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Fathers Who Foster: Exploring Gendered Narratives from Foster- Fathers

Philip Heslop

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PhD

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Abstract

This thesis reports the findings of an in-depth narrative study, involving 23 foster-fathers from within an independent foster care agency. The foster care of 'looked after' children in Britain has undergone considerable organisational change over the last few decades. This change to fostering has coincided with feminist and sociological discourses that have developed our understanding of family and gender relations. However, as research and practice have tended to focus on how women look after fostered children, these new ways of looking at gender roles and family relations have not been applied to families who foster. This focus on women as foster carers preserves traditionally gendered roles where women are seen as homemakers. Therefore, there is little understanding of what it is that men do within fostering families and men are routinely assigned a secondary role, as support carer or breadwinner, to a woman main carer. This study aims to add to the understanding of foster care by using feminist concepts around intersectionality and performativity to reappraise the literature and reflect on foster-fathers' experiences as they see them. Data were gathered through mixed methods involving foster-father interviews and observational diaries alongside gathering data from 70 social worker questionnaires. While men in the study performed traditionally masculine roles, many were also seen to take on roles normally performed by women. The study highlights the complexity of foster-fathering because men were seen to perform roles and tasks that are not currently attributed to them. This complexity is often overlooked in both research and social work practice. The findings from this study show men developing caring alone in isolation from social workers. Furthermore, the findings suggest social workers could better support men and women negotiate roles within fostering that extend beyond performing gender which reproduce existing male breadwinner and female homemaking roles.

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Finally I would like to dedicate this thesis to Lucy Heslop, my granddaughter who was born as I completed the thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	1
List of Tables	5
Table of Figures	6
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	7
Introduction to the Thesis.....	7
My Personal Interest in Foster Care	8
A Note on Terminology	9
Summary and Structure of the Thesis.....	10
CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY WITHIN FOSTERING	13
Background to Foster Care in the United Kingdom	13
<i>Foster care statistics</i>	13
<i>The early growth of foster care in the lives of vulnerable children</i>	14
<i>Legislation and policy developments</i>	14
<i>Formalising family care</i>	16
<i>From private family to public service</i>	17
<i>Defining professionalism</i>	18
<i>Foster care and the movement towards professionalism</i>	20
Adoption, Residential Care, Kinship Care and Special Guardianship.....	21
<i>Residential childcare</i>	22
<i>Adoption</i>	22
<i>Special guardianship</i>	23
<i>Kinship care</i>	23
The Role of the Social Worker in Foster Care	23
Fostered Children.....	26
<i>Growth of child welfare</i>	26
<i>Attachment theory and fostering</i>	28
<i>Fostered children and family care</i>	29
Summary	31
CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO RE-EXAMINE THE LITERATURE.. 33	
Introduction to the Chapter.....	33
Contextual Thinking behind the Thesis.....	36

<i>Performing gender and performativity</i>	37
<i>Complex social systems and intersectionality</i>	43
<i>Intimacy and families of choice</i>	47
<i>Social capital and family practices</i>	48
<i>The reproduction of existing gender relations and their subversion</i>	51
Challenging Traditional Constructs to Gender.....	52
<i>Dynamic families</i>	52
<i>Men and masculinity</i>	55
<i>Men and gender journeys</i>	58
The Literature on Men Who Foster	59
<i>The roles attributed to foster-fathers</i>	60
<i>Men fostering in same-sex couples</i>	63
<i>Barriers to men fostering</i>	64
<i>Risk and protection associated with gender and the welfare discourse</i>	65
<i>Summary of the literature relating to men who foster</i>	66
Re-examining the Foster Care Literature.....	67
<i>Fostering families as traditional carers</i>	68
<i>Fostering distinct from parenting</i>	70
<i>Foster carer confidence and self-efficacy</i>	71
<i>Professionalism, payment and motivation to foster</i>	72
<i>Summary of fostering literature</i>	74
Conclusion to the Chapter	74
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	78
Introduction to the Research Methodology	78
Aims of the Study and the Research Questions.....	79
Arriving at the Method for Research Design	80
<i>The qualitative and quantitative approaches</i>	80
<i>Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods</i>	81
<i>Grounded theory</i>	82
<i>Arriving at narrative inquiry</i>	83
Research Relationships	86
<i>Reflexivity</i>	86
<i>The insider / outsider researcher role</i>	88
<i>Dilemmas of research and paid employment</i>	89
<i>The pilot</i>	90
Gathering the Data.....	91
<i>Social worker questionnaire (see appendix 6)</i>	91

<i>First foster-father interviews (see appendix 5)</i>	92
<i>Observational diary (see appendix 7)</i>	93
<i>Second foster-father interview (see appendix 8)</i>	94
<i>Sampling – social worker and foster carers</i>	95
<i>Agency profile</i>	95
<i>Supervising social work profile</i>	99
<i>The foster carers’ profile</i>	99
Ethical Issues	101
Analysis	102
Generalisability to the study	105
Summary	105
CHAPTER FIVE: JOURNEYS IN BECOMING FOSTER-FATHERS	106
Introduction to the Chapter.....	106
Categorising Foster-fathers Journeys to become Foster Carers.....	109
Support to Partner - “I supported her”	110
<i>David’s story</i>	111
<i>Alex’s story</i>	115
A Childhood in Care: - “I’ve been in foster care myself, I have lived that life”	116
<i>John’s story</i>	117
<i>Chris’ story</i>	121
<i>Robert’s story</i>	125
Extend or Create the Family - “To become a family”	128
<i>Jeff’s story</i>	129
<i>Simon’s story</i>	129
<i>Jonathon’s story</i>	130
<i>Miles’ story</i>	132
Care for Children - “To care myself”	134
<i>Ben’s story</i>	134
<i>Mike’s story</i>	136
<i>Peter’s story</i>	138
<i>Alan’s story</i>	140
<i>Thomas’ story</i>	142
Conclusion.....	144
CHAPTER SIX: WHAT MEN WHO FOSTER DO AND THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER	146
Introduction to the Chapter.....	146
Study Findings – Statistical Evidence	148
<i>Tasks and roles undertaken by foster-fathers</i>	148

Study Findings Explored.....	152
<i>Traditional men / traditional roles</i>	152
<i>Transporting duties and role modelling</i>	158
<i>Entertainer and educator</i>	163
<i>Professional-fathers</i>	167
<i>Emotional support and personal care</i>	171
<i>Masculinity and the heroic man</i>	178
Men’s Satisfaction with Fostering Role and the Performance of Gender	181
Subverting and Reinforcing Gender.....	182
Conclusion.....	183
CHAPTER SEVEN: RELATIONS WITH SOCIAL WORKERS.....	185
Introduction to the Chapter.....	185
Fostering Systems and Social Work	186
The Social Workers’ Perception of Men who Foster	188
<i>Generalised assessments of men as carers by social workers</i>	189
<i>Care planning in the delivery of fostering</i>	195
<i>The essential male role – men as assets and men as risk</i>	200
<i>Evidence of change and the evolution of foster-fathering</i>	204
Summary of Social Workers’ Perceptions of Men who Foster	207
The Foster-fathers’ Perceptions of Social Work Intervention	208
<i>Team work and feeling appreciated</i>	209
<i>Feeling ignored and professionally undervalued</i>	214
<i>Feeling monitored and under surveillance</i>	220
Summary of Foster-fathers’ Perceptions of their Relations with Social Workers	223
Conclusion.....	224
CHAPTER EIGHT: ENDINGS EXPERIENCED BY FOSTER-FATHERS	227
Introduction to the Chapter.....	227
Fostered Children’s Experience of Endings and Transitions	229
Men, Masculinity and Endings.....	232
Findings from the Narrative Interviews	234
<i>Regular endings – children and young people in transit</i>	234
<i>Moving to independence</i>	238
<i>Unplanned moves: Allegations and placement breakdowns</i>	243
<i>Relinquishing the home-space</i>	249
Conclusion.....	257
CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE	259
The Research Questions.....	260

<i>How do men reflect on and value what they do as foster carers?</i>	261
<i>What are the tasks and roles which men undertake as foster carers?</i>	262
<i>How do social workers relate to men as foster carers?</i>	266
Limitations of the Study.....	268
Original Contributions to Knowledge.....	269
Implications for Policy and Practice.....	272
Recommendations for Future Research.....	275
Conclusion.....	276
APPENDICES	277
Appendix 1 - Letter of invitation to participate in the study.....	278
Appendix 2 – Study information sheet.....	280
Appendix 3 – E-mail inviting social workers to take part in the study.....	283
Appendix 4 – Consent form.....	285
Appendix 5 – Interview schedule.....	286
Appendix 6 – Social worker questionnaire.....	287
Appendix 7 – Observational diary.....	291
Appendix 8 – Second interview information sheet and topic guide.....	295
Bibliography	296

List of Tables

Table 1 - Carers' gender and approval status (N = 2277).....	97
Table 2 - Age of men approved as main carer (N = 313).....	98
Table 3 - Age of man approved as secondary carer (N = 1437).....	98
Table 4 - Length of time social workers who returned the questionnaire have been qualified.....	99
Table 5 - Foster-fathers - sample description (N = 23).....	100
Table 6 - Foster-fathers participation in the research (N = 23).....	101
Table 7 - Men's journey to become foster-fathers (N = 23).....	108
Table 8 – Questionnaire data on who the social workers see during home visits (N = 70).....	190

Table of Figures

Figure 1 - Social workers' perspectives of the roles of foster-fathers (N = 70)	149
Figure 2 – Foster-fathers' perspectives of their roles as foster-fathers (N = 23)	150
Figure 3 – The daily record of activities undertaken by foster-fathers (N = 16).....	151
Figure 4 - Where foster-fathers transport children (N = 16)	159
Figure 5 – Men's satisfaction with fostering (N =16)	181
Figure 6 – Foster-fathers' positive comments about the support they receive (N = 23)	210
Figure 7 – Foster-fathers' negative comments about the support they receive (N = 23)	215
Figure 8– Foster-fathers' roles within the family (N = 23).....	217
Figure 9 – Gender relations in foster families.....	272

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Thesis

I have called this thesis “Fathers Who Foster: Exploring Gendered Narratives from Foster-Fathers” because it is about the experiences of men who foster narrated through their stories as they perform gender as foster-fathers. Through this study I aim to add to the understanding of foster-fathers by using intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Walby, 2007) and performativity (Butler, 1990), which are innovative to studies of fostering, to reappraise the current foster care literature. Most men foster with a partner and this study reflects this by focusing on foster-fathers in couple relationships. Fostering has a long history and over recent decades there have been significant developments in the care of children ‘looked after’ away from home. These developments have placed more emphasis on foster care and the fostering family has become the placement of choice for children ‘looked after’ by Local Authorities. This greater emphasis on fostering has shifted it from private family activity to a public service and there has been a significant increase in social work interaction with families who foster. Throughout these changes to fostering the role of men has been largely overlooked in the literature.

Foster caring families, whatever their composition, are clearly defined and are an easily accessible sociological group who provide the researcher with a potentially rich source of material. Foster care in Britain is a state regulated activity where children deemed unable to reside with their birth family are ‘looked after’ by approved fostering families (Department for Education, 2011). The history of fostering is rich as alternative versions emerge at different times in relation to sociocultural factors. Fostering in Britain has evolved and the current version is different to earlier versions. As most men foster with women partners, this study reflects on how foster-fathering intersects with family and professional systems. This chapter is a brief introduction to the thesis and sets the scene by looking at my personal motivation to undertake the study. This introductory chapter presents a note on terminology and summarises the structure of the thesis. In the following two chapters I offer a

review of the literature and explain the conceptual foundation of the study. While there is a paucity of specific literature on foster-fathers there is an extensive body of relevant literature outside of fostering, which is too large to incorporate into these two chapters. This literature, therefore, permeates throughout the thesis according to its relevance to specific chapters.

This study is about foster-fathers and the British foster care experience. I suggest in this thesis that a wider sociocultural understanding of fostering would address gaps in our knowledge, particularly as little is known about roles undertaken by men who foster (Gilligan, 2000). Alternative arrangements of fostering, and the care of children by non-related substitute families, co-exist within the British experience and internationally to show the social value afforded to childcare and diverse levels of state control and regulation. For instance, Swedish foster carers are state approved workers (Hojer, 2004) and in contrast in Mozambique foster carers experience minimal state intervention, support and regulation (Charnley, 2006). Research and social work practice are both prone to focus on how women look after fostered children (Wilson *et al.*, 2007) to the detriment of understanding what it is that men do within fostering families. Through this study I set out to investigate the influence of gender concepts on the behaviour of foster-fathers and their negotiation of masculinity by examining a sample of male foster carers. While women still do the bulk of the caring, and the labour market remains segregated between the genders, the men's narratives show there is a convergence on some levels between what women do and what men do as carers. The data from this study show that in their fostering men reflect this convergence, but social work practice does not often recognise any convergence of roles.

My Personal Interest in Foster Care

My personal interest in foster care has grown out of my social work practice and a desire to work positively with vulnerable children who are unable to reside with their birth families. I have worked with foster carers for nearly two decades and concurrently I am a father with three children. As an

advocate of fostering that provides quality care to children, I favour a system which endorses the centrality of the adult carer and child relationship. As a practitioner, I have become increasingly interested by the nature of this caring relationship and the possible impact of gender in defining foster carer roles. While employed as a supervising social worker and training manager, I have endeavoured to engage men who foster and have become ever more interested in their stories and perspectives. Over the years my interest developed and I chose to delve deeper into the subject so that a PhD study with its formalised support, structure and rigorous approach became a natural step. I therefore embarked on a PhD, beginning in 2007, as a part-time post-graduate student with the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University.

A Note on Terminology

There are several words and phrases used as short-hand employed throughout the thesis which require some explanation:

- The phrase “looked after children” and word “children” are used to refer to children and adolescents who are ‘looked after’ in the care of the Local Authority;
- “Narrative” is used to describe the stories of foster-fathers and is at times interchangeable with discourse or group theme. This is further explained in the methodology chapter;
- “Foster care” is used to refer to formal fostering in England as defined by the Fostering Regulations (2011) and relates to foster carers approved by Local Authorities and authorised Fostering Agencies;
- “Social work” and “social worker” is used to refer to social workers and supervising social workers registered by the General Social Care Council and its replacement body the Health Care Professions Council. The thesis mainly relates to ‘supervising social work’, a role defined by the National Minimum Standards (2011) as a social worker supervising foster carers as distinct from the child’s social worker. Supervising social workers have been known as Link Workers and Fostering Officers;

- “Assessments” is used to refer to both formal assessments, such as the BAAF Form F (Chapman and Morrison. 2009) foster carer assessment, as well as more informal practice based assessments undertaken during on-going social work supervision with foster carers;
- The study is principally concerned with fostering as practiced in England. However, England is part of the four countries known as the United Kingdom. While each country has a distinct history and legislation much of the literature does not distinguish between them when discussing fostering. I primarily discuss England though on occasion I refer to the United Kingdom or Britain as it is sometimes difficult to separate each country in the literature.

Summary and Structure of the Thesis

Foster care has evolved and transformed from being a voluntary activity to become a regulated service. This introductory chapter has reflected on this evolution, referring to sociocultural and international diversification in the communal care of vulnerable children. This chapter has introduced the thesis by reflecting on my personal interest in the study and introduced some contextual thinking behind the study. Chapter two contextualises the study with foster care in relation to fostered children, adoption, residential care and social work. In chapter three I argue that concepts of intersectionality and performativity can be applied to the fostering literature. These concepts, derived from feminist literature, allow for an exploration of fostering which provides innovative insights into fostering families and gender relations. Exploring the literature through intersectionality and performativity, a critique is offered to move away from traditional family roles and stereotyped versions of gender founded on the nuclear family. From this critique, the rationale for the study was developed and three research questions devised, which I introduce in chapter four as part of the research methodology. I discuss the research methodology in chapter four and justify the use of narrative inquiry to study foster-fathers and identify emerging themes from my sample.

The thesis comprises four chapters on findings that include discussion and reflection on current literature. The first findings chapter (chapter five) reveals the journeys men in the sample have undertaken to become foster-fathers. From my data, I identify four different types of journey experienced by foster-fathers, which are: to support a partner; a childhood in care; to extend or create family; and to care for children. The individual narratives interconnect with the men's journeys as they overlap, contradict and co-exist with each other. These journeys show men idiosyncratically performing gender relative to their experiences and circumstances. The next findings chapter (chapter six) reflects on what men who foster do and the performance of gender by looking at data from social workers' questionnaires and foster-fathers' observational diaries. The evidence arising from the data show that men take part in a number of tasks with children. Some of these tasks are predictable as they include those readily associated with traditional masculinity, such as being disciplinarian, and others which are more in line with transforming gender roles, like transporting children. Alongside these predicted tasks, new and less predictable roles emerge from my data relating to negotiation and emotionality not associated with traditional masculinity. In chapter seven I focus on the relationships between social workers and foster-fathers. In this chapter I also reflect on the conceptualisation of masculinity and associated patriarchy as men perform gender and move to performativity. The final findings chapter (chapter eight) reflects on the endings men experience during their fostering career. Foster-fathers described various planned and unplanned endings that limit and stop their fathering with individual children, which many feel at a deeply personal level. The narratives highlight men in the study place a high value on their foster-fathering, and that they negotiate new versions of masculinity to care for children though they largely reproduce existing gender relations and traditional manly norms are re-established.

The evidence from the interviews establishes a complex picture concerning foster-fathers as they do not simply conform to stereotyped notions of gender. Certainly they both 'do' gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and display family practices (Morgan, 1996; Finch, 2007) that are very much

associated with traditional constructions of gender. These practices are understood and contextualised within the masculine / feminine binary, but as foster-fathers they extend beyond these normative constructs of gender (Butler, 1990). Through this study, I show that men both affirm and subvert traditional masculinity when they become foster-fathers. By becoming foster-fathers men perform gender roles that subvert masculinity to portray caring and negotiating traits more often associated with women. As foster-fathers they extend beyond male breadwinning with evidence emerging from my data to show that roles are negotiated within the fostering family. While they show agency, and subvert gender norms through performativity, dominant social and power relations re-affirm hegemonic norms to reproduce masculine and feminine norms and continue the traditional performance of gender. The dynamic nature of these family processes is not seen by many social workers; particularly as men present through their narratives that they are not fully engaged by social workers. The complex picture emerging from my data show a process of change within fostering families, which can go unseen by many social workers. In the next chapter I contextualise the study within fostering and introduce trends and developments in the 'looked after' childcare system.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY WITHIN FOSTERING

Background to Foster Care in the United Kingdom

In this chapter I contextualise the study within foster care and in relation to developments in the public care of children in Britain. The chapter is structured to reflect on fostered children along with the background to fostering and to discuss the movement from fostering as a voluntary activity to a more regulated and professionalised service. I also reflect on adoption, residential childcare and social work in relation to fostering. Foster carers operate within the wider fostering social system as they are a communal and societal response to childhood vulnerability. Fostering has undergone much change as it has evolved in Britain to its current position as a more regulated service.

Foster care statistics

During March 2012 there were 67,050 children 'looked after' by English Local Authorities and 50,260 (75%) of these children were cared for in foster placements (Department for Education, 2012). Over time, fostering has become the most common type of placement for 'looked after' children, as the percentage of 'looked after' children in foster placements has risen from 36 percent in 1979 (Berridge and Cleaver, 1987) to the current level of 75 percent, in 2012. The prioritising of fostering in Britain reflects a movement away from residential homes in preference to placements within families which, Butler and Charles (1999) argue, mirrors an ideological assumption based on the primacy of the Western nuclear family. Studies show that most fostering households involve women and men as carers, with married and co-habiting couples predominant (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). While single caring families makeup in excess of 20 percent of fostering households, few men (as little as 2 percent of all households) foster as a single person or with a male partner (Kirton *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, almost all men who foster do so as part of a couple (Brown, 2008) and I only include men in couple relationships in this study as single male fostering households are rare. In contrast, single women carers are much more common (McDermid *et al.*, 2012) accounting for

approximately 20 percent of fostering households. Statistically, mother-headed families are the most frequent type of fostering households. The ethnic composition of fostering is mainly white carers, at over 85 percent of fostering households (Ofsted, 2010) and ethnic minority groups are under-represented in the foster carer population (McDermid *et al.*, 2012).

The early growth of foster care in the lives of vulnerable children

Historically foster care grew out of an informal, voluntary, largely female-based and spontaneous response to the needs of abandoned children and there is a rich history and culture based upon informal communal efforts to meet the needs of children when they are seen to be in need. Fostering as a concept was known in Tudor England (Shaw and Hipgrave, 1983), while fosterage existed amongst Celtic and Saxon peoples (Davies, 2000) whereby poorer families would send their offspring to larger landowners. In Elizabethan England, the Poor Laws (1536) placed responsibility for social welfare with parishes and distinguished between the deserving and undeserving poor with dependent children seen as deserving poor in need of assistance (Smith, 2009). The creation of the Poor Laws was intended to offset the needs of the destitute which Triseliotis *et al.* argue helped to develop a form of foster care as they provided outdoor relief, through apprenticeships, for deprived homeless children (Triseliotis *et al.*, 1995). The system of boarding out of deprived children was formally recognised by Hanway's Act in 1767 (Bebbington and Miles, 1990). Fostering in its more modern connotation was introduced in the middle of the 19th Century with the boarding out of long-term children by the Poor Law Boards and voluntary organisations (such as Doctor Barnardo's) for orphaned and abandoned children. These children were not expected to return to birth families and the system was very much unregulated (Triseliotis *et al.*, 1995).

Legislation and policy developments

Following on from its early beginnings as a voluntary activity and the boarding out of long-term children, by Poor Law Boards and voluntary organisations, foster care in Britain has experienced progressive regulation through legislative and policy developments throughout the 20th Century.

During the early 20th Century fostering operated mainly within private family life with little regulation (Triseliotis *et al.*, 1995); however, on-going legislative and policy developments throughout the century have steered it towards a more public service and away from being a voluntary private family activity. Midway through the 20th Century the quality of care provided to children who were separated from their parents received considerable publicity and public scrutiny following the evacuation of children during the Second World War (1939-44). This public interest and subsequent concern of the evacuation of children, combined with the death of Denis O’Neill whilst living in foster care in 1945, resulted in the 1948 Children Act (Bullock *et al.*, 2006). The relevant childcare legislation in England following this post-war review of children in public care is:

- **The Children Act (1948):** This Act reformed fostering with foster care becoming a temporary measure to facilitate children’s rehabilitation back into their birth family (Rowe, 1980; Triseliotis *et al.*, 1995). By becoming a more temporary family-based service, fostering was transformed and carers had to develop skills as they focused on tasks and solutions involving children and birth families.
- **The Children Act (1975):** During the 1970s and 1980s fostering experienced an upsurge in prominence through the 1975 Children Act as it increased provision for children who required substitute family care (Rowe, 1980).
- **The Children Act (1989):** This Act refocused fostering around children’s rights and the paramountcy principle of child welfare (Brayne and Martin, 1999).
- **Care Standards Act (2000):** The call for further regulation of foster care (Warren, 1999) was supported by Lord Utting’s inquiry, and report, following examples of child abuse within foster care (Utting, 1997). Following on from Utting’s report, fostering was again transformed by regulation through the Care Standards Act (2000) and the implementation of

National Minimum Standards (2002 and 2011) and the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011).

- **The Children Act (2004):** Following the death of Victoria Climbié and the subsequent inquiry by Lord Laming (2003), this Act was implemented to focus children's services around improved agency coordination and children's outcomes based on the '*Every Child Matters*' agenda (Cheminais, 2007).

Through legislation and policy initiatives, brought about by instances of tragic short-falls in childcare and public concern over public childcare, foster care has significantly moved towards a regulated and formal service.

Formalising family care

Fostering is neither culturally or nationally specific nor restricted to Western societies and there is considerable diversity in the organisational means employed to meet the needs of vulnerable children. It has been shown that extended family and community networks in Sub-Saharan Africa can meet the needs of orphaned children through utilising social capital that prizes social networks, relations, connections and forms of reciprocity that influence economic and non-economic benefits (SSewamala *et al.*, 2010). In contrast, fostering agencies and Local Authorities in England are approved by the state (Department for Education, 2011) to meet the needs of vulnerable children deemed unable to reside, for whatever reason, with their birth families (Fostering Regulations 2011). Fostering in Britain has moved towards a more formalised service and Kelly and Gilligan have argued that the state within nuclear family based society has to develop policies "to cope with the contingency of the family failing to or being unable to care for children" (Kelly and Gilligan, 2000: p7). Foster care in Britain has a distinct history having evolved through the social policies of an emerging state that has increasingly regulated the social care of children through legislation.

The organisation of foster care as a modern phenomenon is possibly unrecognisable from earlier historical incarnations. Increased regulation, through National Minimum Standards (Department of Health, 2002; Department for Education, 2011) and legislation (Children Act 1989, Care Standards Act 2000, Children Act 2004), has largely formalised fostering in England with foster caring families providing a public service. Foster care practice is now organised into several categories around: assessment placement; short-term placement; long-term placement; and short-break / respite placement. The permanency agenda has heavily influenced foster care practice along with the objective to reduce placement turn-over for children (Sinclair *et al.*, 2004). Through legislation children's foster care placements are regulated by: childcare assessment; care planning; social work supervision; and reviews for children and foster carers (National Minimum Standards, 2011). Fostering has undergone a general movement from voluntarism, in its earlier history, to the current regulation of childcare tasks through child care planning.

From private family to public service

Foster care evolved as a voluntary and female-based activity, though recently there have been moves towards professionalisation (Kirton, 2007) and an increase in men performing foster care activities (Wilson *et al.*, 2007). Fostering began as an informal private family response to children in need and has been transformed over recent decades to become a more formal and professional service located within the public domain. There is a sociological distinction between the public and private spheres, where the private sphere represents family and home life. It has been argued, by Edwards and Ribbens, that the private and public spheres are highly gendered ideological concepts (Edwards, 1990; Ribbens and Edwards, 1995) as the gendered division of labour, through conceptualising private and public spheres, are about different ways of caring and behaving (Edwards, 1993). The nuclear family idealised the gendered separation of home and work space with men claiming the public domain of paid employment outside of the home. The private family sphere has historically been linked with women, while men developed in the more professionalised public sphere outside of family. Foster care is delivered within and by families, and is therefore located

within the private sphere of family which is heavily gendered as a feminised area. However, foster care is also a public service which is organised and managed by social workers through legislation, policy and national standards. The movement towards regulation has shifted foster care towards the public sphere where social work practice intervenes to provide a more public service to fostered children, particularly as fostering has become more professional.

Defining professionalism

While professionalism is not central to this thesis it does emerge as an important theme. Therefore, I provide a brief definition of professionalism to contextualise themes which emerge from my data. Professionalism is broadly defined as possessing specialist knowledge and qualifications, meeting high standards and being self-regulatory with a degree of autonomy (Larson, 1977; Macdonald, 1995; Neal and Morgan, 2000). There are several critical elements to professionalisation which include having an agreed body of knowledge, adherence to a code of ethics and undergoing a specific socialisation process (Hugman, 1991, 2003). Larson (1977) argues that professions made themselves into special and valued kinds of occupations during the great transformation of European societies brought about by the reorganisation of economy and society around the market and industrialisation. Therefore, for Larson professionalisation is a process to translate special knowledge and skills into social and economic reward. The process of professionalisation was initially described in the 1920s as a wave of associations by various occupations during the 19th Century (Carr-Saunders, 1928). Caplow, following on from Carr-Saunders, defined several steps by which occupations become professional, most often beginning with the creation of an occupational association leading to a code of ethics and finally legal restriction to the profession (Caplow, 1954). The history and high status afforded to occupations associated with men, such as medicine and law, can be contrasted with a comparably lower status afforded to occupations with a female connection, such as nursing and social work (Halford *et al.*, 1997). The high status afforded to certain professions associated with men suggests how hegemonic social constructions of gender are formed. The professionalisation of social work, for instance, experienced some difficulty due to its association as

a woman's occupation (Dominelli, 1996). Professionalism has tended to be associated with the public sphere and historically professionalism has been linked with men-orientated activities based on a masculine idea that specialist knowledge and skills translate into economic reward (Larson, 1977) and traditionally professionalism has been defined by men (Dominelli, 2002).

The gendered construction of professionalism has been closely associated with male-orientated occupations and masculinity while caring has been traditionally assigned to women as a feminine activity. The definition of professionalism with regards to fostering is problematic, particularly as it has been applied to fostering in a variety of ways. For example, it has been used to describe treatment, specialist and other forms of paid foster care (Shaw and Hipgrave, 1983). Kirton suggests the term 'professional' tends to refer to the distinct phases of innovation in fostering, such as treatment or specialist fostering, as they deviate from customary practices (Kirton, 2007). Martin argues that the use of the term 'professional' without a clear definition within fostering has not been helpful (Martin, 2006). The occupational hierarchy re-enforces concepts of gender role and how these are performed, with care classified as both feminine and non-professional. It is notable that foster care is an occupation without employment or legal professional status. The conceptualising of gendered occupational hierarchies has no doubt influenced foster care and gendered roles in fostering. Martin (2006) suggests that the main differences between foster care and more formally recognised professions, regarding professional status, is that much of the professionalising agenda has been imposed onto fostering from above, rather than from foster carers themselves. Foster care does meet some of the professionalising processes, such as occupational associations through the Fostering Network, and possess specialist knowledge in respect to individual children and with the National Minimum Standards (2002 and 2011) fostering is regulated. However, foster care is not self-regulatory and the professionalising agenda from above would indicate fostering has not yet acquired professional status.

Foster care and the movement towards professionalism

Successive legislation, along with regulations and standards, has led to a professionalisation of foster care through the development of definable tasks in relation to agency expectations and care planning. Over subsequent decades, fostering has increasingly replaced residential homes to provide placements for children perceived to have personal needs that require specialist skills (Shaw and Hipgrave, 1983). Corrick (1999) argues that the shift towards increased skills, through specialist fostering, moves fostering towards professionalism (Corrick, 1999). The diversity of foster care placements, from assessment and short-term to long-term and permanency for children, requires a reservoir of skilled carers able to meet different challenges dependent on placement type and child-need (Sellick and Thorburn, 2002). Concurrent to this need for a skilled-carer population, there is some confusion about the status of foster carers when fostering shifts between unpaid care and financial reward. Foster carers receive financial reward as carers and they meet some of the requirements of professionalisation, but they are not classified as employed workers and fostering is not traditionally professional as it is not self-regulatory. However, fostering has moved towards professionalism with a professionalisation discourse influencing care practices. There is some evidence the movement towards professionalism has led to some degree of empowerment for foster carers, through care planning and '*Delegated Authority*' (Fostering Network, 2011), whereby foster carers are formally provided with the authority to make certain decisions about 'looked after' children in their care.

There is some debate concerning the nature of this movement towards professionalism and carer autonomy, which Schofield et al. suggests more readily fits a managerial agenda rather than a caring one (Schofield *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, Wilson and Evetts argue that this professionalisation results from organisational and legislative change (Wilson and Evetts, 2006) and therefore effectively curtails foster care autonomy. Kirton (2007), in his appraisal of the financial motivations of foster carers through payment schemes, argues that this duality of organisation and legislation should be

set alongside advocacy by foster care agencies (such as the Fostering Network) for professionalism and the elevation of the Third Sector, particularly Independent Fostering Agencies, as professionalising factors (Kirton, 2007). Coinciding with the recent upsurge in regulation has been the reduction of the Local Authorities' monopoly in providing family placements. The last decade has seen a marked increase in the Third Sector Agencies (Voluntary and Independent) providing fostering placements (Sellick, 2007, 2011), with Local Authorities / Children's Trusts purchasing fostering services leading to a market orientated and consumerist service (though checked and safeguarded by the inspection of fostering agencies by Ofsted).

Therefore through a variety of factors, fostering has been transformed from a voluntary activity to a more professional service, though there is some disquiet and concern around what this means for the standard of care to children in relation to love and finances. The result is that fostering, through regulation and national standards, has shifted from the private family domain to be more in the public domain. The shift towards professionalism has had benefits as carers are better trained, supported (including financial remuneration) and regulated, though it is not easy to understand what professionalism in fostering means in day-to-day routines. Data from my study challenge the notion that professionalism, or financial reward, solely motivates men to foster as other factors also motivate them to become foster-fathers. These motivations to foster are complex and multi-faceted as they are often highly personal and take in sociocultural factors such as ethnicity, age and religion.

Adoption, Residential Care, Kinship Care and Special Guardianship

Fostering is one part of public childcare alongside adoption, residential care, kinship fostering and more recently special guardianship. While fostering has become the placement of choice for 'looked after' children, it is important to understand how developments and trends in alternative forms of public care have influenced foster care.

Residential childcare

Residential care is a professional service, mainly delivered by employed care workers (Smith, 2010). The focus of childcare has shifted from the 1970s away from residential child care to caring for children in families, which Fulcher suggests mirrors a trend for family-based placements (Fulcher, 2009). At the end of March 2012 there were 7,910 children in some form of residential care home representing 12 percent of all 'looked after' children (BAAF, 2013). Fostering has taken over from residential care as the main type of placement for 'looked after' children following a considerable decline in the use of children's residential care since the 1970s. This considerable decline in the use of children's residential care, it has been suggested, was due to the negative image associated with institutionalised care, alongside concerns about quality and cost (Berridge *et al.*, 2012). However, new trends are emerging in residential care for children with Smith (2009) advocating for residential care to embrace discourses based on care and upbringing rather than the dominant ones of protection, rights and outcomes. The social pedagogy model is emerging as a potential energising development in residential care (Smith, 2009; Berridge *et al.*, 2011) which Petrie argues has a strong resonance with foster care (Petrie, 2007), a view also supported by the Fostering Network. Social pedagogy's focus on relationships and understanding of children's emotional needs may improve childcare outcomes in foster care and the Fostering Network is currently piloting social pedagogy in several areas through the '*Heads, Hearts, Hands*' programme (Fostering Network, 2013).

Adoption

Adoption is distinct from foster care and it can be defined legally as the permanent transfer of parental responsibility from birth to adoptive parent. Adoptive parents are granted an adoption order and parental responsibility for a child through recourse to court proceedings. Between April 2011 and March 2012 there were 3,450 children adopted from care in England (BAAF, 2013). In common with fostering, adoption has been transformed from a voluntary activity towards increased regulation culminating in the Adoption and Children Act (2002). Until 1927 and the implementation of the Adoption of Children Act (1926) adoption was unregulated. Conceptualising family and

adoption are entwined and the movement towards regulation in adoption has been heralded as necessary to meet the challenges of inclusivity (Ball, 2002). Inclusivity has extended the promotion of non-traditional families adopting, such as single persons and same-sex couples. Fostering has been influenced by adoption through permanence (Maluccio and Fein, 1983) in long-term fostering and openness (Brodzinsky, 2005) in the promotion of birth family contact with fostered children.

Special guardianship

Special guardianship is a placement option whereby non-birth parents can gain a degree of parental responsibility without adoption. The Adoption and Children Act (2002) provided the legal framework for special guardianship, contained in the Children Act (1989), to provide a more secure relationship to build permanence for children living away from their birth families.

Kinship care

Through kinship placements children continue to live with extended family or friends. It has been argued that kinship fostering provides identity and attachment benefits for children (McFadden, 1998). This type of placement has experienced popularity in the United States, where in the 1990s McFadden (1998) estimated 38 percent of fostered children were placed with kinship carers, though kinship care is not as prevalent in Britain. A study of kinship carers in Britain concluded they were not a homogeneous group as some desired more support whilst others found social service input to be intrusive (Sykes *et al.*, 2002). While I have not included kinship care in my study this type of placement has influenced fostering around children's identity and attachments.

The Role of the Social Worker in Foster Care

The interaction between social work and foster care is an important relationship. Foster carers with a child in placement work with two social workers, the child's and their own supervising social worker (Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000; Sinclair *et al.*, 2004). Social work practitioners require skills in personal relationships and the organisation of work (Howe, 1987). The relationship between supervising social worker and foster carer is a complex one, which can be too formal or too informal

(Selwyn, 1994). Social workers make judgements and decisions concerning carers and it has been suggested that there is some consistency between a social worker's own beliefs and their professional judgements (Daniel, 2000). Studies by Sellick (1999) and Sinclair et al. (2004) show foster carers are largely happy with their supervising social work support. The relationship between social worker and foster carer is, to some degree, dependent on the personal attributes of individual workers, and carers find the relationship is more positive when they feel the social worker is more empathetic towards them (Sellick, 1999; Sinclair *et al.*, 2004). Triseliotis et al. (2000) found that difficulties with the social worker can exist at the interpersonal level when foster carers perceive deficiencies around effective listening, feeling valued, answering messages and being appreciated (Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000). The children's social worker is viewed less favourably by foster carers than the supervising social worker (Sellick, 1999). The role of the supervising social worker has been reflected on through recourse to ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and seen to operate beyond the microsystem and more within the mesosystem (Fulcher and McGladdery, 2011) as they case-manage foster carers. It has been suggested by Sinclair that the relationship with foster carers can change as social workers move away from prioritising interpersonal practice to full-fill agency requirements by becoming more outcome-orientated (Sinclair, 2005).

There appears to be some vulnerability in the robustness of social work assessments, particularly when social workers are confronted by situations which are outside their own personal belief or their agency's operating systems. It has been argued by Dominelli that a rigid adherence to agency procedures and bureaucratic managerialism reduce the importance afforded to individual assessment and analytical skills (Dominelli, 2004). Munro, in her review of child protection and social work (Munro, 2011), coherently advocates for a move towards developing improved individual analytical skills and a retrenchment from regulation. Studies focusing on the engagement of men in child welfare have critiqued the quality of assessments and the adequacy of social work training (O'Hagan and Dillenburger, 1995; Strega *et al.*, 2008). Equally, the experiences of fostering by same-

sex couples have revealed deficiencies in assessments, attitudes and training (Hicks, 2005; Logan and Sellick, 2007). An Independent Inquiry into abuse perpetrated by two male carers in Wakefield found that there were a number of personal and organisational failings, including the fostering assessment, matching, supervision and communication within the Local Authority. This inquiry concluded there was a major deficit in the application of knowledge-based practice with a subsequent deficiency in social work learning and training (Parrot *et al.*, 2007).

Social workers tend to work within chaotic family systems (Smith, 1998) and it has been suggested that social workers struggle to make sense of complex family practices, leading to decision-making difficulties (Saltiel, 2013). In many ways social work operates within uncertainty and fragmentation, which has led to a call for social work to be constructed around anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 1996; Adams *et al.*, 1998; Dominelli, 2002a) that imagines the other person's position. Fawcett suggests that when social workers recognise the diversity of service-user needs they deconstruct taken-for-granted prevailing knowledge, associated with a position of privilege and professional expertise, and move to an exploration of non-generalised interactions in the promotion of pragmatic responses (Fawcett, 1998). Postmodernist approaches to social work promote the deconstruction of professionalism in favour of context-specific partnerships between social worker and client. Fook (2000) argues that social work practitioners deconstruct professional expertise to reconstruct practice in response to diverse situations. In this way social workers seek to develop frameworks by which they can understand and make sense of what they do as practitioners (Fook, 2000). My data do not support this deconstruction of practice by social workers; rather the data show foster-fathers to believe that social workers maintain their professional privilege and that they do not fully engage men as foster carers.

Fostered Children

Foster care is about looking after children and any study of foster care has to have at its core that the child's welfare is paramount. This study is no different, though the focus is on foster-fathers' experiences, the child is paramount and in this section I reflect on childhood and fostered children.

Growth of child welfare

Conceptualising childhood and maltreatment can be a highly emotive exercise, particularly where children require communal care and there are many diverse sociocultural ways in which children receive communal care. Concern about the welfare of children in Britain did not fully develop until the latter part of the 19th Century with the move to reduce child cruelty and the establishment of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC, 2009). The first Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act was passed in 1889 (due at least partly to the campaigning of the NSPCC) to provide guidelines on the employment of children and to outlaw children begging. This Act dealt mainly with the employment of children in an industrialised society and it was not until the implementation of The Children Act 1908 that the state's role in protecting children was first introduced. This 1908 Act made sexual abuse of children within families a matter for state intervention rather than the domain of the clergy, as it historically had been up until this point (Batty, 2004). Internationally, in the late 1980s, the United Nations '*Convention on the Rights of the Child*' promoted universal concepts of childhood and the rights of children (UN, 1989). After this international precedent Britain, through the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, legislated to safeguard children (Home Office, 1991; Social Services Inspectorate, 1995; Department for Education and Skills, 2006). These two Acts were each a response to the reviews and the ensuing public pressure of specific instances of child cruelty and mortality (Department of Health, 1991; Laming, 2003).

Most literature on the adult care of children has been concerned with the role of the mother parenting figure (Featherstone, 2006). This has resulted in an over emphasis on maternal relationships in cases of childhood maltreatment (O'Hagan and Dillenburger, 1995), where women

are castigated for not being good-enough mothers (Winnicott, 1965) and are blamed for most instances of child welfare shortfalls (Strega *et al.*, 2008). Men, on the other hand, as fathers and carers have tended to be isolated from the caring process (Featherstone, 2003; Scourfield, 2003; Dominelli *et al.*, 2011). The pre-care experience of many fostered children is that they have experienced insecure attachments and maltreatment alongside the loss and bereavement associated with family separation (Jewitt, 1991). A longitudinal study of 58 children in long-term fostering placements, by Schofield *et al.* (2000), found most fostered children had encountered multiple maltreating episodes with only 10 percent reportedly not having experienced pre-care maltreatment (Schofield *et al.*, 2000). Given the experiences fostered children encounter they can present emotional trauma and a range of difficult behaviours.

The trauma induced behaviours which fostered children and young people may present include: self-harm; enuresis; encopresis; bullying (as victim and perpetrator); school refusal; violence, and delinquency (Guishard-Pine *et al.*, 2007). Early infant (and foetal) experiences affect neural development so that the neurobiological organism of the traumatised child consequently requires acute and considered caring and therapeutic intervention (Archer, 2003). In their book, Sinclair *et al.* '*Foster Placements – Why They Succeed and Why They Fail*' (2005) focus on fostered children. In this book Sinclair *et al.* recount how the sampled children often showed admirable traits like kindness, but also presented a range of adversities that include: disabilities; disturbing behaviours; aloofness; and anti-social behaviour. It has been argued, by Ward and Skuse (2001), that fostered children encounter ongoing insecurity as research has highlighted how in practice 'looked after' children, more often than not, still result in placement change and the continuance of chaotic lifestyles (Ward and Skuse, 2001). There is strong evidence to show that children in public care experience disadvantage and encounter reduced life opportunities, for instance 38 percent of young prisoners have been in care (Daniel *et al.*, 2002). The Social Services Inspectorate and Joint Reviews found

service delivery to be haphazard, with poor placement matching and planning (Haydon *et al.*, 1999). Fostered children present as having adversities distinct from non-fostered children.

Attachment theory and fostering

Regarding childhood development, the importance of attachment theory to foster care has been well-documented within the literature and emphasises the significance of early infant attachment and bonding with the mother (Jewitt, 1991; Schofield *et al.*, 2000; Cairns, 2004). The field of attachments, developed by John Bowlby originating in his study of maternal influence among delinquent young males, is presented as an evolutionary response, with associated behavioural styles, by humans to ensure close and affectionate bonds by caregiver to infant (Bowlby, 1978, 1997). Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth and Marvin, 1995) developed the mother-infant strange test, involving the observation of infant behaviour following withdrawal of the mother for 10 minutes, to assess the levels and patterns of attachments in children. Attachment theory is important, and while the worthiness of this explanation of childhood growth cannot be doubted, its general appeal within fostering has prohibited alternative reflection. Michael Rutter cautions against an over-emphasis on attachments and he argues models of resilience are also an important factor in childhood development (Rutter, 1995).

Within attachment theory there has emerged debate concerning the fluidity of attachment patterns. Fonagy argues that attachment patterns tend towards being transgenerational with the internal working model, of the self, remaining stable across the lifespan (Fonagy, 1999; Bouchard *et al.*, 2008). Crittenden (2000) promotes a dynamic-maturation model to attachments to explain the variables within behavioural patterns due to maturity, life changes and culture (Crittenden, 2000). While the continuity of patterns can be transgenerational there can also be idiosyncratic change in patterns of attachment to children across very short time periods. Crittenden summarises the process by stating:

“The past is fixed, but its meaning is rewritten every time it is recalled. Maturation is the means, and mental integration is the process through which future functioning can be expanded to yield a nearly infinite range of human possibility” (Crittenden, 2000: p 357).

This dynamic-maturation theory is a model that explains the diverse self-protection strategies used by children within the different attachment relationships to primary care-givers. Crittenden’s dynamic model to attachments emphasises the potential change foster carers can have on children’s attachments. Alternative and complementing models of childhood growth include: identity formation (Erikson, 1968); staged schematic progress (Piaget and Gruber, 1977; Piaget and Inhelder, 2000; Piaget, 2001); mentored progress (Vygotsky, 1933); social learning (Skinner *et al.*, 1988); role modelling and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1978, 1994); and ecological systems connections (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It can be summarised that, while there are different models of childhood development, fostering is heavily influenced by an attachment model that places a large emphasis on women as carers. My data affirm the validity of attachment theory in fostering; but they challenge its application solely with the maternal-figure, as suggested by Bowlby (1978, 1997) and Ainsworth (1995), when my data show foster-fathers also form attachments with children.

