the young person views as able to meet their needs within that environment. It is depicted as purely functional for the young person and transferrable between environments and individuals based on what the young person needs at any given time.

Rivalry/Jealousy.

A common thread throughout the staff participants was the idea that young people within the care system often display a type of jealousy amongst their peer group and an exaggerated sibling rivalry. This was depicted as a frustration for the staff participants. This is captured in an extract from Molly, below;

At times their relationship is very volatile, but they have settled down a lot, started to respect each other a bit more. They're quite competitive, all of them and they'll all fight for top dog within the home, most attention from the staff, but they can get along if they need to get along. We sort of take the third one out and there's just two of them, we can go out and enjoy an activity with them, or around the home.   MOLLY.

The emphasis is that the young people have a need to feel prioritised by staff. This suggests a perceived sense of insecurity and uncertainty around the continuation of members of staff being available for the young person when needed.   In an attempt to ensure that

relationship is made available to them, behaviour is directed towards members of their peer group who may be competing for attention from that relationship.

Fighting to 'fit in'.

Staff participants shared a consistent view that young people in care are often fighting an ongoing battle of trying to fit in. This ongoing battle includes trying to find where they fit in each time they move placements and trying to fit in amongst their peer groups. The impact of this behaviour of trying to fit in is discussed in terms of being traumatic for all involved, especially for the young person. Below, Joe takes on an empathic stance and reflects on the difficulty of experiencing this repeated battle of trying to fit in in contrast perhaps to how typically, people would be accepted within their home environment and within a typical family structure;

> *When this other lad come in, they was both fighting to see who was going to be top dog, you know what I mean and it was a constant battle all the time for them to, yes, they'd get on, but there would always be something throughout the day that would happen, 'cause to try and get one over on one another and find their place in the home and that impacted on staff, that impacted on them, it impacted on his social worker, family, it was quite a traumatic time, when this new person moved in. So, for them, if it was traumatic for us, how bad is it going to be for them, when again, they've got to find where they fit into this house, plus he already knew us as staff, so imagine going into a place where you've got new staff, there's new kids and you've got to start all over again.   JOE.*

The young people are depicted as quite vulnerable and helpless; this links with the earlier notion of missed experiences and missed learning and development around the building of relationships. The members of staff paint a picture of the young people as being unsure of how to behave naturally and as adapting their behaviour in an attempt to fit with the expectations of their peer group as opposed to focussing on if and how those relationships are positive and meet their needs. This is demonstrated further by Molly;

I don't know whether they've had very positive influences or they've never really learnt how to interact appropriately. A lot of them are very attention needy, they'll try to fit in and try too hard, by perhaps spending all their pocket money on their friends. Once their pocket money has gone, their friends have no interest in them anymore. A couple of the young girls we've had, they've got involved with lads in the local area and did things they wouldn't necessarily have wanted to do, but at that time wanted their attention and wanted to feel needed, I suppose and that they fitted in. I think they've just never really had those relationships with all the right reasons with different family members or friends in the family, so they don't know how to act appropriately, so a lot of our work is helping them to make the right decisions and choices. MOLLY.

Here Molly describes the sacrifices some young people are willing to make within relationships in order to be accepted, to feel a sense of value and worth by behaving in ways to please others and receive positive feedback. This represents how staff understand the young people's behaviour in terms of missed experiences of mutually positive relationships.

Difficult peer relationships.

A common thread throughout the staff responses included the perspective that young people in care often struggle with peer relationships. This was particularly pertinent when discussing peer relationships within the unit. The perspective is that the young people are simply placed together and don't necessarily build up any kind of meaningful relationships with each other. This is captured in the extracts below by Molly and Karen;

I don't think any of them would be friends if it wasn't for them living in the same setting or the same children's home. MOLLY.
I wouldn't say that any of the children have got strong friendships with the other person, it's just somebody else that they live with. KAREN.

Along the same lines, when discussing peer relationships outside of the unit, staff perceive young people as having similar difficulties. In trying to make sense of why young people in

care might struggle with peer relationships, some participants considered background history to be a contributing factor;

> *They struggle being in the relationship with their peers, there's a lot of competition going on, it also depends on their background and why are they here, but like obviously if they were neglected, they will seek attention and will do stuff for attention.   RITA.*

Here the inference is made that a young person's experiences of past relationships has a direct impact on their ability to build future relationships and as such, the priority of having their needs met wins over the need to focus on peer relationships.

Summary

When sharing their perspective on the young people's interpersonal relationships, staff participants shared a view of young people in care as having an unusual focus on their relationships with adults. This was constructed as a preoccupation and sense of ownership over adults in an immediate caregiving role. In addition to this, staff portrayed a frustration around young people's display of jealousy and rivalry amongst their peer group in an attempt to hold the attention of key figures within the staff team. Further difficulties within the peer groups were described by staff as an ongoing battle to fit in and adapt to new environments with limited resources with which to do this. This was understood by the staff team as a consequence of missed experiences of the necessary models and building blocks from relationships from their past.

Over and above the professional.

More than just a job role – wanting a connection/relationship.

Some staff participants talked about relationships they had built with young people within a professional setting and the impact that these relationships had had on them.