Fostered children and family care

Children who enter the ‘looked after’ system do so for a range of adversities. Most children enter the care system due to abuse and neglect, with as many as 89 percent having experienced multiple maltreatment (Wade *et al.*, 2010). Children ‘looked after’ by local Authorities are presumed to have formed insecure and disorganised attachments (Carlson *et al.*, 1989; Main and Solomon, 1990). Definitions of maltreatment and abuse are notoriously difficult to arrive at and are the cause of much debate (Stevenson, 2007; Cawson *et al.*, 2000). The difficulty in defining maltreatment does not remove the obligation to safeguard children and the evidence is that foster carers look after children who have probably experienced maltreatment prior to being fostered. Fostered children have endured much and most behave in ways that others find unsettling (Sinclair, 2005), particularly when many exhibit behaviours caused by traumatic experience due to maltreatment (Cairns, 2004;

Pallet *et al.*, 2008). In their review of research Wilson *et al.* (2007) highlight six areas in which fostered children experience difficulties that include acquiring a positive identity and educational achievement (Wilson *et al.*, 2004). Another conclusion concerning the vulnerability of fostered children is that they form an at-risk group for maltreatment (Hobbs *et al.*, 1999). Fostered children therefore experience higher than average levels of adversity.

These adversities and subsequent on-going difficulties result in expectations that fostering families facilitate a therapeutic environment and deliver an attachment model of care to encourage a secure-base for children (Schofield and Beek, 2009), alongside a safer caring model (Slade, 2006). The centrality of attachments (Howe, 1995b; Schofield, 2002; Cairns, 2004) in children's lives has been well documented almost to the detriment of other childhood developmental factors, such as resilience and poverty (Rutter, 1995). Recent work has suggested that the construction of a fostering placement around an attachment discourse conflicts with the construction of non-parenting foster carers (Hollin and Larkin, 2011), which challenges the centrality of attachments to fostering. Fostering is going through change and there may be some inconsistency between attachment and professional models of care. However, in a study by Schofield *et al.* (2013) long-term foster carers (comprising a largely female-based sample) are seen to successfully negotiate between professional and attachment models. My data show that foster-fathers both value their professionalism and seek attachments with children.

Children in public care continue to experience disadvantage and research demonstrates that the foster care of 'looked after' children is far from straight forward (Cairns, 2004; Wilson *et al.*, 2004; Wade *et al.*, 2010). The futures of fostered children are insecure because they live away from birth family and friends, experience temporary placements and regulated lives. Amidst this insecure environment Sinclair (2005) in his review of fostering research concludes that children have five main requirements, which are: normality; family care; respect of their origins; control; and

opportunity. In this appraisal of 'looked after' children's requirements Sinclair does not include emotional warmth, belonging and love as he is reflecting on bureaucratised versions of children's needs. The *'Every Child Matters'* five outcomes agenda, introduced in the Children Act 2004 (Cheminais, 2007), similarly overlooks the importance of emotional warmth, connection with family, sense of belonging and love in children's lives. Alongside children's requirements and needs they also have wishes. A survey by the Children's Rights Team looked at the views of fostered children, foster carers and birth parents concerning foster care (Morgan, 2005). In this study by Morgan, two-thirds of the sampled foster children responded that they had no choice as to where they were fostered; with a third declaring they did not have enough information about a foster home prior to moving into placement. While most of the foster children said that they felt they were treated in the same way as the foster carers' own children many also said they often felt they were the odd one out within the home (Morgan, 2005). The report commented that: "Children should know where they are loved" (Morgan, 2005: p32) and we are left with the impression that fostered children lack a sense of belonging and do not feel wanted. The emotional needs that are expressed by children in Morgan's report contrast with the bureaucratised versions of children's needs represented in policy and much of the literature. My data show foster-fathers seek to form emotional attachments with children that are real and not bureaucratised.

Summary

Foster-fathers look after children within a regulated fostering system. Foster care has moved from a voluntary and unregulated service, within private families, to a more regulated, professionalised and public service. Fostering is part of the 'looked after' children system that includes adoption and residential care. While fostering has become the most prevalent placement for 'looked after' children it has been influenced by adoption's permanency and openness, residential care's professionalism and support systems, as well as kinship care's continuation of the child's identity. Foster care is not fully professional though it is moving towards professionalism through a

professionalising discourse. Relations with social workers are more positive when foster carers feel they can trust the practitioner to provide empathetic support. Fostered children present needs that are different from those of non-fostered children and they experience higher levels of adversity. The attachment theory discourse has a significant influence over foster care, possibly at the expense of alternative models of childhood development. Fostering is closely linked with women and therefore men tend to be an overlooked resource. In the next section I contextualise the theoretical framework of this study.

CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO RE- EXAMINE THE LITERATURE

Introduction to the Chapter

The literature review was initially undertaken in 2007 and repeated once in 2010 and again in 2012 by searching a range of academic databases including Web of Knowledge, PubMed and the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences. This review highlighted the paucity of work focusing on foster-fathers. There is a large body of fostering literature which has mainly focused on fostered children (Andersson, 2001). When the literature has looked at fostering families it has focussed on foster caring tasks and relationships with fostering agencies (Triseliotis *et al.*, 1995) and has primarily looked at women as foster carers. The literature has assumed the role of the foster-mother as synonymous with the main carer (Sinclair *et al.*, 2004) and little of this literature has reflected on foster-fathers. While most fostering households include a foster-father the research into foster care is focused mainly on the experiences of women (Gilligan, 2000; Wilson *et al.*, 2007) and men's voices are seldom heard in the literature. Therefore, I extended my search of literature beyond fostering to look at gender and in particular feminism and the critique of gendered relations. Through this search I came across feminist arguments around performing gender, performativity (Butler, 1990) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Walby, 2007). Through these concepts I have been able to review the literature and they formed the theoretical framework of my thesis.

While I mainly use Butler's notion of performing gender as the basis to re-examine the fostering literature I also present several other theories, such as complex systems theory (Walby, 2007) and family practices (Morgan, 1996), in this chapter. In this thesis I argue the current understanding of fostering is incomplete when little is known about how foster-fathers perform gender roles that both subvert and affirm traditional masculinity. In this chapter I develop a theoretical template based on Butler's performativity concept, which relates to how individuals perform gender, to

appraise both the literature and my data. By performing gender the individual mimics and acts out a gender role while performativity produces a series of effects that consolidate an impression of being a gender (Butler, 1990). In this way Butler argues people perform gender by way of mimicking and repeating expected gender norms of manliness and womanliness. She also argues that through agency individuals can challenge these gender norms.

The literature represents fostering families as characteristically organised around traditional gender relations and structured on the man as breadwinner and woman as homemaker model; more so than for society in general, with an apparent demarcation of roles based upon sexual difference (Sainsbury, 2004). Traditional social practice is a mechanism to structurally legitimise the activity within the continuity of the past, present and future and define it as a recurring practice (Hall, 1999). This traditional family structure can be described as a married couple in which one partner, traditionally the man, works as the breadwinner while the other, usually the woman, stays at home to fulfil the homemaking responsibilities. The statistical evidence is that foster families tend to be married heterosexual couples, more so than for society in general (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). Within fostering, despite important work on men in same-sex couples (Hicks and McDermott, 1999; Hicks, 2005), research suggests that fostering families mainly fall into traditional gender roles (Gray and Parr, 1957; Bebbington and Miles, 1990; Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000; Sinclair *et al.*, 2004) which reduces men to a singular level of masculinity based on traditionally held assumptions of gender, with men as breadwinners. Through intersectionality there is the ability, at least theoretically, to look at how different inequalities of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, religion and culture relate to foster care. In the literature men are presented as supporting a more energetic woman carer (Fanshel, 1966); being underused (Davids, 1971; Gilligan, 2000); focussing on promoting children's development (Inch, 1998); undertaking professional roles (Hojer, 2004); being a role model (Fanshel, 1966; Wilson *et al.*, 2007); and paradoxically hard to reach (Dickerson and Thomas, 2009).

Male foster carers are seen as secondary to women carers within a difference to gender discourse which defines fathering and mothering as distinct roles that are not interchangeable. This discourse is increasingly at odds with empirical evidence because studies have shown that when fathers assume the primary care-taking role they are as sensitive and competent as mothers (Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). This tendency for foster care literature to focus on women in fostering takes many forms from historically mirroring societal perceptions of family, gender and motherhood (Gray and Parr, 1957; Bebbington and Miles, 1990) to a more contemporaneous association of the main carer with women (Sinclair *et al.*, 2004; McDermid *et al.*, 2012), so that foster-fathers are described as a neglected resource (Wilson *et al.*, 2007). There is also sample bias in current research with studies largely drawn from women (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). The gap in knowledge concerning foster-fathers, based on gendered assumptions, led me to look for alternative explanations through feminism with its extensive and wide ranging critique of gendered relations. The importance of Judith Butler's (1990) work on gender performance and performativity to this study is that it offers an explanation of gendered relations which has not been provided before in foster care.

As fostering is so closely associated with women there has been little systematic review of the role of gender and particularly men in foster care (Gilligan, 2000). While there is literature that looks at foster-fathers (Gilligan, 2000; Newstone, 2000; Wilson *et al.*, 2007; Gilligan, 2012) this is limited by both volume and theoretical scope. In this chapter I introduce the key concepts of intersectionality and performativity as these enable the re-examination of the mainstream literature to reflect on the agency men use to transgress the caring women non-caring men divide. There is a large body of relevant sources concerning social work, sociology, childhood, gender and family which is too extensive to summarise in one chapter. The aim of this chapter is to frame the literature within feminist concepts and reference to literature will permeate throughout the thesis to contextualise the findings.

Contextual Thinking behind the Thesis

This thesis uses feminist concepts on performing gender and intersectionality to reframe the current understanding of fostering. By theorising how gender is performed, Butler (1990) argues there is some flexibility in how we understand gender as individuals do and undo gender. Gender performativity, according to Butler, is the means to produce hegemonic understandings of gender that construct how to be a man or woman; it also allows the means for gender to be subverted (Butler, 1990). Intersectionality is concerned with the interactions of different inequalities such as gender, race and disability (Crenshaw, 1989). The feminist critique has fundamentally altered the perception of gender relations in society and feminist sociology is very important in developing an understanding of social actions and of family relationships (Hearn *et al.*, 1998). Feminism developed to describe women's oppression and present ways to overcome this oppression (Tong, 1989), though the exact nature and source of this oppression has been much debated (Popay *et al.*, 1998).

Feminism, theory and practice, moved into social work in the late 1970s and early 1980s as an oppositional discourse. In social work feminism challenged gender power relations as these impacted on the behaviours of and expectations about men and women, but not in specific areas of the profession except for differentiating between front-line workers and management (Dominelli, 2002b). Performativity, as the means by which gender norms are regulated and how relations between the genders are socially constructed (Butler, 1990), has not been applied to social work and foster care. Feminist contributions to family are significant as these challenge patriarchal assumptions to reconstruct understandings of gender, family and professionalism. These feminist contributions are highly relevant to my study as my reflection on foster-fathers use them to deconstruct and reconstruct masculinity among men. More specifically I use Butler's arguments on performativity to show men perform fathering roles in fostering that affirm and subvert masculine norms and how existing gendered relations are maintained.

Performing gender and performativity

Judith Butler's reflections on the means by which gender is formed and roles constructed have expanded to include ontology, as it relates to existence in relation to sex and gender (Butler, 1990, 1993). Butler suggested in 1990 that feminism had mistakenly assumed women have common characteristics and by doing this feminism continued to divide humans into two distinct groups constructed around gender. She argued that this gender based division inadvertently neglected individual agency and identity. Butler proposed that masculinity and femininity are on a continuum regulated by gender which allows for some personal agency and individual identity. By reflecting on ontology and sexuality Butler argues that individuals perform an identity, by repetition and imitation, and through performance sexuality is flexible. Butler suggests that the ways in which individuals perform gender, constructed around social norms and agency, allow for diverse and alternative identities. In her book '*Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*' (1990) Butler indicates that the cross-dressing man subverts gender to show how alternative identities and masculinities can be formed. For Butler the flexibility in gender roles, and sexuality, reflects her sense of ontology by way of performance as these roles are acted out and socially constructed.

Butler's argument is much more than performance as it is a projection of self and identity contextualised within social codes and the unconscious self. By referencing postmodernist language and Foucault's regulatory discourses (Foucault, 1977), Butler expands her position to argue that gender performance is not purely voluntary and she has conjectured on how hegemonic gendered norms are constructed and recreated, despite identity and personal agency. Michel Foucault, by investigating groups outside of the mainstream of society, addressed socially constructed norms, the self and individuality (Foucault, 2001). Postmodernist knowledge is concerned with how language-games constitute the self, society and social relations in heterogeneous manners, sending out contradictory codes and interfering messages (Lyotard, 1984 (2005 reprint)). Foucault (1978) shifted attention from language to discourse as a system of representation because discourse is about the

production of knowledge through language. By conceptualising language, Foucault reflected on its relationship to practice and how discursive practices, historically and culturally, set rules for organising and producing different forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1978; Foucault and Gordon, 1980). In this way, regulatory discourses are those that transcend social agency as they reflect rules which govern specific activities and practices. Butler (1990) has taken Foucault's regulatory discourses to argue that gender performance transcends social agency and identity as the heterosexual binary matrix is restored and hegemonic gender norms reproduced. However, and importantly for Butler, while the heterosexual binary matrix creates masculine and feminine norms these norms can be challenged by performativity through performances that undo gender. In this way she argues that gender performance is much more complex than a simple division between two genders as alternative variations of masculinity and femininity can be created.

Butler's main interest is to address how hegemonic gender constructions can be subverted or troubled. Gender is understood in the sense of doing and gender is a culturally sanctioned performance which is performed, mimicked and repeated socially within hegemonic norms. Gender is therefore something we do through discourse and not something we are as an ontological state. Butler is interested in agency and subversion of gender, though she recognises that gender performance is not voluntary as it conforms to the gender binary logic that reproduces hegemonic norms. Butler is concerned with gender identity and subjectivity and to understand this she reflects on performativity and the difference with gender performance. While gender is performed she argues that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results (Butler 1993) and to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. Therefore, Butler argues that gender is performative and is not necessarily an expression of identity as gender is performed. In developing an understanding of performativity, Butler (1990) draws on Austin who suggested (cited in Butler, 1990) that a performative utterance is to enact the very actions being described, such as a judge passing down a sentence with the statement "I sentence you to...".

Gender for Butler is always performed, and this performance of gender is entirely a social matter with identity manifested in performativity. The model of performativity offers the means to understanding how gender is constituted within the heterosexual matrix and as a possible mechanism for subverting gendered norms. Butler presents the idea of the potential for performative subversions as gender performance that subverts normative gender identities. Therefore, performing gender is a repetitive act to 'do' gender while performativity allows for the possibility of gender identity to be enacted within a social context. It has been argued that Butler merges her understanding of performance and performativity (Kelan, 2009, 2010) and certainly the distinction is not always clear. While gender as performative is mostly enacted within heteronormality and gender norms, it also allows for agency and identity to subvert gender norms. Therefore, in my thesis I understand the difference between performance and performativity as being that performance is simply acting within traditional gender norms while performativity is the process of doing and/or subverting gender norms differently through the exercise of agency.

In developing performativity, Butler argues that while gender is socially constructed it is not simply a voluntary activity as there are regulatory discourses, which create norms:

"Gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, and constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged." (Butler, 1993: p 22)

For Butler, gender is a performance as it represents specific social activity within a time and place rather than a universal expression of personal identity. The normative is a process by which the hegemonic heterosexual matrix regulates the gendered subject resulting in feminine and masculine norms. Though actions and agency may subvert gender stereotypes, language, tradition and

understanding can exert pressure to confirm this stereotype by using gendered phraseology as the pressure exerted is outside social agency:

“In an ideal world gender would not matter. We would be judged on our own merits instead of our gender. In actuality the world is far from ideal, and conscious and unconscious assumptions about men and women influence our judgement.” (Kelan, 2008a: p 5)

Individual practices can subvert and / or affirm gender roles by operating along the heterosexual binary of masculinity and femininity as performativity is all about being a man or woman both individually and socially. Performativity is therefore the series of effects, such as language and culture, which reproduce what it is to be a man or a woman and create gender norms as well as offering the means to subvert these norms by performing gender differently.

For Butler, identity is acted out by agency which may challenge gender norms, but Butler compounds her argument by adding multiple layers to her understanding of performance to include unconscious acquiescence and conscious challenge to sexual stereotypes. She has used her own identity as a lesbian woman to show she is presenting an internalised expression of identity to subvert gender norms. However, by this very expression of her internalised identity she is conforming to gender norms as her performances are both for and understood by others within the parameters of the gender binary, as discourse creates subject positions for the self to occupy. Through their performances men and women re-enact socially constructed gender norms which reinforce the dominant binary of masculinity and femininity. Performativity is the processes whereby the enacting of gender is either enacted and affirmed or enacted and subverted through agency and performing gender differently. By referencing her own identity as a lesbian woman, Butler recognises she performs gender and identity to develop a sense of the ontological as authentic and her idea of the ontological in the sense of performance. However, the social

construction of gender is more than personal agency and sexual difference as they are influenced by social and unconscious forces that define gender.

Butler (2004) argues that doing gender while an incessant activity is not necessarily automatic or mechanical and she speculates whether gender is either a pre-existent regulator or it is the act of regulation that defines gender. Butler has developed her arguments on performativity, as she has debated the relationship between regulatory discourses and agency in the performance of gender (Butler, 1993) and concurrently she has contributed to developing queer theory as it relates to gender and sexuality. Butler accepts the possibility that gender is a norm, but argues that this cannot be said for masculinity and femininity as gender may be the means by which the normalisation of masculinity and femininity takes place (Butler, 2004). Butler suggests people are regulated by gender, as men and women, but alternatives to the heterosexual binary are also produced, such as a cross-dressing man (Butler, 1990) and the families of choice discourse (see page 47). Therefore, new versions of masculinity and femininity can be produced as they operate along a continuum, though they are regulated by gender. The production of normative concepts, as a common standard, does not fully exhaust the norm as it is an “abstraction of commodity” (Butler, 2004: p 50). Gender, as the means to produce notions of masculinity and femininity, Butler (2004) argues, is also the mechanism to deconstruct masculinity and femininity. The practice of gender performativity not only affirms normative notions that govern reality, but also shows the reproduction of new realities that are altered in the reproduction, as:

“If gender is performative, then it follows that the reality of gender is itself produced as an effect of the performance.” (Butler, 2004: p 218)

In my study I show data from men’s narrative that both subvert and affirm masculine norms. They perform roles that challenge masculine norms through acting as foster-fathers who care for children. However, gender regulates fostering as the narratives show men reproducing existing gender relations because they perform gendered tasks associated with stereotyped masculinity when they

support a woman main carer. These reproductions of existing gendered relations, that affirm masculine norms, are distinguished from gender performances that subvert this norm as men show emotionality and negotiation with children which challenge the masculine stereotype.

The application of gender practices in the workplace by Kelan (2009, 2010) has shown how gender is both done and undone. By recourse to West and Zimmerman's (1987) work on doing gender, Kelan's study is located within both the ethnomethodological tradition, of analysing micro-interactions to reveal constructions, and within discourse analysis and postmodernism, through Butlers' (1990) performativity and the binary heterosexuality logic. Kelan argues that gender is undone within information and communication technology (ICT) work. This workplace type is associated with men, and paid employment has historically been commandeered by men. Therefore, women who work in ICT challenge the gender binary, as:

“Women in ICT companies are thus broadening the notions of what it means to be a woman and undo gender by creating more meanings associated with gender.” (Kelan 2010: p187)

The women's working practices undo gender, but through the performance of gender could be interpreted as doing gender. Kelan argues that the way the practices are read still reflects the gender binary logic as there is considerable flexibility in defining masculinity and femininity. Women working in ICT theoretically challenge the traditional gender construct. However, by and large the basic gender binary logic is not questioned as there is no other way to classify gender other than through the binary gender logic of man and woman (Kelan, 2010). Therefore the binary gender logic is maintained by flexible ways of thinking about masculinity and femininity (Kelan, 2009), rather than alternatives emerging to challenge these concepts.

For both Kelan and Butler, the normative regulates performativity to restore the heterosexual binary matrix along the lines of gender, though masculinity and femininity can and do change. The

gendered conceptualisation of fostering is encapsulated in the literature to show the emphasis on women (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). Through the men's narratives in my research, I show men are involved with very distinct roles not linked to the dichotomy between men and women (Butler, 1990), as they subvert gender stereotypes around emotionality and caring for children. At the same time they continue to reinforce masculinity as they negotiate new versions by performing roles in fostering that both subvert and affirm the gender binary. My data illustrate how the construction of norms as part of gender performance includes seeing men as potential risks if they do not conform to masculine norms or follow social workers' stipulated regulations. My study shows how foster-fathers perform roles and tasks associated with women, but they very much remain men who are masculine as they move from performativity, by performing gender to subvert norms, to gender performances that reproduce masculinity and reproduce traditionally gendered relations with women as homemakers.

Complex social systems and intersectionality

The literature and professional practice confine fostering within conventional discourses and traditionally gendered parenting roles. Fostering, as the substitute care of children in non-related families, draws on notions concerning childhood development and the sociology of family. Sociological explanations of family include Marxism (Engels and Barrett, 1986); social systems and functionalism (Parsons, 1952; Luhmann, 1995); feminist (Tong, 1989); and postmodernist (Lyotard, 1984 (2005 reprint); Foucault, 1990). There is a substantial body of work focusing on fostering and this literature establishes fostering within a traditional discourse whereby women are presented as the main carers and men are assigned secondary roles, as support carers or breadwinners. The narrative from the literature defines women foster carers as the substitute mother within a nuclear family construct of gender (Nutt, 2002). The statistical evidence from existing studies show that most fostering households are headed by a woman main carer with men categorised as supporting carers, and that there are very few men only households (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). In many ways this corresponds to fostered children's pre-care experience as few live with their birth-fathers prior to

becoming 'looked after' children (Newstone, 1999, 2000) and there is evidence of mother-blame where women are seen to fall short of idealised perceptions of caring (O'Hagan and Dillenburg, 1995). It can be conjectured that fostering, in Britain, is not only substitute family care, but more specifically is an idealised construct of motherhood within a functionalist social systems model, based on the man as breadwinner and woman as homemaker.

The emergence of nuclear families, during industrialising society, was seen as a functionalist and static social system that defined masculinity and femininity. Talcott Parsons (1951) argued that the evolution of the nuclear family was not an isolated experience because families exist within social systems. The nuclear family evolved within capitalism and the growth of an urban bourgeoisie, or middle class, where families produce socialised individuals who act in accordance to the rules of society, operating within interconnecting social systems (Parsons, 1951). The social systems theory emphasis is on the relationship between societal components rather than any intrinsic differences, as the connections are seen as linear and natural. Luhmann developed social systems by drawing attention to the capacity for self-organisation and reproduction within sub-systems (Luhmann, 1995). Functionalism and social systems theory reliance on linear and relatively simple relationships between systems has progressively struggled to explain the apparent disorder, or entropy, in modern and postmodern society (Harvey and Reed, 1996). The emergence of diversity in family types and the relationships which develop through the intersection of social inequalities have led Sylvia Walby to reappraise functionalism by referring the social systems model to complexity and chaos theory (Walby, 2007). By applying complexity and chaos concepts to sociology, Walby has been able to demonstrate that social systems are more flexible and less rigid than represented by Parson's social systems theory (Walby, 2007). Complex social systems appear disordered, and in a state of entropy, but they are not random as feedback loops (negative and positive) interact with systems in predictable and non-linear ways (Harvey and Reed, 1996) just as distorted noise in a microphone creates predictable, though apparently chaotic, sounds.

Social systems are no longer classified as static as they are seen to evolve over time. Social systems are much more complex and chaotic than functionalist as new forms of relations between systems emerge. Fostering is a sub-system within society which interacts with the public and private family domains involving different and complex levels of social systems that are both internal and external to family. Walby's (2007) reflection on complex social systems and the relationship between intersecting social inequalities, such as gender, sexuality, disability, or class have moved beyond Parson's (1952) understanding of social systems, which I argue transfers to fostering families. Through my data, I show fostering families to be more dynamic, and complex, as foster-fathers operate in ways that are not expected by social work practice based on a functionalist understanding of relationships and connections. In a recent study, Saltiel (2013) argues that there is an element of uncertainty surrounding social workers' decision-making in child protection situations concerning complex, unconventional and chaotic families. Saltiel argues that an appreciation of the way people actively negotiate their family roles could be a useful way of understanding this complexity and provide social workers with a valuable tool for understanding the situations about which they must make decisions (Saltiel, 2013). While Saltiel is looking at social service users and their relationship with social workers I argue, in my study, that this is true for foster-fathers and foster care too and that social workers need to assess individuals, family practices, gender performance and their interconnecting environments.

The term intersectionality was first used by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) in relation to black women in the USA (Crenshaw, 1989), and developed to recognise the inadequacy of using single social inequalities, such as gender or race, to understand the extent of disadvantage and the marginalisation of separate groups (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Conceptualising intersectionality is a far more complex ontology than approaches which reduce individuals to one category only, such as gender or race. Intersectionality can help to overcome the tendency for competing and hegemonic inequalities, for instance race or gender, as fluidity in social structuring is better understood through

application of diverse inequalities embracing both gender and race. Walby (2007, 2012) argues that the intersectionality of social relations (gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, or disability) to the institutionalised social systems of economy, polity, violence and civil society can be associated with complex (and chaotic) social systems, Walby explains that:

“Gender relations are a separate system; it overlaps with class, but neither gender nor class fully saturate the institutional domains.” (Walby, 2007: p460)

Walby argues, by theorising the intersectionality between the different social systems with a positive feedback loop, social equilibrium is exchanged by new forms of structure and inequalities (Walby, 2007). In this way, it can be theorised that social inequalities intersect with institutionalised social systems to throw up new forms of parenting and partnering that are different to the nuclear family construct.

Fostering families are regulated and supervised by social workers; however, they exist away from this regulation and social work supervision. Important work by Hicks (1999, 2005) demonstrates the success of same-sex couples fostering against the odds, as they have tended to be marginalised by a heterosexual understanding of family. Furthermore, legislation has changed in England to promote diversity in fostering through the Equality Act (2010) and the National Minimum Standards (2011). While heterosexist versions of family and parenting may hold hegemonic sway, fostering has evolved through individual practice, by carers and professionals, promoted by legislative procedures that support this evolutionary process. To better analyse social structuring and understand the complex intersections, Walby suggests it may be necessary for concepts such as gender and race to have their meaning temporarily classified and stabilized at the point of analysis (Walby *et al.*, 2012). The intersectionality discourse contends that there is a discernible move away from one form of parenting, partnering and fostering, an argument which is borne out by the statistical evidence accumulated over recent decades as alternative forms of parenting and partnering emerge. In

relation to foster-fathers, recourse to complexity and intersection theories can help to explain the possible diverse ways in which families and relations within families are formed.

Intimacy and families of choice

Concurrent to the representation of tradition based fostering families, and gender roles constructed on the woman as homemaker and man as breadwinner, sociological approaches to families have developed a more flexible, dynamic and less traditional understanding of gender (Giddens 1994). The family of choice discourse (Weeks *et al.*, 2001, 2007) highlights the ability of adults to negotiate roles within same-sex parenting relationships which are non-traditional. The families of choice concept is intended to capture the commitment of chosen, rather than fixed and assigned, relationships and ties of intimacy (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2011). Kath Weston originated the idea of families of choice in 1991 when she noticed that gay men and lesbian women were increasingly extending the meaning of family beyond the biological family which is the source of traditional support and intimacy. She argued that when friends provide the intimacy and support, which traditionally family members are expected to provide, then the family extends by choice (Weston, 1991). The development of families of choice within the gay, lesbian and bisexual community has resulted in some reflection on what the same-sex family represents. The shared narrative of gay, lesbian and bisexual relationships is based upon an understanding of the limitations of an institutionalised heterosexism, with gendered constructs dependent upon sexual differences. Within the homosexual community the network of friendship has been an observed social phenomenon, along with relationships negotiated within positions of mutuality and the reinventing of intimate life within the sphere of choice. The resulting perception of greater choice and openness in relationships, along with the aim to break away from heterosexually structured differences, has led to a feeling of openness to relationship possibilities within the non-heterosexual community (Weeks *et al.*, 2007). Anthony Giddens argues choice also transforms heterosexual relationships in modern society because intimacy within relationships evolve where forms of control based on social

assumptions of male dominance are less easily maintained (Giddens, 1992; Giddens and Pierson, 1998).

Individuals in same-sex couples produce new versions of masculinity and femininity as they perform gender within the families of choice discourse. Butler (1990, 2004) has debated the extent to which new regulatory discourses normalise gender. Butler argues gender is a regulatory discourse and while alternative versions of masculinity and femininity are created, they remain existent as the gender binary matrix regulates gender norms and gender is socially performed. The literature presents fostering families as conformist (Sainsbury, 2004) and as a heterosexual activity involving either a woman as a single carer, or a heterosexual couple with a man fostering alongside a woman main carer (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). Current research has shown that social work practice can negate men as fathers (Dominelli *et al.*, 2011) and as foster-fathers (Wilson *et al.*, 2007) because women continue to be seen as the main carer. My data show men negotiate their roles with children and family as they develop intimate relationships that are not solely reliant upon hegemonic masculinity and male power. However, my data also show how complexity expressed through gender regulatory norms and intersectionality ends up reinforcing traditional ways of 'doing gender relations' in the family as traditionally gendered relations are reproduced in fostering.

Social capital and family practices

The concept of family is important within sociology as the discipline which studies society and human relationships, though it also interacts with other academic disciplines. Within economics, the term capital relates to assets and the accumulation of assets has been sociologically applied to human and social conditions. Human capital is the development of assets and production inherent within individuals, and was initially applied to the education process and the intergenerational transmission of earnings, assets and consumption from parents to their children (Becker and Tomes, 1986; Becker, 1993). In relation to social interaction, social capital (Putman, 2000) is the ability of an individual to secure benefits through membership of social networks and other social structures,

along with the networks of social relations characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity (Ravanera, 2007). It has been recognised by Furstenberg and Kaplan that the measurement of social capital within families is problematic though they speculate that inter-personal family relationships and negotiating skills are important in defining family roles (Furstenberg and Kaplan, 2007). There is also a sociological distinction between the public and private spheres, where the private sphere represents family and home life. In relation to foster care, the conceptualisation of capital and the distinction between public and private spheres are important on a number of levels, and include: the intersecting relationship between the accumulation of assets (foster carers receive financial remuneration); and the renegotiating of family roles in both the private (family) sphere and the public (social welfare) sphere. There is a relative nature to social capital, in that individuals are members within different social organisations which have different variables affecting the production and expenditure of social capital.

The application of social capital to families is driven by understandings of community reciprocity which, it is argued, are based on gendered notions of parental role (Edwards, 2004a). Foster-fathers have been shown to promote social capital to children by active participation with them and through engagement in social and community networks, such as family and education (Gilligan, 2012). Gilligan suggests (2000, 2012) that foster-fathers' promotion of a sense of secure-base for children can also cultivate social capital for the child. Edwards (2004a) argues that the heuristic application of social capital to family presupposes notions of reciprocity and gender roles that prioritise acceptable behaviour that influence policy, leading her to call for a more open application of social capital to families. This prioritization of acceptable behaviour is seen in both Gilligan's (2012) application of social capital by foster-fathers and in the Government's *'Troubled Families'* policy, which castigates those who do not conform to notions of community responsibility (Casey, 2012). Indeed, social capital is highly gendered as it appears to apply more readily to paternal and masculine activities which may result in a limited understanding of foster-fathers' relations with children.

Intersectionality and complexity theories, along with families of choice, highlight the fluidity of gender and family relations. Gender performativity, with its understanding of regulatory norms and social agency, is more able to explain foster-fathering than social capital as it is limited to reciprocal activities whose gendered application is little understood. The argument by Gilligan (2012) that foster-fathers promote social capital is highly gendered as it relates to existing gender relations within families constructed around activities to promote the child's economic progress and wellbeing. By promoting social capital foster-fathers perform gender to affirm traditional masculinity and reproduce gendered relations within families.

Regarding family practices, David Morgan (1996) argues that families are not concrete structures, as they are created through everyday practices that are fluid and take place in social contexts. Family participation is represented by activities within families where the emphasis is on the social actor recreating his or her world within the context of the family and doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and family practices (Morgan, 1996) in the everyday routines which overlap and intersect with other practices based on class, age, gender, ethnicity and culture. The display of these family practices (Finch, 2007) emphasise the social construction of these activities as they are both conveyed and understood by others, internally and externally to the family, and is understood to define roles within the fostering family. The doing and displaying of family in everyday routines has been transferred to fostering families during daily routines to show an ethic of care (Rees *et al.*, 2012) and in the creation of adoption kinship (Jones and Hackett, 2011). The discourse is that gender roles are largely socially constructed phenomenon in relation to socio-economic, cultural and historical factors that are shown through the everyday routines. However, the social actor does not have total agency in actions as sub-conscious, structural and cultural factors merge to influence activity and reduce personal agency (Giddens and Pierson, 1998). Butler's (1990) concept of performativity helps to explain the process whereby agency that may challenge gender norms is not enough, as performances are rooted in a society that reconstruct existing gender relations. The

doing and displaying of gender implies personal agency in the construction of gender as everyday routines are performed. My data show foster-fathers performing gender which subverts traditional masculinity as they move to performativity and undo gender that extends beyond doing and displaying family practices. They also perform gender as support carers and disciplinarians that affirm traditional masculinity as the normative regulates performativity to recreate the conditions for performances to reproduce gender norms, which are not voluntary.

The reproduction of existing gender relations and their subversion

Gender, Butler argues (2004), is a regulatory discourse in the reproduction of hegemonic gender roles. Existing gender relations are reproduced as they affirm traditional masculinity and femininity, normalising men as breadwinners who are controlling and aloof, with women normalised as homemakers who negotiate and connect emotionally with children. Men in my study reproduce normalised masculinity in their performance of gender. While gender is a regulatory discourse, foster-fathers in my study also perform gender acts to challenge masculine norms when they produce alternative and non-hegemonic versions of masculinity. However, my data demonstrate men can be perceived as potential risks when they deviate too far from traditional masculine norms. In my study foster-fathers perform gender to subvert masculinity when they show negotiation and emotional connection with children. Masculinity and femininity are not fixed points as they slide along a binary scale with diverse variants produced as people perform gender to produce non-hegemonic versions of masculinity and femininity. Concurrently, complexity expressed through gender regulatory norms and intersectionality end up reinforcing existing gender relations as they are reproduced in fostering. Foster-fathers perform gender when they take on feminised tasks through which they subvert traditional masculine norms and they continue to construct masculinity which is both affirming and challenging to stereotyped masculinity. In the analysis of my data I reflect on foster-fathers as they reproduce existing gender relations and subvert these gender relations when they move from gender performance to performativity and produce new versions of masculinity. As foster-fathers they use agency to create alternative masculinities in performing

gender to subvert traditional stereotypes. However, through their gender performances foster-fathers 'do' gender to re-enact gender norms and perform gender as anticipated to remain manly and maintain existing gender relations.

Challenging Traditional Constructs to Gender

The literature presents fostering families as tradition based with clearly defined masculine and feminine roles. Conceptualising family as traditional presupposes a normative structure and from this normative concept emanates gender relationships which are inherent within the definition. The context of this study enables the reappraisal of fostering by recourse to complex social systems and social agency in the performance of gender.

Dynamic families

Fostering is delivered in both the public and private spheres as it combines family caring with a fostering agency. Family is associated with the private sphere and paid work with the public sphere, which also includes communal and social activity that is external to family. However, social workers transcend both the public and private spheres because they work within families to look at the internal private family through the lens of the public sphere, a process involving professional surveillance of families (Dominelli, 2002b). As a process, fostering necessitates some form of interaction between the public and private spheres when social workers intervene in private family life. The apparent conventionality in fostering families, represented in the literature, implies consistent uniformity to family type and concrete gender relations. Far from being static, families and interactions within families have evolved (Giddens, 1992) and the diversity of family types has been recognised with the growth of alternatives to the nuclear family. The dynamic construction of family results in the evolution of diverse and non-nuclear families not only nationally and internationally, but also geographically. Social work judgements are influenced by personal belief systems and the robustness of practice assessments has been questioned, particularly when social workers are confronted by unfamiliar and complex situations (Saltiel, 2013).

There are a number of factors that influence how families are formed, that include class, race, gender and geography, which can influence foster families too. In a study on family types Duncan and Smith (2002) identified the evolution of regionalised and localised family types that predominate within local communities. They argue specific family types emerge to become culturally predominant as localised versions of mothering and fathering become normalised within local communities; for instance some communities favour breadwinning fatherhood while others are more reliant on single-parent mothers. Foster carers are similarly influenced by localised family discourses and notions of parenting. This localised diversification of family types would seem to challenge the literature's homogenous representation of foster caring families. The notions of idealised families and parenting within communities transcend geography because regulatory norms may exist within non-localised community groups, such as religious groups, and can relate to fostering as a sub-group within society. There is also the potential for idealised family practices within the fostering community.

Therefore, rather than there being one type of family, there is a multitude of family types dependent on local, historical, cultural and social factors and fostering families are equally open to these influences just as much as any other community. Butler's (1990, 2004) conjecture that performance transcends identity, as it involves the acting out and imitation of roles in line with social codes and regulatory discourses, conforms to the diversification of parenting roles and the hegemony of parental types. Social work practice can miss the complex makeup to families who foster as performances are multi-faceted and little understood. While most people foster as part of a man and woman couple there are single carer households and same-sex couples who foster (Skeates and Jabri, 1988). The literature, by presenting fostering families as uniform, demonstrates the regulatory gender discourse and its influence on the performance of gender as fostering families tend to conform to masculine and feminine norms. Butler (2004) argues, the production of regulatory norms allows for some diversity in the performance of gender and therefore carers through agency can

perform gender to challenge masculine and feminine norms. There is diversity in fostering families and through the use of agency foster carers are able to take on roles which are not usually associated with their gender, which is evident in same-sex and single-caring households in fostering, though this diversity is largely absent in the literature. The presentation of uniformity (and hegemony of parenting roles) in fostering is partly explained by the general short-fall of material dealing with lesbian and gay fostering and adoption (Hicks and McDermott, 1999).

It has been argued, by Charnley and Langley, that anti-heterosexist social work has been constrained with practice, compromised by limited recognition of sexual minority cultures as well as personal and political reluctance to change (Charnley and Langley, 2007). Currently there are over 45,000 fostering households in the United Kingdom (Fostering Network, 2012) and legislation on equality (Equality Act 2010), alongside recruitment short-falls, have promoted the active recruitment of carers outside of those perceived to be part of the typical fostering population and to recruit from within Black and Ethnic Minority and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender groups (Betts and Mallon, 2004; Rule, 2006). As with general social trends, fostering families evolve so that their makeup and composition alter over time. Fostering by same-sex couples, within the families of choice discourse, subverts gender roles based on the heterosexual binary logic (Butler, 1990) because they perform gender outside of the traditional man as breadwinner and woman as carer family construct. Therefore, far from being homogenous, fostering has internal variations due at least to the diversity of the types of families who foster. While the literature and social work practice construct fostering around hegemonic masculine and feminine norms the actual performance of gender, by both single women carers and same-sex couples, subvert these norms. Fostering families, as with families in general, have evolved to allow variety and diversity; and this diversity tends to be overlooked in both the literature and social work practice, except for specific material that reflects on issues relating to same-sex couples fostering.

Tom Shakespeare, in his focus on disability, critiques the construction of idealised families as he reflects on the lived experience and individual narratives (Shakespeare, 2000). It can be argued that the construction of fostering as a substitute family essentially mirrors Shakespeare's argument concerning the idealised nuclear family and social concepts of caring and helping (Butler and Charles, 1999). This transference of the idealised family concept onto fostering may well affect the perceived roles of foster carers, effectively generalising them within an idealised construct of family, particularly as foster care has largely replaced residential care in a trend to mirror family life (Fulcher, 2009). Therefore, current methodological frameworks for working with foster carers are biased towards a perception that locates foster carers within the nuclear family construct and its inherent demarcation of gender roles, classifying women as homemaking-carers and men as breadwinners. To counter this generalised way of understanding foster carers, a more individual approach is required to reflect the experiences of carers themselves. I show through my data that masculinity is flexible and fluid and while some foster-fathers perform gender to challenge traditional masculinity, many of them still construct family within an idealised version based on the man as breadwinner and woman as homemaker.

Men and masculinity

The roles of men and fatherhood in particular have received increased attention due in part, at least, to a perceived crisis in fatherhood with increasing numbers of non-resident fathers and the changing nature of employment (Hearn *et al.*, 1998). Conceptualising and operationalising breadwinning work without any real reflection on the nature of these roles has resulted in the demarcation of gender functioning with masculinity defined in association with the breadwinning concept (Warren, 2007). Psychologically, men are portrayed as being more individualistic and achievement orientated with women portrayed as more socially and relationship orientated (Gilligan, 1993). Studies highlight the positive benefit of fathers and men to children (Knight, 2004; O'Brien, 2005; Towers, 2006) though the focus of working with men has primarily seen them as the source of concern in relation to the welfare of children (Ryan, 2000). There is evidence that when fathers and men are more involved

with the care of children these children often do better in later life, particularly in their psychological and social development. It is argued by Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) that the absence of a father figure in a child's life can be harmful because many paternal roles go unfulfilled.

The concept of masculinity and its association with the tough and aloof man, along with the tendency to treat boys as little men, encourages toughness and emotional aloofness that can result in sad and lonely boys (Pollack, 1999). Pollack suggests this tough man image should be contrasted with the lived experiences of boys and these experiences need to be more fully understood. Influential work by Connell has transferred the Gramscian concept of hegemony (Gramsci and Buttigieg, 1992) to masculinity through men's use of violence to maintain a dominant gender position within society (Connell, 1995; Connell, 2002). Connell maintains that masculinity is historically constructed with complex intersections between the genders and class which, through diverse and historically relative social codes, maintain gender hierarchical positioning. Therefore, Connell suggests a plurality of masculinities rather than one form of masculinity though the suggestion is that the hegemonic type remains predominant. Hearn and Pringle (2006) argue the notion of masculinity operates within patriarchy and the development of plural and dynamic masculinities fits with a diversified understanding of patriarchies, rather than a singular version that is mostly associated with the traditionally tough, aloof and hegemonic version (Hearn and Pringle, 2006). This plurality of masculinities and patriarchies implies that men are not solely defined by recourse to a singular version of masculinity and that social agency influences identity and roles within families. Butler's (1990) performativity helps to explain the multiple masculinities, and patriarchies, as men perform gender to produce and reproduce masculinities along the gender binary continuum with hegemonic masculinity associated more with traditional masculinity and patriarchy. Hearn et al. also argue masculinity is a social construct which relates to the time and place of its context (Hearn *et al.*, 1998).

Though Connell (1995) promotes the primacy of hegemonic masculinity this plurality of masculinities, and patriarchies, implies that men are not solely defined by recourse to a singular version of masculinity. Men therefore show some agency in how they develop their identity and roles within families. However, the conceptualising of gender difference, based on non-interchangeable mothering and fathering roles, continues to influence social work childcare practice and the engagement of men (Scourfield, 2006a; Scourfield *et al.*, 2012) through mother-blame (O'Hagan and Dillenburger, 1995) and the 'good dad-bad dad' binary (Pleck, 2004), which results in under-assessed fathers (Featherstone, 2003, 2004) where dads are invisible ghosts (Brown *et al.*, 2009) so that a child welfare discourse locates men at either end of a risk or asset continuum. Locating men as risk or asset limits their role, particularly as masculinity can be problematized as risk. The construction of problematized masculinity relates it to a singular, or traditional, version of masculinity that is linked to male power. This singular and problematic version of masculinity contradicts the diversity of male discourses and identities.

The underrepresentation of foster-fathers in the literature corresponds to an apparent perception that men in general are somehow difficult to engage in childcare, in contrast to research that increasingly supports active fathering in child development (Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). Social work assessments can miss the potential contribution men play in children's lives by not recognising diversity in family practices and types of family. Men are therefore seen in the context of a risk or asset binary in relation to Elizabeth Pleck's 'good dad-bad dad' binary (Pleck, 2004). Social workers can perform gender to see men as either risk or asset in relation to their own value system and understanding of masculinity. Men are expected to perform gender roles that conform to social workers' understanding of masculinity which can be problematized when it relates to a singular version of masculinity, mostly associated with the traditional one. This perception of men, as potential risk or asset, marginalises them away from care and does not reflect the diverse possibilities provided by foster-fathers as I show in chapter six. My data show foster-fathers to

identify with the 'good dad' breadwinning role and continuing to identify with the 'good dad' concept when they produce new masculinities to include negotiation and nurturing.