Below, Joe shares an example whereby a connection was made with a young person with whom he worked, through a genuine 'likeability' factor. This 'likeability' factor was highlighted as a key factor by staff as a necessary starting point from which a genuine relationship could develop. In addition to this 'likeability', Joe highlights the significance of identifying with a young person and how that connection can lead to the development of a genuine reciprocal relationship;

> *I worked with a lad from Birmingham, yeah, streetwise, Birmingham lad, that I really liked. He was a bit cocky, he was a bit arrogant, he give it a lot of, you know, in your face kind of stuff, but I really liked him. Probably, you know, you could sit in a room and have a conversation and it would be like, a very relaxed conversation, you kind of, I don't know, I don't why, like, I think it reminded me of me kind of when I was his age or whatever, still a bit like it now and you know, the kind of, you could have a laugh and joke with him, appropriate laugh and joking……Got on with him, got a good understanding, you know, I felt like we'd got that positive relationship, where, yes, he knew that I'd have a laugh and joke, but yes, he knew that there was a time where, you know and he kind of, we knew that with each other, you know what I mean? He knew that he shouldn't say that and as soon as he'd said something, he's like kind of said, I'm sorry, you know, shouldn't have said that and we'd got that relationship. Yeah, we still had our ups and downs and we'd got that relationship where, if there was something on his mind, he'd come and tell me that there was something on his mind, he was worried and stuff like that.*　　　*JOE.*

The sense here is that this relationship is genuine with mutual investment and a shared understanding. The extract hints that both parties cared about the other's feelings and behaved in ways which demonstrated respect for each other. Staff suggested that this

genuine investment is required in order for a true and genuine relationship to develop on more than a superficial level.

Following on from the idea of investment is the perceived impact the staff have on the lives of the young people. It is inferred that the young people change dramatically as a result of the relationships developed with staff through investment and a commitment of giving oneself to the relationship over and above what is required professionally.

In contrast to the experience of investing in positive relationships with young people, staff also shared experiences of difficult relationships with young people. Here, the importance of likeability in a young person is discussed from another angle in that without it, relationships between staff and young people don't develop past the superficial and professional level. This is suggestive of a desire to work with young people who demonstrate a need for staff. It also implies that staff prefer relationships which require investment and which can be developed to a level past that of meeting the young person's basic and practical needs;

> *I think we had a child in once with avoidant attachment and that was really difficult to build a relationship with her. She was really, really good at everything, she never caused a problem, a really lovely, lovely girl, but so you'd sort of say to her, you know, 'oh, you've eaten a lot for tea' and then if you kind of pushed it, she'd be like, 'yeah, well, so and so took my lunch today', but she wouldn't come forward and tell you anything, so you'd be like, 'where's your school jumper, 'oh, I lost it three weeks ago', 'didn't you be cold', 'yes', you know, that type, that's kind of harder to make a relationship. KAREN.*

Again, Karen demonstrates a desire to meet the young person's emotional needs rather than just their practical needs and for a connection to be made through the opportunity to invest a part of the self to the relationship. One would assume that practical needs can be met when a young person remains closed. However, in order to invest and connect emotionally, Karen identifies a need for the young person to be open and available to this.

Importance of time and investment.

A common thread throughout the staff interviews was the emphasis on the importance of time spent with young people and the importance of allowing a young person time to develop relationships at their own pace. There was also an emphasis on the need for placement longevity in order for young people to reach the point of developing and maintaining secure relationships.

Another emerging thread involved the idea that of all adults involved in the young people's lives, the staff team identified themselves as investing the most time with them. This is captured by Rita, below;

> *It depends who they make the relationship with and usually it is somebody from here, you know, like if they leave here, it's probably a teacher or a TA or you know, it's somebody who spends with them more of their days of the week. Social workers, for instance, yes, they are involved, but they don't see them on an everyday basis, like we are here 24/7, so we've got the chance, the better chance to build a relationship and gain the trust and then like if there is anything going on, they will come and you know, talk to us.   RITA.*

The staff team place themselves at the centre of the young people's lives and identify themselves as the most important figure based on time and investment they offer. The tone of staff suggests that this relationship should be viewed and respected as key by other professionals in the young people's lives, somewhat suggesting a need for recognition of the role played by the staff team and the hard work involved. Staff take a somewhat protective stance towards the relationship in which they have invested time and hard work. In addition to this, participants also suggested that the young people also demonstrate the closeness to staff members by being their first port of call.

Challenging

When discussing relationships with young people, staff also shared experiences of challenges and in particular, the emotional impact of working with young people. When discussing placement moves, staff often suggest a sense of disappointment on both the part

of the young person and the member of staff. There is also a sense of guilt around 'leaving' the young person and a sense of mutual loss following the development of a relationship over time with both parties having invested in each other.

The participant below talks explicitly about the emotional impact of relationships with young people coming to an end;

> R: You know what I mean, both of us together, we'd have a laugh and we'd have a joke, we both liked football, both supported the same team, we both played football, he was quite sporty, I was quite, you know, all that and now, all of a sudden, I'm leaving him, you know what I mean, or I'm going somewhere else and that was quite hard, I think.
>
> I: For both of you?
>
> R: For both, yeah, but I'd never really, yeah, I come and I'll have a laugh and joke, there's a lad now here, he's going to be moving on soon, you know, I've kind of built a good relationship with him, I'm his key worker and stuff like that, but like this lad was kind of, you know when you kind of, I don't know, like the therapist, she said to me, she said, do you think you've let him in or something, you know when you kind of, I don't know what it is and you kind of think, well, I don't know, never had a kind of, you know, 'cause you can come and you can care for them and you can give them the best care, but you don't really have to kind of let them in, do you, you know what I mean, you do it and you go. She was like, do you think you've let him in, like and I was like, what do you mean, I didn't get it, but it really kind of knocked me about, if you know what I mean, I felt, well, what does she mean by that, I've been with him for three years, you know, what's all that about and you think, but I don't know.
>
> JOE.