Men and gender journeys

The transitions men, and women, undergo throughout life have been explored by O'Neil et al. (1993) through the development of the gender role journey theory and subsequent measure of gender journey. This theory explores the changes and adaptations men go through and it provides a theoretical framework to explore how men construct and adapt their gender identities when they are seen to move from traditional masculinity to more feminised activities as they mature (O'Neil et al., 1993). The journey metaphor provides a framework for evaluating thoughts, feelings and behaviours concerning gender roles, sexism and gender role conflict. It also proposes men go through a series of stages in their gender identity. The journeys are varied and often involve childhood, maturation, employment, relationships and partnering, parenting and endings. A longitudinal study using the gender role journey measure, by Marcel et al. (2011), found that most men's perceptions become less traditional over time. In their study Marcel et al. suggest that the transitions and experiences during young adulthood are crucial in a man's gender identity. A recent study by McDermott and Schwartz (2013), using the gender role journey measure with 551 student and graduate men, supports the validity of the test. In their study, McDermott and Schwartz suggest that the intersection of gender and other cultural and contextual spheres, like age, gender and sexuality should be further explored as they appear to impact on gender identity (McDermott and Schwartz, 2013). While in my study I am not using the gender role journey test, it is useful to highlight its application as it relates to the socialisation and transition of gender through experience. It also demonstrates how gender performance can alter throughout the life-course, with socialisation enabling the production of new realities and masculinities. Gender identity and gender performance can move to performativity and the possible subversion of masculine norms though the logic of the gender binary remains intact. Through the gender journey measure it is argued, by

Marcel et al. (2011) and McDermott and Schwartz (2013), gender identity changes, but new gender is not produced because existing gender relations are reproduced.

The Literature on Men Who Foster

In Britain there are several articles focussing on men who foster (Newstone, 1999; Gilligan, 2000; Newstone, 2000) and a study by Wilson et al. involving 69 questionnaires and 9 follow-up interviews with foster-fathers in the South East of England (Wilson *et al.*, 2007). In this collaborative study Wilson acknowledged that she had not previously focussed on foster-fathers commenting there is a “relative lack of attention paid them by agencies, social workers and researchers” (Wilson *et al.*, 2007: p 23). The Fostering Network and British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering have both provided some literature on men who foster, mainly through their respective magazines, practice notes, press articles (Wrighton, 2006; Brown, 2008; Tapsfield, 2008) and a reflection on the stories and experiences of 12 male carers (Lewis and Boffey, 2010). There has also been some literature relating to men fostering with male partners (Hicks and McDermott, 1999; Hicks, 2005).

Internationally, there are several resources available to the researcher. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were two significant American studies by Fanshel (1966) and Davids (1971). Fanshel devoted a chapter, in his foster care study in Philadelphia, to men who foster (Fanshel 1966). In his study, Fanshel interviewed 81 men (in contrast to 101 women interviewed) using a specific interview schedule designed specifically for men, which was reduced to half the length of the women’s interview as it was believed that men would not tolerate a longer interview. Fanshel presented the foster-father as a “rather retiring, passive person who relies on his more energetic wife for leadership in family affairs” (Fanshel, 1966: p 45). Davids (1971) specifically undertook a research project on foster-fathers in the United States and concluded that men are underused in fostering (Davids 1971). Inch, in the United States (Inch 1998), and Hojer, in Sweden (Hojer 2004), have both looked at men fostering as part of their respective doctoral studies.

The roles attributed to foster-fathers

There is little contention to the assumption that children who require foster care have a need for therapeutic support (Schofield *et al.*, 2000), as they often experience multiple disadvantages which the foster carer is ideally placed to address. Statistically, there is clearly a role for men in foster care, as most fostering households possess a male figure and fostered children tend to have lacked such a figure (Newstone, 2000). Therefore, foster-fathers are ideally placed to have a positive role in a child's life, by for instance taking an interest in the child's school work (Gilligan, 2000). Role modelling by men and providing a positive example to children are themes which emerge from the literature from the 1960s (Fanshel, 1966) to the most recent study in 2007 (Wilson *et al.*, 2007). This role modelling tends to be activity and leisure-based (Wilson *et al.*, 2007), affording men the opportunity to work directly with children. These studies show that men present themselves as being traditional in their gender roles (Fanshel, 1966; Hojer 2004; Wilson *et al.*, 2007).

Foster-fathers throughout this literature seem to have a very fixed concept of public morality and it is suggested, by Inch (1999), that foster-fathers assume a significant responsibility to develop fostered children's sense of morality in line with Erikson's generativity (Erikson, 1963; Inch, 1998). Erikson, influenced by Freud, promoted the concept of generativity, which is the desire to guide the next generation, as a driving power in human organisation (Erikson, 1968) with particular reference to a male impulse to impart moral values in children. Newstone (1999, 2000) has emphasised the positive input involved fathers can have on children and relates this to foster care. Newstone emphasises the emotional benefits associated with an involved man in a child's life and links this male involvement to the stability of the fostering placement. This literature on foster-fathers shows that men have a role in fostering and that they act within gendered norms as generativity and role modelling are traditionally masculine. There is within the literature something of a paradox as men are presented as having an involved role in the lives of children though this is largely overlooked in practice by social work agencies and staff (Fanshel, 1966; Hojer, 2004; Wilson *et al.*, 2007). The

evidence from these studies show men to perform gendered roles with children, but they also show men are involved directly with children as they participate in recreational and education tasks. Therefore, the literature shows men to reproduce existing gender relations although there is evidence within it that they subvert these relations when they engage directly with children. This evidence is not theorised within the existing literature where men are described as traditional, conformist and support to a woman main carer (Bebbington and Miles, 1990; Sinclair *et al.*, 2004).

Fostering is a voluntary activity which suggests agency in the motivation to foster. Research evidence supports the view that men tend to be less motivated to become foster carers with many applying to foster to support a woman's application (Fanshel, 1966; Davids, 1971; Hojer, 2004; Wilson *et al.*, 2007). However, motivation to apply to foster is distinct from the desire to continue to foster. There is evidence from current research to show men are leaving paid employment, or transferring to part-time work, to be able to foster (Wilson *et al.*, 2007). It has been suggested that men choose to foster to fulfil personal interests, such as the opportunity to become a father or to provide an opportunity to retrace their fathering (Inch, 1998; Inch, 1999). It has long been held that the paternal interaction is different for foster-fathers compared to biological fathers (Davids, 1973) as they are perceived to be less involved with fostered children than with biological children. My data show some men are directly motivated to become foster-fathers with some going on to become the main carer to facilitate a woman partner to work full-time away from the home.

Ingrid Hojer's (2004) Swedish study of fostering from the perspective of foster carers involving 366 foster carers (192 women and 174 men) suggests that foster-fathers develop new caring skills as they become drawn more into family life through fostering (Hojer, 2004). Hojer suggests women's association with maternity enables ready formed skills to be transferred to fostering while men have to develop new skills as foster carers:

“The men interviewed did not emphasise the concept of care in the same way, nor did they express the same wish to use their caring skills.” (Hojer, 2004: p42)

For Hojer’s sample, the demanding nature of fostering appears to increase the need for involved childcare which results in foster-fathers becoming more engaged in family life through fostering. The performance of foster-fathering creates new masculinities in Hojer’s study as they take on caring tasks through fostering which are not linked to their biological parenting. The process of male engagement with fostering, in turn, had the effect of leading to an increase in the sharing of roles between men and women. This engagement, and sharing of roles in Hojer’s study, brought the couples closer together as they were required to communicate more about fostered children than with biological children. Through fostering, men in Hojer’s sample were able to become more emotionally in-tune with their partner and other family members, so that: “Through fostering fathers were drawn closer to the centre of the family” (Hojer, 2004: p 42). Hojer’s study suggests that there is a dynamic nature to fathering as men become foster-fathers and take on new roles associated with fostering. This dynamic nature to fathering, as it changes and evolves in different contexts, challenges the stereotyped version of gender.

Families involved in fostering seem to develop new gender roles and family displays that are different from those prior to becoming foster-parents. These roles evolve as men acquire new skills and knowledge by looking after fostered children. These foster family negotiations and family practices remain under-theorised and are little understood in the literature. Hojer’s explanation is that men become more engaged in childcare through fostering as it is closely linked with paid employment in Sweden. Therefore, they perform gender which challenge masculine norms by becoming caring men, though as paid workers their performance of gender affirms existing gender relations because they remain breadwinners. Wilson et al. (2007) in their study note that there is evidence of a gendered division of labour in household tasks, with men performing most of the DIY tasks, but men tend to leave contact with officialdom to their women partners. There was some

equality within Wilson et al's. sample group in relation to some parenting tasks pertaining to promoting attachments, security, comfort, developing autonomy and modifying behaviour (Wilson *et al.*, 2007), though men were largely presented as supporting carers.

Both Wilson et al. (2007) and Hojer (2004) in their respective studies used samples which were solely made up of heterosexual couples and found evidence of traditionally gendered roles. Neither study made reference to intersectionality as both studies reflected on gender and did not look at the impact of other inequalities such as ethnicity, culture or age. While these two studies found a clear divergence between gender roles they also found evidence that men engaged with childcare tasks which are more associated with the maternal role, as Wilson et al. noted:

“Fathers, at least as they conceived their roles, participated in a majority of the tasks involving direct work with children more actively than might have been predicted.”

(Wilson *et al.*, 2007: p 31)

The apparent preparedness for men to engage more readily with some tasks, like children's activities, while disengaging with others demonstrates a gender stratification that may have developed away from the regulatory fostering framework and without recourse to social work supervision. The data from studies already published elsewhere (Bebbington and Miles, 1990; Sinclair *et al.*, 2004) show that foster-fathers perform gender to affirm traditional masculinity. There is also evidence to show a process involving negotiation, at some level, when men and women choose tasks, as foster carers, that show personal agency. However, in these studies gender continues to define men and women as having different roles in fostering.

Men fostering in same-sex couples

The studies on fostering families all highlight a predominant perception of uniformity in the type of person who fosters (Sainsbury, 2004). Within any sociological group there is never a total homogenous status to its structure. While most people foster as part of a man and woman couple, there are single carer households and same-sex couples who foster (Skeates and Jabri, 1988).

Stephen Hicks has produced work reflecting the experiences of gay men fostering. These experiences present a range of barriers from men seen as unfit carers, concerns about gender role modelling and the risk of sexual abuse (Hicks and McDermott, 1999). A study, by Skeates and Jabri (1988), found gay and lesbian carers were more likely to look after children perceived to be difficult to place due to health or behaviour reasons. There is an issue of rights and a political agenda with some well publicised reactions by religious based adoption agencies, particularly in relation to the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Hicks, 2003). For Stephen Hicks the assessment of gay and lesbian people is crucial as:

“It is in being assessed as a potential carer that the attitudes and values of social workers, and social work agencies, come into play.” (Hicks and McDermott, 1999: p 189)

The research, by Hicks (2005), demonstrates that there is a reservoir of interest in fostering within the gay and lesbian community and that there has been an increase in gay and lesbian people becoming foster carers. The evidence suggests that the assessment and support services have not developed at the same pace as this interest (Hicks, 2005).

Barriers to men fostering

The literature recounts several barriers to men which apparently prohibit their role as carers, and possibly uppermost is the perceived threat of an allegation concerning child abuse; other barriers include stereotyping and the perceived negative attitudes of child care professionals. Fear of an allegation of abuse is a major concern for men who foster, more so than for women (Wrighton, 2006). Regarding allegations of abuse against foster carers, the highest rates of allegations against foster carers relate to physical abuse (Nixon and Verity, 1996; The Fostering Network, 2006). Most studies on child maltreatment and allegations of child abuse highlight that men are disproportionately more likely to have an allegation made against them. In their study, on allegations in foster care, Bray and Minty (2001) found that two-thirds of alleged perpetrators were men. The fact that men are more at risk of allegations of child abuse than women may result from several factors: the perpetration of child abuse by men is more common than for women; men are

more readily perceived as a potential risk; and their actions could be misunderstood or interpreted which promotes men as perpetrators. Most studies highlight sexual abuse as the second most frequent type of allegation against foster carers. The welfare of vulnerable children is paramount and it is important for allegations of child maltreatment to be investigated. It seems that men experience more allegations than women, particularly when factoring in gendered fostering tasks, which may reflect on both instances of abuse and perceptions around gender or even both factors. What this expressed experience and perceived risk result in is an apparent barrier which restricts or prohibits men from identifying with or undertaking some fostering tasks. My study, by presenting men's narratives, reflects on foster-fathers attitudes toward allegations and their relationships with children and social workers. My data show men to experience this risk negatively as they try to negotiate roles to care for children within a system they feel does not recognise their contribution or support them adequately.

Risk and protection associated with gender and the welfare discourse

The conventional opinion on the perpetration of maltreatment and abuse is, to a degree, associated with gender; that the majority of adults who abuse children sexually are men (Fowler, 2008) and mothers are likely to be blamed when children are neglected (O'Hagan and Dillenburger, 1995; Strega *et al.*, 2008). Professional judgements are interlinked with decision-making and are described as making sense of probabilities to point a way forward, though the impact of risk in child welfare is a further dimension that requires on-going reflection, review and analysis (Hollows, 2008). However, professional judgement based upon probabilities implies that all the probable variables are known about. The potential roles undertaken by foster-fathers are affected by stereotyping men, as non-carers, and the fact that some men (and women) abuse children. Personal attitudes and organisational procedures influence social work decision-making and gender concepts may be misunderstood or go unnoticed, with for instance mother-blame and father-ignoring noted factors in child welfare work (Featherstone and Peckover, 2007; Dominelli, 2008). My data show foster-fathers feel undervalued by social work and social workers' practice failing to routinely visit men as carers.

The stereotyping of gender roles affect foster-fathers as they can be marginalised from caring tasks and seen as secondary to a woman main carer. This marginalisation of men from caring can take several different forms, such as being seen as non-caring or out at work and therefore under supported by social workers, or perceived as a possible risk. It is suggested by Elizabeth Pleck (2004) that fathers who do not financially provide for their children (for whatever reason) are classified as 'deadbeat dads' (originally coined by President Gerald Ford). By perceiving men as either successful financial providers for the family or as deadbeat men who do not, welfare agencies run the risk of failing to see the diverse ways in which men parent children (Pleck, 2004; Dominelli, 2008). The association of child sexual abuse with men adds an element of risk to foster-fathers, as their actions when not performing according to stereotyped parenting and accepted masculinity, based on being a provider, can be misunderstood and seen as risky. The conceptualising of gender difference in parental roles continue to influence social work childcare practice and the engagement of men (Scourfield, 2006a; Scourfield *et al.*, 2012) which appears to be transferred to fostering, particularly when men are classified as hard to reach by a foster care study (Dickerson and Thomas, 2009). The construction of problematized masculinity belies the diversity of male discourses and identities as the relations of male power are closely interlinked with social problems (Hearn and Pringle, 2006). Social work assessments may overlook the potential contribution men play in children's lives by not recognising diversity in family practices. The construction of problematized masculinity is possibly transferred to fostering when men are allocated a secondary role to a woman carer, particularly as they could be seen as a risk when they move away from normalised masculinity and perform roles that deviate from masculine norms.

Summary of the literature relating to men who foster

The review of the literature has identified there is a gap in our knowledge about how existing gender relations affect and influence the delivery of fostering by families. Foster care research has not matched the developments in understanding family composition and gender relations achieved in

other academic fields. There are misunderstood and unseen layers of complexity in fostering families. Subsequently, there is no reflection on a foster-father narrative and more specifically men are seen to be secondary carers who largely support women partners as they deliver care to children. While it is recognised that men are becoming more involved as foster carers (Newstone, 2000; Hojer, 2004; Wilson *et al.*, 2007; Lewis and Boffey, 2010) their voices are rarely heard in the literature. Researchers and practitioners have tended to focus on how women look after fostered children (Wilson *et al.*, 2007) to the detriment of understanding what it is that men do within fostering families. Research by focusing on the main carer excludes men (McDermid *et al.*, 2012) and fails to give voice to foster-fathers, so they are assigned a secondary role as support carer or breadwinner. The public and private spheres are seen to merge in fostering through the interface between work and home, with a discernible movement towards professionalism. The manner in which foster carers negotiate the private family roles, and take account of professionalism, has largely gone unnoticed so that men who care are viewed as operating as risks or assets within the social construct of woman homemaker and male breadwinner dichotomy. By using concepts around performativity, intersectionality and complexity I classify gendered men to analyse their gender performances as they 'do' gender by caring for fostered children and how they can be seen as risks when they deviate from masculine norms.

Re-examining the Foster Care Literature

The foster care literature's association with traditionally constructed families who foster tends to neglect foster-fathers as they are assigned secondary non-caring roles within families. By re-examining the literature through recourse to feminist notions of intersectionality and performing gender a diverse picture emerges. In this section I initially reflect on the traditional family discourse and expand to look at the specific foster care literature.

Fostering families as traditional carers

Research on the composition of fostering families has tended to be undertaken because of concerns over the recruitment of foster carers and a perceived short-fall in fostering families (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). Our understanding of who fosters over the last fifty years has benefitted from several studies (Gray and Parr, 1957; Bebbington and Miles, 1990; Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000; Sinclair *et al.*, 2004; McDermid *et al.*, 2012). All of these studies attest to the fact that the delivery of foster care is seen to be mainly undertaken by women and heavily influenced by traditional concepts of gender roles based on the construct of the woman homemaker and man as breadwinner dichotomy. Within the literature there is a predominant perception of uniformity in the type of person who fosters (Sainsbury, 2004) with foster carers seen to be ordinary people representative of traditional family lifestyles (Sinclair *et al.*, 2004) where caring is largely a woman's activity. Firmly grounded within the prevailing ideology of the 1950s, a study by the Home Office described fostering as a woman's activity and defined the household by the man's employment status (Gray and Parr, 1957). The recourse to nuclear family understandings of gender functioning is present throughout all these studies as fostering families are presented as typically orthodox. In their study Bebbington and Miles refer to the conventionality of the majority of fostering families (Bebbington and Miles, 1990), an observation that extends to studies outside of Britain (Andersson, 2001).

The association with a traditional family construct suggests that fostering, in Britain, is based on the ideological primacy of the Western nuclear family (Butler and Charles, 1999), involving clearly defined gender parenting roles. This association of fostering with the nuclear family is summarised in a doctoral theses by Linda Nutt:

“The majority of foster carers appeared to represent the ideology of the nuclear family and thus presented the paradox of using bureaucratic, substitute care to reinforce images of traditional families.” (Nutt, 2002: p 65)

Nutt's study of foster carers' perspectives suggests that Local Authorities reinforce traditional family life by the type of families they recruit to fostering (Nutt, 2002). The discourse is that fostering displaced residential care due to the ideologically driven value placed upon family life; where family involves clearly defined different roles for men and women. While contemporary research aims to move away from overt gender stereotyping, recourse to operational language continues to associate fostering with women when:

“We have slipped from talking about foster families to talking about the main carer (in practice almost always a woman).” (Sinclair *et al.*, 2004: p. 23)

The importance of language and linguistics to gender identity is emphasised by Butler (1990) as the performative is the effects, such as language, to enforce stereotypes. The classification of main carer status is most frequently allotted to women and it has been suggested that the focus on the main carer tends to exclude men from research (McDermid *et al.*, 2012), particularly as they are often seen to take on a secondary role in support to a woman partner (Newstone, 1999).

The statistics suggest fostering is predominantly delivered by women as part of a couple or single person household from ethnically white communities (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). The statistical evidence appears to support the orthodox view, found in the literature, that fostering is heavily influenced by existing gender relations with most men fostering with a female partner. The emphasis on women carers supports the view that fostering is structured around a gendered mothering role. Nutt's conclusion to her doctoral thesis emphasises the overlaying imperative of caring and motherhood in fostering and the centrality of children to foster carer sense of self, intimacy and family meanings aligned to a rescue discourse to save children (Nutt, 2002). Fostering is presented throughout the literature as an activity undertaken by women with men playing a support role to the household mother-figure. Foster-fathers are seen as secondary to a woman carer within a discourse of gender difference which defines fathering and mothering as distinct roles that are not

interchangeable; a discourse which I show in my study is limited because men perform gender that both subvert and affirm traditional masculinity.

Fostering distinct from parenting

The nature and function of fostering is to care for children and the literature has shown there are a number of challenges for foster carers. These challenges experienced by foster carers lead to specific tasks which they undertake that are distinct from parents. At one level, these are definable through the National Minimum Standards (Sainsbury, 2004) and the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards concurrent to the individual child 'Care Plan' (Department of Health, 2002; Department for children schools and families, 2010; Department for Education, 2011). Substitute care replicates some parental roles and undertakes universal developmental and habitual child care tasks that include nurturing, feeding, close personal care and educating. Most children routinely experience a healthy childhood, supported by adult mentoring and guidance towards increasing independence and adulthood. Research highlights the existence of particular challenges in foster care distinct from universal childcare (Sinclair *et al.*, 2005b). It has been argued by Wilson *et al.* that a model of successful foster care depends on three placement factors: those that affect the child; the foster carer; and the interaction between the two (Wilson *et al.*, 2003). A study by Brown and Calder (1999), utilising concept-mapping from foster carers' responses to cluster the different categories, identifies four areas of challenges faced by carers, which are: problems with the child welfare agency; perceptions of low importance by others; safety and stress; and health (Brown and Calder, 1999). While there are similarities between fostering and parenting, there is much divergence between the two and those who are already parents have to develop new skills as foster carers. The transference of distinct mothering and fathering roles to fostering based on parenting experiences is therefore limited, as men and women are required to acquire a new set of fostering skills.

The ways in which foster carers interact with professionals is different from parenting as they take on defined tasks with 'looked after' children. Though operating within a planned and increasingly

regulated service, the difficulty experienced by foster carers is often exasperated as the majority of children are placed in an emergency and all too frequently outside of the carer's approval status, which can result in placement breakdown (Sinclair *et al.*, 2000; Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000; Sellick and Thorburn, 2002). The skills required from foster carers are becoming far more sophisticated than those of parenting. There is an increasing need to work with professionals to meet the often complex needs of children in placements. Paradoxically, the literature's recognition of fostering as distinct from parenting contrasts with the predominance of stereotyped gender roles. Foster carers perform roles and tasks that are different from parenting because they are routinely expected to interact with child welfare professionals and maltreatment issues much more frequently than expected from typical parents. However, the literature does not reflect on gender as the assumption is that fairly static gender roles remain intact. Given the difficulty foster carers experience, the relationship between confidence and skills is significant as foster carers endeavour to maintain the complex roles they perform as carers.

Foster carer confidence and self-efficacy

Foster carers tend to look after children who have experienced maltreatment and abuse. A significant effect of child maltreatment is the child's maladaptive behaviour and the meaning of the child's behaviour can easily be misunderstood (Crittenden, 2000a), which is complicated by the multiple levels of adversity, maltreatment and abuse often experienced by children (Farmer and Pollock, 1998). Foster care is a challenging activity on many levels and it has been shown that personal adversity and difficulty experienced by carers can impact on their ability to sustain fostering placements for children (Farmer *et al.*, 2005). The foster carer's ability to provide support and set boundaries for children and young people appear to be influential factors that affect placement disruption (Crum, 2010). The foster carer's own skill-base, self-efficacy and confidence are important factors in the sustainability of placements for children, particularly when they present challenging behaviour. Self-efficacy concerns individual's beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments within a social-cognitive theory of human functioning (Bandura, 1977, 1994). There is

strong evidence linking parental self-efficacy to parental competence and though there is variation across parents, children and cultural contexts the influence of parental self-efficacy is a potential predictor of child-functioning and parental confidence (Jones and Prinz, 2005).

There have been several studies that have transferred the concept of parental self-efficacy to fostering (Denuwelaere and Bracke, 2007; Whenan *et al.*, 2009; Morgan and Baron, 2011). In their Australian study Whenan *et al.* (2009) conclude that foster carer self-efficacy is an important factor for foster carer well-being, satisfaction and ability to continue fostering. Morgan and Baron (2011) undertook an English study on foster carer self-efficacy and challenging behaviour among 'looked after' children. They conclude that self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between challenging behaviour and the carer's well-being. The evidence points towards the suggestion that foster carer self-confidence in their abilities and parental self-efficacy has an influence on foster placement stability and carer well-being. A Belgian study, reflecting on well-being among foster carers and fostered children, found that men have a significant role in the well-being of children (Denuwelaere and Bracke, 2007). This positive view of foster-fathers is supported by Gilligan (2012) when he argues, in a review of research, that foster-fathers cultivate the foster child's sense of having a secure-base and influence a child's self-efficacy (Gilligan, 2012). Whilst fostering is distinct from parenting, parental self-efficacy seems to be a determining factor in a carer's ability to sustain fostering placements for children.

Professionalism, payment and motivation to foster

Historically there has been some unease about financial profit being made out of caring for vulnerable children, though several studies highlight that foster carers are not directly motivated to care for payment (Kirton, 2001; Schofield *et al.*, 2013). However, there seems to be an international shift towards recognising the need to pay foster carers and fostering agencies for 'looked after' children (Colton *et al.*, 2008). The indication from research is that foster carers are not motivated by finances alone to look after children. Commitment to care for a child emerges as a main motivator

for foster carers (Schofield *et al.*, 2013) and that they construct their fostering tasks from the reference points of work and family (Kirton, 2001). The relationship between fostering and professionalism is more complex than for most other occupations given the emotional nature involved in caring for children and the unease of being seen to profit from childhood vulnerability. Kirton (2001) found that his sample of 20 foster-mothers valued parental and familial factors more than professionalism and this women-only sample indicates that foster carers distinguish between fostering as a parent or as a worker, depending on the child or type of fostering tasks (Kirton, 2001). Kirton in his study did not set out to reflect on foster-mothers as his focus is on fostering, and it is a pity he does not include any men who foster in his sample. It has been noted by McDermid *et al.* (2012) that sample bias in foster care research tends to exclude men from studies. In my study I suggest that foster-fathers' relationship with fostering and professionalism is more complex, given their motivations to care for children and feel valued as professionals.

The work and family divide is seen as two separate spheres with different parental roles identified (Bianchi and Milkie, 2010). A recent study argues that the uniqueness of fostering as both family and work generates some debate between parenting and professionalism (Schofield *et al.*, 2013):

“Foster care is unique, because of the way in which work and family roles interact and overlap. The core of the work is to provide love, care and family life for children. In turn, family life must always include and take account of the role that foster carers play on behalf of the local authority in looking after children in the care system. This is professional work for which training and skills are expected in the UK and which is rewarded, to a greater or lesser extent, financially, with some carers expected to give up other employment to be available for the child.” (Schofield *et al.*, 2013: p48)

This study by Schofield *et al.* reflects on foster care and the work-family interface conjecturing that there will be both parenting and fostering characteristics within a potentially role conflicting arena between being a carer or a professional. Through a sample of 40 foster carers (37 women, 3 men)

Schofield et al. argue that long-term foster carers can negotiate roles that are complementary and mutually rewarding, particularly where carers are able to move flexibly between the roles of skilled professional and loving carer / parent. They conclude that social workers and child care plans need to recognise that children require skilled carers and loving parents (Schofield *et al.*, 2013). These findings by Schofield et al. are very interesting because they illuminate the complex relationships and roles in which foster carers operate and show a potential for growth as they combine professional skill with care for children. They also point to diverse skills between carers and families as they negotiate the interface of work and home, which may lead to a better understanding of what skills are more successful in fostering and training to develop such skills. In their study Schofield et al. (2013) by including men in the sample suggest that foster-fathers are also motivated to care for children and that they are more than breadwinners in the fostering relationship. My study, by focusing on men, expands on the motivational attitudes of men as they perform gender roles which contrast with hegemonic masculinity and they are not restricted to being a breadwinner.

Summary of fostering literature

The literature predominantly presents fostering as an activity undertaken by women as carers, a version that is also supported by statistical evidence. The literature presents a fairly rigid version of mothering which is closely associated with the nuclear family. The literature highlights the performance of tasks undertaken by foster carers, though the literature predominantly looks at women both consciously, by the researchers, and as a result of sample bias. Some evidence from the literature, though limited, suggests that men perform gender as foster carers who challenge traditional masculine norms. However, the literature overwhelmingly shows them to perform gender within the heterosexual binary matrix where men support women as main carers.

Conclusion to the Chapter

The literature review has shown that foster-fathering is a suitable topic for examination. Fostering is closely associated with a difference between the genders model where mothering and fathering

roles are not interchangeable. The non-interchangeable mothering and fathering roles and traditional models of parenting are contradicted by the increasing diversification of parenting roles, through for example the families of choice discourse (Weeks *et al.*, 2001) and stay-at-home dads taking on homemaking roles (Eagly and Wood, 1999; Rochlen *et al.*, 2008; Fischer and Anderson, 2012). There is a gap in the literature concerning the means by which gender is socially constructed within fostering families, due to the tendency to persevere with relatively non-interchangeable stereotyped gender parenting roles in family-life. Foster care has a distinct history, though it is grounded within interconnecting and complex systems. Men who foster have been shown as not fully engaged by social workers and their roles are hidden from agencies and researchers alike. As participating agents, foster-fathers, at some level, become engaged in the negotiation and renegotiation of roles, both at the private (interfamily) and public spheres. It has been speculated that the accumulation and expenditure of social capital can help to explain this process in both the private and public spheres (Furstenberg and Kaplan, 2007). However, it has been argued by Edwards (2004a) that value associated with social capital is heavily gendered as children are encouraged to take up activities that are seen to be socially worthwhile, which tend to be public and male orientated. Edwards (2004a) calls for a more nuanced understanding of social capital to take account of those less socially worthwhile activities such as caring and nurturing, which are routinely undertaken privately within families. Therefore, using social capital as a measure would possibly fail to notice how men perform as foster carers within the private sphere and it may only highlight those stereotyped activities men are already known to take part in. This assumption is supported by Gilligan (2012) when he uses social capital to show foster-fathers have a positive role with children as they take part in socially worthwhile activities, such as supporting education and leisure activities. Unfortunately, there is insufficient knowledge, in the literature, about foster-fathers and any social identity to know about any tasks they take part in that are not highly gendered.

There is a gap in our knowledge concerning foster-fathers and the negotiation of gender roles in fostering. The literature review highlights the benefit of utilising concepts like complexity, intersectionality and performativity to reflect on gender relations within fostering. The provision of services through fostering involves complex social structures as family intersects with professionalism along with the competing, and complementing, inequalities of gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity and disability. The literature has largely ignored the effect of these inequalities on fostering. There has been limited reflection on same-sex couples fostering, but mainly the literature has looked at fostering through the lens of social uniformity based on heterosexuality and stereotyped gender roles. Men are more likely to be perceived as non-carers or risks to children as their role is constructed around a singular version of masculinity and non-interchangeable parenting roles. The literature has shown women to perform gender as they provide fostering roles that are both caring and professional. The women who foster emerge from the literature as caring and feminine in line with traditional gender roles within an ethic of care. The literature on foster-fathers is less conclusive as it is limited by volume. What we can glean from the literature is that fostering is heavily influenced by gender and that there is some process of negotiation or realignment occurring as men and women foster.

Through this literature review I set out to provide a theoretical framework around which to contextualise the study and have argued that Butler's performing gender, as well as referencing intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Walby, 2007), provides a suitable framework to re-examine the literature. In this review I also reflected on alternative theories, such as family practices, (Morgan, 1996), families of choice (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2011) and social capital (Putman, 2000), as they are relevant to fostering families. While I recognise the value of these theories, I predominantly use Butler's performing gender as the theoretical framework for this study and draw heavily on performing gender in the empirical chapters. The conclusion from the literature review is that there is insufficient evidence to know how men perform fostering and that there is a significant

gap in our knowledge concerning foster-fathers. This study contributes towards filling this gap and aims to expand our knowledge of fostering by referring specifically to foster-fathers and their performance of gender.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction to the Research Methodology

This study is concerned with the experiences of men as they provide foster care to children. Fostering is both socially and legally constructed to look after children who are unable to live with their birth parents. This study, by focusing on foster-fathers, attends to personal agency in the delivery of fostering by men within the broader sociocultural context of social childcare in Britain. This study is grounded in an epistemological approach as it aims to raise our knowledge concerning a distinct social group which little is known about (Gomm, 2004). The perspectives and experiences of foster-fathers are little understood and through this study I set out to hear the voices of men who foster and give meaning to their everyday experiences through their narratives. The study used mixed research methods by employing narrative interviews, questionnaires and observational diaries to address the research questions and triangulate the findings emerging from data gathered by these different methods (Olsen, 2004). The research data from this study were gathered from within one Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and to contextualise the findings within an organisational setting the study drew on agency statistics along with national fostering statistics.

My Predominant aim was to explore foster-fathers' subjective experiences of fostering and childcare within families; therefore a large component of the data are first person accounts by men of their experiences as they deliver fostering. Through this study I present the narratives of 23 foster-fathers. These offer the opportunity to hear their voices as they make sense of their experiences. There is a wealth of literature on narratives, and narrative inquiry has successfully been used to hear the voices of many groups (Riessman, 1993; Czarniawska, 2004; Elliott, 2005; Andrews *et al.*, 2008). Through narratives there is the potential to reveal the layered contexts of class and gender (Riessman, 2002), therefore narratives are well suited to examine the stories of foster-fathers. In this study, I used narratives to collect the stories recounted by men about their fostering and used the

data from these stories to analyse and develop themes that emerge from the data. To accumulate data, this study utilised three diverse methods to gather data: social worker questionnaires; foster-father interviews; and observational diaries. Study data were derived from the biographies offered by foster-fathers, by way of narrative and observational diaries. From the onset it was recognised that little is known about the interaction between social workers and foster-fathers. This is an important relationship and because little is known about it I decided to gather data from social workers on their relationship with foster-fathers. Therefore, a questionnaire was forwarded to all social workers employed by the IFA.

Aims of the Study and the Research Questions

The overall aim of the study is to present the experiences and opinions of men as they deliver foster care. The literature review has identified a gap in knowledge concerning how men foster and negotiate their roles internally and externally to the family. Following the literature review, I formulated three specific research questions. The research questions addressed by this study are:

1. How do men reflect on and value what they do as foster carers?
2. What are the tasks and roles which men undertake as foster carers?
3. How do social workers relate to men as foster carers?

In the next section I describe in more detail the research methods used for this study. Initially, I describe the specific methodological approaches adopted for the study and then reflect on the agency and national context to fostering. I then present the research design used to gather data from the sampled groups within the agency. As a post-graduate research student I reflect upon issues concerning the robustness of the research and the generalisability of the data. I also reflect on ethical issues and reflexivity, drawing particular attention to the insider-outsider researcher.

Arriving at the Method for Research Design

The literature review highlighted the relative paucity of material directly relating to foster-fathers. However, there is some literature on foster-fathers (Wilson *et al.*, 2007), though this is limited by volume and theoretical scope. Therefore, I set out to study men who foster and add to this literature. To validate research it has been put forward that systematic, rigorous and impartial methodology is required (Silverman, 2005). It is important that research is verifiable and representative of academic practice. While there are a wide range of potential and viable methods available to the researcher, the actual methodology chosen is central to the objectivity of the research (Robson, 1996). The initial question about research methodology is based on what type of data, qualitative or quantitative, would provide suitable evidence for the research questions.

The qualitative and quantitative approaches

There is widespread debate concerning the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative approach to research measures objective facts focusing on variables and is embedded within a scientifically objective framework which is independent of context (Neuman, 1997). The quantitative approach is seen as much more value-free and verifiably independent as it relies on the positivist approach to scientific inquiry, while the qualitative approach is described as interpretive and ethnographic (Robson, 1996). More specifically, quantitative research involves the collection of numerical data for analysis in relation to a hypothesis. Qualitative research aims to gather data that are rich in material and involves methods that produce textual data (and words) rather than numerical data, with methods ranging from observations to interviews. Sociological qualitative research was initially established in the 1920s and 1930s by the Chicago School and through fieldwork studies developed by Anthropologists such as Mead, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). While there are discernible sides which favour each approach, and much debate between them, there are, as Bryman (2008) argues, many similarities between them. For instance, both quantitative and qualitative approaches produce large amounts of data

which is then reduced to become manageable, each approach also aim to answer research questions and to produce data in relation to the literature review (Hardy and Bryman, 2004; Bryman, 2008).

A main asset attributed to quantitative methodology is in the scientific analysis of data. Data can be gathered, in relation to a theory and hypothesis, and numerically analysed. In foster care research, several large and important studies have utilised large-scale questionnaires to generate data (Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000; Sinclair *et al.*, 2004), though these studies have not been able to present carer narratives as they have relied on large amounts of data rather than individual stories. Rooted in the positivist scientific approach, quantitative methods are traditionally seen as ascendant to qualitative methods. The main reasons for criticising the qualitative approach are: it is too subjective; lacking in scientific objectivity; and is prone to bias, particularly in relation to the coding of data. An asset ascribed to qualitative research is the tendency for it to be inquiry-led rather than hypothesis-led (Katz and Mishler, 2003). While qualitative methods are often portrayed as second best and more likely to be used to exemplify quantitative research, through mixed studies, Katz and Mishler (2003) put forward a strong case to promote qualitative methods. Katz and Mishler reflect on the merits of qualitative methodology due to its subjectivity, with a focus on real life experience, and ability to instigate studies into phenomena or discover new avenues for inquiry (Katz and Mishler, 2003). The capacity for qualitative data to be used for new and inquiry-led research is a positive case for using qualitative methods in my study into men who foster, due to the relative lack of attention which this topic has received.

Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods

While each approach has merits, mixing both qualitative and quantitative approaches is fairly common research practice. It has been suggested that mixing the approaches tends to adhere to a hierarchy with the subjugation of qualitative methods as a means to further explore findings from quantitative data (Katz and Mishler, 2003). Therefore, qualitative based interviews can be used to validate and test data derived from quantitative methods, like questionnaires, which are usually

hypothesis-led. However, the aim of my research is to give voice to foster-fathers and not be hypothesis-led; which would seem to be best promoted by a qualitative approach involving some form of sampling, interviewing and observations so that theorising would be data-led and not hypothesis-led. The ability to gather data-rich qualitative research to develop theory is more appropriate to my study than hypothesis-led quantitative data.

Regarding mixing qualitative and quantitative methods, Creswell discusses six different types of mixed inquiry that are structured around the predominance of qualitative or quantitative data and the sequence by which data are gathered (Creswell, 1994, 2009; Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011). My study provided the opportunity to gather data by mixing both approaches, and to be data-led the qualitative approach was ascendant to the quantitative element. The mixed method I used in this study is a concurrent nested approach. The concurrent nested approach allows the researcher to gain a broader perspective as a result of using the different methods as opposed to using the predominant method alone (Creswell, 2009). Creswell argues that this mixed method has several strengths because the researcher is able to collect the two, or more, types of data simultaneously during a single data collection phase. Through this method of mixing data, I was able to gather diverse perspectives from the different types of data collected from foster-fathers and social workers through qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires. The mixing of research methods, and triangulation of data, allow for the internal comparison of data (Creswell, 2009). Elliott, in an influential work, has promoted the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in narrative research (Elliott, 2005). In my study I used narrative based inquiry to gather data on the opinions and attitudes of foster-fathers and triangulated the narrative information with data from questionnaires and observational diaries.

Grounded theory

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, in response to the criticism that qualitative research was limited by scientific inquiry and prone to bias. Glaser and Strauss argued

that theory is emergent through data that is systematically gathered and rigorously analysed (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Strauss further developed the process to more systemic coding of data through open, axial and selective coding to refine the analysing tools to develop emergent data-based theorising (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory advocates for qualitative methodology to use coding techniques and develop theory from data and not vice-versa. The premise is that research is data-led and not based on hypothesis as themes are allowed to emerge from the research, rather than research used to validate a pre-research hypothesis. The emphasis on themes emerging from data allow for, theoretically at least, a freer exploration of a subject. Not constrained by overemphasis of statistical data, found within quantitative methodologies, Strauss and Corbin argued that themes can be evidenced with only as much data as is required (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The positives within grounded theory are: it is research question-led; is an established field; and allows for emergent themes using smaller amounts of data. There are limitations to approaches based on grounded theory as it can be difficult in practice, and grounded theory negates the role of the researcher's theory split as theory emerges from data. There are alternative and at times different versions of grounded theory, particularly as Glaser and Strauss each separately went on to develop different interpretations of grounded theory. I took from grounded theory the positives, such as: using in-depth interviews and observational methods; having a second interview to test developing theory; and that grounded theory allows for theories to emerge from quite small amounts of data. Thus, I drew on many of the insights of grounded theory without strictly following its prescriptions, especially with regards to reaching saturation point in the sample.

Arriving at narrative inquiry

This research is concerned with the lived experiences of foster-fathers and to ascertain their social identity as a group. The variety of stories and experiences the men have as foster-fathers had to be captured in ways that express these collective and individual narratives. To begin to capture the foster-fathers' narratives and stories, particularly as this is a new avenue for research, an epistemological postmodern approach (Corker and Shakespeare, 2002) is a helpful starting point.

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and postmodern approaches are concerned with acknowledging that it is not possible to have a single narrative and exclusive story about something which is complex. Mirchandani distinguishes between the epistemological and empirical forms of postmodern sociology to establish that the epistemological postmodern focus is on knowledge in contemporary society and to look for new ways to acquire knowledge and challenge existing assumptions (Mirchandani, 2005). Little is known about foster-fathers, though the general assumption is that women are main carers and men who foster support a female partner. Through collecting narratives, research is able to give voice to individuals, which may be collated to identify group narratives (Riessman, 1993, 2002; Andrews *et al.*, 2008). As Corker and Shakespeare explain, postmodernism significantly overlaps theories of diversity such as feminism, queer studies, critical race studies and disability studies (Corker and Shakespeare, 2002). Therefore, postmodernism offers an explanation for diversity in family structure and gender roles. Postmodernism also provides an investigative methodology for conducting narrative-based research, as well as the tantalising prospect for addressing the possibility of foster care and more specifically male caring narratives.

Narrative inquiry is a wide field associated with sociological and postmodern approaches that are connected to Foucaultian genealogies (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003; Andrews *et al.*, 2008; Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). Foucault, by investigating groups outside of the mainstream of society, addressed socially constructed concepts of normalisation, as well as reflecting on the self, individuality and subjectivity. For Foucault, difference and non-accepted states of being represent a challenge to the age of reason (modernism) and social conformity. His examination of mental illness (Foucault, 2001) charts the way in which 'madness' (or different behaviour) was disapprovingly categorised as being a non-accepted state of being. Foucault presents genealogical history to deconstruct what was previously regarded as unified and account for the constitution of knowledge, discourses and domains of objects, pointing to rigorous investigation of knowledge and discourses (Foucault, 1972; Foucault and Bouchard, 1977). Postmodernism, therefore, deconstructs a world

structured on unity and uniformity. Concepts such as consumerism and globalization are associated with the deconstructed postmodernist world view, resulting in individualisation, identity, choice and narrative. Narrative at its simplest involves story-telling and the role of hearer / researcher, and narratives are often associated with Foucaultian genealogies and discourses (Andrews *et al.*, 2008).

The narrative, in social science research, has gathered increasing legitimacy due to the ability to reflect on individuals and small social groups (Riessman, 1993; Czarniawska, 2004; Elliott, 2005; Andrews *et al.*, 2008; Gubrium and Holstein, 2008; Dominelli *et al.*, 2011). Essentially, narratives are the stories that individuals recount and there is a sequential and consequential structure to the story, as the storyteller interprets the world to give some sense to it. The diversifications in biographical research testify to the variety of ways in which narrative can be interpreted; an underlying feature of narrative is the principle that ordering or sequencing of events shapes an account (Riessman, 1993; Czarniawska, 2004; Elliott, 2005; Andrews *et al.*, 2008). For the researcher the manner of the retelling is highly valuable because it is interpretation and not fact (Riessman, 2002; Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). Riessman in her seminal book, published in 1993, on narrative research argues that:

“Respondents narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society.” (Riessman, 1993: p3)

In another narrative study, Rosenthal utilised life biographies in her research looking at the Holocaust by talking to both ‘survivors’ and Nazis (Rosenthal, 2004). The uniqueness of individual biographies, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue in their study into fear of crime, reflect upon the unconscious self (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a). The narrative approach allowed my research to reflect on how men talked about their personal journey to become foster carers and to share their narratives in ways to recount individual stories as they see them.

Narratives provide the opportunity to investigate individual discourses and group identities, particularly those that are not considered mainstream. A narrative approach is also a recognised method that allows the researcher to undertake initial research into a new subject (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). Narratives can also lead the researcher to identify social practice and group identity (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008). Postmodernism validates the outsider and recognises the disparate discourses systemically present in society. Narrative inquiry has successfully been used in adoptive family research (Jones, 2009), which would indicate the potential to transfer narrative-based inquiry to foster-fathers. Narrative considers the significance of stories in people's lives and each time the stories are retold they are reworked and reimagined. As Polkinghorne (1988) explains they are, sometimes semi-conscious, uninterrupted monologues through which individuals reassess meanings of past actions and project future outcomes (Polkinghorne, 1988). By retelling stories, story-tellers are engaging in a performance to both tell the story and make sense of their stories. Narratives are personal discourses, which are both conscious and unconscious projections of identity, and they offer the opportunity to identify group identities and narratives. I therefore chose narrative inquiry to study foster-fathers and listen to their stories without prior hypothesising as this allowed for the individual and group narratives to emerge from the men themselves.

Research Relationships

The researcher is an integral component of the research process. In this section I reflect on myself, as the researcher, in the research process. I look at reflexivity and the insider / outsider researcher role as I remained a paid employee of the IFA where I undertook the study.

Reflexivity

Positivism in research seeks objectivity while ethnographic research is more reflexive by nature. Reflexivity, broadly defined, is a process to self-reference, and in research refers to the way it is affected by personnel and the process of doing research (Davies, 1999). Researchers are often motivated by their own personal interest to undertake the work and all research begins with at least

some theoretical assumptions (May, 2002). I have worked in foster care for nearly two decades, and have developed an acute interest in fostering, as well as being a father. This personal subjectivity can be perceived as problematic in research, particularly involving a survey that aims to test out or develop a theory, as there is already the inbuilt potential flaw of personal bias (Williams and May, 1996). While I have not set out to consciously test a hypothesis, I did begin with some opinions concerning foster care and the feeling that foster-fathers are a neglected resource. There is considerable debate concerning the role and function of the researcher, not least the reflexive interviewer. Due to the relative newness of reflexivity and continuing debate about its meaning, the application of reflexivity to social work research, it has been argued, can be difficult to implement in practice (D'Cruz *et al.*, 2007).

Feminist research has challenged the generation of knowledge as being gendered and hierarchical (Oakley, 1993), arguing the interview process is socially constructed by researchers and not objective. Oakley (1993) considers the importance of ethics in the epistemological and methodological generation of data through reciprocal interviewing. Oakley argues that traditional interviewing is limited, as it assumes a one-way hierarchical process by which the objective interviewer gathers information. She suggests that the dyadic researcher and respondent relationship has to involve some interaction between the two as interviewees tend to ask questions of the researcher; a process which invalidates claims of objectivity when using interviews. Oakley by acknowledging the two-way process of interviewing, as conversation and the socialisation of respondents who ask questions, puts forward a feminist interview that is non-hierarchical and which recognises the engaged role of the interviewer (Oakley, 1993). While the interview cannot be wholly objective, through reflexivity the ethical dilemmas of data generated by participatory researchers is explored and identified as part of the research process.

As a researcher I feel it is necessary to acknowledge and recognise my engagement with the subject as well as my part in the gathering, analysis and presentation of data. The research itself says much about my own personal identity and perceptions. The style of interview and narrative I chose was conversational though structured around topics. The sample included a mix of men both known and unknown to myself as the researcher which required careful consideration. It is important to recognise reflexivity in research practice and acknowledge that I come from an insider position as a male practitioner-researcher who continued to work full-time with foster carers, as a training officer, while undertaking a post-graduate degree. There are clear ethical considerations for research involving individuals already known to the researcher with dilemmas around social desirability and power-imbalance. Therefore, participants were carefully selected to ensure they had no social work or managerial involvement with me as the researcher. As an employee with the IFA, and having acute interest in foster care, I generally come from an inside position. In the next section I consider research as insider / outsider and reflect on the dilemmas of research and paid employment

The insider / outsider researcher role

Research is value-laden with much debate concerning the validity of different approaches, particularly as positivism promotes the construction of objectivity and detachment. The ability to perform research objectively has been challenged by feminist practice to reduce hierarchy in research (Oakley, 1993) and the postmodernist emphasis on the need to know the researcher's identity and context as part of the narrative interpretation (Angrosino, 2005). The postmodernist epistemological process challenges hierarchies of knowledge (Mirchandani, 2005) and the production of ethnographies breaks down social barriers between researcher and subject. Ethnography is interpretative rather than structural and it is argued ethnographers create their objects of study rather than discover them (Davies, 1999). While the outside position to research is seen as more positive, due to the objectivity perceived in this position, researchers are increasingly acknowledging their own position within, and to, the studied subject. The construction of objective

research is limited and the dichotomy between outsider and insider positioning is theoretical as it is best conceived as a continuum (Breen, 2007; Richie *et al.*, 2009).

Conceptualising reflexivity, and the implications for research practice, relates to the relationship between the insider and outsider positions. The argument is that the space between the two positions, and the location of the researcher on the continuum, clarifies the rationale and reflexivity of the researcher (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). The insider-researcher occupies a position of engagement and membership with the population being studied (Kanuha, 2000). Qualitative researchers, it is argued, are not detached from the study as they engage with participants and directly participate, to some level, with the study (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). The rationale is that researchers, by occupying a space between the outsider and insider positions, are required to conceive of themselves as part of the research process and acknowledge reflexivity in their research:

“There are complexities inherent in occupying the space between. Perhaps, as researchers we can only ever occupy the space between. We may be closer to the insider position or closer to the outsider position, but because our perspective is shaped by our position as a researcher (which includes having read much literature on the research topic), we cannot fully occupy one or the other of those positions.” (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: p 61)

Positioning with regards to the insider-outsider continuum leads to transparency due to researcher self-reflection. The merits for location towards, or even within, the insider position are transparency, reflexivity and reciprocity (Kanuha, 2000; Breen, 2007; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Richie *et al.*, 2009).

Dilemmas of research and paid employment

During the study I continued to be employed by the IFA which meant I had a relationship with the subject and some participants that predated my research. Within narrative interviewing, a relationship that predates the study is a possible asset as it can open up the narrative interview to provide richer data (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000b), but it can also lead to social desirability in

interviewee responses. There is a growing recognition of the validity for the insider-researcher, particularly within postmodern discourses, where membership can be a benefit to research (Breen, 2007; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Richie *et al.*, 2009). The sample included a mix of men both known and unknown to me as the researcher, though I did not work directly with anyone involved in the study. The division between foster-fathers already known and those not known, to me as the researcher, enabled the checking and cross-referencing of data to counterbalance social desirability in interviewee responses.

As a researcher working with the agency I held a privileged position and had access to the men in the study. While this enabled me to have access to a group of men to study, this privilege also implies a power position. This was a dilemma as there were positives in being an employee due to the access to and participation with the sample, but I also have to acknowledge there are negatives in this position due to the power relations of being a paid employee and researcher. While I mainly come from an insider position as paid employee and researcher I was excluded when foster-fathers met on their own. Essentially, I had little or no control over men talking together about my study and had to accept the possibility they would do this. Through reflexivity I am able to acknowledge these dilemmas and try where possible to limit their impact on the study and acknowledge where I could not limit any impact. All of the participant's identities were anonymised from the agency to counterbalance the potential power-imbalance and I had no social work or management input with anyone involved in the study.

The pilot

The research methodology was piloted (Robson, 1996) to ascertain its effectiveness and to test the questionnaire format, interview schedule and observational diary. The pilot involved two social workers and a retired foster carer not involved with the IFA. Following the piloting of the methodology and consultation with the University supervisory team some amendments were made

to the question sequencing on the interview schedule and technological wording amended on the questionnaire.

Gathering the Data

To meet the objectives of the research, data were gathered from three diverse sources: the IFA database; supervising social workers; and foster-fathers. The rationale behind gathering information on the IFA was to contextualise the social work and foster care samples within the agency profile. Data were gathered from supervising social workers as no comparative study exists from which to utilise information on their relationship with foster-fathers. The data collected from foster-fathers are the main component of research data and involved men being interviewed (some twice) and maintaining observational diaries. Through the mixed concurrent nested (Creswell, 2009) approach I gathered data from foster-fathers and social workers to compare their respective perspectives on men who foster. As the aim is to present emergent themes from foster-fathers' stories, the research design did not seek data from partners or children, though it would be a feature of future research to explore themes from different perspectives involving partners and children.

Social worker questionnaire (see appendix 6)

The relationship between social workers and foster-fathers is an important relationship. However, this relationship has not been explored in the literature. There is literature on 'looked after' children living in foster care and women foster carers which I was able to reflect on in the literature review, but the lack of information from social workers was a major gap. I therefore chose to extend the study and seek information from social workers about their relationship and practice with foster-fathers. The research gathered a lot of data and I would not have gathered data from social workers had there been some literature on the interaction of social workers with foster carers. I chose a questionnaire as a method to gather this information as I wanted to gather specific data on their relationship with foster-fathers and the questionnaire design allowed me to select specific data. Data from questionnaires tend to be quite superficial and are more description rather than

explanatory (Munn and Drever, 1995), and are preferably combined with alternative methods. I mixed the data from the social workers' questionnaires with the carers' interviews and observational diaries to triangulate (Olsen, 2004) the data and to provide for an internal comparison (Creswell, 2009). The data from the social worker questionnaires are arranged into four sections covering: generalised assessments of men as carers; care planning in the delivery of fostering; the essential male role; and evolving social work practice. The questionnaire was forwarded to social workers employed by the IFA. On receipt of a returned questionnaire each was allocated a reference number and saved anonymously. A record of the identity of the respondent was not kept so that anonymity was maintained throughout the process.

First foster-father interviews (see appendix 5)

The study's primary aim was to ascertain men's narratives through interviewing a sample of foster-fathers. The interview was structured by using the narrative interview format (Riessman, 1993) to facilitate discussion and to allow men to portray their stories as they see them. As already discussed earlier narratives and stories are sequential with a beginning, middle and end component. Riessman (1993) in her seminal work '*Narrative Analysis*' suggests the narrative interview should be structured around 5 to 7 broad questions plus a series of probing questions using 'can you tell me...?' and 'what was the experience like for you?' questions. The interview schedule was designed to facilitate discussion and structured around a series of stimulus questions on motivation, experience and support formulated around 'can you tell me' questions (Riessman, 1993; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). The stimulus questions used during the interview were:

- Can you tell me in your own words how your life has led to you to become a foster carer, and why you initially applied to foster?
- Can you tell me how you would describe to another man what it is like to look after children as a foster carer?
- Can you think of how being a man has affected what it is that you do as a foster carer?

- Can you tell me about any difficult situations that you have found yourself in as a foster carer?
- Can you think of any ways, as a man, in which foster care has changed your life?
- Can you tell if there is anything else you would like to say about foster care and how it affects you?

The foster-fathers were provided with an information sheet prior to the interview and all men signed consent forms. Through the information sheet (see appendix 2) men were recruited to the project that both understood and identified with the study aim to hear the voices of foster-fathers. The consent form (see appendix 4) informed the men taking part about the study and confidentiality. Men were entitled to withdraw at any stage of the study, though no one did. I interviewed the men alone in their homes and each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. The sample only included men in established couple relationships. Single male fostering households are relatively rare (McDermid *et al.*, 2012) and few fostered in the agency. They were not included in the sample as the agency staff did not identify any suitable candidates to take part in the study. The interviews were all taped and I also took notes during each interview. Following the interview I transcribed the tapes myself, to ensure confidentiality, and each foster-father was allocated a fictitious name to maintain their anonymity. All of the hard copy data were stored in a locked filing cabinet within the IFA's office, which was Ofsted approved to store confidential carer information. Electronically stored data were saved on a password protected computer.

Observational diary (see appendix 7)

To enhance the study's findings and provide data for an internal comparison, a foster-father observational diary was added to the research methodology (Creswell, 2009). It has been argued diaries have been relatively neglected as a sociological research method (Elliott, 1997). Elliott suggests that diary data can be used as a means to observe behaviour which is inaccessible to participant observation. An observational diary, kept by foster-fathers, is a method to capture their own priorities and is both a record of, and reflection on, the experience of caring. To capture these

daily observations I designed a diary format to record professional contact; transport undertaken; activities with children; contact with child; and who had been present in the home. The diary schedule included a Likert scaling question on carer satisfaction and sections to capture daily description and any other comments (see appendix 7). The foster-fathers were asked to maintain a diary of their activities over a two week period and of the 23 men interviewed 16 returned a completed diary. In total 206 days were recorded by the 16 men, and of these 150 were weekdays and 56 weekend days. The data from the observational diaries were used in the analysis of all data. Through diaries statistical data were extracted to compare with the narrative based data. Diaries were anonymised and stored in a locked filing cabinet in the IFA office.

Second foster-father interview (see appendix 8)

To further explore the data and following an initial analysis a second interview of 6 foster-fathers was conducted. For this interview I drafted a summary sheet of the initial findings to use as stimulus for a conversational interview with the 6 foster-fathers. This interview facilitated more of a conversation between interviewer and interviewee by reflecting on the initial findings sheet. I selected 6 men for a second interview to explore more fully the findings from the first interview and to check to see if anything had changed with the 6 men in this second sample. The 6 men were selected from the sample of men (N=16) who had completed an observational diary. The 6 were selected from men to represent age along with category of caring as well as the quality of data from their first interview. I would have liked to pursue a second interview with all the 23 foster-fathers, but with limited resources and the already accumulating rich data, gathered from the first interview, I chose to use a smaller sample second time around. This second interview enabled me to check and seek further evidence, to test emergent hunches and provisional hypothesis and to give the respondents a chance to reflect on the initial research findings and their first interview.

Sampling – social worker and foster carers

Sampling is the use of a subset of the population to represent the whole population. In order to undertake the study I endeavoured to access two distinct groups, social workers and foster carers. To gather the social work data the questionnaire was forwarded to all social workers employed by the IFA through the internal company intranet on three occasions (28/5/10, 12/6/10 and 25/6/10). In this way, the questionnaire, along with information about the study, was distributed to 204 social workers who were employed by the IFA. The social work sample was self-selective and the mix depended upon those who completed the questionnaire.

The foster carer sample required a different approach because I needed as large a mix as possible for the research to include men from each of the separate categories. Through a purposive sample 23 foster-fathers were recruited to the study and interviewed using a narrative based interview schedule (Riessman, 1993; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000b). A purposive sample was selected as an objective of the study was to identify themes emerging from selected foster-fathers for a possible future research project involving a larger sample of the carer population. Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling and it is a type of non-probability sampling technique. Non-probability sampling focuses on selecting a sample based on the judgement of the researcher as the main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on the characteristics of a population that are of interest. Participants were selected in consultation with agency workers to meet the needs of the purposive sample based on age, relationship status, ethnicity, sexuality and their category of fostering. The sample included men in established couple relationships, which reflected the status of most men fostering for the IFA, as there were very few single men fostering and of these none were recommended by agency social workers.

Agency profile

I include the agency profile in this section of the thesis, rather than the findings chapters, as it contextualises the study findings presented in subsequent chapters. The agency is an IFA operating

nationwide throughout Britain. The IFA's role is to provide preparation, assessment, training, supervision, review and matching to foster carers in accordance with National Minimum Standards (Department of Health, 2002; Department for Education, 2011). IFAs are private fostering companies that work in partnership with Local Authorities to place 'looked after' children and young people into fostering families registered with them. Independent fostering has grown over the last decade to become very much part of the national fostering service framework (Sellick, 2007, 2011). The study is about men who foster and with this focus does not look at agency structural issues insofar as they deviate from the subject of foster-fathers. Therefore, agency statistical information is presented to contextualise the study and demonstrate rationale around sampling. Agency information was gathered by accessing the agency internet database, during July 2010, on the number of approved foster care households; men approved as foster carers; men approved as main foster carers; and men approved as secondary foster carers.

At the onset of the study there were 204 social workers employed by the Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and there were 2277 fostering families approved by the IFA. This compares to the national figure of slightly over 45,000 fostering families in the United Kingdom (Fostering Network, 2012). Therefore, this is a far larger sample than could be provided by any single Local Authority and shows the merits of using this particular IFA for my study. The database highlighted that over 98% of the IFA's fostering households included a woman as an approved foster carer compared to 76% of households with a man approved as a foster carer, see Table 1.

Table 1 - Carers' gender and approval status (N = 2277)

Category of men fostering in household	Number of households	Percentage of total
No men approved in household	527	23.14%
Man approved as main carer without a woman partner	43	1.88%
Man approved as main carer with a woman partner	270	11.86%
Man approved as second carer	1437	63.12%
Total households	2277	100%

Source: IFA internal database accessed 06/07/2010

The number of men approved as foster carers with the agency is 1750, which represents 76% of the agency's fostering households. This figure is directly in line with comparable studies which show between 69% and 79% of foster caring households are married or co-habiting and with 2% of foster-fathers being single carers or part of male only households. Most men foster as part of a married or co-habiting couple (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). Most of the men approved as foster carers by the IFA are categorised as secondary carers with 11.86% of men approved as the main carer. It is difficult to arrive at a consistent and accurate record of the nationwide age distribution of foster carers because the annual Ofsted data-set does not include carer age. McDermid *et al.* (2012), in their review of research on the demographic composition of foster carers, suggest that the majority of studies include foster carers in their forties at the point of research projects and that most foster carers are likely to begin fostering between the ages of 31 and 40. Table 2 represents the age of men approved as main carers.

Table 2 - Age of men approved as main carer (N = 313)

Age	Number	% identified as the main carer
61 plus	48	15.33%
51-60	106	33.87%
40-50	98	31.31%
Under 40	61	19.49%
Total	313	100%

Source: IFA internal database accessed 06/07/2010

The age distribution of carers with the IFA appears to comply with figures used in other studies as most carers available for the study were over 40 years old. Most of the men approved with the IFA are categorised as secondary carers. Table 3 shows the number of men approved as secondary carers in relation to their age.

Table 3 - Age of man approved as secondary carer (N = 1437)

Age of foster-father	Number of men	% of men categorised as the second carer
61 plus	210	14.61%
51-60	453	31.52%
40-50	553	38.48%
Under 40	221	15.39%
Total	1437	100%

Source: IFA internal database accessed 06/07/2010

The number of foster-fathers categorised as main or second (support) carer by the IFA is consistent with other studies. The IFA data show it is a large fostering provider with carers that match national trends identified in other studies. The conclusion from the statistics from the IFA is that it appears to be a fairly typical, though large, fostering agency.

Supervising social work profile

As a component of the study, data from supervising social workers were gathered. I received 70 returned social worker questionnaires and from this return sample there were 14 men, 51 women and 5 did not declare their gender. Table 4 classifies the length of time respondents have been qualified as social workers, demonstrating over half (39) of the sample have been qualified as social workers for longer than 10 years.

Table 4 - Length of time social workers who returned the questionnaire have been qualified

(N = 70)

Period of time qualified	Number
Less than 2 years	8
Between 2 and 5 years	5
Between 5 and 10 years	18
More than 10 years	39
Total	70

Cumulatively, the social workers in the sample have worked with approximately 3215 carers.

The foster carers' profile

Twenty-three foster-fathers took part in the interviews. Through a purposive sample the 23 men were recruited to the study and interviewed using a narrative based interview schedule (Riessman, 1993; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000b). Foster-fathers were recruited to the study from men social workers, in the IFA, recommended to the study following internal publicity within the agency. From these recommendations men were chosen by recourse to the purposive sampling. Men in the sample had an age range between 35 to 69 years. All of them fostered as part of a couple: 22 with a female partner; 1 fostering with his male partner; 20 men were white; and 3 black and minority ethnic people. The fostering experience of the sample group ranged from 2 years to 45 years with a cumulative experience totalling 197 years and, during the study, they looked after 42 children.

Participants were selected, following recommendations from agency workers, to meet the needs of the purposive sample on age and category of fostering. Table 5 presents the foster-fathers sample profile:

Table 5 - Foster-fathers - sample description (N = 23)

Ref. No.	Type of carer	Relationship	Length of time fostering	Age range	Ethnicity
Mike	Main	Married	25-30 years	60-70	White
Jeff	working partner	Married	5-10 years	30-40	White
Peter	Main	Married	10-15 years	50-60	White
David	Shared	Married	45-50 years	60-70	White
John	Main	Married	5-10 years	40-50	White
Andrew	working partner	Married	0-5 years	50-60	White
Joe	Shared	Married	0-5 years	60-70	White
Alan	Main	Married	10-15 years	50-60	White
Simon	working partner	Married	0-5 years	40-50	White
Jonathon	Shared / Working	Partner	0-5 years	30-40	White
Assad	Shared	Married	0-5 years	40-50	Asian
Robert	Shared	Partner	5-10 years	40-50	White
Chris	Main	Married	0-5 years	60-70	White
Stephen	Shared	Married	5-10 years	30-40	White
Ben	Shared	Married	5-10 years	40-50	White
Alex	Shared	Married	20-25 years	50-60	White
Thomas	Main	Married	0-5 years	30-40	Black
James	Shared	Married	5-10 years	50-60	White
Frank	Shared	Married	0-5 years	50-60	Black
Clint	working partner	Married	5-10 years	40-50	White
Miles	Main	Partner	5-10 years	40-50	White
Nigel	Shared	Married	5-10 years	60-70	White
Adam	Shared	Married	5-10 years	40-50	White

All names are fictionalised to maintain anonymity

All 23 foster-fathers who took part in the study were interviewed, 16 returned diaries and 6 were interviewed a second time. Table 6 displays the parts of the research each man took part in.

Table 6 - Foster-fathers participation in the research (N = 23)

Ref. No.	First Interview	Returned Diary	Second Interview
Mike	√	√	
Jeff	√	√	√
Peter	√	√	√
David	√	√	
John	√	√	√
Andrew	√		
Joe	√	√	
Alan	√	√	√
Simon	√	√	
Jonathon	√		
Assad	√		
Robert	√	√	
Chris	√	√	√
Stephen	√	√	
Ben	√	√	
Alex	√	√	√
Thomas	√		
James	√	√	
Frank	√		
Clint	√		
Miles	√	√	
Nigel	√	√	
Adam	√		
TOTAL	23	16	6

All names are fictionalised to maintain anonymity

Note Alan's status changed during the study from main carer to support as his partner ended working full-time.

Ethical Issues

Ethical approval was provided by Durham University's School of Social Sciences as well as the IFA. The ethical issues of this study were assessed through Durham University's internal approval mechanism and approval was also provided through the IFA's internal system. This involved helping the IFA to develop a method for approving research proposals as this was new territory for the agency. The ethical dimension to this study concerned informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, power-imbalance, avoiding harm to participants and the storage of data. I have included copies of

the information sheet, e-mail, letter and consent form used in this study in the appendices. All data were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the IFA office (approved by Ofsted to store confidential information) and where stored electronically data were saved on a password protected computer. Potential interviewees were approached by their supervising social worker before I contacted them by telephone and then with a letter inviting participation in the study. I supplied an information sheet (see appendix 2) and consent form. I assured confidentiality and did not share with the IFA, or any IFA staff, the details of anyone involved in the study. All the participants' names were changed and anonymised. Foster-fathers were given fictionalised names and social worker questionnaires numbered between 1 and 70.

Analysis

This study is concerned with the meanings men give to their experiences as foster carers. It is also about gathering information on the relationship between social workers and foster-fathers. I used several diverse research methods to triangulate the findings (Olsen, 2004) and internally compare the data (Creswell, 2009). Through triangulation I was careful to reflect on emerging themes from my data by comparing the findings from diverse sources and methods to validate the findings. I used a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology within a concurrent nested approach, and gathered qualitative data by interviewing foster-fathers and simultaneously gathered quantitative data from social workers by using a questionnaire (Creswell, 2009). By using the concurrent nested approach I was able to examine the data on multiple levels as I conducted the interviews with foster-fathers, and at the same time gathered questionnaire data from social workers to explore their relations with foster-fathers (Creswell, 2009; Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011).

Most of the data I gathered was qualitative, though there were some quantitative data derived from questionnaires as well as carers' own observational diaries. The data I gathered were primarily narrative-based and were derived mostly from the interviews with 23 foster-fathers, but I also

gathered narrative data which were contained in the questionnaires and diaries. Most of the data were primarily concerned with how foster-fathers make sense of their lives. The data had to be organised and analysed to indicate how foster-fathers interpreted and gave meaning to their fostering experiences. Garfinkel describes ethnomethodology as the sociological method to examine how people use every day means, such as conversation, to make sense of their lives (Garfinkel, 2002). While the interviews were structured by 'can you tell me...' questions there were a lot of ethnographic data where carers reflected on their lives, and all this data required careful coding. Through grounded theory Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe a process to devise analytical categories from data through careful scrutiny. Grounded theory has evolved over time; particularly as Glaser and Strauss went on to devise separate and at times competing systems based on grounded theory. While I did not fully use grounded theory to analyse my data, I coded the data by using one of the grounded theories coding systems based on Corbin and Strauss (1998) to identify themes that emerged from the data (Joffe and Yardley, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

There are various types of ethnomethodological analysis, such as discourse, conversational, thematic and narrative. Discourse analysis has many meanings, but relates to specific discourse, such as race or gender, and specific words arising in a conversation or interview. Researchers using discourse analysis are interested mainly in language in certain contexts and meanings are produced by descriptions and usage of words (Rapley, 2007). Conversational analysis develops on from ethnomethodology to make sense of spoken language to include speech events and speech exchange (Gomm, 2004). Narrative is a socially symbolic act that takes on meaning in a social context (Mumby, 1993) and the interview is a socially reflexive context between researcher and interviewee. Riessman (1993) argues narrative is a means to make sense of the world as we lead storied lives. The overall narratives that I collected were concerned with the stories that the men told rather than the structuring of the stories. I used the narratives and stories to identify themes

(Aronson, 1994; Joffe and Yardley, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006) which emerged from the foster-fathers stories and narratives as they made sense of their world.

I taped each interview and transcribed the tapes personally. I coded the transcribed tapes using the NVIVO 9 software package, to highlight emergent themes grounded in the narratives (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 1998; Joffe and Yardley, 2004). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analysing patterns and themes in qualitative data (Aronson, 1994; Joffe and Yardley, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke argue that thematic analysis is theoretically flexible and therefore can be used to examine language patterns without having to adhere to a particular theory of language, discourse or focus on the structure of the narrative. The transcripts were subjected to comprehensive and lengthy processes of analysis to unearth different stories recounted by diverse actors (Riessman, 1993, 2004). Through the second interview with 6 men I was able to validate the transcriptions of their initial interview (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The social worker questionnaires and foster-father observational diaries provided text rich data. Through the process of coding and cross referencing of the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Braun and Clarke, 2006), and by close attention to micro and macro levels of narrative, I was able to look at overlapping narratives, themes and theoretical frameworks (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008). Looking at the stories, as told by participants in the study and presented in the texts, I was able to identify themes arising from men's voices and through analysis I was able to find meanings and themes from my data. The process of coding and analysis took time; themes were subjected to rigorous cross-referencing and re-analysis to ascertain context and priority as I filtered the coded data and meanings to theorise on the emergent themes arising from my data (Joffe and Yardley, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006). A benefit of using narratives is that each story and teller is important in themselves, particularly when referenced to grounded theory as small amounts of data validate theoretical explanations of emerging themes.

Generalisability to the study

This study is mainly concerned with the findings from data gathered within a single fostering agency, and from this it is difficult to generalise the findings. The findings represent themes from the study sample and not fostering in general. The foster-fathers are a diverse group as they represent different ethnic, age and sexuality groups and are categorised as different types of caring reflecting main, support or shared carer. The narratives are essentially individual stories. The purposive sampling, though a process to facilitate selection, does not provide a rigorous tool to generalise the findings and it has long been argued that the analysis of qualitative data can be problematic (Allan, 1993). To validate qualitative research methods Glaser and Strauss (1967), through grounded theory, developed the possibility for themes and theory to emerge from small amounts of data. While it is not possible to generalise from the 23 interviews, what they show is interesting patterns, found in the data, which argue for social workers to think of foster-fathers in more nuanced ways and engage with them more effectively as carers. More research is needed to demonstrate whether this holds for a larger population.

Summary

This study of foster-fathers was facilitated by narrative inquiry as it affords the opportunity to hear the voices of men themselves and allow for themes to emerge from men's accounts of their lives. Narrative inquiry is by no means the only way to study foster-fathers, but given the parameters of this study it is an appropriate method of research. I mixed narrative inquiry with questionnaires and observational diaries to triangulate and compare the findings and explore them from different perspectives for a richer analysis. The next stage of the thesis is to present the research findings, and in the next chapter I reflect on the journeys men have taken to become foster-fathers.

CHAPTER FIVE: JOURNEYS IN BECOMING FOSTER-FATHERS

Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter I start to present the findings from my data and concentrate on how the 23 men in the sample became foster-fathers. This is the first of four findings chapters and in it I present the men's narratives concerning their individual journeys to fostering. For some men their journey to become foster-fathers reflect their personal motivations to instigate or share fostering from the onset, with a partner, while others find their motivation to become foster-fathers after a period of time fostering when they have supported a female partner. By presenting their journeys to become foster-fathers I begin to address the first two research questions concerning their reflections and roles as foster-fathers. Narratives are sequential with a beginning, middle and end, and through this chapter I endeavour to start at the beginning and look at how men end up as foster carers. In the final findings chapter (chapter 8) I reflect on how they experience endings to their fostering. Through their journeys to become foster-fathers men perform gender which often challenge masculine norms, but they also reassert existing gender relations constructed around paternity and the gender binary matrix (Butler, 1990). Through their narratives they reflect on how some men's journeys recreate their own childhood experiences of fathering whilst others create new versions different from their own childhood experiences of parenting. The men, through recounting their journey to fostering, form in collaboration with the listener the narrative that the decision to foster was the basis of choice as they show personal agency in fostering. In this chapter my data begin to show how men, at some level, show agency in choosing to foster as well as the limits of this agency as they perform gender to affirm gender norms. The performative is the discursive processes that allow for the subversion of gender norms; however, the normative regulates performativity by turning it into performances of traditionally gendered tasks and my data show men imitate paternity and masculinity to become foster-fathers through their journeys. The following three chapters delve deeper into my data to reflect on their roles, relations with social workers and endings to their

fostering; and to explore how they move from gender performance to performativity as normalised masculinity is subverted, though existing gender relations are reproduced.

The journeys undertaken by foster-fathers in this study involve childhood, adulthood, partnering and parenting. The diversity of men's narratives and journeys are represented by recourse to intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Walby, 2007; Walby *et al.*, 2012) and the different discourses of gender, race, sexuality and age as each reflects upon individual performance as foster carers. The data and findings from this study say a lot about the men's journeys as they are expressed through their personal biographies. Their journeys are highly gendered as they use language to express their journeys to show the influence of paternity, partnering and fathering in their decisions to foster. In table 7 I cluster the individual journeys undertaken by the 23 men who took part in the study. Through Table 7 I show how the individual journeys are grouped around men's experiences of childhood (as children or parents); their employment experiences; and whether they create or extend family by fostering children.

Table 7 - Men's journey to become foster-fathers (N = 23)

Ref. No.	Recreate Childhood	Childhood in care	Create Childhood	Change Job	Birth-father	Extend Family	Make New Family
Mike	x			x	x	x	
Jeff	x			x	x		x
Peter	x			x	x	x	
David			x	x	x		
John		x	x	x	x	x	
Andrew	x				x		
Joe	x				x	x	
Alan	x			x	x	x	
Simon	x				x		x
Jonathon	x			x			x
Assad	x				x	x	
Robert	x	x	x				
Chris	x	x	x	x	x		
Stephen	x			x	x		
Ben	x			x	x	x	
Alex	x			x	x	x	
Thomas	x			x	x		
James	x				x		x
Frank		x	x	x	x		
Clint		x	x		x		
Miles	x			x			x
Nigel	x			x	x		
Adam	x			x	x	x	

All names are fictionalised to maintain anonymity

The journeys are varied and diverse as they represent 23 narratives. Some men recreate their childhood experiences for fostered children or recreate their own parenting while others create alternative childhoods to their own experiences. Through these narratives the men show the importance of fostering and fathering in their lives. The mappings of each story show men to pass through stages involving childhood, adulthood, partnering and parenting. The manner in which they experience these stages, and reflect on them in the narrating of stories, are different for each man though they all end up as foster-fathers.

Through their journeys men show how they reflect on fostering and its importance in their lives. There are many motivations, the stories are diverse and each one has a different life narrative.

However, they do provide valuable information on the attitudes of the men, in the sample, and their respective pathways to fostering. Table 7 summarises their journeys and the rest of the chapter is structured to present four types of journeys men have taken to become foster-fathers. These journeys group men around four themes based on their motivation to foster. I collected data for this chapter from the interviews with the 23 men and I have selected specific narratives and stories to explore the themes more fully. Their stories are personalised as individual accounts are interwoven into the four types of journey.

Categorising Foster-fathers Journeys to become Foster Carers

There are many storylines which the men present as there are 23 different journeys. However, there is one narrative which is the performance of gender and reaffirmation of traditional gender norms. The individual stories show men reflecting on their roles as fostering becomes an important aspect of their narrative and identity. The point at which fostering becomes important is different to each man as some are motivated to apply to foster and others become more engaged as they foster. The journeys are varied, but take in some common elements such as childhood and partnering. The gender journey measure, devised by O'Neil (1993) and used by Marcel et al. (2011) and McDermott and Schwartz (2013), has shown a tendency for men and women to move from more sexist stereotyped understandings of gender to less sexist versions as they move through life and acquire more experiences. While I do not use this measure, because I prefer Butler's (1990) gender performance as it regulates discourses to normalise masculinity, it is a useful reference point because it shows gender is more complex and dynamic than the rather static version presented in the fostering literature. In my study most men retell narratives to show they feel they have moved from traditional masculinity, as young men, to less traditional versions through maturity and socialisation. The journeys are complex and I identify four types of journey to group the individual stories. The narratives show men constructing masculinity, and paternity, as they perform gender relative to their personalised journeys. Through the journeys I reflect on their motivations in relation

to their journeys as they emerge from the individual storylines narrated by each man. From these storylines I have categorised four different key types of journeys the men have undertaken to become foster carers, which are:

1. Support the partner - "I supported her";
2. A childhood in care - "I've been in foster care myself, I have lived that life";
3. Extend or create the family - "To become a family";
4. Care for children - "I enjoy caring for children".

The stories and narratives are rich, varied and complex and the different narratives and journey type each co-exist, overlap and contradict each other. In the next section I recount the four different journeys and make reference to several individual stories from the men's narratives as they relate to each type of journey.

Support to Partner - "I supported her"

The nature of care has largely been assumed to be a female activity and most foster care research has tended to presuppose that the main foster carer is a woman (Sinclair *et al.*, 2004). The storylines which can be classified within the fostering journey to support a woman partner is only one amongst four types of the men's journey to fostering. The men's narratives within this classification of journey to fostering reflect men who want to support a woman partner. Men in this classification tell stories that highlight their positive feelings toward women partners' parenting and caring abilities as they fall into being supportive partners to a woman main carer. Though not directly motivated to instigate fostering, men in this type of journey do engage with fostering after a period of time supporting a more active homemaking woman. I have selected two of the men's narratives to represent this type of journey.

David's story

David has been a foster carer for over forty years and during this time he has supported his wife as the main carer. His wife became a foster carer, in the 1960s, while he was in the Royal Airforce (RAF) and he explained during interview:

“We’ve had kids I haven’t met”.

David spent large amounts of time working away from the family home, initially through the RAF and then in construction work which took him all round the world. His journey to fostering was based on his partner as foster carer and he performed gender, to replicate traditional masculinity, as the breadwinner. He recounted how his wife became a foster carer during a time when he was working away from home and he recollected during interview that:

“We were only 22 years old; we had 2 children of our own; I was in the air force. No I shouldn’t think we had thought about it before. We were approached; we always had everybody’s kids. Well, yes, social services, well they approached [partner] because I was away at the time, that’s how it started”.

David said that the Local Authority asked his wife to become a foster carer due to her caring abilities and the support she provided to others in the community. He stated during his interview that his wife did all of the caring and he identified her as a natural carer and matriarchal-figure. He described himself as support to a woman main carer.

David reflected on his childhood, and how he lived in an all-woman household without a resident father-figure. David did not know his father and he grew up thinking men are violent. He explained:

“I was lucky I didn’t have a father. I was brought up by a mother and grandmother and amongst all of my friends I was always the lucky one because I never saw violence, I never had anything like what is going on around me whereas [my partner] did and she always vowed she would never let it happen in her house. When I think back [with] nearly all of my friends, there was the father was always handy with a belt”.

A study by the American psychologist Peggy Drexler (2005) found that boys brought up within all female households tend to be more at ease with their own sensitivity and able to choose from a range of male role models, from outside of the family home (Drexler, 2005). Without a resident father-figure in his childhood, David's perception of men is that they can be violent and controlling, which is in contrast to how he presented himself during his interview. The fostering experience has corroborated David's belief that men are violent, due to his awareness of child abuse by looking after fostered children (Cleaver *et al.*, 1999). David believes men are violent and he cited, through his narrative, the often violent paternal experiences of his partner and childhood friends to verify his negative opinion of men. It has been argued that the association of most acts of physical violence with men is arguably the nearest that the field of criminology has come to producing an indisputable fact (Hall, 2002). The actual function of violence has caused some debate. Influential work by Connell has transferred the Gramscian concept of hegemony to masculinity through citing the use of male violence to maintain a dominant gender position within society (Connell, 1995; Connell, 2002). David's journey began with a childhood devoid of a resident-man in the family home, as he was nurtured by women. Without a resident male role model David saw around him violent and controlling men. As an adult he presented himself as the archetypal breadwinning man who travels abroad to keep a family at home and he performs a highly gendered role, with an identity based on his understanding of masculinity.

Following his retirement, David's role in the home changed as he became more involved in fostering though he still reiterated that:

"It's still a woman's job to mother the children and yours [the man] to be there as backup, do the running around, all the car work and but apart from that, yes, I'd say the role of the man, yes it is good".

While he did not choose to foster, David has found fostering rewarding and now in retirement he has enjoyed developing his role as a foster-father. As a retired man he performs a different version

of masculinity to his pre-retirement versions. In many ways he is a supportive partner who transports the children and is a calming influence within the family. However, he has somewhat come into his own by emerging as an empathetic character at odds with his projected persona as an aloof and absent father-figure. David's gender performance affirms stereotyped masculinity which he also subverts when he moves to performativity to perform gender and become more engaged with the caring aspects of fostering.

Through fostering, David has become emotionally aware of children's needs, devising a safe hug (seen to be a side-ways or non-touching hug with a child which reduces actual physical contact) for a fostered child. David explained:

“Yes the safe and unsafe cuddle, but it needs to be replaced because in an obscure way it is a form of love and a form of affection, no matter how wrong it is, it still is to the child and they have to learn the difference between that, and they have to learn the correct one so they can tell the difference, and to make them feel safe”.

He recognised the risks for children devoid of human attachment and how a male role model can provide a positive template for children and young people. This is in essence the journey of a man who has made significant changes in his life to support his wife as a carer. These changes have seen him move away from being a man with a fixed and highly traditional view of breadwinning masculinity to become more involved in the family. Following his retirement, fostering has drawn David more into the family to become more caring and emotional towards children. The gender journey measure highlights how men's gender identity often move from traditional masculinity, as young men, to more feminised versions of masculinity through experience and socialisation as they mature (O'Neil *et al.*, 1993). David's journey, and socialisation, has altered his gender identity away from aloof and breadwinning masculinity to become more involved in the emotionality of caring. David's journey moves him away from traditional masculinity and the association with control and violence into more caring roles associated with women.

David's journey has taken him from distant, aloof and non-resident masculinity to become emotionally aware and in-tune with children through his increased engagement in fostering. To emphasise David's complex gender identity, and the journey he has taken, he told the story of a young man's suicide:

“One of them [young person] hung himself earlier this year, committed suicide which we couldn't understand because he had his girlfriend and a new baby and everything was going well”.

The intimacy between a man and child is something he recognised as being important though he was uncomfortable with this emotionality. The apparent professionalism of fostering has made it easier for him to perform intimacy as an act to inform the child of appropriate bonds (Hojer, 2004), shown through the safe hug. The emotion he feels with this young man's suicide is more deeply rooted within him than professionalism and highlights the journey he has made. He clearly feels the suicide is more difficult to understand as the young man was to become a father. Fatherhood can lead to critical analysis by men of their role and offer the opportunity for them to explore broader issues of masculinity and to place fathering within a historical, ecological and cultural context (Watts, 2010). The emotions shown by David for the young man are not because he is supporting his partner, they are emotions that he feels intuitively and personally. David may be upset as he has failed to protect the young man, a role associated with masculinity. This ties his journey into how difficult it is for men who want to perform gender differently from the normative ascriptions associated with each gender to actually achieve it. His journey to become a foster-father is complex as he performs different roles and tasks at different times and he moves from performativity, which challenge gender norms, to performance as he continues to 'do' gender to identify with a traditional version of masculinity. Through his narrative he articulates a supportive role to his partner, describing her as a childcare expert who is predominant in the home.

Alex's story

Alex presented a narrative where he is a supporting partner to a woman carer and similarly to David, Alex has recently retired. Alex recognised fostering has changed him as he stated:

“I think I’m more approachable as a person”.

Alex’s story is about a man who supported his wife to foster. In many ways fostering was an extension to their family life as they had two children and his partner chose to foster to extend her caring role in a very traditional nuclear family (Parsons, 1952). Alex’s wife moved from parenting to child-minding and then to foster care, as Alex described:

“Right, first of all it was when [partner] was doing child-minding and she was asked to do some work with families, ones who couldn’t cope and we just progressed from there”.

Professionally, he worked in a very male-orientated profession through which he experienced a depressive illness. Alex was able to reflect on how fostering helped him to recover from his illness, primarily due to his relationship with fostered children.

While Alex performs gender as a traditional man, fostering can be a transforming experience and it allowed him to become more affectionate to children. Alex explained:

“I love the little ones to bits”.

Through the socialisation of his journey Alex has come to recognise he enjoys and identifies with fostering, though portraying himself as a supportive carer to his wife who is the main carer. Alex performs gender as support to a woman carer that affirms masculine norms. Through his role as a foster carer he has become more aware of his partner’s skills:

“It’s made us realise me responsibilities because I was working when my own children were growing up so I hardly ever saw them. So I think what’s happened is fostered children [are a] replacement children for my own and I spend time with them I should’ve spent with me own two or as much time as I can”.

Fatherhood is described as being a life changing event and one which can result in personal reflection as it is a powerful motive for reforming masculinities and can serve as a valuable strategy for enabling men to be reflective and to critically analyse masculinity (Watts, 2010). Alex has undergone a process of critical reflection and he has become more supportive of his female partner through the second chance of fatherhood which fostering has afforded him. Having performed within a highly masculine environment, he missed out on his fathering and the emotions he attaches to this side of his personality. Like others, his journey to fostering is complex; his depressive illness facilitated a fuller engagement with fostering as he had strong attachments to children. The complexity expressed by men as they recreate masculine norms through performing gender, end up reinforcing traditional ways of 'doing gender relations' in the foster family. The men in this category of journey perform gender as supporting carers though their fathering is more complex as their narratives are highly personalised accounts of their journey and motivations to foster, which alter over time. Both Alex and David start out performing traditional masculinity, but through fostering each modifies their performance in ways that are not always recognised as they move to performativity, and discover they like caring for children. However, their journeys continue as they 'do' gender to affirm traditional masculinity and reproduce hegemonic gender relations as their women partners remain main carers.

A Childhood in Care: - "I've been in foster care myself, I have lived that life"

The sample of 23 men included a sub-group of 5 men who had childhood experiences of residential care, foster care and adoption. Their stories recount journeys to create fathering experiences different from their own childhood as each began with rather negative versions of fathering. Childhood refers to a chronological period of human growth and development, and the stories within this type of journey recount men's journey to fostering as beginning in their childhood experiences of the care system. I have selected 3 of the men's narratives in this sub-group as they recount stories to show how their own childhood adversity motivated them to foster. These stories

are highly personal accounts of childhood in care and how these experiences promote their adult identification with fostering, both as carers and with children.

John's story

The journey for John has taken him from a childhood in care to become a foster carer with fostering representing an important aspect of his life. John experienced a traumatic childhood when his mother's mental health led to John and his siblings becoming 'looked after' children. In many ways John's experience of being in care was difficult, and he said:

"I came from a broken home, mum and dad got divorced when I was, well, 5 years old and I was brought [up] by my mother. My grandfather played a big role in my life until the age of about 9 when my mum had a nervous breakdown and at that point I was taken into care myself which for me was devastating because it felt like my family was, like, deserting me myself, my younger brother and the younger sister. My sister was placed with grandparents but my brother and I were put into Local Authority care and at that time it was children's homes, it wasn't really foster care".

The importance of attachment theory to foster care has been well-documented with the literature tending to emphasise the significance of early infant attachment and bonding (Jewitt, 1991; Schofield *et al.*, 2000; Cairns, 2004). John's childhood experiences imprinted attachment patterns that last a lifetime, though as Crittenden's (2000) dynamic model of attachments demonstrates maturation can alter these patterns. Childhood attachments and early caregiver relationships significantly influence the internal working model and feelings of self-worth (Howe, 1995b). John, through his narrative, illustrated how his identity is strongly influenced by these childhood experiences of being a 'looked after' child. His early childhood trauma and attachments have promoted his gender identity and he performs gender constructed around a strong masculine ideal.

The relevance of attachment theory to social work and foster care is that it provides a model to explain childhood behaviours in relation to the quality of care and nurturing the child has received.

John talked about his feelings on being a 'looked after' child:

"I was put into Local Authority care, taken to a different school and made to feel quite guilty about the fact I was in care even though it was not my fault".

During childhood John became a carer to his younger siblings and he identified with paternity from a young age. John constructs his gender identity around a paternal ideal, influenced by his early attachments and sense of guilt and loss. Gender and attachments intersect to produce John's identification with fostering and his gender identity. The guilt, he presented, may well relate to him being the elder sibling who was unable to be an effective father at this stage in his life. During childhood John was both a father-figure to his brother and sister and a carer to his mother:

"It was at that point that I became, like, her surrogate husband [to his mother] if you [are], like, looking after the other two and bringing them up".

John's motivation to foster is located within his childhood as he journeys from child in care to foster-father and included his own partnering and birth-parenting. At a young age his gender identity was as a father-figure and carer to his mother and siblings.

Extended family is important to John; his aunt, uncle and grandfather each had caring roles within the family. However, the extended family support dissipated leaving the children to go into Local Authority care. John recounted during his interview how his grandfather sexually abused his brother:

"Little did I know at that time that my brother had been abused whilst he was in the home but also was being abused by my grandfather as well and he did attempt it a couple of times with me but he didn't get anywhere".