This extract explores the difference between the levels of relationships between staff and young people. It suggests that for some young people, staff are able to develop relationships and meet their needs in a positive way without what may be considered as becoming too close or of crossing professional boundaries perhaps. For other young people, the notion of 'letting them in' is shared with caution and there is a sense of being

seen as being unprofessional for allowing this to happen. It is also discussed in terms of an unexpected and unplanned occurrence. The ending of the relationship between this young person and member of staff, is experienced by the member of staff as a time of unpredicted emotional turmoil, being 'knocked about' emotionally by the changes and subsequent loss but also the sense of guilt on how the ending impacted upon a young person for whom this member of staff had invested genuine level of emotional regard and care.

Summary

When discussing their own experiences of relationships with young people with whom they have worked. Staff participants identified the need for a genuine 'likeability' factor in order to build relationships with the young people on a level above that of superficial or professional. In addition to this, staff conveyed a desire to make a genuine connection with the young people with whom they work and to build relationships whereby they are able to meet the emotional needs as well as the basic and practical needs of the young people. Within the system of professionals and relationships in the young people's lives, staff place themselves as the key figures and main point of contact for young people in their care. This is understood in terms of time and investment on the part of the staff team and a sense of desired recognition of their importance in the young people's lives was suggested. Staff also shared their experiences of the emotional impact felt by them when significant relationships with young people come to an end.

The pull of the birth family.

Making sense of young people's on-going pull towards their birth family.

A common theme amongst participants was of staff trying to make sense of an on-going pull young people in care expressed towards their birth family;

This was entwined with difficulty in understanding the pull based on the view that birth parents were inadequate and or unsafe for the young person to be around;

> *I think it is hard, 'cause at the end of the day, they do see them as, it's my Mum and Dad and if I had a choice, I will go back to my Mum and Dad and every young person that I've worked with, as they've come up to leaving care, they all say they're going back to live with Mum and Dad. Nine times out of 10 they don't, you know, either Mum and Dad don't want them back or Mum and Dad can't have them back or, but in their head, they're going back to Mum and Dad, or Mum, or Dad or, you know, so. JOE.*

Here, Joe demonstrates this theme by sharing a difficulty in making sense of the experience of the young person in terms of quite black and white thinking. He attempts to understand the young person's perspective based on his own moral values and judgements, this was common of the staff responses.

Staff further expressed a need to work on helping the young person to change their way of thinking about their birth family through a process of being taught what is right and what is wrong. The stance is that his perspective is accurate and that of the young persons is flawed and needs correcting in some way;

> *You try and talk to them and educate them, but it's quite difficult, you know and sometimes it is hard to get your head around the fact as why do they want to go back to their Mum and Dad, why would they go back to their Mum and dad?   JOE.*

The staff having difficulty in understanding the young person's perspective leads to their belief that they need to support a move to the 'correct' way of thinking. This is largely based on the morals and value judgements of the staff whilst grounded in the best interests of the young people.

Birth family and contact discussed using professional language.

When discussing their role within facilitating relationships between young people and their birth families the staff participants took a step back from sharing their personal views and took on a professional stance and described their role and activities in terms of professional language you might find within national frameworks and guidelines surrounding looked after children.

Terms such as 'best outcome' and 'where appropriate' were used to discuss factors determining the levels of contact between young people and their birth families. This is in stark contrast to the perspectives shared when discussing the ongoing nature of relationships between young people and their birth families.

Below, Sally demonstrates this by separating herself from sharing her personal views regarding contact with birth family;

> *Well, again, it depends if you're a key worker. I think usually, I mean, obviously I'm an RSW [residential support worker], but most RSWs on each side of the home have a key child and then there's usually two members of staff to one child, so they share the duties and responsibilities. I mean, it's everybody's responsibility, whoever's on shift, if we have phone calls or if we have planned on site contact or planned visits from social workers, everybody takes it on as the responsibility if they're on shift, but it's usually the key worker's responsibility to oversee these meetings being arranged and actually carried out.   SALLY.*

This is representative of the staff placing themselves within a professional role and using professional language when describing this issue. Roles are discussed in terms of what one

might consider meeting a job description and a shared professional responsibility between the staff team.

Summary

When sharing their perspectives on the relationships that young people in care have with their birth families, staff expressed a difficulty in making sense of the ongoing desire to return to their birth family which was often communicated by the young people. Attempts to make sense of the ongoing draw to what were perceived by the staff as unsafe relationships embedded in histories of abuse and trauma, were made based on the staffs own set of values and moral judgements. In contrast to this, when discussing their role in facilitating relationships between young people and their birth families, staff changed their stance from the personal to the professional and shared a discourse of professional language similar to what might be found within national framework and policy documentation.

Table 6: Identified Themes within Young People's Data

Super-ordinate themes	Sub themes	Summary
1. The impact of breakdowns and endings.	a) Feeling let down, isolated. b) Past placements as 'places' rather than 'people' or 'relationships.'	This theme includes expressions of difficult emotions in relation to past relationships, placement endings and placement breakdowns. Participants describe an ongoing battle with relationships and having to consider them on a conscious level rather than being able to enjoy them 'naturally.' It highlights defences which are used such as referring to 'places lived' rather than 'people lived with'.
2. The Value of positive relationships.	a) Positive experiences of relationships. b) Value of 1:1 relationships.	This theme explores the idea that young people still value positive relationships and indeed desire them and demonstrate a need for them. Positive relationships are described as beneficial and useful. Positive relationships help the young people to feel valued, likeable, worthy and accepted. Following on from this, the idea that close, one to one relationships are easier to manage, of more use, highly valued.
3. Always vs Never.	a) Always (Desired). b) Never. c) Pull to BF (Definite).	The idea that current positive relationships will last forever, are unbreakable and every aspect of them is positive. In contrast, past relationships will never be revisited; the endings of these relationships were final. Relationships with birth family are qualitatively different in terms of always and

never – the nature of them has changed i.e. from full time 'permanent' to 'part time' contact, but they still remain as 'ALWAYS'. Moves from birth family have not ended up in the 'NEVER' pile of relationships.

The impact of breakdowns and endings.

Feeling let down, isolated.

Running throughout the interviews with young people was the theme of feeling let down by other people. This included both in the past and present tense. Also, feelings of isolation were apparent through many of the interviews with young people.

In the extract below, Kerry demonstrates this by describing a flurry of repeatedly being let down by adults and services;

> *Yeah, then my social worker moved me cos the lad used to beat me up and they found out so I got moved from there and then I went to another foster placement an then I went back to my dad and then my dad took an overdose so the police took me to my nan and then I went from my nan to another foster carer and then I went back to my nan and then I went to my mum then I went to my mums mates then they kicked me out at the police station at like 1 o cock in the morning and then I went into like premier inn for the night and then I went to (unit name) and then went into hospital and then come here. KERRY.*

Although this is shared in a somewhat matter of fact way, there is an undercurrent of awareness that Kerry has been repeatedly failed and let down by those in a position entrusted to care and keep her safe, all within a short timescale of magnified emotional turmoil leading to an overwhelming sense of isolation and loneliness.

Young people also shared how the experience of being let down repeatedly can impact on them emotionally and how this impacts on their approach to future relationships.

> *R: you've just got to be careful though*
> *I: Whys that?*
> *R: Cos some people like you think oh yeah I get on with them really well and then they might not turn out to be what you expected them to be*
> *I: Hmm*

R: Like my brother when I first met him after like 10 11 years of being adopted I was like well excited to be with my brothers and sisters and then now I look at them and I think you aint what I wanted you to turn out to be so now I just stay close to like just some of my sisters just 2 of my sisters and my little brother

I: Hmm

R: And the others I'm just like I can't be bothered with you cos you just are not what I expected you to be if you know what I mean so you've just got to be careful that you don't like I dunno that you're not too quick and rush into things and that you've got to get to know people before you actually like become close to them

I: Yeah

R: Or let yourself become close like proper close to them cos if like you start trusting them straight away and telling them everything and then you find out what they're really like and then you're gonna be gutted so it's better to like get to know someone like properly for a while and then if you do click with them and you find yeah actually and then obviously talk to them about stuff but.   JADE.

Here Jade shares the hopes held for developing relationships with relatives she hadn't been in contact with previously based on the assumption that biological siblings would automatically have the best intentions and her best interests at heart.   The experience of these relatives 'fall from grace' entwined with deception is followed by Jade sharing the hurt caused and the need to approach future relationships with caution to protect oneself against further being let down and the emotional impact of this.

The experience of loss described by the young people is framed as a learning experience and described as impacting on how future relationships are approached. Young people express the need to protect themselves from being let down again and from experiencing further hurt.

When discussing breakdowns of interpersonal relationships, young people also shared their experiences of feeling isolated within relationships which they viewed as being unhelpful and unavailable.

Past placements as 'places' rather than 'people' or 'relationships.'

An interesting concept arising within the interviews with young people included the way past relationships were constructed as 'places' rather than with 'people'.

This detached perspective of relationships implies that they are of little importance and is demonstrated by the participant Jade, below, who when asked about friendships, names places she has lived rather than explicit relationships with people in her life;

> *I: so perhaps you could start by telling me about some important friendships you've got*
>
> *R: well*
>
> *I: that can be any kind of friendship*
>
> *R; erm…what now?*
>
> *I: Yeah yeah*
>
> *R: I'd probably say (name of residential unit) now um they help me a lot but other placements haven't really helped me.   JADE.*

The interesting use of the term other 'placements' haven't helped me as opposed to other 'people' depersonalises and objectifies previous relationships which have for various reasons come to an end. The same participant when discussing in more depth, previous adults within caring and parental roles, interestingly uses the term 'friendships' and 'people I've lived with' to refer to those relationships.

The use of the term 'friendships' and 'people I've lived with' again minimises the significance of those relationships and potentially the significance of the impact the loss of those relationships may have had. Furthermore, the reduced level of 'closeness' within a family unit is identified as being easier by young people and thus, just 'living with people' rather than considering them 'relationships', reduces the level of intensity and significance in the young person's life.

Summary

The theme of difficult emotions covers the young people sharing experiences of feeling let down by those entrusted to care and to keep them safe. Within this experience of repeatedly being let down is a sense of isolation and loneliness. Amidst the emotional turmoil of rejection, loss and loneliness, the young people objectify many of these previous relationships as 'places lived' rather than 'people' or 'relationships'.

The Value of positive relationships.

Positive experiences of relationships.

All of the young people interviewed were able to draw on positive experiences of relationships. These positive relationships are experienced as available, helpful and supportive.

> *I: So what makes Chris important to you?*
> *R: trust really*
> *I: trust? ok that's quite interesting……..is that that he trusts you or you trust him or…..*
> *R: a bit of both.   REECE.*

> *I:…and (name) members of staff, what is it about them that makes them important?*
> *R: they look after me, they're always here, you can't get rid of them! (laughs).*
> *   MAX.*

The two above extracts demonstrate that the young people are able to reflect on experiences of positive relationships and access them. It also suggests that the young people value those relationships as meeting their needs in some way.

For some of the young people, relationships they had developed within the residential units were described as the first and only current positive relationships in their lives. These relationships were described as being built around unconditional positive regard and a sense of availability and containment during difficult times. Some participants moved this along further by relating developmental growth and change directly to the new experience of positive and helpful relationships within the residential units.