John presented feelings of guilt as he did not know about this abuse and though John could rebuff his grandfather, he did not protect his brother. Childhood attachment influences personal identity and the ability to formulate relationships. John experienced a traumatic childhood with insecure

attachments when he experienced separation from his mother along with family sexual abuse. Classification of attachment is important because the child who experiences secure and healthy attachments can be expected to have his or her needs met; to see the world and people within it as being trustworthy and to develop a positive self-attitude (Howe 1995b). Many children, particularly those who enter foster care, may not have experienced a history of secure attachments with their birth-parents. The resultant behaviour styles relate to care-giving responses with the child's behaviour being particularly insecure and disorganised if the primary parent had been the source of distress or abuse (Howe, 1995b). The emphasis is shifted from the adult perpetrator of maltreatment to the child who is seen as responsible for the behaviour. John feels guilt that he did not care for his family enough and protect his brother from his grandfather's sexual abuse. His early attachments have impacted upon his construction of masculinity as he performs gender, which in childhood was as a caring older brother and father-figure, though he still feels guilty that he could not protect his brother.

While the worth of attachment theory and its explanation of childhood growth cannot be doubted; its general appeal within fostering has maybe prohibited alternative explanations such as resilience and social learning. Moreover, the measurement of attachment behaviour patterns has itself caused some debate, which might shed a light upon the inherent complexity of behavioural patterns. The British Child Psychiatrist Michael Rutter (1995) recommends a more cautious approach, when utilising strange separating events to observe generalised infant behaviour as infants may respond differently to what are unnatural and unusual events. John is very keen to show his own resilience as a brother, partner and father. As an elder brother he supported his sister's swimming, to a national competitive level, with much sacrifice from himself. John was ambivalent towards his brother, possibly representative of his own feelings of being unable to rescue him. He performs gender as an elder brother, but when unable to protect his sibling he performs gender to withdraw and become

an aloof and detached male. He presented a tough masculinity as he was able to rebuff his grandfather's advances and has shown much resilience by succeeding as an adult.

At a young age, John was able to escape his family life and join the army where his sporting ability flourished, enabling him to become a professional sportsman. Though his army and sporting careers seem short in duration they are very significant in his narrative as the stories he recounted demonstrate his resilience and strength as a survivor (Rutter, 1999; Cairns, 2004; Gilligan, 2008).

John explained:

“It wasn't until I'd left home and I ran away from home basically at the age of 16 with mum's permission that I found my dad and gained his permission to go and join the army. So, I became one of the last boy soldiers joining the army to run away from a really shite home life”.

John's journey involved a childhood in care and subsequent early adulthood in the army. He became a young soldier to escape the chaos of his childhood. He constructed a strong sporting masculinity as he performed gender to affirm normative masculinity. During his childhood, John took on the paternal role with his siblings and maybe army life was an escape from this role as he moved from one gender performance to another. Following his marriage and the birth of his son, John made the decision to become a foster carer. For John, fostering was an opportunity for him to re-enact his childhood experiences and promote wellbeing for children by performing gender as a foster-father.

John did not have an attachment to any foster carers as a 'looked after' child and his own disorganised attachment with his mother, and father who he mentions only briefly, mean he wanted to foster because he knows how children need attachments. Furthermore, John clearly identified with fostered children and wanted to support his wife's career:

“She was a teacher and because of my [sporting] back-ground she got me to go into school to teach [sports] at schools and I saw a lot of kids from a background that I'd

come from, single-parent families, abused kids that had really struggled and when [partner] we got together it's one thing we would like to do is foster".

John's journey, which includes him becoming a birth-father to his son, culminated in him becoming a foster-father:

"From there on in when we realised that fostering was like our destiny to go and do it we really, really went at it - to make it work and I've always been at home being the man [and] main foster carer whilst [partner] has been at work".

For John his identity is intertwined with fostering and paternity and he is the main motivator in his family to foster. As the main carer John performs gender to challenge the conventional fostering practice of the main caring woman, as it is his partner who goes out to work. Through his journey John performs gendered relations that affirm stereotyped masculinity when he joins the army. John also performs gender which subvert the normative as his wife is the main breadwinner and he becomes the main carer through foster-fathering.

Chris' story

This is a narrative rich in storylines, as Chris' narrative is a series of stories involving personal hardship and survival, and he took great pride in his story-telling abilities. In many ways Chris performed his stories as he narrated them. He related stories to emphasise his personal resilience and the success of his survival strategies. Trauma, attachments and resilience are all recounted in the very varied narrative retold by Chris. Many of his stories are based on self-reliance and survival strategies, as Chris stated:

"Well, I myself was fostered; then adopted as a child and my experiences through childhood, adolescence and adulthood has given me an insight into the problems, the joy and the heartaches of being a child in care. So, I want to give a little bit back to what I have taken out of society because a lot of my fellow foster-friends and adoptees have ended up in prison [or] dead".

Fostering provides a venue for self-reflection and enabled Chris to contextualise his past and to cope with his maternal relationship. Chris' story recounted rejection by two mothers, his birth and adopted maternal figures.

Chris explained how his adopted-mother rejected him following his adopted-father's death. The relationship with his birth-mother he described as complex because he thought she was an aunt and he recounted a recent story:

"My experience, I'm quite scarred from the experiences that I've been through. I met my real mother three weeks ago, she's 90, met her at a wedding. She was an old aunt of mine that's all I knew her as, but she's my mother. 'Come and stay with me darling', 'Oh I love you' and all this. So, we went to London for a week and all she did there was abuse me, criticise [me], abuse [me], nasty [to me]. So if I hadn't had the experience of being a foster carer I would have just walked out. I now know a classical side. Perhaps a classical side of guilt and instead of feeling sorry for what she did she's trying [to] justify, [as] she's in denial".

The discourse within this narrative seems to conform to insecure attachments and traumatic difficulties associated with childhood (Bowlby, 1997; Cairns, 2004; Gerhardt, 2004) and it is interesting that he repeats his maternal rejection by seeking proximity with his birth-mother well on into adulthood (Fonagy and Target, 1997; Fonagy *et al.*, 2007). Chris' journey to foster-fathering, like John's story, takes in partnering and parenting. However, unlike John, Chris expressed his attachment to his adopted-father and he had a father-figure who he could try to recreate in adulthood.

Chris described a childhood where he felt he was not wanted and told the story of his conception as a business transaction:

“My mum had 6 or 7 children. She sold [the children] during the war years, she sold them to childless couples which was very common in certain parts of London, but apparently she was on the game so she had all these children”.

The relationship with his adoptive parents’ son is complex and traumatic and Chris described being the victim of a serious assault (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000; Cleaver *et al.*, 2006; Johnson, 2008) by a family member:

“I was beaten; I was stabbed over washing up. I said [adopted brother’s name] there is still egg on that [knife] and he plunged it in me [he said] it aint there no more is it”.

The Russian born American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner has been a significant influence within childhood development studies; both in the United States of America, where he is attributed with being the father of the ‘*Head Start*’ programme (Cornell University, 2005), and in Britain through the ‘*Common Assessment Framework*’ (Jack, 1997, 2000; Calder, 2003; Gill and Jack, 2007). Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological systems theory to explain the developing person within an environmental context as nested systems similar to a set of Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner argued that the complexity of social interactions, along with the child’s developing psychological comprehension, is strongly influenced by the primary dyadic maternal relationship. Bronfenbrenner, very early on in his theory’s development, enquired as to how important it was for this maternal relationship to be positive and he later presupposed that within the mother and infant dyad both parties should, at least ideally, undergo periods of growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Chris, during his interview, presented a narrative that he did not experience positive maternal relations and that his periods of growth were achieved away from either mother-figure.

There is little evidence within Chris’ story of any childhood protective or nurturing environments from adults, especially following the death of his adopted-father. Instead Chris presented a childhood of maternal disorganised attachment with both birth and adoptive mothers. However, he did reflect on the importance of community:

“I don’t know why; I had a wonderful childhood hop picking in Kent, you know we were on the streets and our parents saw us when we were hungry”.

Chris is attached to his community and through communal engagement he related how he became more self-reliant. He explained:

“In the end I went travelling through Europe. I was three years [travelling] I joined the travelling circus, French Foreign Legion you know I had some wonderful times... mind you I did abscond [from the French Foreign Legion] and that’s a story in itself. I got married in ‘82 to [a pop singer’s] backing singer. Lovely singer and we were married for a year”.

His identity is community-based as he performs gender to show a tough self-reliance as he travels through his life. Chris told stories that recount hardship interspersed with moments of success.

The analogy, by Chris, of being dealt a poor hand is fatalistic, but he overcame this through personal ability and strength. He recounted how others, from his community, have also gone onto success through music as resilience, survival and success all intertwine in his narrative because:

“Out of little acorns out’ve them tenements when you didn’t have a penny some great people have come out’ve [area in London] I went to school with him [famous singer]. Some great people came out’ve those tenements and some scally wags and it was very easy for me to go [down] that road down the naughty boys road and I know a lot did, what they call pavement artists; they get a sawn off shotgun, run over the pavement and into the bank. I knew and I had a [adopted] brother who was a villain, their real son”.

Chris explained how he endeavoured to recreate his sense of community through fostering following his conversion to Christianity. He intertwines his journey to foster-fathering with his journey to Christianity, along with his partnering and his parenting by becoming a birth-father. Hardship, gender, age and culture intersect as Chris develops a sense of identity closely attached to his sense

of community and survival, and through complexity and gender performance traditional family relations are recreated. Chris, by recounting his stories, performs gender to highlight a tough and resilient masculinity. His journey to fostering both extends his family and enables him to make sense of his past. Like John, Chris is creating through foster-fathering attachments for fostered children as he knows how important these are to children though he performs gender and creates masculinity constructed around resilience, self-reliance and toughness. The attachments he seeks to create for children are structured around moments and spectacle rather than through nurturing as he wants to instil a sense of self-reliance in children and not dependence on adults.

While he seeks to recreate communal experiences for fostered children, he creates new childhood experiences through fostering to involve family in fostered children's lives. Chris' childhood experiences are important to him as a foster carer. Chris has experienced rejection, violence and trauma, and throughout his narrative he presented a cheery series of anecdotes to show how he has succeeded and overcome adversity and now wants to pass on this learning to others:

“So, I [have] been slapped all my life. They say you are played the hand you are given I had 2, 3, 4, 5 in a game of brag you know, but I've played it the best I can and I came through it and I came out that tunnel and I've got a wonderful, wonderful wife, I've got a wonderful son I've got a lovely little home, I've got lovely friends, I'm a magistrate. I work, but I became a Christian in 2000 through the birth of my son and then we became foster carers shortly afterwards”.

Chris presented a narrative of tragedy and survival as he recounted his own misfortune and adaptability. The story culminates with his fatherhood, both biologically and as a foster-father.

Robert's story

Robert also experienced a period of time in foster care as a child, along with his sister, due to maternal illness. Unlike John and Chris, Robert is reticent about discussing his childhood in any great

detail. Robert was not the motivator to foster and he is very clear that he agreed to foster to support his partner:

“Well, I think if I’m clear about [the fact] I wasn’t the prime mover in becoming a foster carer. It was my partner who was compelled to do it and I agreed or we agreed to do it together and when she explained her rationale to me I agreed with her and agreed to support her in that and do it as a joint endeavour and that’s initially why I became a foster carer”.

Robert presented a detached logic to fostering, and in doing so performs gender to affirm masculinity as the aloof and detached male. Robert is a step-parent to his partner’s children and fostering was at first too challenging as they had their own children, who he had to protect. He explained they left fostering, following their initial approval as carers, due to the foster children’s behaviours, their own children’s ages and the fostering agency not meeting their support needs:

“We found ourselves thrown into compromising situations so we took a break until our children became adults The first time that we fostered our own children were still at home and we found it became quite difficult because we expressed certain criteria which weren’t met”.

Robert presented himself as a supporting carer, which is very much in line with the literature where men are support to a woman main carer (Sinclair, *et al.*, 2004). His narrative shows him to claim his step-children, but not fostered children as he distinguished between their different roles in his life. However, he implied that fostering was suspended until his step-children attained adult status at which point they were able to resume fostering as fostered children posed little risk to his step-children. Robert appeared to problematize fostered children, a discourse which emerges throughout his narrative which is in direct contrast to his step-children who he seeks to protect.

Following their first difficult attempt with fostering, and with his step-children old enough not to be vulnerable, Robert agreed to support his partner and give fostering another go. Robert explained:

“Fostering was part of my own experience because I was temporarily fostered myself as a kid, not for any major length of time, when my mother went into hospital. We didn’t get on well with her family and that wasn’t an option so we, me and my younger sister, went into foster care for a few weeks and it was very positive, a happy home and I came away with a lot of good memories. So, it was something I was aware of that kids may need help at some time and I saw how I had been the beneficiary of it and I saw it as a virtuous thing to do to be able to extend the benefits of stability and well-being to someone who wasn’t a recipient in their own lives”.

While Robert was a support carer who credited fostering as his partner’s decision, he nevertheless came across as valuing fostering as a rescue solution for children. With his positive childhood experience of fostering, he identified with the virtuous nature of fostering. Robert wants to provide stability for children; though he also seems to see them as problematic and unable to accept the stability he offers to them.

Robert stated that his own experience of being fostered was happy and now at a time and place where he can help other children he acknowledged the virtuous act of looking after children. Robert’s language is rather detached as he performs an aloof masculinity. Through his interview he presented some disillusionment with fostering and its challenges:

“It’s demanding, challenging, it takes you to places that you never imagined that you would go to. You find yourself in situations that you would never imagine being part of”.

Robert’s narrative is one which does not readily acknowledge his personal biography in becoming a foster-father as he cites his partner as the main motivator. Robert performs gender to show logic, protection, child control and lack of emotionality. He does not mention his own father and gives little away during the interview concerning his own history. Robert is critical of the behaviours presented by young people and is equally critical of childcare professionals. Through his narrative we

are left with a sense of regret as he tries to rationalise his position as a foster-father because he finds it difficult to rescue children, possibly as they do not accept his offer to rescue them.

The narratives in this section are acutely interesting and personal as they come from men who have experienced childhood adversity and been in the care system themselves. These experiences have left lasting impressions as they seek to create alternative parenting, to their own childhood, concurrent to promoting environments they see as helping children in the longer term. They are not particularly nurturing, and are less nurturing than others in the sample, possibly as they know through experience this is not enough to promote childhood resilience and self-reliance. These men in this type of journey perform gender associated with masculinity, but they subvert norms as they seek caring experiences for children rooted in their own histories. Normative gender roles regulate their performances as they reproduce existing gender relations with their partners, and for all their commitment to fostering they do not become nurturing carers and their roles are founded on traditional masculinity.

Extend or Create the Family - “To become a family”

Foster care operates within both the macro-social systems of society and inside smaller family micro-social units. The literature review highlighted that foster carers are predominantly seen as traditionally orientated people. Societal beliefs about what constitute a family are significant in determining normalised forms as well as restricting forms classed as being abnormal (Newman, 1999). The literature review identified that foster carers are representative of tradition-based family systems, more so than for society in general, with an apparent demarcation of roles based upon sexual difference. Rather than being one family model type, there is a multitude of types dependent on local, historical, cultural and social factors as human agency intersects with environmental factors to create and recreate family. Another type of journey which emerges from my research is of a storyline where men recount the desire to extend or to create family through fostering. Several

individual narratives have been selected to represent the different ways foster-fathers create and recreate family with children. The stories the men retell about this type of journey include the milestones associated with childhood and adulthood, but here they are bound together by men embarking on new partnering relationships. In this relationship the men's narratives place children at the centre of family to create new families with children.

Jeff's story

Jeff's story is about a man who after leaving the army met and married a woman who fosters. Before joining the army he worked on building sites, as a labourer, and held a view that men worked in masculinised jobs:

“Basically my career spans from labouring on the building site to spending 12 years in the armed forces and then from meeting my wife today and with my wife being in the fostering role for 12 years. That's how I became a foster carer really”.

Jeff has two young children from a previous marriage and now lives with his current wife and her adult children; he also works as a children's support worker. Jeff talked about how his father and grandfather worked in traditionally masculine employment, such as the army and building work. His journey, though succinct, involved the transition into adulthood through the army, then partnering, divorce, and finally remarriage and fostering. Through this journey Jeff has perceptively moved from the traditionally masculine army to become a care worker and foster carer, two roles which are removed from traditional masculinity. Fostering has enabled Jeff to become more reflective as a father and partner though he continued to be a support carer to his wife. His story is different to others in the study as he entered into a relationship with an existing foster carer to create an extended family with him as the foster-father.

Simon's story

Simon, who works full-time as a funeral director, has grown-up children from a previous relationship and now with his new wife would like to create a new family:

“It was my partner at the time who decided to finish her job and take up fostering because she hadn’t any kids of her own. So, being partners before we got married just right at the end of the day I wanted to support her with what she wanted to do. So, that’s how it came about, the first instance of fostering not by myself it was with [partner] she is the main foster carer, but now we [are] both foster carers. [I’ve] done the training and everything is hunky dory so we got married [and] it’s all hands on now”.

Simon made several references to wanting to transfer his working from the dead to children, sequencing a story that working with children is preferable to working with the dead. This may be a metaphor representing aging and rebirth within a new environment as he seeks to create a new family following retirement. The journey for Simon to foster-fathering is about supporting his new partner to create a family with children. The narrative he presented is one of creation as he and his partner seek to make a new family through fostering. Simon explained:

“My role will change, could be a months’ time could be two or six 6 months’ time, but I’m willing to sacrifice a full-time job to get involved with the kids which is more rewarding than the dead people”.

Simon values his experience as a father, which he said he could use to support his wife care for children. He presented himself as the provider and supporter to his new partner as he performs a highly gendered role as a foster-father. Simon stated that his partner had chosen to foster and he acknowledged that he also wants to create a new family. Fostering would seem to enable him to continue to provide for the family financially, as well as facilitating the opportunity to perform gender as a father-figure within a new family. The role of father and breadwinner is important to Simon and fostering appears to provide the opportunity to have an income and create a new family with children.

Jonathon’s story

Jonathon lives with his female partner who has a grown-up daughter. The journey Jonathon presented is based on his family life and childhood leading him towards fostering:

“It’s sort of something that I have been involved in and out of for most of my life at some sort of degree. Obviously before I even met [partner] my mum was a respite worker in a children’s home...so I was always sort’ve doing bits and pieces”.

He also talked about his partners’ family background in fostering and her parents, who are foster carers, as having been an important motivator in their evolution to foster caring. Jonathon explained:

“We sort of, it just sort’ve evolved into foster carers because we’ve always been surrounded or involved with that sort’ve element of care to some sort or degree all my life. As I say it wasn’t a decision ‘right lets become foster carers’ it just sort of evolved”.

Jonathon’s narrative shows a journey which was both conscious and unconscious. Consciously he wants to support his partner and to continue as the breadwinner and perform a traditionally masculine role. He appears to recognise his desire to care for a child, but he does not seem to be aware that it is deeply entrenched in his unconscious self.

During his interview Jonathon told a story about a little girl, placed for adoption with his in-laws as foster carers, which motivated him to foster. From this emotional connection, with a child, Jonathon then drew back from the emotions he expressed by describing fostering as a profession, comparing it to his working life:

“Obviously I’m going back to work in my normal job in a few weeks’ time, but if you sort’ve compare fostering to a 9 to 5 job, I work in a [job], to a 9 to 5 office job, its [fostering], extremely more involved”.

Jonathon came across throughout his interview as confused as he tried to navigate fostering between the emotions of caring and paid employment. Jonathon proffers an intimacy in his relationships and we see subjectivity and performativity in the way he wants to care for the adopted girl, but he returns to ‘do’ gender as he remains embedded to the breadwinning role because it is difficult for him to withdraw totally from gender norms. Jonathon wants to reproduce traditional

masculinity as the breadwinning paternal-figure. Through his performance we see glimpses of his identification with emotional paternity, but he is unsure about how much he can show as performativity creeps in to his performance though ultimately he identified with breadwinning masculinity.

Jonathon's journey takes in his childhood and partnering to include his own motivation to recreate fathering through fostering. However, he talked about fostering as a financial activity:

“We are financially [insecure] with the wedding it's more of a needs must thing, and we haven't got the space in the house to take on enough work through the agency to pay the bills to be honest”.

Jonathon presented his journey, to foster-fathering, as one relating to paid employment with his personal agency embedded in family and employment. He described a childhood journey living with his mother who was a care worker and without biological children he moved towards fostering with his partner. With Jonathon gender performance relates to breadwinning masculinity as well as paternity.

Miles' story

This narrative is of a gay couple who chose fostering as a means to extend their family with children.

Miles explained:

“How my life has led me [to fostering]. I suppose basically it was one of the few opportunities to become a family being a gay couple”.

The journey taken by Miles has much in common as well as some differences with heterosexual couples. In common with heterosexual couples Miles, and his partner, have undergone childhood, adulthood and partnering, though differences relate to sexual identity as well as the families of choice discourse involving two men fostering and the negotiation of parenting roles. Research demonstrates that there is a reservoir of interest in fostering within the gay and lesbian community and that there has been an increase with gay and lesbian people becoming foster carers, but the

evidence suggests that the assessment and support services have not developed at the same pace as this interest (Hicks, 2005). Through intersectionality we are able to see how gender and sexuality intersect to create further discriminating factors as Miles feels his sexuality and gender affect how people relate to him as a carer.

The story retold by Miles begins with the realisation that they are able to foster as it is not restricted to heterosexual couples. Prior to fostering he worked in a profession with children which he recounted as having been a good foundation for fostering younger children:

“I was a [professional] before and I used to work with children, 5 year olds straight from nursery. I was quite happy to get a young child [and] my partner is sort of better at dealing with teenagers so I suppose we do what we feel is best and obviously our upbringing impacts on how our parents brought us up”.

Miles and his partner agreed that he would become the main carer due to his experience with younger children. The shared narrative of gay, lesbian and bisexual relationships is based upon an understanding of the limitations of an institutionalised heterosexuality, with gendered constructs based on sexual differences. With Miles we see how he has subverted gender roles through the families of choice discourse (Weston, 1991; Weeks *et al.*, 2007) and he has become the main carer partner with his male partner claiming the breadwinning roles.

The narrative of the non-heterosexual community is shared through not being typecast into a stereotypically gendered role based upon sexual difference. Miles' journey to foster-fathering involved his sexual identity and relationship within the families of choice discourse. As a gay man he performs gender that creates new realities around masculinity. Miles is the main carer while his partner works outside the home as they have recreated homemaking and breadwinning roles. The development of families of choice within the gay, lesbian and bisexual community has resulted in some reflection on what the same sex family represents. Giddens reflects on the democratisation of

family life, within a late-modern world, and refers to the concept of families of choice and the cross-over influence into the heterosexual world where gender roles are more open to negotiation (Giddens and Pierson, 1998). The experiences of non-heterosexual families and the diversity of family-types and gender roles highlight a range of petit-narratives which may well be mirrored within other families, such as foster carers as they perform gender which affirm and subvert masculine norms. The men in this section all present fostering as a means to extend family or create new family. This type of journey to fostering transcends sexuality as men perform gender which affirms existing gender relations and norms as they become fathers, through fostering, and go onto challenge these relations through negotiating fostering roles.

Care for Children - "To care myself"

The retelling of storylines where the man is the motivator to care is a theme which emerged from some of the narratives. This theme shows how some men identify with caring as their journeys lead them to become foster carers. Studies have highlighted the positive benefit of fathers and men to children (Knight, 2004; O'Brien, 2005; Towers, 2006) though the focus of working with men has primarily seen them as the source of welfare concern (Ryan, 2000). It has been suggested that the motivation to become a foster-father can be an attempt for men to meet personal interests, such as the opportunity to become a father or to provide an opportunity to retrace their fathering (Inch, 1998; Inch, 1999). The journeys some men in my study recount involve childhood with positive father-figures and a transition to young adulthood and partnering which uphold the movement away from traditional masculinity (O'Neil *et al.*, 1993) as they seek to become carers for children. Men in this category of journey are primarily motivated to care for children. I begin by recounting Ben's story and I have chosen several other individual stories to reflect this type of journey to fostering.

Ben's story

The men in this study have given witness to their own experiences of being fathered with the father-figure often becoming the foundation for male identification with masculinity. For some this

identification with masculinity is about reproducing these good childhood experiences with their current family while for others it is more about providing different versions of masculinity. Ben's story of his journey consciously began in his childhood and relationship with his father. As a child, Ben was able to draw on his father as a role model, so that he consciously constructs paternity and masculinity in relation to his father. As a foster carer Ben is the main carer, rather than his wife. Through his fostering Ben endeavours to reproduce his happy childhood, crediting his homemaking father with motivating him to care for children. Ben was positive about his father's caring ability though he balanced this paternal feminisation with the assertion that his father was a boxer and a tough man. Ben stated:

"I had a fantastic childhood my dad was always on hand. My mum had a [job] so she went out to work, evenings, so my dad was in charge. So, this thing about men who foster and why do men want to nurture and everything like that it was given to me by my own father at a very early age, dad bathed us when mum was at work. I suppose he was a modern dad. He cooked our tea, hoovered and went to shops because mum was at work and he used to say a real man isn't one who goes to the pub and drinks ten pints of beer a real man is someone who is comfortable with who he is and so I saw that with my father. I was brought up that way and he's continued that throughout his life, but my dad's just an old fashioned version of a modern man today so I've never had that 'oh its soft to be like that' because my dad was a very good amateur boxer so he wasn't a softie. He was tough, really, but he had the nurturing side to him. So, I've been brought up with that it's alright for men to care and nurture so it was nothing alien to me. My son's friends have said 'so your dad's a foster carer' as though it's like a ladies job and 'oh isn't that a bit soft' and my son has said to them 'well, we'll go to our house you know they might be having their tea and when we go you tell our dad he's soft and see what he does' so he understands that side of it and hopefully I'm repeating it with my own son. My dad passed it on to me and hopefully I'll pass it on".

Ben's identification, within the family, as the homemaking man concurrently in control is a position which would conform to Connell's argument that men present masculinities where male power is not simply derived from being a man, but is a dynamic social construction which is backed by institutional forms of understanding (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Ben's performance of gender as a main carer challenges masculine norms, though he also affirms masculine norms by associating caring with his boxing father. By negotiating his masculinity, to incorporate a caring role within the family, Ben extends beyond Connell's hegemonic masculinity as it is more than just exercising control over the family. Ben has a clear gender identity as a man who cares for children, though he remains manly and rooted in paternity.

Mike's story

In his story Mike was the main carer for many years. He supported his wife in her career though at the time of his interview she had recently retired. His journey concerns a man whose interest in fostering arose out of a desire to support his partner during her professional studies. Mike explained:

“Yes I was working on the buildings and I got a job [with children] and when she wanted to become a [professional] we sat and discussed it, I said right you are if you are going to be a [professional] I need to be in all day so I applied for the job at the school up the top and I'll be in all day and look after the kids and be there so I applied for the school job and changed direction to suit her going to work but it worked out all right”.

Prior to fostering, Mike worked on building sites and changed his occupation in line with the needs of his partner and family. Initially this led him to work in a school and whilst working there his children asked if a friend, who lived in a residential home, could come and stay with the family. This prompted an application by the family to foster with Mike becoming the main carer while his wife worked outside the home. He was positive about his role looking after children, describing it as “smashing”, and through performativity he acts as the main carer to subvert masculine norms.

The journeys are nuanced with the men's narratives as they present sequenced stories to relate meanings. Mike's journey, with his young adulthood spent working in traditionally masculine employment on building sites, enabled him to change his role by way of his wife's employment and his foster-fathering. Mike's gender identity underwent change when he performed gender to become a carer; though this change is neither stable nor permanent as he relinquished feminised roles, associated with the home-space, on his partner's return home following her retirement. The process of ending fostering which Mike experienced as he relinquished the home-space is explored more fully in Chapter 8. Mike's performance of gender is in transition as he changes from being the main carer to become support to his wife as main carer. By performing gender as a foster-father who is the main carer Mike creates an alternative masculinity to hegemonic norms. However, gender is, as Butler (2004) speculates, a regulatory discourse because when his wife returns to the home, normativity restores gendered roles and she reclaims the main caring roles.

The narrative Mike presented during his interview was that he was motivated to foster due to his wife's employment and their children's request to take in a friend. However, he also retold a story about working as a youth worker before his wife's employment:

"I was working before I started in the school I was helping run a youth club with 2 other blokes in [area] and before education started opening youth clubs we opened a youth club in [area] when we moved there and I would be down there two or three nights a week with the kids".

Childcare and community support is embedded deeply in Mike's narrative as his journey retraced caring for children at several turns, as a parent, youth worker, working in a school and as a foster carer. In many ways this is a family that negotiated gender role reversal as the couple performed gender roles not associated with masculine and feminine norms. Mike was the main carer and his wife worked as the breadwinner. Mike made a conscious decision to change his role from working on a building site to become a househusband and in this way they are mirroring families of choice in

a manner reminiscent of same-sex couples (Giddens and Pierson, 1998). Mike negotiated a version of masculinity which is different to the breadwinner construct. His description of the roles and tasks, which he undertook within the home, seem to go further than the ones attributed to men by Walby (1997). However, this role is not fully stable as Mike found it difficult to break from gendered relations and these role reversals are in turn reversed on his partner's retirement. By performing gender as a carer Mike subverted stereotypes, as he had taken on the role of main carer within the family which enabled his wife to become the family breadwinner; though, as I show in chapter 8, traditionally gendered relations are restored with the return of the woman to the home-space.

Peter's story

This narrative concerns a man's journey from the armed forces to become a foster-father. Peter's wife took up employment as a residential worker in a children's home and Peter became the main foster carer. Peter explained:

"It's something [partner] and I thought about many, many years ago when I was in the RAF and we thought about doing it then, but because I was always moved around so often and so frequently that I was told no wait until you come out of the forces and you are settled, and you have your own routes established. So, a couple of years after I came out that's exactly what we did [foster]".

The negotiation to foster, between Peter and his partner, involved some role reversal and coincided with the independence of their children:

"Well, our children had already grown up or were well on their way and we thought we can fill the gap...we didn't want any more of our own in fact [partner] couldn't any way and we just thought well why not and it's giving somebody a chance".

Peter's renegotiated gender role is non-traditional as his partner took up the breadwinning role and he became the homemaker.

During his interview, Peter reflected on this gender role reversal which he felt coincided with a general change in employment patterns. He explained:

“Twenty years ago you would never think of a man doing this job, he’d be outside, down the pit or the farm or wherever, he was the breadwinner. Some men wouldn’t do this, but now it’s more common, it’s more accepted there’s not many jobs around and women are taking a lot more jobs they are becoming more adept at jobs that were for men are now shared and this is no different. It’s a job bringing up children; it’s a job whether it’s a woman’s job it doesn’t matter”.

It has been noted that foster care is becoming more professional (Kirton, 2001; Wilson and Evetts, 2006; Kirton, 2007; Sellick, 2007) and that professionalism can be associated with gendered occupations (Crompton, 1987). Peter’s continued identification with employment reinforces masculine norms and the breadwinner / financial provider role.

Peter by contemplating the changing nature of employment was able to compare fostering with paid employment. He argued that fostering had become a job suitable for a man and by relating fostering to employment he is effectively reproducing traditional gender relations by maintaining a breadwinning role. On leaving the armed forces Peter worked in several jobs before fostering with his partner. Peter explained he had not intended for fostering to become his job:

“Oh well I left in 1996 and we started to foster almost straight away it took 6 months process to get through and we started. I’ve been doing it for; this is our 11th year now. I started so it was almost straight away as soon as I got out I left the RAF we got our own house so we had a base and I got a job in Civvy street then we could set down our own roots if you like. If you haven’t got your own roots how can you look after somebody else, so we were fine got a job, got a house and then we got a bairn about 18 months later something like that”.

Fostering is an important part of Peter's life, as it takes the form of vocation and employment. Peter is positive about fostering and it is important for him that he recreates family with children. However, he performs gender to affirm masculine norms because he continued to identify with the breadwinning role. He explained:

"I don't work anymore, I work in the house, I don't work outside that's the biggest change, it's probably given me more respect for ladies, for women that work in the house because I know what they do and what they go through - the daily chores".

Peter, by identifying with fostering and employment, appears to believe that gender relations are transforming and that he himself represents this transformation in person. His partner, by becoming the breadwinner out of the home, performs gender that subverts feminine norms and its association with homemaking and caring. The income from fostering is inconsistent because it depends on a child being in placement and at times Peter has had to return to paid work out of the home, which shows his continued association with breadwinning masculinity. Peter was positive about fostering and he seemed to believe that it was becoming more professional. By performing gender Peter identified with breadwinning masculinity, but he also subverted this version of masculinity by becoming the main carer for children.

Alan's story

Alan was the main carer at the time of the first interview, though by the second interview his wife had left work to concentrate on fostering. The basic thread of Alan's journey is that they adapted their employment patterns to meet the financial opportunities that came their way when his wife was due a promotion and he became the househusband. Alan explained their rationale:

"She said unless you pack in work and become a househusband I'm not prepared to take this job on because it was a nice step up in salary and if you're not prepared to do it I'm not taking on all that extra work to still not see you over the week ...so we had already agreed I'd be a househusband".

This, however, was only partly true when the fostering narrative extended to their son's illness and how it impacted on Alan as a father. Through his son's illness Alan appeared to have had an insight into mortality and parenting:

"Your son is seriously ill, I thought Christ, I only left [hospital] an hour and a half ago and we went back [to hospital] and he had got that superbug, MRSA whatever it is, he got that and he was in an isolation ward".

Alan's own experience and attachment to fatherhood and his son's illness awakened in him strong paternal emotions which motivated him towards fostering.

Alan also retold, through his narrative, how his journey brought him into contact with fostering by proximity to his sister-in-law who fostered a young girl. Alan, and his wife, became attached to the girl and they offered to care for her. The interconnections of these factors converge within the narrative as Alan told the story about the girl's impending move to an unsatisfactory residential placement and their desire to help her:

"I packed in and become a househusband earlier than I thought I was going to and the girl was with us under friends and family and then the social worker asked [sister-in-law] if she could take the girl to see this house it was still getting done, but when [sister-in-law] saw the house she said to [partner] 'I wouldn't put an 18 or 20 year old in it never mind a 12 year old'. She [partner] said can't we do something and this kid was a lovely girl she had problems [and] I kept saying 'I can't understand why nobody can look after her she's lovely'. Anyway, so we contacted the Local Authority and said [what] about becoming foster carer".

His journey, like most of the narratives, is complex as it took in partnering, parenting, employment, mortality and fostering. The intersection of these elements motivated Alan to become the main carer through fostering. His journey from worker out of the home to a foster carer was a complex web of conditions that allowed him to transfer working out of the home to caring in the home. He

explained how he became a foster carer in a way which maybe belies his instinct to care, as he performed caring tasks which challenged his understanding of masculinity. In a sense he wanted to make good his son's illness and the awful trauma he experienced as a father, take control over the powerlessness he felt due to his son's illness and to rescue the young girl as he performs gender that affirms masculine norms constructed on being in control.

As a foster carer, Alan chose to reconnect with fathering and to look after other people's children. In his narrative of his journey to fostering Alan did not talk about his childhood, rather he talked about his own parenting and fathering. His son's illness, combined with the relationship with a young girl fostered by his sister-in-law and his wife's job offer, resulted in him becoming a foster-father. Alan's partnering and parenting are important aspects of his journey. Through performativity he performs gender to create an alternative masculinity to what he perceives to be the norm when he takes on the househusband role within the family. However, the paternal motivation restores normative gender roles within the gender binary because he remains a man who recreates paternity.

Thomas' story

This narrative is about a man who, after arriving in England from Jamaica, found through fostering a channel to communicate his cultural identity to children and the community at large. Thomas narrated a journey involving physical and metaphorical travel as he moved from Jamaica to England and altered his gender identity. Fostering reflects sociocultural factors; as there are national and geographical differences in the delivery of fostering (Hojer, 2004; Charnley, 2006). Living in Jamaica Thomas was a fisherman and a taxi-driver and his journey to fostering involved the relocation to a different country. Communication is a recurring theme in his narrative. Thomas chose to foster because he felt that he was a skilled communicator with children. Fostering provided Thomas with a sense of pride and acceptance within the community. The act of fathering, associated with an apparent need to care for children, provides men with a purpose within the family where children are a binding agent cementing families together. This emergent paternal motivation to foster is

more complex than masculinity, and fathering, solely founded on man as breadwinner. Thomas reflected on his feelings about children:

“With family and kids around and my step-kids grown-up [and] off to university and my son is getting old now, he is 16, I said at the time he was 14 [he’ll] soon get off [and] I cannot live without having kids around, we have to have kids around”.

Family with children is very important for Thomas as he performs gender to reproduce existing gender relations through fostering. Thomas’ story unfolded to tell the story of a man who endeavours to retrace and remember his Jamaican roots and share this heritage with children from black and mixed-race heritage. Through fostering Thomas gives birth to the children’s Jamaican heritage and he enjoys talking to them in a “Patois” Jamaican dialect. The act of foster-fathering enables Thomas to remember and recollect his Jamaican past because identity is an important part of his narrative.

Thomas’ narrative demonstrates how he believes fostering has allowed him to develop personally and through caring for children to become less confrontational and physically masculine. The intersection of ethnicity, gender and sexuality results in diverse performances of gender and a change of gender identity. Thomas told a story of a man whose gender identity had moved, through fostering, from tough masculinity to proud carer. The socialisation provided by fostering has provided Thomas with alternative versions of masculinity. Thomas throughout his narrative, like many others, presented a strong masculinity, but when it came to caring for children this masculinity changed. Thomas explained:

“I would just explain to a carer anyone who wants to come into foster care, male or female, I would explain to them and tell them how it feels and the joy and the happiness [you get] from it”.

Through his narrative Thomas presents a strong identity with fostering, caring and his Jamaican heritage. Thomas, like others in this category, all present a sense of satisfaction with their role as

caring foster-fathers. The expressions of joy and happiness emerging from the interviews highlight how foster-fathers identify with caring and gain satisfaction by caring for children beyond traditional motivations based on control and breadwinning. The narratives in this type of journey show men as main carers and househusbands who perform gender to both produce new masculinity and reproduce existing gender relations as they create masculinity based on paternity and fatherhood.

Conclusion

The narratives show men making considerable personal and metaphorical journeys to become foster-fathers and these journeys demonstrate many of the men's motivations to foster. I have categorised their journeys to fostering into four types grouped around motivational factors. The different journeys men recount in their stories intersect as the narratives weave between them. The journeys are complex and diverse, but the data from the narratives overwhelmingly support the view that men are motivated to foster. They negotiate these journeys as they create and recreate fathering through fostering. In these journeys men perform roles that subvert and confirm gender norms. The material and evidence from this study leads to conclusions and thinking that are somewhat different to the perceived concept of masculinity and gender roles attributed to men because they perform gender to show there is fluidity and flexibility in masculinity.

My conclusion is that men narrate journeys to show they reflect on fostering and their care of fostered children. My study data correspond to conclusions found through the gender journey measure (O'Neil *et al.*, 1993; Marcell *et al.*, 2011; McDermott and Schwartz, 2013) as men's gender identity adapt through socialisation to become less traditionally masculine. There is evidence from my data to show masculinity is being reconstructed to allow men to care for children with many of the individual journeys to fostering nested in their biographical narratives. The sociocultural environment, social agency and identity combine with time and place to influence how men perform gender within the family. They perform gender that is subversive in that they contradict the

normative understandings of gender roles as they place children at the centre of family and their journeys to fostering. Concurrently they also reproduce, through gender performance, traditionally gendered relations. Many men continue the breadwinning role and paternity emerges as a strong motivator for all the men who took part in this study. The emerging picture is a complex tapestry of constructed gendered roles within fostering families.

CHAPTER SIX: WHAT MEN WHO FOSTER DO AND THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER

Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter I reflect on what my data say about performing gender and performativity. Butler (1990, 2004) argues that gender regulates masculine and feminine norms along the lines of a heterosexual binary matrix. The ways in which gender is performed can challenge and affirm normalised masculinity, and femininity, with the possible creation of new versions of masculinity. Gender is performed to 'do' gender and Performativity is the means to reproduce and subvert the construction of hegemonic gender norms (Butler 1993). Foster-fathers would seem to occupy less familiar and recognised territory than foster-mothers. Family life is a common social phenomenon where family concepts are embedded within a social system that perpetuates gender roles. The actual nature of experienced family life is diverse, and of course not all family experiences are positive. The family who chooses to foster does so within the context of society in general as well as their own family unit. Societal beliefs about what constitute a family are significant in determining normalised forms as well as restricting forms classed as being abnormal (Newman, 1999), gender roles are formed with children from a young age through language as well as role modelling. Foster-fathers represent a significant proportion of the adult fostering community and increasing numbers of men are taking on an enhanced role in fostering (Wilson *et al.*, 2007).

The aim of this chapter is to look at the roles and tasks undertaken by foster-fathers and reflect on what my data say about how men in the sample perform their gender roles. It has been argued, by Inch (1998), that foster-fathers are morally driven to influence children. Inch cites Erikson's (1963) generativity concept to show that this foster-father characteristic is a masculine trait performed by men as they foster. My data support Inch's contention that foster-fathers perform gendered tasks, but they extend beyond Erikson's generativity as they take on tasks to encourage independence in

children beyond imparting moral values. Men appear, in my data, to associate with professionalism and I have argued in the literature review (pages 18-22) there is currently a professionalising discourse to fostering. Foster care is not a profession though it has benefitted from some elements of a professionalising discourse, namely around payment and training. The public-space of employment has traditionally been associated with men and the suggestion, by Kelan (2009), is that masculine work-based skills can be more successful in the work-place. My data show men value aspects of professionalism around payment, recognition and teamwork though they do not utilise masculine work-based skills in their homes as foster-fathers.

Butler (1990) argues gender is a performance, as it represents specific social activity within a time and place, rather than a universal expression of personal identity. Performativity is the process whereby men use agency to create alternative ways to perform gender, usually to subvert the traditional stereotypes. However, the normative regulates performativity and is a process by which the hegemonic heterosexual matrix regulates the gendered subject that results in feminine and masculine norms. While fostering is traditionally allocated to women as carers, my data on the tasks undertaken by foster-fathers show they both subvert and conform to traditional masculinity. As men they perform gender, and act out roles, to construct masculinities that are both unconscious and consciously negotiated. The process is complex, but men emerge as foster-fathers who produce masculinities where gender regulates the construction of masculine norms.

In this chapter I use data from interviews, diaries, and questionnaires to show the range and prevalence of activities men undertake as foster carers. By organising and analysing the data, I have identified emerging themes about foster-fathers and their work as foster carers. Through the narrative data, from the foster-father interviews, these emerging themes will be explored to reflect more fully upon their gender performance as men who foster. The chapter is structured to focus on the research findings by presenting statistical data derived from the foster-fathers' interviews, the

carers' diaries and social workers' questionnaires to identify the roles and tasks allocated to men in fostering. I explore the findings, from quantitative data and the qualitative narrative interviews, using a concurrent nested approach (Creswell, 2009) to categorise and identify the roles undertaken by foster-fathers in the study. The chapter also reflects on men's satisfaction with foster-fathering and the subversion and re-enforcement of existing gender roles by the foster-fathers as they perform gender.

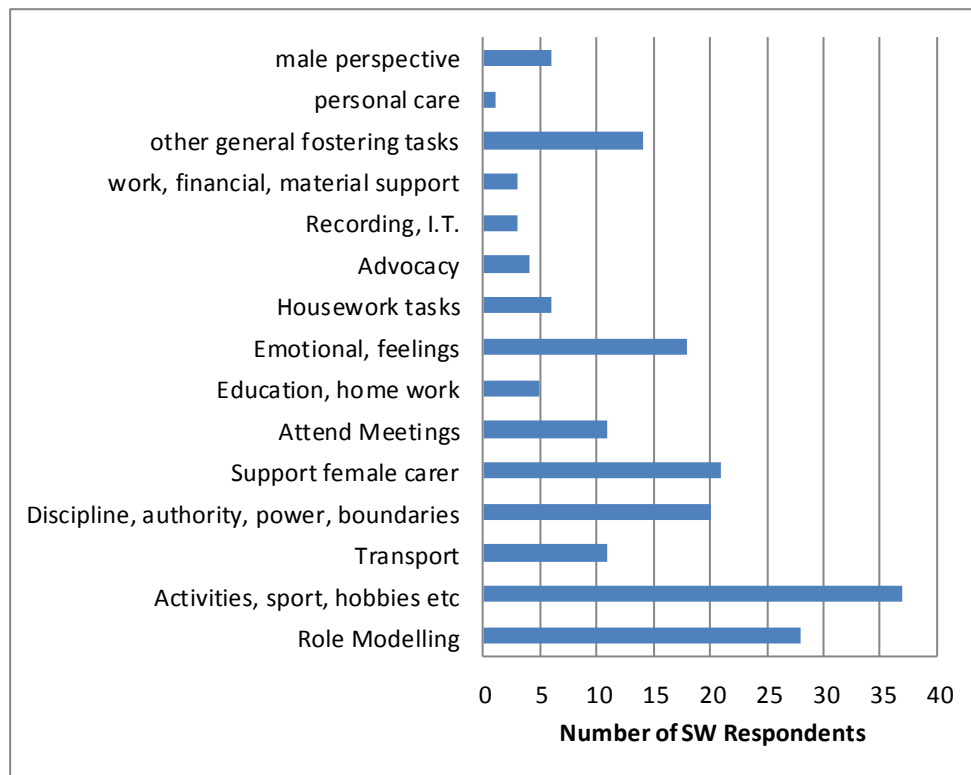
Study Findings – Statistical Evidence

In this section I present the statistical findings from the study in relation to the roles and tasks undertaken by foster-fathers.

Tasks and roles undertaken by foster-fathers

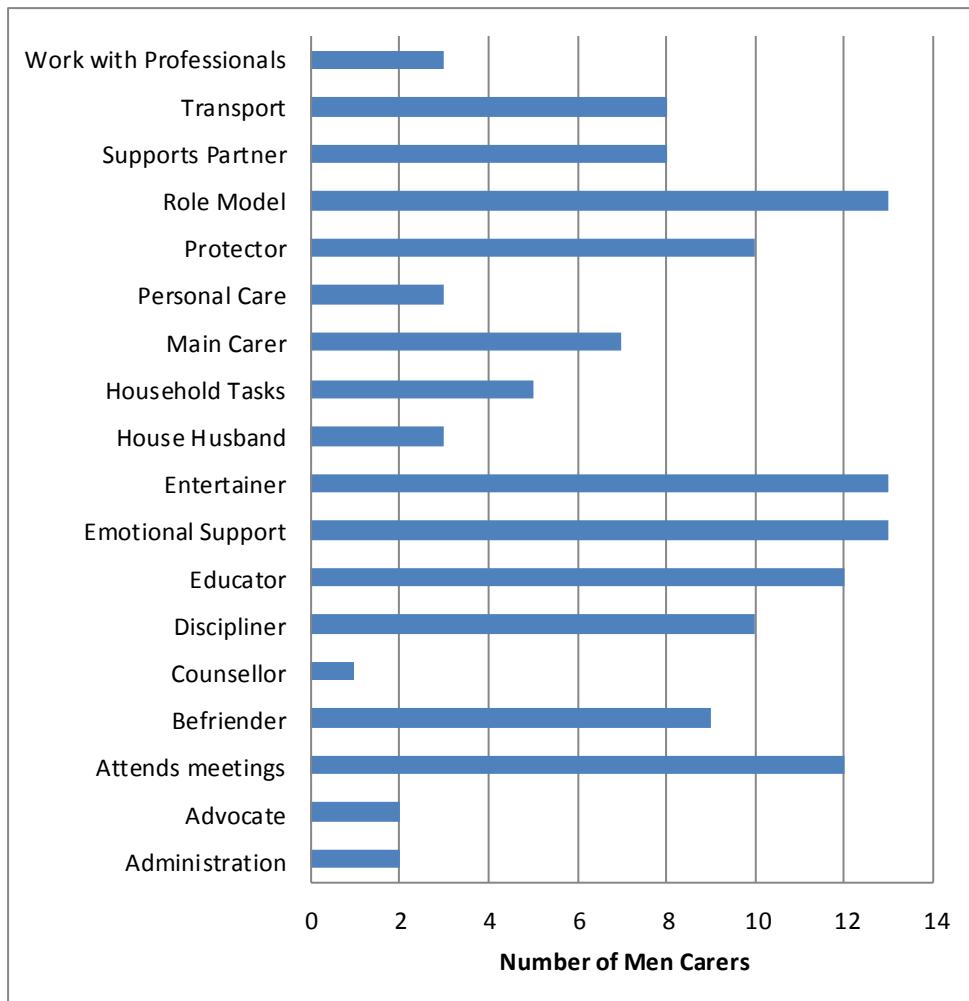
The data from my study show men undertake many tasks and roles in fostering. The tasks relate to their gender performance as they work with children and navigate their role internally within family and externally with social workers. In the questionnaire, social workers were asked to identify which roles and tasks men undertake, their answers are presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1 - Social workers' perspectives of the roles of foster-fathers (N = 70)



In Figure 1 the social workers' perceptions of the roles of foster-fathers are represented through data collected from the social worker questionnaire (N=70). The most common roles which social workers attributed to men are: involvement in activities, hobbies and sport; role modelling; supporting a female partner; and setting boundaries (or disciplinarian) within the home. Some social workers included the 'male perspective' as a specific task for men. Creswell (2009, 2012) argues that using mixed research methods enables the researcher to compare the data and findings arising from the research. I used a concurrent nested approach to simultaneously gather data from foster-fathers and social workers. As this study is primarily concerned with foster-fathers, the data from the social worker questionnaires are about their interactions with foster-fathers. To explore foster-fathering from different perspectives, the data gathered from the social worker questionnaires were compared with data gathered from foster-fathers who took part in the study. In Figure 2 (p. 150) I use data from the foster-fathers' first interviews to indicate their perceptions of their roles as foster-fathers.

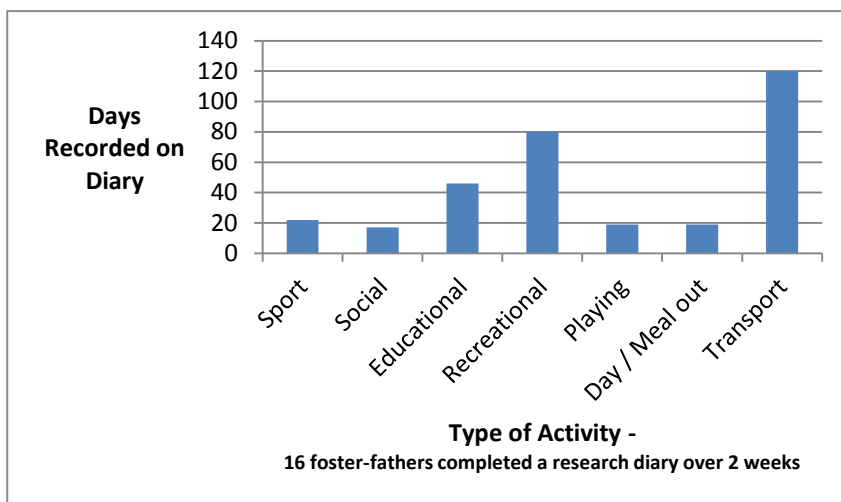
Figure 2 – Foster-fathers’ perspectives of their roles as foster-fathers (N = 23)



There is a lot of information from the study concerning the different and sometimes varied range of activities which men are seen to undertake. The most prevalent tasks attributed to men by men are: role model; entertainer; and emotional support. The internal comparison (Creswell 2009) of the data show there is some convergence and divergence between the different perspectives provided by foster-fathers and social workers. Interestingly, men described attending meetings, maintaining discipline and being a protector as fairly common activities undertaken by men. The role as protector is not included in the social workers list, in the succeeding chapter I explore social worker and foster-father relations around power, and the heroic male role model, which may relate to the protector role identified by men in the interviews.

Through the study’s observational diaries, men recorded their participation in some form of activity with children on 141 days of the total 206 days for which men completed diaries. The diaries show men were involved in activities with children on nearly two-thirds of the days recorded. Figure 3 presents the data from the 16 foster-fathers who completed diaries over 206 days. Each day may have had more than one activity:

Figure 3 – The daily record of activities undertaken by foster-fathers (N = 16)



Transporting children and recreational activities are clearly more common events than any other role undertaken by the foster-fathers in the study. Through the diaries, we see the extent to which men participated in the lives of fostered children. This finding corresponds to studies undertaken by Wilson et al. (2007) and Hojer (2004) as they also conclude that men work directly with children through activities. However, these studies by Wilson et al. and Hojer imply that men work more directly with children far more frequently than is attributed to them by social workers. Data from my study challenge this view as the social worker questionnaires point to social work awareness of men directly working with children. Through the questionnaire over half of social worker respondents recognised that men participated with children in activities and they were aware that men work directly with children.

Data from my study show men acting as mentors and providing social learning opportunities for children. Data from both the social worker and foster-father samples highlight role modelling and mentoring. By being mentors and role models, men perform gender to affirm masculine norms as they assume a controlling position over children. Foster-fathers as role models and mentors appear to recreate versions of masculinity. The role attributed to men by social workers to provide a male perspective corresponds to this notion of recreating masculinity for children. Butler (1990) argues that performativity is much more than voluntary as it includes deep-rooted and unconscious understandings of gender. She argues these can be established in childhood where masculinity and femininity are defined socially by adults around the child as well as through language and social coding. The data present a varied picture as men perform gender to produce existing gender relations and concurrently create alternative versions of masculinity. There are several themes to emerge from my data on the tasks and activities foster-fathers engage in and I explore these themes in the next section.

Study Findings Explored

In this section I explore the narratives in relation to the roles and tasks undertaken by men and offer several different themes to emerge from them, which are: traditional men / traditional roles (men as breadwinners); transporting duties and role modelling; entertainer and educator; professional-fathers; emotional support and personal care; and heroic man and masculinity. My data show how foster-fathers move from gender performance to performativity and back to performance as they recreate gendered relations in fostering.

Traditional men / traditional roles

Conceptualising family as traditional presupposes a normative structure and from this normative concept emanates gender relationships which are inherent within the definition. Traditional masculinity reproduces existing gender relations constructed around normalised and relatively non-interchangeable fathering and mothering roles. Most of the foster-fathers within the IFA, as shown

in Table 1 (see page 97), are approved as second or support carers with only 11.86% of fostering households where a man is the main carer and less than 2% of households did not have a woman approved as a carer. The picture from this evidence, from the IFA, is that most fostering households fall within a traditional nuclear family construct where women are usually the main carer within the family. This in itself is an effect that will reproduce existing gender norms which individuals repeat and mimic as they perform gender.

The internal comparison (Creswell, 2009) of the different sources of evidence illustrates how most men affirm existing gender relations as secondary carers supporting a woman main carer. My data also show some men perform gender tasks to subvert the masculine norms when they take on main caring tasks. The different perspectives in this study converge to show most men perform gender to affirm existing gender relations as they take on traditional gender roles, to support a woman main carer. Gender seems to be a regulatory discourse though some of the actual tasks undertaken by men as they perform gender enable them to create new non-traditional masculine norms. There is some divergence between the social worker and foster-father perspectives. The narrative data show men, while supporting a woman main carer, take on more tasks in association with fostering, such as working with professionals and attending meetings. The study data also show foster-fathers work directly with children through activities and transport arrangements. By performing gender, the tasks men do are regulated by normative concepts of gender, but they also create alternative masculinities as they foster though the gap between men and women who foster is maintained. My data show that women usually remain prime carers in fostering when they are automatically seen by social workers, and most men, as main carers.

The man who supports his partner is a prominent theme, as expressed by David who is clear that his role is to support his female partner:

“When it comes to knowing what kids need and what the correct route to take is, there’s no good looking at me for that, she [female partner] is never wrong, but I think it’s easier just saying she’s the professional I’m the staff”.

Similarly, another foster-father, Alex, explained:

“I’m just here to help her [woman partner] out when I can and she lets me know when I can help [and] when I can’t help. If the situation gets out of hand she’ll put her hand up and stop me from interfering, she’ll deal with it in her own way”.

Alex and David perform gender by being support carers to a woman and they affirm traditional masculinity to reproduce existing gendered relations. For Alex, his role is to follow his partner’s instructions as women are seen as being the expert carer within the family, an attitude which allows men to step-aside and let the woman care within the home.

However, these roles men perform as foster-fathers are less straight forward than they at first seem.

The complexity of these gender relations is described by Stephen:

“[Partner’s name] she’s the backbone of us all, I do all the running around when she’s not here I take over her role and vice-versa”.

Stephen is consciously adhering to a stereotyped version of gender where his partner is “the backbone” but he can become the substitute carer, as and when required. The ideological predominance of the nuclear family is based on the sociological assumption that the nuclear family developed through the transition to industrial society and is therefore perceived as normal in industrialised societies. Conceptualising a normative family model type provides hegemonic and guiding images of how roles and tasks should be shared in a family. Within this family discourse fathers are ascribed the role of breadwinner who supports the family outside of the home which is the woman’s domain. Foster carers are social agents who undertake activities that are embedded within social structures which are drawn from their own narratives and social influences. While existing gendered relations are reproduced, particularly when Stephen’s partner is present, he goes

onto perform gender as the substitute carer to replace his wife when she is absent. The Foster carer's self-identity becomes a reflexive project and an endeavour that is continuously reflected on to create, maintain and revise a set of biographical narratives (Cohen, 1989; Giddens and Pierson, 1998). My data show evidence that some foster-fathers endorse the ideological perspective of traditionally gendered roles. However, their daily experience as foster carers can challenge this conceptualisation of gender stratification when they take part in looking after children within the home. While Stephen creates an alternative masculinity, as substitute carer, his wife remains the main carer and Stephen continues to be a foster-father who performs gender to support his wife rather than become an equal foster carer who fosters alongside his wife. In this way Stephen does not transform gender, rather he performs gender to re-enforce hegemonic norms as the substitute carer.

Evolving male roles have received increasing attention (Hearn *et al.*, 1998), Walby (1997) suggests that gender transformation is taking the form of new gendered tasks, as men have taken on the role of transporter and chauffeur to create new gender relations. The ways in which men perform gender may change and evolve, but the normative regulates performativity (Butler, 1990) to restore the division between masculine and feminine with gender being a regulatory discourse. Simon, who is employed, supports his partner, but intends to become a full-time carer, and Simon stated:

“It gives [my partner] a bit of a rest when I can do [care for the young person]. I'm limited, really, at the moment, but [I am] willing to pack in being a [worker] and [will] hopefully become a full-time foster carer with [partner] to give her time off throughout the day” (Simon).

Simon's conscious motivation is to support his partner, but he was also looking to become a full-time foster carer as a means to change his career. Wilson *et al.* (2007) have already documented how more men are increasing their role in fostering and changing their employment patterns to foster,

particularly, as working from home is becoming more common. Simon performs a traditionally gendered role as breadwinner and support to a woman carer.

Data from the narratives demonstrate that men perform gendered roles as they take on the disciplinarian or boundary setter role in the home:

“I impose boundaries and perhaps I am stricter than most on maintaining [them] I think”
(Chris).

These roles are traditionally masculine as they involve control alongside providing support to the woman carer. During his interview Andrew said:

“I think I got to bring [partner’s name] into it here as well because you have got to do it as a team. [Partner’s name] does the caring, the cooking - the domestic things. I think the kids still needs not a threat, but they need a sense of discipline in the house, the threat of he’s going [to] tell me off if I don’t get this right and whatever”.

Andrew expected women to perform gender as homemakers with a man acting as the controlling enforcer within the home. Andrew’s perception is that he is ‘back-up’ to support his wife as she cares for the children. Considering the perceived risk of allegations, men describe as barriers to their fostering and the practice of safer caring (Slade, 2006) associated with the welfare discourse where safeguarding children is predominant (Rees and Pithouse, 2008), the candour expressed by Andrew is surprising. My data challenge the assertion that the threat of allegations and safer care restricts men in their daily practice as foster carers, concurrently my data also affirm that they reflect on allegations and recognise they are a potential barrier to them fostering. They were conscious of the risks and need to practice safer care, but this did not stop them performing gender to control children or provide emotional support to them. This is another area of significant divergence from social workers who reflect repeatedly, in their questionnaires, on the threat of allegations and safer care; I explore this further in chapter 8. The lived experiences of men presented in the data from the

diaries illustrate how they frequently engage with children in a variety of recreational and educational activities.

Simon reflected on his role as the boundary setter; contrasting his masculinity to a softer hearted woman:

“Being a male a lot of youngsters look up to males as a dominant figure where a lot of females can be soft hearted and go ‘ah bless’ and I’m not an ‘ah bless’ person basically so I stick by the rules and that’s the way I play”.

The gendered performance by Simon affirms hegemonic masculinity and he contrasted this with femininity which he felt was less rigid. Simon, by his strong identification with rules, re-affirms traditional masculinity and performs the dominant and hegemonic male figure within the home. While Simon is explicitly rule-orientated, John identifies that his need for order and boundaries lie within an empathetic approach by stating:

“When you realise that some of the backgrounds of the kids that you take into your house, where they don’t have the boundaries that you have had or you are putting into place that your kids have had. It takes time for them to relearn and I think that you have to be a lot more understanding and reflective of what the kids have been through”.

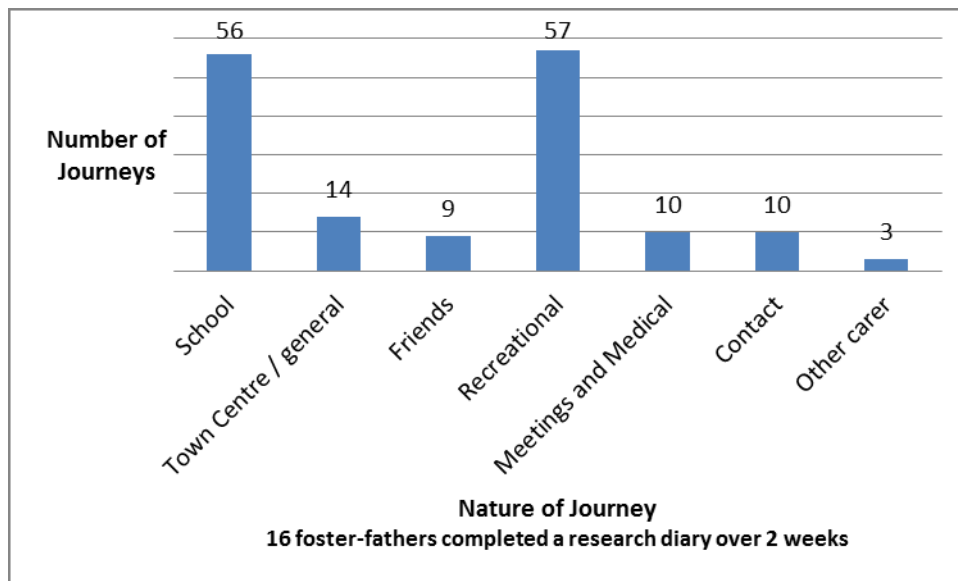
Normativity regulates masculinity and femininity and with John favouring boundaries within the home he reproduces masculine norms based on controlling masculinity. Gender is a regulatory discourse; John through his manliness creates a new version of masculinity by becoming more reflective and understanding towards fostered children’s needs. Through the exercise of agency, John subverts gender norms by performing gender differently by using reflection to better understand the child, but in the context of hegemonic masculinity he reaffirms traditional masculinity as the outcome is to enforce boundaries. The changing nature of family, gender relations and identity is a much debated topic (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995). By taking on the disciplinarian role, as well as secondary carer to a woman main carer, men perform gender which conforms to

traditional masculinity. There is evidence from my study to show men are engaging in a number of activities as foster carers which affirm the tradition-based breadwinning role. Men perform gender within the binary matrix as they remain controlling and fixated on setting boundaries. However, through fostering John created a version of fathering different to the one he used with his own children. Fostering has enabled him to create an alternative version of masculinity, and paternity, through reflection rather than just control. In their performance men do not mimic women as carers because they retain their masculinity. As foster-fathers some men can recreate their own fathering, but many create alternative fathering which is less rigidly masculine. Many tasks undertaken by men are traditionally constructed as masculine, but in their gender performances foster-fathers show they affirm and subvert hegemonic masculinity.

Transporting duties and role modelling

Foster-fathers in my study undertake some tasks that reflect their new roles as carers and are gendered within the traditional discourse. The practice of performing gender regulates activities undertaken by men as witnessed by the traditional man discourse. Walby (1997) argues that though gender is transforming with new masculine roles emerging, to include transport and chauffeuring, gendered notions of masculinity and femininity remain. These new roles reproduce existing gender relations and though women do drive and transport, it is an activity more linked to masculinity than femininity. The transporting and chauffeuring of children, with its association with driving a vehicle, is an activity more often categorised as male-centric or as Joe explained: "I transport [child's name]". The carers' diaries illustrate the amount of times men transported children and families as they have transported children and young people on 120 days of the total 206 days accounted for in the diaries. By transporting children, men drive them to a range of activities and venues. Data from the diaries show that school and recreational activities are the two most frequent venues for men to transport children to and from, as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4 - Where foster-fathers transport children (N = 16)



The data in figure 4 are derived from the foster-fathers' diaries 16 men completed over two weeks. By driving children, and undertaking transport duties, men perform gender which affirms gender stereotypes in line with Walby's (1997) transformation of gender. However, during the act of transporting children men interact directly with children as they engage them in recreational activities, and by performing gender in this way they subvert stereotyped gender roles.

The association of transporting children with men is described by Ben:

"I just throw myself into it, I pick them up from school, I do all the [driving] - they're all mums at school because dads are at work I'm just one of the only men - one of 4 or 5 men in the playground... I take the children to parties and talk to the mums and I think they think it's quite normal".

Ben, through transporting fostered children to school, identified with fostering even though he believes it is a woman's activity because "dads are at work". This is evidence of some transformation on his behalf (though limited), in that he is identifying with an activity which he perceives as women's work and he acknowledged that his gender performance is becoming "quite normal". Ben's recognition of himself in a minority position, as a man at the school gate, highlights how he reflects on his fostering. The act of socialisation with women, at the school gate, has enabled Ben to reflect

on how his role at the school gate is becoming more normal and socially recognised. Research by Duncan and Smith (2002), on family formation and geographical spatial cultures, identifies the regional diversity in family forms which affect partnering and parenting. Duncan and Smith found that it is difficult for individuals to contradict idealised and locally practiced notions of what are good partnering and parenting (Duncan and Smith, 2002). The question begins to emerge, from my data, as to whether or not there is a foster-fathering narrative or discourse which significantly influences, and regulates, men's activities as foster carers in the practice of performing gender. The suggestion, from Duncan and Smith's work, is that men and women take on different tasks which can vary between different communities as normalised versions of fathering and mothering are created.

Men within foster care are taking on transport duties, though the nature of what this actually means is debatable because it could represent power and control or seen as secondary tasks supporting a woman as main carer. The transporting of children by men is not isolated to fostering, as it has been generally associated with men and can represent gender power-imbalance within families which is more about men's control than representing significant signs of gender transformation (Walby, 1989; Walby, 1997). Alternatively some men, by transporting children, may be main carers who take on the bulk of caring activities. The collective foster-father narrative from my study is that men perform gender to create new versions of masculinity regulated by gender. These new versions do not replace gendered roles though they are modified and at times transformed as men become more caring and reflective through fostering. Through agency the foster-fathers were seen to take on new roles as carers, but they continued to be manly and perform traditionally gendered roles. The men reproduced existing gender relations and though they created alternative and new masculinities, gender continued to regulate them as foster-fathers.

The literature has highlighted how foster-fathers are role models who provide a positive example to children, which tends to be activity and leisure based, such as fishing or sports (Fanshel, 1966;

Newstone, 2000; Wilson *et al.*, 2007). My data, gathered from all three research methods, show men to identify with recreational pursuits with children and that they value role modelling:

“I think it is the mentoring and the role modelling particularly to young men which is absolutely fundamental to the role of a foster carer” (Robert).

In performing this role, the literature presents men as seeing themselves as traditionally gendered (Fanshel, 1966; Hojer, 2004; Wilson *et al.*, 2007). In my study role modelling is attributed to men by themselves and by social workers. By performing gender through role modelling, foster-fathers are recreating a masculine norm because role modelling is a task readily associated with men. Through role modelling men are regulating children by mentoring and providing a learning environment. Butler (1990) suggests the intergenerational transference of gender stereotypes takes shape through every day language and regulatory discourses, such as girls dressing in pink and boys being tough. Role modelling implies the intergenerational transference of values, skills and attitudes from adults to children; therefore, by being role models foster-fathers create regulatory gender discourses, by for instance encouraging sport with boys and encouraging other such gendered activities.

The performance of these activities provides men with time to focus on promoting the child’s moral understanding of right from wrong, which for Frank included moralising on alcohol:

“I says if anybody wanted a bottle of whisky and it was something we need I says the kidneys would be able to cope with it, but you lot [the young people] want to binge drink and drink, drink, drink, drink, and I says you’re just destroying your kidneys and I says once you’ve done the damage there is no reversal and cos I’m telling them this they go ‘wow’ and it’s making them think about what are they doing”.

The reality for Frank is to problematize alcohol leaving him with the task of advising young people about its perils. For Frank, his own childhood experience of being fostered provides him with an authoritative knowledge which the young people respond to. Frank performs gender to reproduce

alternative realities for children from his own experience by projecting an authoritative masculinity to shift them from negative influences, such as alcohol.

Foster-fathers present a fairly fixed concept of public morality, in line with Inch's (1998) study. There appears to be an apparent desire for men to provide caring activities that promote future generations, which Erikson called generativity (Erikson, 1963). Thomas presents a typical gender performance as he explained how it is important for boys to be independent:

"I said 'what I am doing here when I am calling you guys in the kitchen [is] to learn to cook, when I am calling you guys to learn to load the washing machine, to sweep the floor, to mop the floor, to do your ironing [is] because I want you to be independent'".

Inch argues foster-fathers, by providing caring opportunities that promote future generations, assume a significant responsibility for foster children's developmental status (Inch, 1998). Assad during his interview stated that:

"I think it's been helpful being a male in the sense that they've looked up to me and say 'what did you do at this age'. Rather than speaking to my wife I think they connect with me a lot more".

Newstone has emphasised the positive input involved fathers can have with their children and relates this to foster care as he reiterates the emotional benefits associated with an involved man in a child's life. Newstone takes this argument further when he associates an active paternal figure with the stability of the fostering placement (Newstone 1999 and 2000).

Foster-fathers in my study identified with the fathering role, often fulfilling a function which they feel that fostered children have missed out on. As John explained he was:

"Trying to be a really good male role model by being more of a hands on father because a lot of the time, if they come from a single parent family, [where] it's just mother [and]

they don't realise that dad can do cooking as well or that I can help them make the bed at all, you know all these other kinds of things, domestic chores".

Men perform gender as they impart morality onto children; though this is consistent to Erikson's generativity, my data challenge the generalisability of Inch's (1998) argument, that foster-fathers adhere to generativity, when some foster-fathers in my study seem to promote childhood independence and self-reliance rather than generativity. On a practical level, foster-fathers can become positive male role models who take an interest in the fostered child's life (Gilligan, 2000). By performing positive role modelling, foster-fathers differentiate themselves from the negative male role models which they perceive children have experienced prior to fostering. Men perform gender by role modelling and recreate regulatory masculine discourses for children through daily practices and language. Role modelling passes on constructs of masculinity between man and boy. While gender roles are interchangeable, as new masculinities and femininities may be created, the division between genders is recreated. By role modelling men are recreating versions of masculinity, though different to the aggressive masculinity often associated with fostered children's pre-care history, which restore the heterosexual binary logic. By performing gender, through role modelling, men are asserting versions of masculinity based on gendered differences between men and women. Role modelling is, therefore, a means to re-affirm gendered roles and reproduce these in future generations. However, they also subvert gender norms as the more nuanced realities of these men show that despite all the social influences and pressures for them to conform to masculine ideals, they are still able to emotionally attune and attach with children.

Entertainer and educator

The literature represents foster-fathers as engaging children in leisure orientated activities and that they are motivated to promote a sense of moral value with fostered children (Inch, 1999; Wilson *et al.*). In my study men presented themselves as striving to promote children's aspirations and in doing this they utilised a wide range of leisure and recreational activities, as Frank said:

“I wished I could do more inside of the house now, like outward bound courses teach, them some simple skills. One of the things I do teach a lot of the kids is trust and getting their trust and them to trust me; that’s what we’re looking for those kids to trust me, to believe in me”.

The frustration for Frank is that he cannot do enough for children. Trust is paramount for him as he endeavours to create environments for children around learning and leisure activities. Frank presents himself as a patriarchal figure for young men to look up to. His own childhood experiences, of Local Authority care and maternal immigration, has given him a deep sense of identity as a black British man. His gender identity intersects with his sexuality, age and ethnicity. Wallace (2002) argues that black masculine identity, in America, has sought its own ideological equilibrium of race and masculine subjecthood. Wallace argues that black male subjectivity has undergone objectification under the gaze of white eyes with public perceptions of black masculinity associated with male body, sport and size and therefore black men are simultaneously invisible and disregarded and perceived as a potential threat. Essentially black men face a discourse of hypervisibility and perpetual surveillance due to the perceived threat they are seen to present within this stereotyped version of black masculinity (Wallace, 2002). Frank’s discussion of role modelling and allegiance to welfare reflects his identity as a British black man as he aims to promote identity in young black males. The discourses of gender, race and welfare intersect with Frank’s childhood and fostering. Wallace (2002) shows how African American men have sought to both realise the idealised image of black masculinity, through soldiering and romantic heroes, and to deconstruct this image through expressive mediums like dance and theatre (Wallace, 2002). Frank uses his own identity, as a black British man, as a template for other young black men and for him trust is about young people identifying with him as their mentor.

Ben’s identification with foster care is closely linked to a motivation to work with children; a motivation he has had from a young age. Ben told the story of caring for a little girl:

“At least you can look back and think that little girl now is a lovely little girl. The 16 months [in placement with us have], well obviously it’s a contribution you’ve given her aint it, I mean I’ve spent hours on [the] floor playing with shapes with her”.

Ben performs a nurturing role and enjoys playing with children. Current thinking actively promotes involved fatherhood during childhood. While foster care research has given little attention to foster-fathers, and their roles, contemporary studies about men and a subsequent male movement have developed our understanding of men and masculinity (Hearn, 1998). Ben presents a masculinity that is different to the normative. He performs gender to challenge the welfare discourse by playing with and nurturing a young girl. Alongside nurturing and playing with children, Ben emphasised the contribution he has made in her life. The implication is that he is providing some form of template and structure for her future which is not linked with recreating masculinity in boys. Instead, he performs gender to show the girl different versions of masculinity and men can care for children.

The relationship between nature and nurture is a point of conjecture for foster-fathers as they care for non-biological children. Alex, reflecting on the relationship between nature and nurture, stated:

“They are completely different, it doesn’t matter what you try to instil in them they are still going to end up with their mam’s and dad’s genes. All you can do is to try to point them in the right direction and make sure that they know right from wrong”.

Alex is clear that his role is based upon imparting a moral code of right and wrong in children, while accepting that he is not the only influence in the fostered child’s life. The role of men and fatherhood has been questioned due to demographic changes along with theoretical critiques, such as feminism (Hearn, 1998). The concept of masculinity and its association with the tough and aloof male along with the tendency to treat boys as little men, it is argued by Pollack (1999), encourages toughness and emotional aloofness. Drexler’s (2005) work highlights that boys who grow up within women-only households grow into men as gender is a regulatory discourse. It is better to think of masculinities rather than a singular version, as the singular version is often associated with

controlling and hegemonic masculinity. Drexler's study found that boys, within women-only families, portrayed an increased emotional sensitivity, self-awareness and acceptance of difference as well as an ability to choose male role models from a wide range of sources (school, neighbours, sports stars) rather than this model being monopolised by a resident man (Drexler, 2005). Foster-fathers are resident males though they are not the only influence on the fostered child living in their home. Alex expressed this at a practical level as he wanted to encourage children to know right from wrong. However, he feels fostered children are almost predestined to experience difficulties based on their parents' genes. Alex's ability to father comes across, through his narrative, as limited by the fact he is not the biological-father.

The importance of men in the lives of children is receiving increasing recognition in national policy. The Fatherhood Institute presented a report to the Department for Education and Skills on the costs and benefits of active fatherhood (Burgess, 2006). English Legislation has promoted fathers: the Children Act 2004 advocates for a stronger focus on parenting and families including the role of fathers; while the Gender Equality Duty (2007) requires that all public bodies promote equality in their services between men and women. In 2009, the Department for Children, Schools and Family launched the campaign '*Think-fathers*' to generate debate about fatherhood by service providers and employers and to highlight the importance of men in children's lives (Department for children schools and families, 2009). Men as foster carers are ideally placed to provide a positive role model to children and to counter-balance the disadvantage often experienced by fostered children, by for instance taking an interest in the child's school work (Gilligan, 2000). For many of the male carers this is a role they eagerly embrace, as Nigel explained:

"We strive to make sure she gets the best possible education that she can get and she's moved up to, she's gone to high school, only just gone to high school and she is really, really thriving and the older one of the two children we have at the moment is a very

bright young lady, very bright, but the hard thing is getting her to believe in herself because she has this lack of self-belief”.

Foster-fathers in my study see education as important. This may correspond to a rescue attitude to save children from their parental environment and provide them with an alternative future. In line with Inch’s study my data present evidence to support, at some level, Erikson’s generativity concept as it influences foster-fathers (Erikson, 1963; Inch, 1998; Inch, 1999). Generativity is a masculine activity as men perform gender to promote future moral understanding in children. However, the findings in my study extend beyond Erikson and Inch’s generativity as foster-fathers perform roles that are more than imparting moral values because they show a motivation to rescue children and provide them with independence to prevent future hardship and maltreatment. Leisure and education are venues and tools which foster-fathers use to produce children who are independent as well as morally appropriate individuals.

Professional-fathers

Foster care developed as a voluntary and woman’s activity, though recently there have been moves towards professionalisation and an increase in men fostering (Wilson *et al.*, 2007). Fostering is an emotional activity as it involves caring for children who have often experienced adversity and trauma (Cairns, 2004). Fostering is moving towards being more professional (Wilson and Evetts, 2006; Kirton, 2007) which has arguably made it more accessible to men (Hojer, 2004). It has been argued that a professionalising discourse normalises and codifies individuals within regulations which reduce personal agency (Osgood, 2006). It has also been argued that the performance of gender in the workplace is based on masculine stereotypes (Bolton and Muzio, 2008; Kelan, 2008b). While fostering is not professional as it does not meet standardised requirements for professional status, such as being self-regulatory and possessing specialist knowledge, it is moving towards becoming more professional. This professionalising discourse, though difficult to define, is due to fostering benefitting from financial rewards and training as well as the National Minimum Standards (2011) which regulate fostering from above. Over recent decades fostering has moved from a

voluntary activity towards a regulated and more professional service. This section reflects on how men experience this movement towards professionalism.

Several of the men in my study emphasise they are househusbands to show how mothering and fathering roles are interchangeable. Alan became the main carer, and left his job when his wife was promoted, he explained:

“We had already agreed I’d be a househusband and when I was saying ‘oh I’d pack in at Christmas’ time this was in the May, June... when I had decided to pack in [work]. So, that was it I packed in and become a househusband earlier than I thought I was”.

Another carer, John, related how he had taken on the household tasks which he described as being a woman’s activity:

“What I try to do in my role is to try and do the day-to-day fostering role the housekeeping role, the shopping role, everything that a housewife would do but in role reversal”.

Both Alan and John explained that they were performing gender, as househusbands, which challenged their own ideological understandings of gender roles. My study highlights how fostering enables men to see themselves as home-workers who have altered their gender identity while remaining attached to breadwinning. They see their change of status as a change of job so that they become home-workers within a professionalised discourse. John discussed his management of fostering as if it is a working environment stating: “It’s a working household and I’ve had to get up at seven” (John). This foster-father identification with professionalism through defined fostering roles has been reported on in other studies (Hojer, 2004; Wilson *et al.*, 2007).

Though legally not classified as employment, foster care is home-based care work. There has been an increase in the rates of remuneration for foster carers and changing attitudes towards professionalism and care (Kirton, 2007). This movement towards the professionalisation of foster

care has not only raised expectations around a regulated service (through Ofsted inspections, National Minimum Standards and annual foster care reviews), but also means that foster carers have more contact with childcare professionals. James is a weekend respite carer with his wife who works full-time. While he is a weekend respite carer he is still required to attend meetings, during the week, which his wife cannot attend because she works full-time. James described his interaction with professionals as:

“Hectic on account of interfering social workers phoning you up every whatever [and] having to go to meetings, obviously [partner’s name] has got to fit in with her main job, but sometimes I’m left to go to the meetings which I don’t mind”.

James appeared unhappy with having to attend meetings and liaise with childcare professionals. His narrative details a motivation to care for children during weekends and to create a family atmosphere with his new partner. The men’s diaries (N=16) record that they have some contact with a professional on 87 days, out of the total 206 days recorded (though 56 days are weekends when they are less likely to have professional contact). James appeared to be motivated to create weekend family experiences involving children and he came across as being less interested in the professionalising aspect of foster care, though he acknowledged that he had to work with professionals as a foster carer.

As home-based workers, some men devise organisational tools. Peter, whose wife works full-time, explained how he had devised his own system to record his daily contact with professionals:

“You’ve got more paper work, you’ve got social workers, link workers, you’ve got all sorts of people coming and going. In fact I’ve got a visitors book and I did it solely because of the amount of people that were coming in. You forget you did such and such, well I can’t remember so you look in the visitors and yes [that person] turned up on last Monday. It keeps a track of who’s coming and going”.

Peter and James appear at opposite ends of a professionalising foster care spectrum. Each carer recognised that they interact with professionals though they processed it differently. This difference may arise because of the organisational differences between respite and full-time caring. It has been argued by Kelan (2008, 2009) that the performance of gender extends beyond the home into the workplace where normative masculine traits tend to be rewarded. Studies by Kirton (2007) and Schofield et al. (2013) show foster carers, though benefitting from financial reward, are largely not motivated by payment to care for children. While these studies, unlike mine, do not reflect on foster-fathers the evidence from the literature is that foster carers do not foster for financial award alone. Through the association of professionalism, with payment, fostering has become a paid service delivered by carers in their home, with the home doubling as work-base and home-place. Fostering has transformed from an ideal of voluntarism to a more professional service. Kirton (2007) argues the professionalisation discourse can be viewed as adapting to changing social norms, reducing gender inequality and exploitation in fostering. The data from my study show men value professionalism which means feeling respected, being part of a team and paid, though they are primarily motivated to care for children. However, many men in my study continue to identify with breadwinning masculinity. The professionalising discourse has enabled men to become home-based workers as they reproduce masculine norms constructed around breadwinning.

The professionalising trend to fostering encourages men to take up fostering, but it is not the sole motivating factor. Though acknowledging the benefits of professional status men, in the study, present fostering as a caring activity. As Adam explained:

“It’s a very good rewarding job; you [are] putting something back into a kid’s life which you do as a matter of course every day. I’m looking after them”.

Adam associates fostering with employment and described it as a rewarding job. This emotional connection with children and the sensitivity offered by men contrasts with the professionalisation of caring tasks and stereotyped gender roles. Most professionals argue for a distance between paid

employee and service-user (Osgood, 2006), though foster-fathers in my study seem to contradict this aspect of professionalism. The emotionality of caring was tenderly presented by Alex who explained: “[for] every kid that’s gone, I’ve shed a few tears”. There is no self-regulatory framework to fostering nor is there a recognised code of ethics specific to fostering. Rather, the professionalisation of fostering is imposed by external professionals and organisational standards that manage the delivery of fostering (Wilson and Evitts, 2006).

Through the narratives foster-fathers present an ethic of care, beyond being a professional care-worker. They perform caring tasks with children and act against the pressures for non-emotional masculinity. Many men in the study recognise the child’s need for emotional connection. Most show that they want to provide children with a nurturing and emotionally warm environment and to do this they perform tasks within families that subvert stereotypical gender roles. There is evidence, from the men’s narratives, to show a process of men constructing professionalism as paid carers to become foster-fathers who care for children. This constructing of professionalism opens up fostering to men in ways not currently attributed to them, within a fostering system founded on the male breadwinner and female homemaker dichotomy. Foster-fathers affirm relationships with children, involving emotionality and reflection, beyond those associated with professionalism alone. The professionalising discourse may reduce gender inequality and encourage men to foster, but professionalism, as paid carers, is not the main motivator found in my study for men to foster.

Emotional support and personal care

There is a wealth of literature on the professionalisation of the various caring professions and the associated risk of regulation through competency-based models (Crompton, 1987; Dominelli, 1996) that dissociates caring from emotional warmth (Osgood, 2006). The roles men undertake in fostering extend beyond professionalism and move towards emotional support to children. Professionalism results in distance from service users, specific occupational skills, specialist training and the restriction of access to the profession. Foster care does not itself possess these elements as it is

managed by social workers and fostering agencies in line with National Minimum Standards (2011) and Fostering Regulations (2011). Foster care is the recipient of elements and aspects of professionalism and there is a professionalisation discourse to fostering. However, men in this study show they welcome elements of professionalism based on feeling valued and respected. They also take on roles and attitudes which are not professionally orientated nor associated with stereotyped masculinity when they perform tasks to care for children that include emotionality and nurturing. This emotional support is produced in different ways by foster-fathers and it is not always easy to recognise the emotionality behind the support. For instance Mike discussed during his interview why he advocates for children:

“I stick up for these kids that need sticking up for and fight for them in their corner for them. You know nobody does”.

In many ways, this expression of support is masculine as it implies both saviour and control. The welfare discourse, to safeguard and protect children from abuse, appears to restrict the role which men can perform in foster care (Rees and Pithouse, 2008). Emotional warmth with fostered children is a difficult area for foster carers, because it can be misunderstood as risk based behaviour, particularly when it is perceived as not being masculine or associated with men. The benefits for emotional warmth between an adult and child within a safe and secure environment are indisputable (Schofield *et al.*, 2000; Daniel and Wassell, 2002; Cairns, 2004; Smith, 2005; Gilligan, 2008). Following the Children Act (1989) and the sharp increase in allegations made against foster carers ‘safer caring’ was devised by the Fostering Network as a means to promote less risky fostering practice (Slade, 2006). The threat of an allegation and adherence to safer care practice can at the very least prohibit instinctive acts of emotional warmth from men to children, particularly when hugging a child may be seen as risky and could be perceived as abusive.

In contrast to the expected withdrawal from emotionality, this study has unearthed evidence to show some men promote obvious emotionality in child care. Chris in his narrative told stories to

show his empathy with fostered children and that he understood the need for children to feel comforted as he himself had been in care:

“[Partner’ name] was there I put her [foster girl] head in my shoulder and you could feel it. All the rubbish draining out of her and she was lovely and when she went she said ‘this is the best’. Now I shouldn’t have done that. I should’ve asked her permission ‘can I comfort you’. Whoever made that rule up has got their head up their arse and I’m sorry I said that they have its utterly preposterous, I know”.

Chris is aware that he is acting outside of an expected role within fostering by letting the girl rest her head on his shoulder, though his partner was present to witness this act. He remonstrated against rules that restrict emotional warmth. As an adult he understands his own childhood experiences of parental rejection and need for childhood attachment. He is conscious of the risk for allegations to be made against him and chooses to challenge authority which he said was not child friendly. Chris performs a role he perceives as important due to his own appreciation of the importance for moments of emotional warmth with children. Chris is very adept at retelling stories, having worked as a public speaker, and he relived his stories each time he told them; and his performance as storyteller affirms masculine norms. He gives children strong boundaries and moments of warmth rather than an all accepting and nurturing environment. His narrative is strong on personal resilience and community support because his childhood experiences informed him that he had to become self-sufficient and seek-out his own support networks. His emotionality is closely linked to his own experiences and therefore he tries to create moments of emotional connection with children whilst acknowledging they are independent of him.

Hugs and cuddles are contentious acts in fostering as they are easily misconstrued as inappropriate within a welfare discourse. Ben and David both explained during the interviews the dilemma of providing hugs or cuddles to children. Ben told a story where he hugged a child who he had previously looked after:

“I never had my head in the clouds, I always thought if you could do just a little bit to help a child occasionally you get feedback, so I took a child out every Friday because he was banned from school and he shot up like a foot and a half now and I saw him a month or so ago and he come over and gives us a cuddle. Them days out [with me] he really enjoyed”.

In this instance, the hug is an acknowledgement of their past relationship and affirms a bond between an adult man and child within a safe and trusted environment. The instinctive show of emotional warmth by men is problematized in fostering as they tend to be unplanned, unregulated and unsanctioned within a system requiring child care plans and safer caring agreements. David, who described himself as a secondary carer to his expert partner, understands that children require emotional warmth and how fostering is prohibitive:

“Well, it’s restricting in both ways because you have now got to be so much more careful, I mean its normal little girls want a cuddle, so they get their cuddle. Make sure they are not on your lap, squeeze them in beside you on the chair or whatever, when [foster girl] wants a cuddle she gets a cuddle, she gets a goodnight kiss. Well, I always have a laugh I call it [Foster girl] cuddle and her heads within about that much of me [arm’s length] and her bodies within about that much of me [arm’s length] and her arms which never touch that sort of thing, but it’s a token gesture it counts the same”.

In this story David describes planned emotionality negotiated between adult and child where the child’s needs are ascendant. It is interesting that David and the little girl accommodate the risks associated with fostering and the benefits of emotional warmth within a shared bond between adult and child. Gender while being a regulator also enables the production of new realities as David becomes a grandfatherly figure to a fostered child.

Emotional support extends to men providing support to children who have undergone profound difficulties associated with past trauma. Thomas described a very emotional episode:

“When I first witnessed it [self-harming] I was shocked, but what you going to do you are not going to run from it, because if it was your child’s flesh and blood are you going to run away from it? No, so you are going to have to face it head on and I sit with him I talked with him and I cried with him. I let him know we have feelings just like. You know you are probably doing that because you want to feel pain because you feel that nobody appreciates you, nobody respects you. So, I let him know ‘look I respect you right’ and I can remember he sat on the floor and he asked me ‘why you sit on the floor you’re not supposed to sit on the floor’, ‘no I [am] coming down to your level because I’m just like you, I’m just like you. So, therefore this is where I am gonna sit with you and I am gonna talk to you until you understand that I have feelings too’. Yeah because it was frightening to realise that he was not suicidal, but to me for somebody to cut themselves and the blood he could bleed to death, so that was very, very difficult for me”.