For some, life outside of these relationships was described as an ongoing struggle. With an air of caution based on difficult past experiences, the young person below, Jade, shares an insight into striking the right balance between the risks of allowing dependence on relationships with others and the benefits of those relationships if they work out;

R: So what has that taught you about relationships? You've talked a little bit about it….

I: I dunno its taught me that you just gotta be careful with who you trust and that or who you talk to but if you do trust that person then you can go a long way if you trust them cos you can get a lot of things off your mind and like feel safe with it and you know that if you've told that person something that it's alright and then you can like start helping yourself because you're off loading to someone and it will make you feel better it won't make anything ever go away but at least you feel like you've got people that are there for you…

I: So it's something about having to be the right kind of person…

R: Mmm.   JADE.

This extract suggests a vulnerability based on the lived consequences of previous relationships being hurtful contrasted with the continuing desire to trust and depend on future relationships based on the belief that they can be helpful and beneficial.

Value of 1:1 relationships.

A common thread running through the interviews with young people was the preference of one to one relationships. One to one relationships were depicted as easier to manage, less confusing and of more benefit to the young person. Following on from this, special one to one relationships were defined as unique, special and that care within those relationships is reciprocal.

Below, Jade explicitly refers to the benefit of having fewer closer relationships compared with larger networks and groups of friends;

R: Just go and socialise and then if you click with someone then you've got another friend but you don't have to have loads of friends just like a couple that you know are close to you

I: Hmmm

R: That you now you can trust and that but obviously like if you have like a big network of friends and you like then it aint really as good cos you just like yeah I've

got loads of different friends but there's no one that's actually close to me so like I'd rather have just like one or two people that are really close friends than like 10 friends that are not close if you know what I mean. JADE.

The inference here is that the presence of larger groups makes it more difficult to develop a 'closeness' with individuals. The value and importance of these closer one to one relationships therefore supersedes the desire to have a large network of friends.

In thinking further about the value of one to one relationships, young people constructed a sense of an idealised one to one relationship with another person, free from the threat of others penetrating the created bond between two people.

Summary

All of the young people interviewed were able to draw on experiences of positive relationships, many of which were in the present tense. These positive relationships are desired, useful and valued by the young people. Following on from this, young people demonstrate a preference for intimate one to one relationships as opposed to a large network of relationships. These are constructed as being easier to manage, of more use to the young person and more reliable.

When discussing positive relationships with particular staff members, qualities identified as important in the other person included those similar to they would hope for in a parental figure, one of keeping the young person safe and contained and nurturing in nature.

Always vs. Never

Always (Desired)

An interesting concept which arose during interviews with young people was the concept of relationships being defined as 'always' and 'never'. Namely, current positive and helpful relationships were constructed as being permanent, secure, forever and perceived as always being available. In contrast, past relationships which had ended in loss and separation under difficult circumstances were constructed as final, severed and never to be revisited.

When describing their current placement within the residential unit the participant below, Jade, defines this and the relationships within this environment as permanent and ongoing;

> *R: Nah no never felt this settled before but I know this is my home and like I am settled here so it's all good*
>
> *I: You said something really interesting then I know this is my home, how do you know that kind of what…?*
>
> *R: Cos after living here for a year like as times gone on things have just like a lot of things have happened and like change has happened but I still know that this is my home no matter what so like I can if I've got any problems I know I can always come here.*
>
> *I: Hmmmm*
>
> *R: Like and it's not just gonna be my home until I'm 18 and then them say right you're 18 now go and get your flat goodbye it's not like that and I know that if I get my flat that I'll still be able to come down and like they'll still like treat me like I'm at home if you know what I mean so I now it's not just gonna be like when you're 18 we're gonna just like tell you to move on*
>
> *I: Hmmm*
>
> *R: And I've always got (unit name) to come back to if I need them so yeah.*
>   *JADE.*

The term 'it's all good' in relation to being settled within the unit places great emphasis on the security of the placement and relationships within it as being the key factor to life in

general being positive.   Furthermore, the young person demonstrates a distinct need for the relationships within the placement to be ongoing and to remain accessible in the future when needed. There is a sense of the young person reassuring themselves through the dialogue with the researcher that these relationships will always be available and accessible as a secure base in the future.

This example is reflective of other young people who placed great importance on the ongoing availability of these positive relationships in terms of helping them to develop and remain safe.

Never

In stark contrast to the construct of relationships as 'always', was the way in which past or negative relationships were constructed as 'never'. In response to the hurt felt following these breakdowns, the relationships were depicted as having been severed, never to be revisited.

The below participant, Kerry, demonstrates this when discussing a the breakdown in a relationship with a key worker within the residential unit;

> *R: Like me and (name) used to be really close*
>
> *I: Is that a member of staff?*
>
> *R: Yeah but now we're just like nothing, there's nothing between us anymore.*
> *KERRY.*

Here the emphasis is on the finality of the relationship and the assumption that it could never be repaired following a negative interpersonal experience.

Similarly the next participant, Jade, shares an experience of a relationship which ended in placement breakdown;

> *R: But I don't have any contact with them no more like I never would*
>
> *I: Is that with*

R: My adoptive parents

I: Your adoptive parents

R: Yeah nah I don't ever speak to them anymore.   JADE.

Here the emphasis again is on the 'never', the young person being of the opinion that now that relationship has broken down there is no scope for it to ever be repaired or for any future contact with that person to be necessary or desired.

In a similar vein, albeit less of an abrupt ending in nature, young people also described their expectations around relationships ending as a result of a planned placement move. The assumption is that, following a placement move or ending, all relationships within that placement automatically come to an end also with no expectation that contact with significant people would continue.

Pull to Birth Family (Definite)

An exception to the construct of always and never was the pull to birth family. Although these relationships were to an extent, in the past, they were discussed as being qualitatively different to relationships in the 'never' pile of relationships.

For some participants, the assumption was that parents were important unconditionally because of the biological link;

I: Mum? So why is Mum important in your life?

R: she made me

I: because she made you, good point! So she's important because she made you?

R: and she cares for me

I: and she cares for you? What is it that Mum does or says that tells you that she cares about you?

R: comes and sees me.   REECE.

And;

I: tell me about why he's important to you,

R: cos he's my dad.   MAX.

Even in the face of these relationships with parents facing turmoil, there was no severance or finality as with other relationships facing similar difficulties. Indeed, the idea of not having such relationships with birth family at least on some level, would be too difficult for some young people to consider.

Summary

An interesting phenomena arising was the construct of young people categorising relationships as 'always' or 'never'. This included the idea that current relationships viewed by the young person as being positive and helpful will inevitably last forever, are unbreakable and that every aspect of them is positive. In stark contrast, relationships from the past which had ended in breakdown were final, severed and never to be revisited. An exception to this rule was relationships with birth parents. For the young people interviewed, these were qualitatively different in nature even though to an extent, they are relationships from the past. Some were in the present in terms of ongoing contact but had changed qualitatively in nature over time.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore how young people in the care system experience relationships within the context of ongoing trauma and loss from the perspectives of both the young people themselves and residential staff who support them. Interviews were conducted with residential staff, and young people within the looked after system, and the sample originated from a semi-rural county within the UK. Data analysis was in the form of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with the aim of capturing insight into the lived experience of the participants on the phenomena of relationships.

As key figures in the day to day lives of looked after children and young people, the residential staff who participated in this research offered extremely valuable perspectives on issues relating to relationships for young people within the care system. The experience and expertise of these participants, paired with their willingness to share some personal reflections, contributes to the literature considering interpersonal relationships for looked after children from an angle not previously considered (Unrau, 2007). Alongside this, the perspectives offered by young people within this research add to a dearth of literature providing this marginalised group with the opportunity to have a voice in research which is dominated by more powerful groups (Unrau, 2008 and Oke, 2011).

Staff themes

Key findings within this study are presented separately for each sub-group of participants. Findings from the staff group are grouped into 5 super-ordinate themes; 'the burden of emotional baggage', 'filling the gaps', 'negotiating unknown territory', 'over and above the professional' and 'the pull of the birth family'.

Within the theme of 'the burden of emotional baggage' staff take an empathic stance towards the notion that upon entering the care system, young people carry with them the emotional burden of past trauma and abuse often entwined within the context of interpersonal and caregiving relationships. Staff used this as a key factor in formulating their understanding around the construct of 'consistent inconsistency'; the notion that

young people in care often experience repeated loss and separation which can further compound their difficulties in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships and impede their chances of utilising positive relationships appropriately for support in the face of adversity.

Recent research by Lee et al., (2014) has also highlighted the link between the experience of loss for young people within the care system and difficulties in developing future relationships. This included the notion that the experience of loss for these young people can lead to the development of relationships in their adult lives which take on a role of parentification alongside a desire to achieve a sense of belonging within their own 'new' families as adults.

Rather than increase resiliency, it is suggested that repeated loss and trauma in these young people's lives can lead to increased vulnerability towards the impact of further loss (Golding, 2008). Evidence supports the role played by connectedness and supportive relationships in improving resiliency for those who have suffered abuse and trauma (Collishaw, 2007) and thus, understanding further the web of relationships in these young people's lives in order to improve their future life chances and mental health is paramount.

The young people's response to repeated loss and trauma was understood by staff participants as a defence mechanism to protect themselves from further hurt and loss. This defence mechanism was depicted as a reduced level of investment in relationships by the young people based on the expectation of being let down.   Although this may be functional in the short term, long term consequences of impeding the development of functional relationships are concerning. The experience and availability of a secure attachment has been suggested as key for social, emotional and psychological wellbeing (Golding, 2008).

 In addition to this, staff suggested that young people internalise a sense of letting other people down and 'failing' at placements which can lead to low self-esteem. Staff suggested that this sense of low self-esteem can become a barrier towards the development of future relationships for looked after young people.   For some staff, certain young people are viewed as adopting an approach towards relationships which is purely functional for having

their needs met by others in a detached manner. Attachment theory can be helpful when considering the styles of relating which these young people might adopt. A common style of attachment for children within the care system is that of an 'Insecure Avoidant' style (Golding, 2008). Those with an insecure avoidant attachment style have often experienced caregivers as frightening, unavailable and ineffective at meeting many of their needs. In response to this, the insecurely attached individual can often become withdrawn, and may place few demands on their caregiver other than to have their basic needs met.

Staff described their role as providing missed experiences for the young people in terms of experiencing positive and helpful relationships with caregiving adults. An approach emphasising clear and consistent boundaries was viewed as the bedrock for young people to develop positive working relationships on which the young people could learn to trust and draw upon for support when required. Indeed, the development of these secure attachments is deemed essential for a young person's social, emotional and cognitive development (Golding, 2008). When discussing the philosophy of mental health, Haigh (2012) identifies the significance of containment in achieving psychological well-being. Here, containment is identified as the need to provide a psychological environment whereby difficult emotions and experiences can safely exist. Haigh (2012) further suggests that this developmental experience can lead to individuals feeling less alienated and more able to achieve sustainable interdependence. It is thus reassuring that the staff team involved within this research construct it as their role to provide such experiences for young people.