This story shocked Thomas because it was outside of his own experience. For Thomas self-harm is a challenging area and to support the self-harming child he felt it was important to reach out to him emotionally. Within the story he shows an adult deliver emotional support to a traumatised child. The story, as told by Thomas, extends beyond paid employment and professionalism involving distance with service users as he becomes emotionally in-tune with the child. In their narratives men are showing a tendency to construct professionalism, albeit unconsciously, and its association with defined occupational tasks, skills and professional distance to become emotionally engaged with childcare and children. It is difficult to gauge the extent to which men construct professionalism from my data, though a narrative emerges to show men construct fostering roles as they perform tasks.

The delivery of personal care by foster-fathers to children is another problematized area due to the perceived risk of an allegation of child abuse (Swain, 2006). The experience of many men is that they are not supposed to take part in personal care with children, as Miles stated:

“It’s funny when we went to our training initially they had a foster carer in to talk to the group and she automatically assumed a woman would be doing the bath time routine you know all the sort’ve more intimate aspects it was like hold on we’re two blokes what are we going to do”.

Miles implied that this experience challenged his motivation to care for children. The association of fostering with women dis-incentivises men away from fostering. The link with professionalism through defined tasks and payment act as an incentive for men to foster. Ben’s experience is that there has been some shift towards an acceptance that foster-fathers can deliver personal care to children:

“We took a baby in, five years ago, and the social worker had to ask the parents, although there was an Interim Care Order, whether I can change nappies. We have just recently had a baby in, on the same sort of order, and it was just taken for granted when she was writing out the placement agreement the [supervising social worker] lady said. You know they’re joint, well, he is the main carer ‘I don’t have any problems well do you?’”.

In this story Ben is reflecting on the dilemma of him as the main carer having to change a baby’s nappy. The social worker, in this instance, supported Ben in the personal care of changing a baby’s nappy though she took the added precaution of pointing it out to the parents that a man was the main carer. Linking personal care with femininity problematizes men performing these tasks. My data, from social workers and men, show some acceptance that men can provide close personal care to children, though the risk that it is seen as dangerous remains.

Alan as the main carer talked about how he feels that he is somehow encroaching on roles that are more associated with women. Alan then explained how he felt obliged to take precautions that his motivation to care for children would not be misconstrued and perceived as risky:

“I think it’s always thought of as a woman’s role looking after children and there is generally this thing of a male carer. I think there is a thing you have to... well its

accepted women look after children [but] I have to bath [boys name] still but I make him wear trunks. I wouldn't go and bath him not wearing trunks and things like that. Whereas with my own son it wouldn't have entered me head to say 'well put your trunks on'".

There is evidence emerging from my study to show that some men show unexpected emotionality with fostered children and that they participate in their personal care. The professionalisation discourse is opening up fostering to men becoming foster-fathers due to the regulation of tasks and the payment of carers. While fostering remains a feminised activity, the regulation of tasks opens up fostering to men so long as they meet these tasks, which are mostly defined by social workers through care planning that includes risk assessment. However, the delivery of personal care and emotionality remain heavily gendered as feminised activities. The problematizing of men as risk in childcare would seem to impede seeing men as assets and possibly limits their professional participation. Foster-fathers can be seen as risky when they perform gender which challenges masculine norms because the provision of personal care or displays of overt emotionality with children are not often associated with men. Some foster-fathers, like Ben and Alan, are trying to reduce the gap between male and female carers by using agency to challenge traditional norms of masculinity and take on child-care tasks as they foster. However, many of the men's interactions with women leave them reaffirming the gap because they accept being redefined as non-carers and prefer to be breadwinners.

Policy and legislation supports the role of foster-fathers as the potential source of positive paternal input into child rearing, but this has not resulted in gender equality because men continue to be seen as risky when they perform feminised roles. This continuation of gendered caring roles may well indicate deeply entrenched inequalities concerning gender and care. Regardless of policy, the evidence is that there is a shortfall concerning social work and child welfare assessments because they fail to identify assets within family networks (Cleaver *et al.*, 2004; Gill and Jack, 2007) or to

engage with fathers (Strega *et al.*, 2008). There is data from my study to show how foster-fathers are engaging with children and young people. Some perform gender as foster-fathers that subvert masculine norms when they provide close personal care for children and become emotionally engaged with childcare. The ways in which foster-fathers produce masculinities that deliver feminised roles, along with masculinised roles, demonstrates the limits of the welfare discourse that views men as risk or asset. The emerging picture of gender in fostering is much more complex than simply seeing men as risks or assets.

Masculinity and the heroic man

There is some strong evidence, emerging from the narratives, to show that men and women express care in different ways with men presenting heroic, warrior and saviour roles that have been associated with masculinity for some time. The heroic man resonates to an imperialist construct of saviours (Dawson, 1996) with the suggestion that the welfare state positions men as breadwinner, nation builders and hero soldiers (Christie, 2006). Mike during his interview showed a strong association with heroic masculinity by stating:

“You’ve got to be an advocate for these kids and fight for their corner against all sorts of authority and try to get the best for them and yes it sometimes makes you feel belligerent, particularly me. I know that, but I’m there to do it for the kids and nobody else would and it affects the way you think about other people. I mean most people would think ‘oh well social workers’. Well so what? But no, you have got to fight social workers for their benefits as well the kids’ benefits because they make some bloody awful decisions”.

The heroic man is seen to be a strong male figure; one who can challenge authority as well as being a man who children can look up to:

“It’s about the child, so as a man your walking in there and you’ve got to be prepared to stand up to be a man because they are looking towards you because most, the male boys, that are in care they are always looking for someone to relate to or to be” (Frank).

In this description Frank explained how he creates his role with boys as a manly figure. Heroic masculinity is discussed by Whitehead (2005) as being a form of masculinity that overarches social divisions between men. Whitehead defines the key characteristic of heroic masculinity as courage that transcends fear of personal vulnerability and argues that heroism defines what it means to be a man (Whitehead, 2005; Hearn and Whitehead, 2006).

With his childhood experiences, Frank understands what it means to be in care and he explained during his interview that he hopes to promote stability in children's lives by being a role model. Frank suggests that boys look to him as a role model because he positions himself as a strong masculine character and he explained:

“If they see a strong character or a strong man it's something they want to see, but if you are going to come into work and think you are going to coast it, don't do it [foster] really don't do it. You've got to be able to stand and hold your corner”.

The creation of the strong heroic man is central to Frank's narrative. Heroic masculinity is about performance or performing traditional hegemonic masculinity. The heroic man extends beyond role modelling as some foster-fathers make expressions to show heroism and warrior traits to rescue children. Frank's aim is to present a benign hegemonic masculinity in control, but not damaging because he seeks to restore order into young men's lives. The heroic man is more than mentor or role model, this role is deeply personal for Frank because it relates to his gender identity as a man. Heroic masculinity is much more subjective, patriarchal and personal than a professional fostering role. This patriarchal-figure, though protecting, is not the same as a professionally structured mentoring role where support is scaffolded around the child. The foster-fathers, as they perform gender, construct a strong manly image in contrast to maltreating men. The heroic man does not have to be attuned or empathetic to a child or social workers, and is more associated with traditional masculinity due to its controlling and uncompromising nature.

The manifestation of this saviour and heroic role, by some foster-fathers, relates to an internal self-image of men as saviours who are appropriately in control, but can also be seen to be inappropriate projections of hegemonic masculinity and viewed as signs of aggression. As Whitehead and Hearn (2006) argue heroic masculinity appears to define what it means to be a man. It would seem that men by becoming foster-fathers negotiate versions of masculinity to perform gender along the binary of the heterosexual matrix which both subvert and confirm hegemonic masculinity (Butler, 1990). Mike, whose narrative locates him within the heroic saviour male figure, is often at odds with authority and social work practice which he perceives as not doing enough for children. Performativity is a continuum by which masculinity and femininity is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in accordance to the binary as new regulatory discourses and realities are produced and reproduced. Whitehead (2005) suggests that heroic masculinity is a triad with the villain and cowardly non-man. The villain Whitehead associates with the criminal, but some foster-fathers retell stories where birth-fathers are villains. Mike talked about a child's father and stated:

“He's horrible, he's a villain, he's a thug, batters hell out of her [mother] but not where you can see – all over her stomach”.

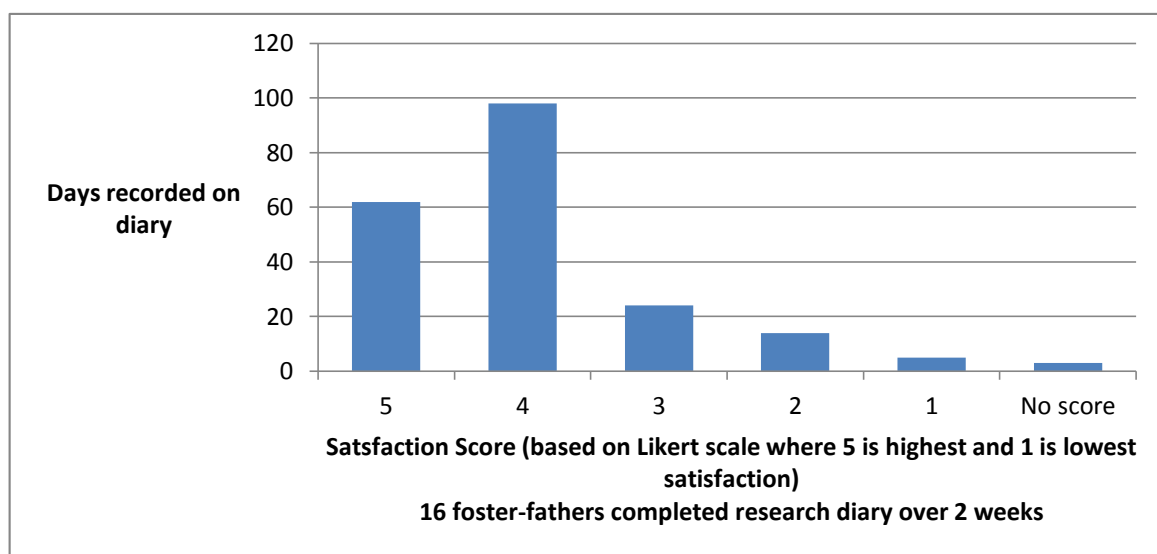
Mike was very critical of the child's father and he set himself up as an alternative heroic father-figure who rescues children. In his work on heroic masculinity, Whitehead identifies the triad of hero, villain and non-man and he suggests the non-man is actually the negation of heroic masculinity. Most men in my study perceive fostered children's birth-fathers, and other pre-care father-figures, as falling into Elizabeth Pleck's (2004) 'bad dad' as they are neither financial providers nor suitable carers for children. Whitehead's (2005) work is concerned with male violence where the non-man position signifies non-conformity to masculinity. The men in my study all present some conformity with masculinity, and some perform gender as heroes who rescue children. Some foster-fathers presented themselves as masculine men who performed heroic masculinity to care for children. They contrasted their masculinity with villainous birth-fathers and they certainly did not take a non-man position as they portrayed themselves as manly non-violent men. This association with heroic

and saviour masculinity exemplifies how foster-fathers reflect on and value their roles as foster carers. It also demonstrates how they negotiate their masculinity in contrast to negative versions of masculinity which they associate with fostered children's birth-fathers.

Men's Satisfaction with Fostering Role and the Performance of Gender

The men were asked to provide a satisfaction score in their diaries. The data from the diaries on their satisfaction rating are presented in Figure 5:

Figure 5 – Men's satisfaction with fostering (N =16)



In their diary, men were asked to use a daily Likert score to reflect on their satisfaction with fostering, with 5 being very satisfied and 1 not satisfied with the day's fostering. In total 16 men completed the diary for 206 days and their data are presented in figure 5. The diaries show that on most days most men were satisfied with fostering, with 78 percent rating each day as either 4 or 5. The range and nature of the activities they participated in are varied, but a common theme is men are satisfied with fostering. Their satisfaction with fostering relates to their gender performance and seems to reflect that they can be both manly and take part in caring tasks with children as foster-fathers.

Subverting and Reinforcing Gender

The data show that foster-fathers recognise children's need for emotional connection. Most men in the study want to provide children with a nurturing and emotionally warm environment and some take this further by becoming emotionally attached with children. Conceptualising the humans into gender divides the species into two on a variety of linguistic, social and psychological levels (Cranny-Francis *et al.*, 2003). There is evidence from the men's narratives that men are constructing professionalism, as paid carers, to become foster-fathers. This constructing of professionalism involving agreed tasks, team working and payment opens up fostering to men in ways not currently attributed to them, within a fostering system founded on the male breadwinner and female homemaker dichotomy. Foster-fathers in my study affirm relationships with children involving emotionality and reflection that extend beyond those associated with professionalism alone. Some men in the study (such as Ben) perform masculinities, and paternities, as foster-fathers that subvert gender roles associated with traditional masculinity. The way in which Ben performs gender is both manly and interchangeable with mothering roles involving intimacy and nurture. Several foster-fathers in the study, such as Peter and Alan, identify with main caring though they are keen to be seen to remain manly. Through performativity we gain a glimpse of the subjective self which subverts masculine norms, however, the foster-fathers continue with the re-enactment of gender that performs traditional and new-traditional roles as foster-fathers. The men do not create new men rather they enact gender differently and produce alternative masculinities but they remain men who foster. The foster-fathers, by performing gender, blur boundaries of feminine and masculine to redesign their own versions of masculinity that include negotiation, reflection and emotionality with children rather than accept hegemonic masculinity based on control over family. However, in the end, performativity moves to performance as men continue to 'do' gender beyond agency and hegemonic roles are reproduced as they, despite their emotionality and caring, retain their supporting roles to women as main carers.

Conclusion

In relation to foster care, families function within society and communities and are influenced by socio-historical, cultural, systemic, social agency and political factors. Foster care research has largely presented foster carers as traditionally orientated and constructed on the Western nuclear family, with foster caring roles based on gender differences (Wilson *et al.*, 2007). This tendency for uniformity of family type would seem to contrast to gender and family research conducted within the social sciences where roles and family type are presented as much more diverse than the rather stereotyped fostering family we see in the literature. Men perform gender as role models which they clearly value as it is seen as masculine. As foster-fathers they reproduce gendered roles to challenge and support stereotyped versions of masculinity. They construct patriarchal models within fostering which produce mentoring and social learning for children. Acknowledging that some men abuse children and allying this to the stereotyping of men creates a dilemma regarding foster-fathers as they can be problematized as risky. Organisational and personal modes of functioning and assessing influence professional decision-making and judgements. Gender concepts are often misunderstood or go unnoticed, with for instance mother-blame and father-ignoring being noted factors in child welfare work (Featherstone and Peckover, 2007; Dominelli, 2008). Foster-fathers are expected to act within a parental role based on gender assumptions and stereotyping within a non-interchangeable version of mothering and fathering.

The emerging evidence from my study is that there are distinct roles and tasks that are allocated to men as carers within fostering families. There are traditionally gendered roles, but other roles emerge to show there is some transforming of gender identity and roles within the fostering family. An emerging theme from my research is that foster-fathers identify with fostering as it enriches their lives. In my research men are seen to be caring, empathetic, nurturing and emotional as they negotiate their versions of masculinity within fostering. Concurrently, they are also breadwinners who value payment as home-workers and are often support to a woman as main carer. They

perform roles and act out tasks as foster-fathers that reproduce existing gender relations, but they also create new masculinities as caring men. Their gender performances are nuanced by their daily realities because they care for children; certainly they 'do' gender as men, but some also 'undo' gender as they become main carers within fostering families. However, gender as the normative is seen to regulate what is expected of men, both of themselves and by others, as existing gendered relations remain largely intact despite their fostering experiences. The next chapter reflects on the foster-fathers relationships with social workers.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RELATIONS WITH SOCIAL WORKERS

Introduction to the Chapter

The interaction between foster-fathers and social workers has largely gone unrecognised in the literature. Social work, by operating within systems and with people, is described as an occupation which requires skills in both personal relationships and the organisation of work (Howe, 1987). Working with men, as actors participating in the delivery of foster care to children, is an environment for social workers to employ both interpersonal and organisational skills. This interaction for foster carers is a significant professional relationship. The nature of this interaction is influenced by perceptions and therefore it is important to understand how foster-fathers and social workers perceive one and other. The lack of clarity around the nature of these perceptions indicates there is a significant gap in knowledge in the delivery of foster care. By reflecting on foster-fathers this study has gathered data on how they perceive their relations with social workers and how social workers organise male foster carers. The data are presented to shed light upon the relations between foster-fathers and social workers.

In this chapter I draw on the 70 social worker questionnaires as well as the men's narrative interviews. To maintain anonymity for the social workers I have numbered the questionnaires from 1 to 70. Foster care operates within connecting social systems (Parsons, 1951; Luhmann, 1995) where social work is systemically seen to have a central position (Fulcher and McGladdery, 2011). This chapter begins by introducing some key concepts on social systems, including family systems and ecology theory, as they relate to foster care and social work, followed by presenting the data from foster-fathers and social workers. My data show how social workers perceive foster-fathers within masculine norms, with men as breadwinners and support to a woman main carer. Most social workers recognise men have distinct roles in fostering and some understand gender roles are

evolving; however, there is little evidence of any structured support provided to men to negotiate their roles as foster carers. My data also show foster-fathers to favour team working and wanting to feel valued though there is a tendency for them to feel ignored and overlooked as carers, with some feeling overly monitored by social workers. The social workers expect gendered performances by men even when they are faced with performativity when some men perform gender differently and take on non-traditional roles. Through my data, social workers appear to be instrumental to reconstructing the conditions for performativity to turn to performance and reaffirm their traditional stereotype of men. This chapter is concerned with the relationship between foster-fathers and supervising social workers.

Fostering Systems and Social Work

Foster carers are social agents acting within a myriad of social systems including those associated with fostering, family and childcare; as well as social inequalities on age, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. The ways by which these social systems intersect have a considerable influence on the performance of foster-fathers and their gender identity. Social systems were initially conceived as functionalist and linear (where social connections are seen as fairly simple and straight forward as they more or less progress on a straight line between systems), which had limited application to more complex non-linear social systems and therefore has become less useful as a theoretical explanation. Systems theory, closely related to functionalism, has been reinvigorated with alternative systems theories emerging, such as ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); family systems theory (Kerr and Bowen, 1988; Bowen, 1990; McGoldrick *et al.*, 1999); complexity and chaos theory (Harvey and Reed, 1996; Kiel and Elliott, 1996; Prigogine, 1997; Walby, 2007); and attachment theory (Howe, 1995b). These theories all reflect on the interconnectedness of intersecting systems and the relations they exert on individuals.

Family systems theory developed from general social systems theory to reflect principally on families. Fostering is undertaken within families and it is of interest to this study to look at family systems theory and reflect on how this may relate to fostering. The family systems theory suggests that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another but should be conceived of as a part of their family as the family is an emotional and physical unit (Bowen, 1990). Families are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals, none of whom can be understood in isolation from the system (Kerr and Bowen, 1988). According to Bowen (1990), a family is a system in which each member has an allocated role to play where there are rules to respect. Members of the system are expected to respond to each other in a certain way according to their role, which is determined by relationship agreements. Within the family, tasks are tailored to meet familial needs with problems resulting when needs go unmet. The relationships within fostering extend beyond the internal family to include fostered children, their biological parents and social workers. The performance of gender, by foster-fathers, therefore encompasses a wider social system than their family as interactions with social workers and fostered children influence gender performance.

Social systems theory influenced Bronfenbrenner in his development of ecology systems theory and his nested concept of four different social environments that influence childhood growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Ecology theory is a significant theoretical framework underpinning childcare in Britain (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) allied to a model of evidence-based practice and professional knowledge for social workers (Jack, 1997, 2000; Calder, 2003). From this ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), foster care can be perceived as a nested cluster of social settings which range from the networks of relationships in a foster home to organisational contexts, involving the statutory care of children and young people along with national policies and statutes which frame foster care environments (Fulcher and McGladdery, 2011). Through referencing ecology theory to fostering, Fulcher and McGladdery (2011) argue that the social worker has a central role in the management and organisation of foster care. As most

fostering families include a man, the relationship between social worker and foster-father is important though the evidence from the literature (Newstone 1999; Gilligan 2000; Wilson *et al.*, 2007; Gilligan 2012) is that this relationship is overlooked by social work practice.

There is little, if anything, known about the relationship between social workers and foster-fathers. Social work intervention in families is generally constructed around problematized families where the social worker intervenes in the private family space. Social work does not routinely invade this private space and in effect this intervention, with problematized families, opens-up these families to the public space associated with employed social workers and other childcare professionals (Dominelli, 2002). Fostering families are different as they routinely open-up their private family space to social work practice and the public sphere. It follows on from discourses of disadvantaged groups that anti-oppressive practice is required to equalise actions of social work practice to facilitate responses tailored to meet individual service-user needs and offset disadvantage, rather than provide generalised and bureaucratised services. I have gathered data from social workers and foster-fathers and through this data have been able to reflect on fostering systems and relations with social workers. In the next section I present this data to look at social workers' perceptions of foster-fathers.

The Social Workers' Perception of Men who Foster

This section of the thesis focuses on the findings from the social worker questionnaire to look at supervising social workers' relationships with foster-fathers. There are mainly two areas of work which supervising social workers undertake with foster carers, which are: firstly, the assessment of prospective carers; and secondly, ongoing supervision, support, review and re-assessment of approved foster carers.

Generalised assessments of men as carers by social workers

A key component of the supervising social work role is the assessment of foster carers. The assessment of prospective foster carers has two connecting aspects: firstly, an evaluation of what the candidate can offer, their suitability along with strengths and weaknesses; and secondly, to assess and develop the candidate's ability to change or grow with fostering (Chapman and Morrison, 2009). Brown and Calder (1999) argue the open-family system is perceived as more flexible in relation to inter-family roles and more open to change, which is important when embarking upon becoming a substitute carer to a child who has experienced insecurity and trauma. By comparison, a closed-family, akin to rigidity, is less able to renegotiate roles during crisis (Brown and Calder, 1999). Shared and agreed family goals require less acute negotiation, as roles are enacted without hindrance or dispute due to the effective team working through the shared goals (Hojer, 2004). The negotiation and renegotiation of roles and tasks is a key function for the social worker working with foster carers. The care team working with 'looked after' children is in principle coordinated and orchestrated by the child's social worker involving multi-professional members with different tasks and skills. Most studies have concentrated on the woman as foster carer; so little is known about how men as foster carers interact with social workers (Wilson *et al.*, 2007). There is very limited understanding of how social workers formulate their opinions of what men can do, along with any understanding of the process by which social workers negotiate and renegotiate roles within fostering families.

Supervising social workers are allocated to foster carers to provide ongoing supervision, support, review and reassessment. Current studies highlight how foster carers value feeling supported and respected by social workers (Sellick, 1999; Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000; Wilson *et al.*, 2004) but reflexivity in social work practice remains little understood beyond an appreciation that social workers somehow organise fostering (Fulcher and McGladdery, 2011). Through the questionnaire, I asked social workers to reflect on the gender composition of the caring households and which carer they

were likely to see during their visits to carers' homes. The questionnaire responses showed that social workers were aware that men are present in most fostering households as they said 71 percent of these households included a male foster carer. However, during their supervisory home visits, a requirement of National Minimum Standards (Department for Education, 2011), most social workers responded that they were likely to see women only during these visits. In Table 8 I portray the responses from the social worker questionnaires from my study and it highlights how social worker home visits routinely ignore men.

Table 8 – Questionnaire data on who the social workers see during home visits (N = 70)

Who social workers see	Numbers
Mainly women only	50 (71%)
Mainly men only	0
Both men and women	16 (23%)
Not declared	4 (6%)
Total	70 (100%)

The replies, represented in Table 8, demonstrate that none of the social workers visited mainly men only and that less than a quarter mainly visited both men and women. The data, in Table 8, illustrate how social workers perform gender by enforcing regulations and norms that affirm fairly traditional stereotypes by visiting mainly women as carers. These data highlight that men are largely neglected by social workers through the formalised supervision process. The fact that social workers do not visit men, without their female partner, is not surprising given there are very few men only fostering households (less than 2 percent within the agency). However, as most fostering households do contain a man it is a surprise that social worker visits do not routinely include men during the supervision visit to the carer's home. This visiting pattern indicates there is either a conscious decision by social workers to exclude men or they are being opportunistic about the time and contact arrangements for these visits. The social workers visiting patterns suggest that women

account disproportionately for most home visits and it is difficult to know, from this table, what opinion foster-fathers have about social worker visits and any priority they give to attendance during these visits to their homes.

Opportunism, as the rationale for this visiting pattern, is explained by the perception that men are often unavailable for fostering due to paid employment outside of the home, as one respondent declared:

“The majority of the families I work with are traditional families where the male carer works full time and the female carer is a full time foster carer, staying at home”
(Questionnaire 7).

This visiting pattern, of foster carers by social workers, seems to correspond with current research which argues social workers tend to focus on mothers (Featherstone, 2003; Strega *et al.*, 2008; Dominelli *et al.*, 2011). There is little evidence emerging from my data of any discernible negotiation process between social workers and foster-fathers. It can be speculated that men are routinely locked out of caring because social workers do not see them as foster carers in the same way that they see women as carers. This visiting pattern indicates that women are automatically seen as main carers by social workers and it can be argued this visiting pattern, by excluding men, highlights a predominant perception that men are not carers; leading social work practice to concentrate on prioritizing women. It is difficult to envisage foster-fathers feeling valued and respected by social workers who they see all too infrequently.

Alongside a visiting pattern which shows men are disproportionately overlooked by social workers, there is evidence to show social workers feel there are limitations to what men can do as carers. Forty-two of the respondents (N=70) make some reference to the risk or fear of allegations and the practice of safer as being prohibiting factors relating to male carers within the home:

“I believe there is still a lot of reservations around personal care, male carers are very hesitant sometimes due to the fear of allegations and the view that male care givers are more likely to be abusers (statistically) which I don’t really agree with” (Questionnaire 11).

A significant barrier and cause of concern for most foster carers is the risk of an allegation of child maltreatment or abuse (Minty and Bray, 2001). The evidence from studies is that a significant proportion of foster carers (anything from 10 percent to a third) are likely to have an allegation, or complaint, made against them (Fostering Network, 2006). A study in the early 1990s found the highest rates of allegations against foster carers related to physical abuse followed by allegations of sexual abuse (Rosenthal *et al.*, 1991). The practice of safer caring was developed in response to the implementation of the Children Act (1989), in 1992, resulting in foster carer training and a guidance book (Bray, 1994; Slade, 2006).

The influence of safer care practice is strongly expressed by a respondent stating:

“It’s more about safe caring than men actually unable to undertake a task as well as a woman” (Questionnaire 67).

Questionnaire references show safer caring (Slade, 2006) is a limiting factor that relates more to men than women:

“There may be particular issues around safe caring which merit female-led responsibilities” (Questionnaire 17).

Most studies into instances of child maltreatment or allegations of such actions within foster care highlight that men are disproportionately more likely than women to have an allegation made against them (Bray and Minty, 2001). The evidence from my study is that social workers are formulating their assessment of men in relation to risk and a sense of restriction to what they can do as foster carers. My data highlight how social workers perform gender by enforcing regulations and norms that affirm fairly traditional stereotypes and by playing safe by seeing men primarily through

the 'risk' lens. This has then been incorporated into the bureaucratic requirements of social workers through risk assessments as the driving force behind child welfare, as evidenced in Table 8 which highlights how social workers prioritize visiting women during their supervisory home visits to carers' homes. When foster-fathers perform gender outside of masculine norms, men can be seen to be risky. The reproduction of gendered norms fits with Pleck's (2004) 'good-dad bad-dad' binary as men are expected to conform to masculine norms. Social workers perform gender to affirm stereotyped masculinity and they help to create the conditions for the reproduction of existing gender relations by seeing men as non-carers who support a caring woman.

Following on from the perceived risk men present, and the need to practise safer caring within the home, men are restricted from providing "personal care due to fear of allegations" (Questionnaire 11). Men are perceived to be less able to provide personal care to children as it conflicts with masculine norms when:

"In relation to safe care vulnerable female children would not be placed with single male carers and in households where the male was the main carer. The female will generally undertake personal hygiene tasks for the children. In some cases females may offer a more nurturing/emotional comfort role" (Questionnaire 24).

The performance of gender by some social workers constructs fostering around masculine norms where nurturing is not available to men, which limits what they do as foster carers. Social workers expect performances from men that 'do' gender and when faced by performativity which challenge these norms they seek to reconstruct the conditions for performativity to turn to performance and affirm their traditional stereotype of men as risks or assets.

There are signs that foster care is organised within traditionally gender norms. This gendering of fostering roles means men are able to provide activities with children that are more recreational than nurturing because: "The female is the nurturing carer and the male carer provides the fun"

(Questionnaire 15). The theme emerges, throughout the study, that men take part in recreational activities with children, which are seen as additional to the main care provided by women. Walby argues that new gender roles are emerging, but that men still continue to undertake less essential childcare duties such as transportation and recreation (Walby, 1997). This version of gender roles comes across strongly in the questionnaires:

“Women still tend to be the nurturers, advocates, and liaise with other agencies. Men especially if they are working out of the home are supportive with activities and reinforcing disciplines” (Questionnaire 35)

There is evidence of a demarcation of roles within fostering, founded on gender difference, as social workers tend to perceive men as non-caring members of a household and this opinion seems to affect their assessment of foster-fathers and the on-going support / supervision they provide to men. Social workers tend to reproduce existing gender relations in their practice with foster carers and can see men as a risk when they perform gender to subvert masculine norms.

Social work assessments of foster-fathers are influenced by perceptions relating to gender and risk which restrict the potential role of men who foster. The visiting pattern by social workers does not provide evidence of open-systems as either men are absent or excluded (or a combination of the two) and caring roles are assumed to be feminine. Several studies examining social work practice highlight the difficulties inherent in undertaking assessments. A study by Cleaver et al. looking at social workers using the *‘Children in Need and their Families Assessment Framework’*, found that social workers were neither fully competent in the assessment tool nor sufficiently trained (Cleaver et al., 2004). Other studies focusing on the engagement of men in child welfare instances also critiqued the quality of assessments and the adequacy of social work training (O'Hagan and Dillenburger, 1995; Featherstone, 2003; Strega et al., 2008), equally the experience of same-sex couples fostering has found a deficiency in assessments, attitudes and training (Hicks, 2005; Logan and Sellick, 2007). The evidence from my questionnaire point towards gendered social work practice

based on masculine and feminine norms (Butler, 1990). An independent inquiry into child abuse within a foster care family concluded there was a major deficit in the application of knowledge-based practice, with a subsequent deficiency in social work learning and training (Parrot *et al.*, 2007). A hypothesis from my study is that social workers are not effectively assessing nor working with men as carers, with the evidence pointing to a lack of negotiation and renegotiation by social workers with foster-fathers. Men who foster are assessed and approved as foster carers, but they are under-represented in the literature and practice because men are seen as secondary to a woman carer. The assessment of men comes across as limited because it is constructed around the gender difference discourse whereby women are routinely seen and assessed as carers and men are not.

Care planning in the delivery of fostering

A central function of social work is the supervision, support and organisation of fostering placements and the responses to the questionnaire provide lots of references concerning the importance of matching the foster placement to the child's needs. While the generalised assessment of men as carers locates them within the supporting role, secondary to a female partner, they are still seen to offer something valuable to children. Significantly, men are presented as having a specific function in relation to some child needs, such as recreational activities and positive role modeling:

“Male carers can be of vital importance to the wellbeing of the child in terms of a positive male role model, to give a different experience and hopefully an experience of being cared for safely and sensitively – there must be an awareness of previous abuse via a male caregiver which will need to be carefully addressed” (Questionnaire 37).

The male role model is multi-dimensional as it relates to the generalisation associated with role modelling within a social learning environment which contrasts to pre-care negative male role models associated with maltreatment and control. Foster-fathers who perform masculine norms based on the 'good dad' are seen as assets whilst fostered children's biological fathers are more likely to be seen as deadbeat and 'bad dads'. Elizabeth Pleck (2004) argues risk and asset are constructed largely around breadwinning masculinity, though she acknowledges the 'good dad' has

altered over time as men's roles have changed to include more involved fatherhood though the 'bad dad' has remained rigidly associated with the deadbeat man. The gendered perception of risk associated with deadbeat masculinity, which fails to be the breadwinner or traditionally manly, permeates my data from social workers and foster-fathers with evidence emerging to show the value placed on traditional masculinity.

Many social workers felt that foster-fathers provide a positive male image for children, in contrast to the negative male role models many children are thought to have experienced in their pre-care history. This aspect of foster-fathering, to provide a positive father-figure, is a common theme to emerge from the data:

"A young girl who had a negative view of men as all her mother's partners abused her mother. The male carer demonstrated that men can be kind, loving, trustworthy and safe to be with" (Questionnaire 1).

Through role modelling, and by becoming a father-figure, men who foster come into their own in the eyes of many social workers. By becoming a positive male role model, foster-fathers replicate positive masculinity to contrast with more negative versions, seen to be presented by fostered children's biological fathers. Placements for children are organised in accordance to the child's needs and the actual skills of the foster caring household. There is evidence, from my data, to show that gender is important when social workers believe men provide something different to women in foster care. Foster-fathers are seen to perform gender as positive men in children's lives and provide a version of masculinity. This recreation of masculinity, albeit a positive version, affirms existing gender relations where foster-fathers perform as heroic figures in contrast to the villainous birth father (Whitehead, 2005).

The centrality of the child's needs is very laudable and shows the value social workers place upon supporting children. However, there is not a lot of evidence to show that men receive support and

supervision in recognition of the roles and tasks they undertake as carers. Some social workers did stress the need for male carers to attend training and a couple mentioned specific male foster caring training or support groups and that:

“If trained and supported well like female carers, male foster carers can provide an excellent service” (Questionnaire 1).

The implication is that men are overlooked for resources and have to show their ability to care for children as social workers do not assume this role for men. Social work debates have focussed on ‘being professional’ in relation to service-users, competency and power with professional regulation (Dominelli, 1996), through initially the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and latterly the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards, focusing on licence to practice to enhance public confidence. Professionalism implies a position of privilege re-enforced by expert knowledge, for example historically the medical model of disability firmly placed power in the hands of medical professionals (Fawcett, 1998; Corker and Shakespeare, 2002). This professional position, by social work, affects relationships with men when social workers assume a privileged position in the lives of fostered children and my data show that men struggle with this position.

The social construction of professionalism facilitates and limits the role of personal agency, at least to some extent. Social work practice is seen to focus on the assessed needs of the child; with some recognition that men have a role to play in looking after children. However, this is constructed around perceptions of masculine and feminine roles within families so that men are seen to be positive male role models or father-figures rather than as carers for children. Gendered relations continue to define how men foster and they continue to be foster-fathers who support a woman main carer rather than seen as foster carers in their own right. This allocation of fostering roles, by recourse to stereotyped constructions of masculine and feminine norms, extends to patterns of support which overlook men. The perception that men cannot be available for fostering due to work commitments is clearly expressed by a social worker who stated:

“Most of the male carers I work with have paid employment outside of the home and this means that they are less able to attend training, activities, support groups and meetings for the child in their care”(Questionnaire 37).

The implication from this comment is there are structural factors, rather than personal ones, as men’s employment out of the home restricts their fostering activities.

There is some divergence between what foster-fathers do as carers and what social workers presume. Foster care and childcare social work practice is arranged around the child’s assessed needs and the subsequent child care plan is formulated to detail how the fostered child is to be supported. The inference here, at the least, is that care tasks and foster care roles should be detailed within the care plan which is reviewed every six months (Department for children schools and families, 2010). The child’s care plan is an opportunity to reflect on the role men play with children and to maintain consistency between social workers and foster-fathers by attributing and agreeing tasks. There are many expressions in the questionnaires that demonstrate the importance of children’s needs and the matching process though the actual formalisation of this through the child’s care plan is referred to only four times by three social workers (representing less than 5 percent of the total sample of seventy), these responses are:

1. “There are inherent differences between genders of course, but everyone is different and the role is to meet the child’s needs and fulfill their care plan” (Questionnaire 64);
2. “The importance is dependent upon the needs of a child for the specific task of matching alongside the behaviours, history and care plan” (Questionnaire 19);
3. “This will depend on the needs of the young person and the care plan etc.” (Questionnaire 39);
4. “Fulfill the child’s care plan” (Questionnaire 64).

While there are some really positive comments about childcare needs and an understanding of foster care organisation, this is not evidenced by recourse to the formalised structure of the child's care plan. The seventy social worker questionnaires show how gendered relations are constructed around distinct roles for men and women and the recognition of increased risk to men in relation to possible allegations of child abuse. However, there is little evidence through either social work home visits or recourse to care planning that men's distinct role in fostering is formally recognised.

As with care planning, safe caring issues are frequently mentioned whereas the reference to an actual formalised foster caring household safer care policy is only made once:

“But because of safe care issues the households where the men are fully involved implement a balanced safer care policy to protect all involved” (Questionnaire 36).

The evidence appears to present a dichotomy between the declared roles and tasks which men play and a lack of formalisation and structure to the support and supervision which is provided to men. Practicing safer care in the fostering home influences gender performance, because men have to adhere to fostering practices that are not deemed to be risky. The construction of practice around risk assessments prohibit the roles and tasks available to foster-fathers as they tend to adhere to masculine norms, which limit what men can do in the home. The implication is that men are less able to undertake close personal care with children or become too emotionally involved with them. My data conform to Elizabeth Pleck's 'good-dad bad-dad' binary as social workers restrict tasks and roles available to men through a welfare discourse that sees men as risk once they move away from masculine norms. This is in contrast with some of the men's narratives which show them to perform gender that 'undo' and subvert gender norms as they become emotionally engaged with children and some undertake close personal caring tasks. The evidence from the social workers' questionnaires point to men being allocated a supporting role based on gendered constructs of traditional masculinity which goes unrecognised in care planning for children.

The essential male role – men as assets and men as risk

The data from the social worker questionnaire indicate that foster-fathering roles are different to foster-mothering roles. The literature presents fostering families as tending to fall into traditionally gendered roles (Gray and Parr, 1957; Bebbington and Miles, 1990; Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000; Sinclair *et al.*, 2004). There is evidence from my data that many social workers see foster care as falling within traditionally masculine and feminine norms. Taking this gendered conceptualisation further several attitudinal themes emerge. At one level, gender is presented as differently formed with more traditionally understood gender roles as:

“Men and women have different roles in society therefore it is reasonable to say they would have different roles in fostering” (Questionnaire 31).

This traditionally seen difference between the genders is much more explicitly referred to by the response: “Females tend to do more of the nurturing” (Questionnaire 47). Some social workers’ personal belief systems conform to the male breadwinner and woman homemaker model which is transferred to fostering so that:

“Usually in my experience, in two parent households, the male has full-time employment whilst the female is full-time carer. Males have usually played active role in evenings and weekends” (Questionnaire 39).

In this expression men are secondary carers to a nurturing and caring woman partner. Men are seen by some social workers to perform gender in line with traditionally defined roles. Some of the questionnaires show social workers presume men perform gender to affirm traditional gender roles, as they are allocated a secondary and breadwinning role to a woman main carer.

The demarcation of roles based on stereotyped gender comes across, through the questionnaires, as an aspect of social work practice in relation to foster care. My data also show that social workers understand men play an active role in fostering beyond the breadwinner, but this is somewhat less than, or additional to, the care given by women to children:

“I believe often the main tasks of fostering are undertaken by the female carers and the more peripheral tasks are undertaken by the male carers” (Questionnaire 15).

Men are seen to perform gender within masculine norms and this does not expect them to be carers as existing gender relations are reproduced. Men are seen to provide balance to family life because they add something different to women:

“Men can offer significant and crucial support to their partners, but also be involved in doing practical activities with children and young people and offer a different perspective” (Questionnaire 28).

The gender performance expected of men is to support a woman main carer and not to become the main carer as this subverts the masculine norms expected by this social worker.

Responses from the questionnaires show how some social workers view gender differences as both natural and socially constructed because male and female roles are seen as different:

“Fundamentally I believe that there are specific differences between men and women based on social influences, value bases, inherently, etc. [and] that children and young people benefit from the two perspectives within their lives. This provides children and young people with a balance and so although I believe that single carers can meet the needs of children and young people to a high level, I think it is equally important that children and young people have the opportunity to learn from both males and females” (Questionnaire 30).

The idea that there is a natural difference between the genders has been much debated (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005, 2007; Hakim, 2007). Hakim argues individual decisions concerning parental and work roles socially re-enforce gender demarcation along traditional lines as they make sense for many people (Hakim, 1998, 2006). Hakim’s preference theory, to explain mass decision-making and the reproduction of gendered roles, is strongly refuted by Crompton and Lyonette who argues gender demarcation represents structural inequality (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005, 2007). It would

seem that many social workers correspond to the concept that there is a difference between men and women beyond biology and they perform gender to affirm that parenting roles are relatively non-interchangeable.

It has been shown that there are diverse forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995), and Joseph Pleck argues the interrelationships between masculinity and fathering are complex connections that influence both children and fathers (Pleck, 2010). Whitehead (2005) suggests that heroic masculinity overarches social position as it reflects for many men what it means to be a man. However, the widespread notion that children universally benefit from an essential father role, which connects with a uniquely male contribution, according to Joseph Pleck (2010) has not been proven. Joseph Pleck argues that there is little evidence to support the concept that children require a distinctly male or masculine father-figure or indeed that there is a simple paternal role in parenting. Joseph Pleck (2010) acknowledges fathering is shifting from the traditional discourse to a more generic one, equating to fathers being really important in the lives of children, which he conjectures corresponds to the paternal importance hypothesis (Pleck, 2010). In work, by Elizabeth Pleck, reflecting on the 'good dad-bad dad' binary (Furstenberg, 1988; Pleck, 2004) she recounts how constructs of the 'good dad' concept have changed over time, so that fathers are now expected to become more nurturing. In contrast, the 'bad dad' construct has tended to be more statically based upon 'deadbeat dads' who are ineffective financial providers to children and the family (Pleck, 2004). The complexity of the connections between masculinity and fathering and the effects on the assessment of fathers by child welfare professionals would seem to correspond to this 'good dad-bad dad' binary (Dominelli *et al.*, 2011). The effect this can have on social work practice is that men are associated as good when they are effective breadwinners and this perception is difficult to break away from. In fostering, foster-fathers are expected to be breadwinners. Alternatively, foster-fathers who are not breadwinners, but are main carers to a working woman partner, can be seen as unusual as they are found less frequently than women. Within this construct it is easier for social workers to accept men

as essentially breadwinners who can provide a man's perspective to children as role models. Gender performance is therefore affirming traditional masculinity within existing gender relations as foster-fathers are assigned a distinct role in foster care; a role which falls somewhat short of becoming carers in their own right, particularly as men continue to associate with the paid aspect of fostering. I have used data (e.g. page 132) to show foster-fathers continue to identify with breadwinning masculinity, with some, through paid care, seeing themselves as home-based workers.

Men are allocated specific roles as foster-fathers by social workers, a comment reflecting this perspective is:

“The majority of main carers are female. Men who are supporting carers are mostly involved in the disciplining of children and less in touch with the physical, emotional and social aspects of a child's development” (Questionnaire 3).

My data challenge this social worker's assertion (questionnaire 3) because the men's narratives, show foster-fathers are physically and emotionally in touch with children and aware of their social development. The questionnaires suggest that social workers who focus on the main carer end up excluding men from many fostering tasks. My data demonstrate social workers use a discourse of gender difference to define tasks that men can undertake with children and others they cannot, as men can be deemed risky when not seen as support to a woman carer. In my study, some men's narratives challenge social workers' assertion that men are secondary carers. Additionally, some men's narratives show them to be emotionally attached to fostered children. It would seem that social workers' relationships with foster-fathers are influenced by adhering to traditional differences between men and women, where roles are founded on men as providers and women as carers. Foster-fathers are therefore assigned a secondary role as support carer or breadwinner. This social construction of gender difference restricts the performance of gender to masculine norms, and performativity in the long-term is regulated by traditionally gendered relations as foster-fathers are limited from performing gender differently.

Evidence of change and the evolution of foster-fathering

Data from the questionnaires show some social workers perceive that society and gender are going through an evolving process. There is, throughout the data, some evidence of a perceived gender shift regarding men in foster care. This shift is seen to mirror general changes on-going in society which reflect less gender specific roles within families because:

“There is a thread of societal change where the men are stay-at-home dads and this take on what was traditionally perceived as the female role” (Questionnaire 44).

Gender performance is based on the binary logic of two genders, with masculine and feminine norms regulated by discourses around gender. How people perform gender can challenge and affirm the norms and while gender seems to be a regulatory discourse, new versions of masculinity can be produced. My data show how some social workers recognise that gender relations are shifting; one social worker stated there is:

“Huge variation – over time, men have played an increasingly important role in fostering” (Questionnaire 25).

Alongside this general change and evolution in society, some references were made about men becoming more engaged on an individual level in fostering so that:

“Lots of males who are in the background during assessment become an integral part of the foster family/foster couple” (Questionnaire 17).