An interesting phenomenon which arose within the data from staff participants was the belief that young people in care have an unusual focus and preoccupation with their relationships with caregiving adults. Staff expressed this as the young people having a sense of ownership over them. In connection to this, ongoing jealousy and rivalry between the young people and a drive to maintain the attention of staff over their peer group was a frustrating experience for the staff respondents. Some staff were able to formulate this in the context of a need to 'fit in' and adapt to ever changing new environments with limited resources with which to achieve this. In terms of attachment theory, when moving from an insecure to a more secure attachment style, it is suggested that individuals experience a

sense of 'waking up' to the idea that caregivers are available and effective in meeting their emotional needs (Golding, 2008). As a result, their behaviour often moves from being withdrawn from interpersonal relationships, to becoming very demanding of them, and behaving in ways to try to ensure that these new helpful and positive relationships remain available. Dallos and Vetere (2008) identify this move to a more secure attachment style and the attainment of a secure base as the grounding factor required to set the foundations from which future therapeutic work may become effective for young people and families.

Residential support workers are employed within a role to care for some of the most vulnerable young people displaying a range of behavioural and emotional needs. For many young people, the staff entrusted with the responsibility of caring for them on a day to day basis will, at least for the time they are within that particular placement, be their only available parental figures. With this in mind, the written discourse around professional roles somewhat contradicts itself when discussing the emotional and psychological needs of these young people as identified by Hollin and Larkin (2011). This paper points out that policy frameworks such as the 'Care Matters' paper identify the need for the development of close and nurturing relationships for these young people, yet fails to bridge the gap, because they explicitly place those in a direct caregiving role (i.e. foster carers and residential staff) in a strictly 'professional' capacity. This risks leading to the stigmatisation of those professionals who are willing to offer the young people they work with, a genuine experience of secure attachments. Indeed, many staff interviewed for the present study, conveyed a desire to make genuine connections with the young people and to fulfil the young people's needs to experience close and nurturing caregiver relationships. Moreover, staff associated these connections as necessary for a sense of job satisfaction; they queried the point of their work if they were unable to meet the young people's emotional needs. Research by Oke et al., (2011) identified positive outcomes for young people when they were able to form a strong connection with their carer's, and when carers felt a sense of belonging, expressed by referring to the young person as 'my child'. Again within this paper, carers described shying away from admitting to the feelings of love and attachment towards these young people, for fear of being viewed as unprofessional. Within the present study, staff identified themselves as the key figures in the young people's lives and emphasised the need for this to be appreciated by other professionals. The level to

which staff invested a part of themselves into some relationships with young people with whom they had worked was reflected in the expression of the emotional impact they felt when relationships with those children came to an end. The emotional impact experienced by residential workers when relationships with young people come to an end has rarely been explored within the literature, perhaps because it is assumed that this does not, or should not, occur for individuals whose primary relationship is based on a professional role.

Staff demonstrated a difficulty in making sense of young people's desire to return to their birth family. Attempts to make sense of this draw towards 'unsafe' relationships embedded in histories of abuse and trauma, were interpreted via the staff's own set of values and moral judgements.   In contrast to this, when discussing their role in facilitating relationships between young people and their birth families, staff changed their stance from the personal to the professional and shared a discourse of professional language similar to what might be found within national framework and policy documentation. Research by Emond (2014) identified that on a day-to-day level, young people in care feel supported and cared for by residential staff but have the need to balance this not only with their feelings of being separated from their family but also their awareness of a broader discourse that 'children should live with their families'. This study suggested that young people view it as almost shameful to live outside of the heterogeneous norm. This may explain the perceived pull of the birth family and the young people's attempts to achieve a sense of belonging.

Young people's themes
The young people who participated in this research shared invaluable insight and described raw experiences, of what it can be like to live within the care system, to make sense of a whirlwind of relationships around them, and to experience ongoing loss, separation and trauma. Findings from the young people were broken down into 3 super-ordinate themes; 'the impact of breakdowns and ending', 'the value of positive relationships' and 'always vs never.'

A common theme for these participants was the sense of difficult emotions of isolation and loneliness in the context of repeatedly being let down by adults entrusted to care for them and keep them safe. Amidst the emotional turmoil of rejection, loss and loneliness, the

young people objectify many of these previous relationships as 'places lived' rather than 'people' or 'relationships'. This gives a sense of objectifying those relationships which may provide a defence against the difficult emotions attached to them. This is in contrast to findings by Unrau (2007) who suggested that for children in care, moving from one placement to another seems to be more about how their connections with people are changed by the move experience rather than about a physical location transfer. Although the young people in the present study discussed placements as 'places lived' there was an undercurrent of negative emotion towards these which may suggest unprocessed trauma in response to loss of those relationships.

Responses from all of the young people interviewed suggested that they had an idea or model in mind of positive relationships based on their experiences of a positive relationship with at least one caregiver either in the past or present tense. These positive relationships are communicated as being desired, useful and valued by the young people. Following on from this, young people demonstrate a preference for intimate one to one relationships as opposed to a large network of relationships. These one to one relationships are constructed as being easier to manage, of more use to the young person and more reliable.

These findings fit with the theories of belonging (Baumiester, 1995) and connectedness (Phillips-Salimi et al., 2012) in that, we all have an innate drive to obtain a sense of being cared for, respected and valued through our experiences of consistent, reciprocal relationships with others based on empathy, trust and respect. The findings within this study suggest that regardless of past loss and trauma, young people within the care system continue to strive to achieve a sense of connectedness and belonging. Moreover, as a vulnerable population facing ongoing adversity, it is paramount that this is achieved for healthy social, cognitive and psychological development, to increase levels of resiliency and improve long term outcomes. This identifies the need for such attachment experiences to be nurtured and protected by the services supporting these young people whilst in the care system and during transition to independence and early adulthood.

An interesting phenomena arising was the construct of young people categorising relationships as 'always' or 'never'.   This included the young people constructing current

positive relationships as unbreakable that will inevitably last forever. In stark contrast, the young people constructed relationships from the past which had ended in breakdown as severed and never to be revisited. An exception to this rule was relationships with birth parents. For the young people interviewed, relationships with birth family were described as being qualitatively different in nature. It could be that these young people compartmentalise difficult relationships as a defence against associated difficult emotions. This is contrasted with the overwhelming desire to maintain current positive relationships and ensure their availability and accessibility as a secure base in the future.

Implications for practice

Young people within our care system are a vulnerable, disadvantaged population many of whom have experienced abuse, trauma and repeated separation and loss within the context of interpersonal relationships. It is therefore imperative to provide these young people with the opportunity to develop and maintain secure attachments with appropriate adults in a caregiving role in order to process their experiences of trauma and increase their levels of resiliency in the face of high rates of mental health issues for this population (Golding, 2008; Unrau, 2008 & Haigh, 2012). For those individuals in residential settings, this can be somewhat more of a challenge due to the nature of residential staff in a professional role and the limits and boundaries placed upon them through the dominant discourse. However, some may argue that for those in residential settings, for whom outcomes have shown to be poorer than their peers in foster placements and the general population, the opportunity to develop and access secure attachments is even more pertinent.

Reassuringly, staff respondents in this study demonstrate a desire to fulfil the role of a secure attachment figure and provide the young people with whom they work with the opportunities required to benefit from such secure attachments. In practice, what is required is for staff within these roles to be supported in offering and nurturing these attachment experiences. This support may be provided in the form of training, consultation and supervision from an attachment framework. Furthermore, reflective peer supervision may provide a useful arena for exploring the emotional demands and impact of working with this population of complex young people.

In order to achieve resiliency in the face of on-going adversity, young people with in our care system require the opportunity to experience a sense of belonging and connectedness through a secure base. This is necessary to ensure the long term outcomes are improved for this marginalised population. This is particularly pertinent in preparation for these vulnerable young people transitioning into adulthood and independence. For many, this can be a time of balancing resolving past loss and trauma whilst trying to manage and make sense of new relationships and the transition to independence into adulthood. This can often be a time when support systems are reduced, often leading to poorer outcomes and high rates of mental health difficulties.

Lee et al (2014) suggests that young people who have been in care are more likely to engage in 'risky' relationships as young adults transitioning from the care system to independence. This includes drug taking and risky sexual relations. For those individuals lacking the necessary support systems, there is a need for increased outreach work and availability of on-going supportive relationships for care leavers. This may be in the form of more thorough planning and preparation for placement moves to increase predictability, identify risk and implement support strategies to support young people through transitions. Furthermore, ongoing contact with previous carers may be a way of providing young people with a maintained level of connectedness and a reduced sense of rejection.

Critique and future research

Originally this study set out to focus predominantly upon the perspectives of young people within the care system with the staff participants providing an alternative dimension to the findings. In practice, and in line with other findings (Unrau, 2007), accessing and engaging young people within the care system as participants for research is extremely challenging. Although the data presented within this study is taken from four young people, it is key to highlight the qualitative differences between responses from participants. Interviews with the two older female participants provided rich and detailed data whereas the interviews with the two younger male participants provided much shorter responses. The findings presented therefore rely heavily on the data from the two female participants.

The angle of this study therefore developed in nature with the emphasis becoming on the perspective of residential staff on the experience of relationships for young people within the care system. As key figures within the lives of these young people and first hand experiences of interpersonal relationships with them, data from this population is extremely valuable.

The findings from the group of young people are presented in this research as they are identified as a marginalised group and so the importance of providing albeit a reduced number of participants with a voice remains a priority. Due to the varying quality of the interviews with young people, the validity of this section of the findings is limited and generalizability reduced. The perspective offered by this sample of participants however, may be useful as a reflection on the experiences of those involved. Moreover, in professional courtesy to those young people who volunteered their time to take part in the study it would be considered unethical to disregard the merit of their contributions on the basis of limited access to their peers.

As is often reported within the literature of looked after children and young people, future research would benefit from sampling a larger group of young people as participants. Further research considering the emotional impact of placement moves on residential staff may also be useful as this phenomenon is little researched. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of residential staff investing a part of themselves beyond that required of them professionally for the benefit of the young people with whom they work would be a useful angle for future research.

With regards to the sample of staff participants, it is key to note that they were all from the same team. Therefore, commonalities drawn across themes may be influenced to an extent by staff team ethos or shared working environment. The likelihood is that they will have developed a shared understanding of various topics regarding young people generally but also around the specific young people they discuss during interviews. The exception to this is the section whereby staff discuss reflections on personal examples of relationships they have had with young people during their career and reflections taken from previous employment roles.

The staff team who participated in this research have the support of a specialist therapeutic service for looked after children consisting of specialist social workers, clinical psychologists and other professionals providing ongoing support and training from an attachment framework. This model of thinking was evident in some of the responses given by the staff participants. Sadly, in today's climate access to such specialist services are limited in many areas and indeed at the time of writing the service in question also faces threat of closure. The value of such services cannot be emphasised enough and it is hoped that research such as this helps to highlight the importance of specialist resources and funding for both the young people and professionals supporting them.

Finally, all young people within this study were white British, this reflects the demographics within the area this research was conducted. Outcomes for looked after young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are further reduced compared to their white British counterparts. Furthermore, the voice of looked after children from minority groups is silenced within the literature. Future research focussing on this underprivileged and marginalised group is therefore essential.

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