Foster-fathers are seen to perform a role in fostering which challenge masculine norms at some level. Some social workers perceive gender roles as transforming, as: “I see this [gender roles] as gradually changing as our society changes” (Questionnaire 25). Some social workers recognise that societal change and evolution are having a transforming effect on gender roles in fostering families.

There is some evidence of human agency and social work reflexivity within this transformation process. Butler’s performativity describes the process for constructing individual identity through acquiescence to and subversion of gendered notions of heterosexual masculinity and femininity.

Butler (1994) argues that the hegemonic nature of these gender constructions is very strong both externally and internally to self. The performance of gender is constructed in a time and place, consciously and unconsciously, and because the heterosexual binary of masculine and feminine is so prevalent, personal agency is not sufficient to construct gender dissociated from this binary. However, performance of gender can subvert these deeply held constructs to deconstruct and reconstruct gender roles along and outside the binary:

“I have known many male carers and have found them to be as equipped as female carers. I have known one male carer who was the main carer and specialised in new-borns to adoption, undertaking the caring role and providing introductions to potential adopters” (Questionnaire 60).

My findings show evidence that there is a slow transition from traditional gender roles to new gender roles. The postmodern concept of lived life and experience leads to new ways of being that are alternative to stereotyped constructs (Corker and Shakespeare, 2002) so that social work interaction with actively involved foster-fathers can lead to new understandings of men as carers. Through performativity men perform gender to challenge masculine norms and performativity becomes the mechanism to produce new realities when they in turn are repeated. This means that while gender is a regulatory discourse, the way it is performed can undo gender norms and lead to some renegotiation of masculinity which can lead to men being able to become carers. However, this role is not assumed for men as traditional gender norms are deeply imbedded in social relations. Foster-fathers, therefore, have to continually prove their ability and effectiveness as carers.

The emerging picture is complex and social workers frequently make practice-based decisions without recourse to theorising about what they do (Munro, 2011). This version of social work practice is reflected on by a respondent who stated:

“I believe that men are hugely underrepresented within the fostering arena; this I believe has to do with society’s perception that women make better carers and

traditionally women stayed at home. Although thinking has moved on and what constitutes a family has changed, I think that there are still a lot of people including social workers who have not moved on in their thinking and we still debate much to my horror the appropriateness of men who foster looking after females, as people think that they are more at risk of allegations etc... [sic] I think that there is still a great deal of learning to be done around this area. As said previously I believe that men can foster equally as well as women as long as they are assessed as having the necessary skills for the task" (Questionnaire 30).

The sentiment expressed in this statement could represent the deconstruction of professionalism by a social worker seeking to work with individual situations, groups and people. This social worker recognises that men have a role in fostering as well as how social work limits this role to what are perceived to be less risky situations. It is a positive sign that men should be assessed as "having the necessary skills for the task" though we are unable to deduce if this extends to women. There is an opinion contained in some of the questionnaires that men are locked out of caring tasks, a version expressed by one respondent who stated:

"I think there are a lot of female carers who are the more dominant in the relationship and the male carer is often seen but not heard" (Questionnaire 34).

While much of the evidence upholds a traditional understanding of gendered roles, some social workers recognise the evolution of fostering and gender as part of social change. The narratives from my data illustrate the perception that there is a dynamic aspect to fostering with roles altering due to a variety of reasons, such as the child's needs and agency by individual men.

There is evidence from the data of a perceived change in fostering with a move towards professionalisation of fostering which men are seen to be particularly attracted to, because:

"Men like to feel that their role as foster carer is becoming more of a recognised professional role" (Questionnaire 18).

Along with:

“male foster carers have a lot to offer the profession of foster care and can provide placements which are as successful as single female or the traditional nuclear family placement” (Questionnaire 38).

The data show a trend within social work that gender roles, within families and society, are undergoing some change, though social work practice does not seem to participate in the negotiation and renegotiation of these gender roles within fostering families. Fostering is an emotional activity as it involves caring for children who have often experienced adversity and trauma. While there is evidence of some social workers recognising change in family and gender there is little to show they actively encourage enhanced participation by men in caring tasks which continue to be seen as women’s tasks.

Summary of Social Workers’ Perceptions of Men who Foster

A conclusion from my data, in relation to the social workers perceptions of foster-fathers, is that there is a tendency for men to be seen as secondary to women as carers. There is evidence from my data to show that many social workers perceive a difference between the genders that defines fathering and mothering as distinct roles that are relatively non-interchangeable. Therefore, many social workers perform gender to affirm masculine norms by not seeing men as carers. My data show that there is a tendency for social workers to look for general and prescriptive solutions rather than individual ones, as men are seen as risky due to their gender rather than through individual assessment. My data support Munro (2011) in her review of child protection social work where she found that social work practice is often under-theorised and too prescriptive. Social work operates within systems that adapt and evolve; foster care has changed significantly over the decades. Luhmann argues systems have the capacity for self-organisation (Luhmann, 1995) which allows for a more complex understanding of social interaction. The systems in which social work operates are complex and often chaotic structures (Hudson, 2000; Green and McDermott, 2010) where reflective

practice (Ruch, 2007, 2009) and complexity thinking (Adams *et al.*, 2005) are important aspects in assessment and intervention.

Several themes emerge from the social worker questionnaires. Two main themes are: firstly, foster-fathers are liable to be categorised as support and subsidiary carers; secondly, they are not fully engaged by social workers. Many social workers are looking for, and finding, a rather simplistic and traditional construct of gender which does not recognise the potentially rich and complex nature of fatherhood and male carers. The risk of allegations against men is a restricting influence on the perceived role of men and there is little evidence of any formalised support through home visits or care planning which acknowledges the role of men as foster-fathers (Scourfield, 2006a). Concurrently a counter theme emerges, from the data, to show some social workers recognise the changing nature of society and that social change is affecting the roles of men. However, it can be hypothesised that men without appropriate support from social workers are left to self-organise their role as men to become foster-fathers. There is little evidence from my data to show social workers are routinely reflective in their on-going work with foster-fathers or that they recognise any complexity in their assessments of men who foster as they expect performances that reaffirm hegemonic gender roles.

The Foster-fathers' Perceptions of Social Work Intervention

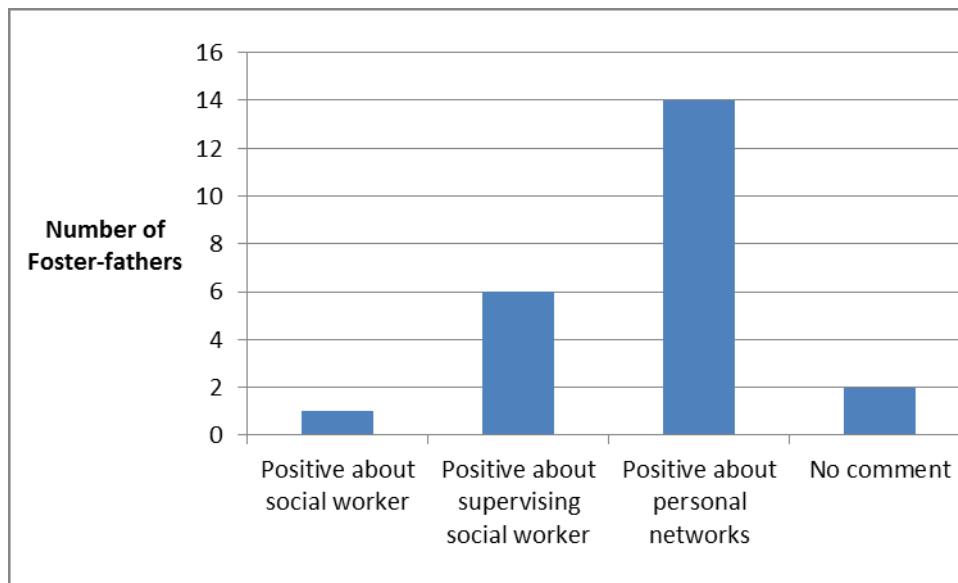
Social work has an uneasy relationship with power, particularly as power is often associated with professional roles. It has been suggested, by Smith (2010), that power is problematic for social workers as they are uncomfortable with the repressive potential of power-imbalance (Compton and Galaway, 1994). Foucault (1990) argued that power is everywhere as it is embodied in knowledge and regimes of truth. The power which social workers utilise within their practice is based on the construction of professional definitions of what is in the best interest of children and the organisation of fostering. It has been argued that professionals perceive themselves as experts and

this professional knowledge provides them with the power to identify what kind of help service users may need (Hojer, 2011). As foster carers are both service-users and service-providers their role and relations with social work is more complex as it is based on personal and professional relationships (Selwyn, 1994; Fulcher and McGladdery, 2011). A study by McDonald et al. (2003) in Worcestershire, through a series of interviews with 10 foster carers, found that the traditional support given to foster carers was not valued by them as it was unable to solve the complex issues and state of impasse that often existed. This study by McDonald et al. (2003) evidenced foster carers prefer team-based and inter-disciplinary interventions which focused on them as equals (McDonald *et al.*, 2003). This section presents the foster-fathers' perceptions of their relations with social workers and I have arranged the data into three areas; team working and feeling appreciated; ignored and professionally under-valued; and monitored and under surveillance.

Team work and feeling appreciated

Teamwork emerges as being important for the foster-fathers. They provided positive comments about their support networks and preferred their own personal network over the formal one provided by social workers. My data also show that they preferred their own supervising social worker over the child's social worker. Figure 6 charts men's positive comments about the support networks.

Figure 6 – Foster-fathers’ positive comments about the support they receive (N = 23)



In Figure 6 data are derived from the responses by men during their first interview and though 23 men were interviewed, only 21 made direct positive references to their support network. The data in Figure 6 highlight most men value their own personal networks and they preferred the support from their supervising social worker over the child’s social worker. The responses by men showed that they are positive about team working which includes working with the childcare team, involving the professionals and carers who work with the child. David, Frank, John and Miles all have had positive experiences of working within the childcare team, as John explained:

“I like working multi-agency; I like working with a lot of different people and being able to put my views and my experiences from my childhood to other people as well. I like to be able to train other people to get involved in the training, I have done [training] in the past not so much recently but training other foster carers”.

John’s opinion of teamwork reflects his satisfaction with feeling listened to and feeling his opinions are valued. His version of team working extends to his participation in delivering training to other foster carers. Alternatively Mike is less positive about his relationship with social workers, but acknowledged: “we get along alright with them because we stick [with children]”. Mike feels his

relations with social workers are 'alright' because of his success in persevering with children who are in his care.

The fostering family is presented by the men as a team in itself. Some comment that they extend the family team to include childcare professionals who provide extra-family support when required.

Frank explained:

"My wife does [support me]; I've got a good strong network of family myself. I've got a good big family and the agency, which I work with, [and] if I'm in dire straits they've got a good team who can just jump and get inside things when I need it and that is, that is imperative that you do, do have a good team".

Some foster-fathers talk about teamwork, based on shared goals and transparent roles. The ways in which they define the team differ as it sometimes relates specifically to the family members and at other times extends to include social workers and other professionals. For Frank there are three levels to his support environment: firstly, his partner; secondly, his extended family; and thirdly, the fostering agency social workers. The experience of Miles, as a gay man with a male partner, adds another dimension to his team working:

"You're sort of aware of that, and I think while [IFA] are quite sort've open, not all social workers are and not all Local Authorities are. So, you sort've are aware that there is a stigma around about a man caring, especially gay men caring, so you just try and be careful and do what you can".

Miles' construction of team work is tempered by his opinion that he does not feel fully accepted as a carer because his sexuality and gender are potential barriers to some professionals. Here we see the effect of intersectionality, as felt by Miles, as sexuality and gender converge to add further levels of discrimination. This is contrary to social work values based on anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 2002a), but corresponds to studies on same-sex fostering (Hicks, 2005). Men appear to like team working and are particularly positive when they feel their contribution is valued. The preference

some foster-fathers express for team working corresponds to a professionalising discourse associated with valuing participants because it sanctions roles (Hojer, 2004), yet contradicts their non-attendance during social work visits as reported in the social worker questionnaires.

While the relationship between gender and the workplace is changing, with feminised skills becoming more valued (Adkins, 2002), performing gender extends beyond the home into the workplace where normative masculine traits tend to be rewarded (Kelan, 2008a, 2009). Therefore, we can conjecture these masculine work-based traits would be transferred to fostering by men strategically to enhance their fostering status. The sanctioning of roles and tasks through team work, linked to childcare planning, can enable men to participate with childcare tasks not readily associated with masculinity, as Assad explained:

“Obviously a lot of persons knew we were involved, but then we had a lot of work with the therapy team from (the IFA), also there was CAHMS involved as well and that was kind of resolved, in a sense”.

Assad’s engagement with therapy relates directly to the child’s needs. Assad, as a Muslim man, explained during interview that his religion is important, particularly as fostering is associated with the Prophet Mohammed. It has been argued that Muslim men’s religious identity is connected to the construction of masculinities and performing gender (Archer, 2009), and that they tend to perceive the every-day dwelling spaces of the home as a female domain (Philips, 2009). In her study involving focus groups of Muslim women, Philips found a diversity of family construction rather than the stereotypical discourse of female submission and passivity. Assad is the only Muslim in this study and his motivation to foster reflects his gender identity. Assad’s motivation corresponds to Philips’ assertion that, though Islam is important to identity, there is considerable diversity within the Muslim community. By becoming a part of the team around the child, Assad participates more directly in the fostered child’s care. Through this team work Assad participates in discussions on

therapy and emotional wellbeing not associated with traditional masculinity. However, his fostering is more personal and cultural than professional as he is not utilising work-based skills in his fostering.

How Foster-fathers perform in team meetings is highly influential as it can bestow unheralded acceptance by others on their caring roles through team working. Men perform gender roles dissociated from power and control through teamwork as against displaying gender which would be understood within the bounds of gender norms. Peter explained how he sees foster care as progressing and evolving:

“I think maybe, maybe because I was a foster carer there’s a lot more people certainly since 10 year ago [so] we get a lot more respect from other professionals. The schools we are constantly in touch with schools and the fact they’ve just been on the phone this morning you know ‘can we do something for [child’s name] they’ve got a PEP [personal educational programme]...School is usually very, very good I’ve had lots of young people going to both schools here and then they are moving up in the summer so I’ve had good relationships with the schools and usually the medics, doctors and that and the dentists”.

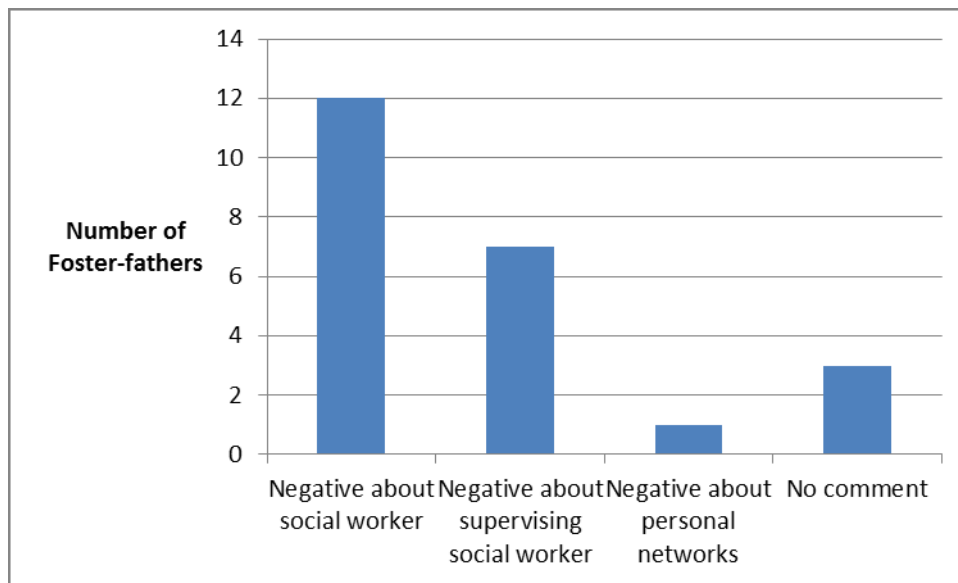
The practice of working with professionals through team working is satisfying for men due to the recognition they get by participating in teams; though there is little evidence to show they are utilising gendered work-based skills in line with Kelan’s (2008, 2009) supposition concerning ICT work. Similarly, ‘doing’ gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) can be contextualised within normative gender roles based on the masculine and feminine binary. Men are acquiring, albeit it slowly, recognition through the performance of successful childcare outcomes rather than utilising work-based skills. The gender performance through team working is beyond ‘doing’ gender (Finch, 2007), as these would be acted out in ways which confirm gender stereotypes of masculinity. Masculine traits are more successful in the workplace, but men seem not to draw on these work-based traditional strategies as foster-fathers.

Through agency and performativity men are performing gender differently as foster-fathers, and while they maintain traditional gender roles, with women as main carers, the way they perform gender is at times unexpected as we would expect the transference of masculine work-based traits to fostering. Team working affords the opportunity for men to engage with professionalism in a way not acknowledged by childcare professionals who perform gender to affirm masculine norms. Through team work, men adjust to become foster-fathers by acquiring legitimised roles. The narratives from men in my study describe a process of negotiation, agency and consultation with partners in their decision to become foster-fathers. Team working is seen by men as a venue to negotiate roles in fostering. Theoretically, men may promote team working as they can perform gender within existing gender relations and transfer work-based masculine traits to fostering, though this does not emerge from my data.

Feeling ignored and professionally undervalued

Men value being seen as professional, as Hojer (2004) suggests foster-fathers become more engaged with fostering when it is a state sanctioned activity. The men's narratives expressed through the interviews highlight a general dissociation from the more formalised support networks provided by social workers, though they do place a higher value on team working. Figure 7 presents the negative comments, by foster-fathers, concerning their support networks:

Figure 7 – Foster-fathers’ negative comments about the support they receive (N = 23)



In Figure 7 data are derived from the foster-father first interviews and though 23 were interviewed only 20 made negative comments about their support network. The men are more positive (see Figure 6, p. 210) and less negative about their supervising social worker than they are the child’s social worker, in line with previous studies (Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000).

The foster-fathers provide evidence that they are overlooked and ignored with regards to the children they look after. Mike, while feeling accepted for his ability to persevere in caring for children, explained that:

“They [social workers] know best, they are trained to do that I’m not, they don’t respect my opinion”.

There is an emerging narrative of powerlessness which is emotionally described by Chris:

“This is the way that we [the social worker] do it we have gotta do this I [the social worker] am under orders. Yeah, half the Nazi party was under orders. It doesn’t make it right I think we should, especially the experienced foster carers, should be given a bit of lee-way because we are not idiots, we see the situation that it is and we make a

judgement on that situation and I think 99 times out of 100, that judgement is the right one”.

The men present a narrative that they care for children though they feel this is unrecognised by social workers and feel unable to fulfil their potential as foster carers.

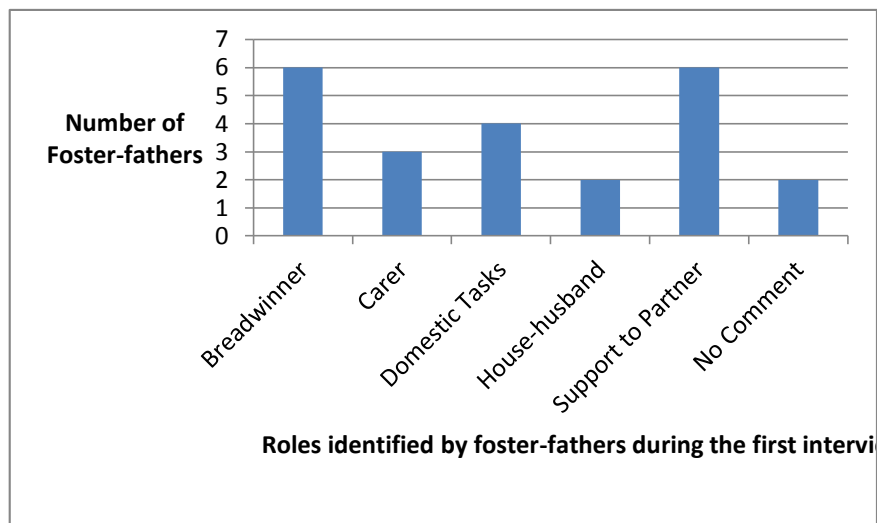
There is the suggestion, from the interviews, that men feel powerless in the face of professionals who hold onto a position of privilege; the cause for this may be power-based professionals or men unaccustomed to a position of suzerainty to social workers, particularly as many of them are women. Chris, who is the main carer, explained that they do not have to rely on the formal support provided by social workers:

“Perhaps if I was on my own I wouldn’t, but [partner] and the family sitting round whatever and I think a lot of social workers they don’t bend, they have got this [attitude], they have been taught this is the procedure”.

Chris by expressing the importance of his family highlighted the importance of the family-team around fostering and he explained that social workers are too inflexible, possibly as result of their training. It has been highlighted by Sellick that there may be a short-fall in the training social workers receive on foster care issues (Sellick, 1999). The impression of social workers by most foster-fathers in my study is that they correspond to fixed notions and generalised practice which excludes men.

The evidence from the interviews is that men perform five main roles within the fostering family and although support to partner and breadwinner are the most common two roles; househusband, carer and domestic tasks are also mentioned. Table 8, based on data from the first interviews, presents the roles men allocated to themselves within the fostering household (of the 23 men interviewed, 21 provided a comment about their role as a foster-father):

Figure 8– Foster-fathers’ roles within the family (N = 23)



My data highlight the varied roles men perform within fostering households; however, while traditional masculinity is prevalent it is not the only version of masculinity. The men are critical of the way they seem to feel overlooked and undervalued by social workers. Robert, who was particularly critical of childcare professionals as he promoted his own childcare credentials, explained:

“I have been on the receiving end of phone calls from school where teams of so-called professionals had thrown in the towel”.

While Clint explained:

“Social workers - they possibly are scared to do 90% of the things because of red tape and the possibility of them getting into some sort of problem with the families”.

These narratives highlight a practicality to fostering which men embrace in contrast to a formal and over-bureaucratized childcare system, represented by social workers, which they disfavor and critique throughout the interviews.

The misunderstood professional is a common source for carer dissatisfaction throughout the interviews as foster-fathers expressed feelings of not feeling valued. Adam, a shared-carer with his

partner, reflected on an event when he perceived the social worker was overtly condescending towards him:

“If she [social worker] comes to our house you get normal pleasantries, but she’ll be sitting down and if I get up to walk to the kitchen she’ll pick cup and saucer up and [say] ‘oh off you go then a cup of tea dear’ it’s almost a bit condescending and I don’t think it’s done it’s not a professional level”.

Adam by reflecting on professional ethics conjures up the expectation that he should be handled more respectfully and again there is the impression of male powerlessness in the face of a professional as he is told to get a cup of tea. It is difficult to fully locate the area of contention as expectations of professionalism and gender collide head on in this retold story. The feeling of condescension can be explained by male powerlessness and is an expression of dented male pride and ego when hegemonic masculinity is challenged. Equally it can be explained by inadequate relationship formation by the social worker who is ineffective in organising the foster carer. We are left with the impression from this retold story, by Adam, that both explanations are adequately plausible with male pride dented and professional obstructiveness. In many ways it demonstrates the complex nature of foster-fathers’ interactions with social workers.

The men in this study identify with childcare and fostering, which they contrast to other childcare professionals by presenting a hands-on approach. Jeff, who is also a childcare worker, offered the view that overlooking the male carer is a missed opportunity:

“I think it can be frustrating in the aspect, I think sometimes professionals, i.e. social workers and other professionals within meetings don’t really see us as a professional as well and sometimes our views sort of gets lost or misconstrued. But I personally think you know as the carer we know a lot more about the young person. I think our views should be heard a lot more than they actually are so I get frustrated in that sort of sense”.

The interviews highlight how men are performing a range of tasks with children. However, it is apparent from both the questionnaires and interviews that foster-fathers are not fully assessed as carers and that this impacts on the on-going support and supervision they receive from social workers. This would seem to contrast sharply with a welfare discourse, that perceives men as a risk, because my study show that foster-fathers are left to get on with childcare tasks with little assessment or support in line with other studies which also show men are under-assessed (Featherstone, 2004) and unseen (Brown *et al.*, 2009). This under-assessment of men seems to correspond to work by Parrot *et al.* when they question the robustness of social work assessments when social workers are confronted by situations outside of their own personal beliefs or their agency's operating systems (Parrot *et al.*, 2007). Foster-fathers perform gender in childcare which can all too frequently fall outside of many social workers expectations or understanding of gender.

The men's identification with fostering is based on a desire to make a difference in the lives of children and young people. They appear to dissociate themselves from the more formal aspects of fostering; particularly as many feel disengaged by childcare professionals, including social workers. This contrasts with their expressed preference for team working, though this relates mainly to the more informal networks, such as family. The evidence from my study is that men feel overlooked and are under-assessed. In this way my data show how social workers perform gender to reproduce existing gendered norms as women are seen to be homemakers with men marginalised as carers. When male subjectivity through performativity challenge these norms, social workers reconstruct the conditions for performativity to move to performance and reproduce hegemonic roles, by planning care with women and overlooking men as non-caring partners. These findings correspond to comparative studies of fathers working with child welfare professionals (Scourfield, 2003; Featherstone, 2004, 2006; Featherstone and Peckover, 2007; Strega *et al.*, 2009; Dominelli *et al.*, 2011). Men want to be accepted and valued as professionals and many embrace caring tasks that are routinely situated within the feminised domain, rather than simply reproduce masculine norms.

This complex gender performance by foster-fathers largely goes unnoticed by the literature and social work practice which tend to see men as breadwinners and supporting carers to a woman homemaker.

Feeling monitored and under surveillance

Evidence from the social workers' questionnaire shows how the risk of an allegation against men influences their social work practice. Studies by Verity (1995), Bray and Minty (2001) and Swain (2006) highlight that allegations and safer caring practice have a strong effect on fostering. Fathers, working with child welfare professionals, have been shown to perceive themselves as feeling under surveillance by child welfare professionals (Dominelli *et al.*, 2011). It has also been noted in previous studies that social workers can find it difficult to recognise the importance of fatherhood (Featherstone and Peckover, 2007). Fostered children have often experienced multiple levels of maltreatment, including sexual abuse (Lipscombe *et al.*, 2003; Farmer, 2004), and they are disproportionately affected by episodes of domestic violence (Cleaver *et al.*, 1999). Domestic violence and child sexual abuse are emotionally charged matters with the evidence pointing towards men being seen as potential perpetrators more often than women (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000; Featherstone and Peckover, 2007; Johnson, 2008). It has also been pointed out that men can be seen as threats in the welfare of children (Scourfield, 2003; Scourfield, 2006a) and it has historically been suggested that the occupation of men could be limited when working with children who have been sexually abused (Pringle, 1993). It comes as no surprise that foster-fathers find themselves under suspicion, as John explained:

“I think sometimes that men are seen in foster care, as foster carers, with a bit of suspicion because people say why would men want to work with young kids?”

While studies promote the involvement of men in children's lives (Fatherhood Institute, 2007) there is a tendency for men to feel under the surveillance of childcare professionals. When men's gender performativity challenge masculine norms they experience suspicion as they can be seen to

represent risk to children. There is some data from the foster-fathers' narratives that show they can feel under surveillance. James who shared the fostering tasks with his partner explained that:

“I know children have got to be protected and whatever, but that's what the carers are there for. So, why [does] a social worker come in and shout the odds and whatever”.

For James, the social worker is over-involved and he clearly disapproved of this over-involvement by social workers in foster care.

The power-balance between foster-father and social worker emerges as an important factor, particularly as it challenges men and their identification with fostering. The nature of power in the relationship with social workers is demonstrably shown by a foster-father through his story about the investigation he experienced following a complaint. Joe had taken the young person, who he looked after, to his daughter's house so that he could attend a concert. The next day Joe was summoned to a meeting with the social worker:

“Well, when we first we got tickets to see [rock musician] and we left [young person] with our daughter and we shouldn't have, we should've got permission and we didn't really know about that and we got pulled over the coals for it”.

Joe was disappointed by the investigation and the outcome of the meeting; however, the National Minimum Standards (2011) stipulate that allegations and complaints against foster carers are investigated with potential recourse to the 'Local Authority Designated Officer' (LADO), police and foster care review. The powerlessness men experience is more acutely illustrated by Alan following an unsubstantiated complaint, made by the young person's father, when he stated: “I come out of our review feeling, Christ good job there wasn't a hangman; they would've hung me up”. Power and how it is perceived and exercised emerges as an important issue in the men's narratives. Data from my study show men can feel threatened by social work intervention as there is some evidence, from the interviews, to show they feel more overly monitored and subject to more surveillance than

women by social workers. This is supported by the literature (Scourfield 2006a: Dominelli *et al.*, 2011) and can be linked to men feeling they are considered as risks rather than assets.

The perception that some men feel more monitored than women comes across strongly in Mike's interview when he talked about his relationship with different social workers. Mike explained his professional relationship:

“Depends on the social worker you are working with. Some social workers hate men and others love men. I mean, I worked with one social worker for a long-time, a woman and she hated men and it was obvious that she hated men, but I had to work with her for a long-time and it was awkward at times and they made the wrong decision about kids sometimes”.

This story can be explained as Mike's own gender-bias because he feels affronted by a social worker who he thinks does not like men. On the other-hand it can also relate to him feeling overly monitored as a main caring foster-father by a social worker. Men discuss their relationships with social workers in many ways that interlink as criticism of social work professionalism. This criticism of social work can relate to them feeling overly monitored as men. Naturally, professionalism involving individuals and relationships are variable and again the nature of gender and power comes to the fore with a male narrative showing distress with female power. Women social workers perform gender as professionals, particularly when working with foster-fathers, who subvert both masculine and feminine norms. The role reversal in this interaction is complex as gender remains a regulatory discourse to reproduce masculinity and femininity. Foster carers in general, irrespective of gender, are subject to support and supervision. It is difficult to gauge from my data to what extent men are disproportionately monitored though some data show many feel they are monitored too much.

Men, in the sample, are clearly wary of the risk of an allegation being made and find safer caring practice restrictive and they feel supported by neither the system nor social workers. James stated:

“I think there is too much input in relation to this, let the carers get on with it. Somebody comes around every fortnight saying this, that and the other: ‘you’re not doing this right, you’re doing this wrong’ and whatever, parenting isn’t a science”.

There is a sense that foster carers are getting on with looking after children, but that they find this monitoring to be intrusive and counter-productive. The monitoring, which men recounted during their interviews, is to be contrasted with the lack of support offered to men through social work visits, as highlighted in the social worker questionnaires. With James’s story it is difficult to know if he is talking about foster care in general rather than specifically foster-fathers. Nevertheless, he describes feeling monitored as a foster carer. The possible hypothesis emerges that foster-fathers are hyper-sensitive to the risk of an allegation and they feel disproportionately monitored as foster carers. This risk of a complaint of child abuse may be real and the evidence from research indicates (Bray and Minty, 2001) men are prone to more allegations than women. Combined with this perceived risk of allegations there is a general difficulty for social work to engage men in child welfare (Scourfield, 2006a). Alternatively, it may be this risk is located more fully within the discourse that men are a threat in general to children; a view which has been historically articulated (Pringle, 1993) and which may remain influential within contemporary social work and childcare.

Summary of Foster-fathers’ Perceptions of their Relations with Social Workers

The evidence from the interviews establishes a complex picture concerning foster-fathers as they both affirm and subvert stereotyped notions of gender. Through complexity and intersectionality men perform gender that moves from performativity, as they re-enact gender differently, back to performances that reproduce existing gender norms. Certainly, they both ‘do’ gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and display family practices (Morgan, 1996; Finch, 2007) that are linked with traditional constructions of gender. These practices are understood and contextualised within the masculine / feminine binary, but as foster-fathers they both stay in and go beyond these, though

only in certain respects and contexts. They favour team working and value being seen as professional, but conversely they do not transport gendered work-based traits and strategies to fostering. Through performativity they perform gender roles which subvert masculinity to portray caring and negotiating traits more associated with women. Alongside presenting new versions of masculinity, not based on control and power, the men in my sample present a 'we know best' attitude by caring for children and offer a heroic saviour figure as a male role model to children. While recognising the power of social workers, they do not acquiesce to professional privilege and expertise. The men's narratives highlight feelings of being monitored and under surveillance. The construction of men as risks, rather than assets, through social work risk assessments marginalises men from feminised childcare tasks. My data show men to perform gender and move towards childcare in their daily lives which challenge gender norms as many portray emotionality with children and some undertake personal childcare tasks. The dynamic nature of these family processes is not generally seen by social workers, particularly as men feel they are not fully engaged by social workers. The complex picture emerging shows a process of change within fostering families which social work practice is struggling to keep up with. Men are more than either a risk or asset and therefore social work assessments and on-going work with foster-fathers should move to engage and assess men more comprehensively than they are seen to do through my data. Foster-fathers may well end up re-affirming existing traditional gender relations, as expected by social workers, but they also take on tasks that are non-traditional which can be overlooked by social work practice.

Conclusion

The evidence from this chapter on the perceptions of social workers and foster carers is multi-faceted, with several themes emerging to present complex versions of masculinities enmeshed in foster-fathering. Foster-fathers experience a connectedness to their fostering, they identify with the growing professionalism in foster care and with certain childcare tasks. This foster-father discourse is supported by perceptions provided by social workers. However, there is a theme emerging from my

data that shows a disconnection within the childcare system, evidenced by social workers visiting practice and the foster-fathers' disengagement with social work. The competing discourses of gender, parenting, welfare, sexuality, ethnicity and professionalism all intersect to throw up new possibilities and realities. The emerging evidence from my study is that men are not fully engaged, or engaging, with the formal childcare system as unrecognised complex social interactions emerge to complicate the interactive process. There is evidence from their narratives to show that men are seen as affected and concerned by the threat of an allegation or complaint of abuse, with men experiencing surveillance and monitoring by social workers as against feeling supported and valued. My data show social workers value risk assessments which reduce what men can do as they are perceived as potential risks to children when they perform gender which subverts masculine norms. The support to men is based on informal networks within the family and there is little evidence of structured support for men by social workers or formally through care planning.

Men value professionalism, but feel under pressure when confronted by social work which they feel challenges and paradoxically ignores them as carers. The narratives of the men in the sample show them to reflect on fostering; their care of fostered children and to how being a man limits their fostering. Gendered notions of fostering fall within the binary matrix of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990), but my study suggests roles are not fixed by gender differences because they are heavily influenced by social constructs of family and gender. My data show men create versions of masculinity through performativity to provide childcare and that this is largely negotiated within the family without much, if any, recourse to any involvement from social workers. The men in my study do not passively receive masculinity; rather they are reflective and are shown to have personal agency as they are seen to negotiate their roles, both internally within the self and externally within the family, especially with children. This contrasts to notions of hegemonic masculinity as controlling the family. However, my data also show that most men and social workers perform gender to reproduce existing traditionally gendered relations because men and women are seen to have

different roles. The process of becoming foster-fathers, with the negotiation of masculinity, is largely overlooked by most social workers as they appear unsure what to expect from men when they are neither a breadwinner nor a supporting carer as their performance of gender both asserts and subverts masculine norms.

While there is some convergence between men and women as foster carers, there is a disconnection and divergence between social workers and foster-fathers. Foster-fathers in my study come across as performing gender to subvert and affirm masculine norms, though they are largely under-supported by social workers as they negotiate these roles. Social workers are seen to perform gender which reproduces existing gendered norms with men seen as a potential risk when they undo gender and challenge masculine norms. Gender as performance is seen to exert considerable pressure on social workers and foster-fathers so that gendered norms are largely reproduced. While the roles between men and women are interchangeable, they remain distinct as men perform gender because they remain men who foster and do not create alternatives to masculinity. Foster-fathers continue to be men who foster as gender continues to regulate how foster care is delivered and perceived with a clear divide between men and women who foster. As with Kelan's (2009) study with women ICT workers who may undo gender by working within male orientated employment, but maintain their femininity which is constructed on the continuum of the gender binary of men and women. Similarly, my data show that foster-fathers also undo gender as they perform gender in a feminised sector (care work), though they 'do' gender and remain men who are defined by masculinity, in many forms, rather than as simply foster carers or people who foster.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ENDINGS EXPERIENCED BY FOSTER-FATHERS

Introduction to the Chapter

Fostering has been described as temporary childcare due to the numerous placement moves experienced by many fostered children (Farmer *et al.*, 2005). The foster-fathers in my study described a variety of situations and scenarios that result in the ending of fostering placements for children. This is essentially a narrative-based study concerning foster-fathers and narrative has a beginning, middle and end. In this chapter I reflect on the endings to their fostering which the men reported on in their interviews. In chapter 5 I looked at how the foster-fathers started their journeys to fostering and in this chapter I continue the journey metaphor to end their fostering journeys. During the study no man, in the sample, terminated their fostering and therefore endings in the context of this study mean either the ending of the child's placement with the foster carer or the foster-father's role stopping with the child whilst in placement. Foster children are ill-prepared for placement endings (Fahlberg, 2001; Stein, 2002), while tough-man masculinity leads to men not being able to show emotional attachments (Pollack, 1999). The endings in foster care can be both planned and unplanned. Planned placement endings result in children moving onto adoption, independence and rehabilitation with family or to another placement. Unplanned placement endings are brought about by placement disruption through allegations against the carer, breakdown in placement due to the child's behaviour, and carer unavailability to continue with fostering. Fostering involves routine placement endings, alongside normal childhood transitions, throughout which foster carers are expected to promote the child's wellbeing (Schofield *et al.*, 2000). Foster-fathers also experience changes to their fostering when women return to the home and resume primary care functions; changes that stop and alter the foster-father's role. This is the crucial point at which performativity becomes performance and traditional roles for men and women become re-affirmed.

There is some literature focusing on the placement endings experienced by children, but there is little information about how men experience these endings. Attachments are recognised as an important component of childhood development because they influence both survival strategies and relationship development (Crittenden, 2000; Fonagy *et al.*, 2007), and many fostered children undergo significant disruption to their development when they experience serial endings. The men in this study reflect on these endings and present an emotionality which is more akin to them feeling their fathering is stopped with the child's move both permanently and temporarily, at least until another child is placed. The emotional ways in which they experience these endings challenge masculine norms as they show men grappling with traditional masculinity which requires them to remain aloof and detached. Through their narratives foster-fathers reflect on other situations which end the foster-fathering role which shed a light on power relations and gender identity, both internally within the family with partners and externally with social workers. The narratives do not stop at performativity, which subvert gender norms, as traditional manly norms are re-established when performativity in the context of hegemonic masculinity reaffirms traditional gender norms, leading to women regaining the home-space and men retaining their supporting role.

The focus of this chapter concerns the men's narratives on the fostering endings they experience when a child's placement ends or their role shifts away from being the main caring foster-father. This chapter addresses men's narratives on how they experience placement endings and disruptions to their foster-fathering. This chapter is organised to present some key concepts. To contextualise the study findings I briefly discuss information already in the literature on how children experience endings and transitions, men's relationship with fostering and masculine roles in relation to endings with children. Several themes emerge from the narrative interviews that include: regular endings (children and young people in transit, moving to independence); unplanned moves and allegations; and relinquishing the home-space. The findings are interesting as men perform gender to show

emotionality and power relations that both confirm and subvert gender roles within Butler's (1990) heterosexual binary matrix.

Fostered Children's Experience of Endings and Transitions

There is literature which details how fostered children experience endings and transitions in foster care, particularly as they relate to childcare outcomes. The very need for foster care implies a process of endings and loss experienced by children (Jewitt, 1991). Foster care has become increasingly outcome-orientated (Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Department for Children Families and Schools, 2008) with the move onto independence, adoption, or a return to birth family representing potential positive outcome indicators (Sinclair, 2005). Foster carers tend to look after children temporarily rather than throughout childhood. They therefore experience routine endings to their care of children not readily replicated elsewhere in families. The experience of foster care by children is profoundly moving as they become children 'looked after' by Local Authorities because their birth family is unable to meet their needs.

Social workers primarily intervene within problematized families and endings tend to be a routine part of this process of intervention (Compton and Galaway, 1994). Unfortunately, the picture emerging from children living in foster care is far from straight forward as they continue to experience disruption to their lives: emotionally (Cairns, 2004); educationally (Jackson, 2001; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007); where they live (Sinclair *et al.*, 2005a; Sinclair *et al.*, 2007); and their moves into independence (Broad, 1999; Stein, 2002). Research by Ward and Skuse (2001), into placements for children away from home, found the regular placement moves continued the chaotic lifestyles they often experienced before fostering (Ward and Skuse, 2001). A childhood in care itself can jeopardise a child's long-term future, with the child in care often experiencing the disadvantages of pre-care maltreatment and then post-care disadvantage (Sinclair, 2005). The subsequent behaviours presented by children in care often put pressure on their foster care placements. The 'looked after'

child can feel alienated from the process of where they live and their behaviour can deteriorate if the process lacks security and stability. Unfortunately, the child's behaviour is often misunderstood and can be seen as problematic, resulting in the foster placement breaking down or ending prematurely (Taylor *et al.*, 2008).

Children in foster care all experience a change of caregiver along with loss and separation from their birth parents (Jewitt, 1991). The way a child acts will depend to some extent on age as well as a multitude of other factors including past attachments, maltreatment and cognitive development (Howe, 1995b). During separation children can present difficult or angry behaviours (Bowlby, 1978) which can place pressure on the sustainability of a foster placement. Children who enter foster care tend not to have experienced a history of secure attachments with their birth parents and the child's behaviour is particularly insecure and disorganised if the parent has been the source of distress or abuse (Carlson *et al.*, 1989; Howe, 1995a). The impact of early attachments on human growth has been reflected on by Fonagy (2007, 2008), who relates the attachment classifications, through the 'Strange Situation' and the 'Adult Attachment Interview', to the development of self and personality disorder (Bouchard *et al.*, 2008). Fonagy (2007, 2008) argues that attachment patterns tend towards being transgenerational with the internal working model remaining stable across the lifespan. Childhood attachment experiences continue to form identity into adulthood and influence gender identity. The child's gender performance will relate to parenting experience and attachment patterns as they form the blueprint for identity and understanding of gender (Butler, 1990).

The lack of permanence, due to the endings and movement between placements, experienced by children in foster care has been the subject of several studies. A project, focusing on the voice of the young person, found that only 13 percent of the sample group had experienced two or less carers as the general experience was for children to experience multiple caregivers (Kufeldt *et al.*, 2003) so that:

“Foster care is a status with no sense of permanency...the state is the parent and the state has a tendency to throw the fledglings out of the nest too early, without ensuring that they can fly” (Kufeldt, Simard *et al.*, 2003: pp. 15-16).

This lack of permanence is also experienced by foster carers as the men in my study reflect on it throughout their narratives. In a study, Ward and Skuse (2005) interviewed 242 children concerning their feelings of foster care. Many of these children, interviewed by Ward and Skuse, referred to wanting to experience a normal family life, as their statements indicated that they were living abnormal lives and:

“Very few young people experienced continuing practical or emotional support from foster carers for more than a short time after the placement had actually ended” (Ward and Skuse 2005: p 13).

Selwyn and Quinton (2004) researched the matter of stability and outcomes in fostering and adoptive families. The research they undertook compared the situation of 130 children in both adoptive and foster placements and they recommend that greater security for children could be reached through more placement decisions being delegated to foster carers (Selwyn and Quinton, 2004). Since that study *‘Delegated Authority’* (Fostering Network, 2011) has been implemented whereby certain tasks can be delegated to foster carers through statutory children’s reviews. However, this is a bureaucratised process whereby ‘looked after’ children’s reviews formally grant permission for carers to agree routine parenting tasks, such as allowing children to spend time out of placement or giving permission for attendance at school trips. The evidence is that fostered children experience bureaucratisation, disruption and endings throughout their childhood more frequently than those not fostered. In the next section I reflect on literature relating to men, masculinity and endings.

Men, Masculinity and Endings

The role of men and fatherhood has been questioned due to demographic changes along with theoretical critiques, such as feminism (Hearn *et al.*, 1998). The concept of masculinity and its association with the tough and aloof man along with the tendency to treat boys as little men encourages toughness and emotional aloofness (Pollack, 1999). The involvement of men in families is complex and Morgan (2007) argues that it should not necessarily equate to fatherhood, which can reinforce paternalistic attitudes of family and masculinity. The often held assumption is that there is a singular version of masculinity, based on a controlling and hegemonic version (Connell, 1995). The association of men with a singular version of masculinity, based on hegemonic and tough man, is too simplistic as my data show foster-fathers experience personal difficulties through the ending of relationships with children. Whitehead (2005) reflects on heroic masculinity as transient bravery that reflects on the meaning of what it is to be a man. The narratives highlight men in my study place a high value on their foster-fathering as they negotiate new versions of masculinity to care for children. The data show how strongly they experience endings to their fostering when children move from their care. The endings experienced by foster-fathers highlight their emotionality as well as illuminating power relations with their partners and social workers as they perform gender roles along and outside of the heterosexual binary matrix (Butler, 1990).

While much work has been undertaken to demonstrate biological and psychological differences between the sexes (Hakim, 2007), the feminist discourse is that gender roles are largely socially constructed phenomena relative to socio-economic, cultural and historical factors (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005, 2007). Foster families are socially constructed as a legal entity with men allocated a supporting role. My study supports the notion that gender roles in fostering are often socially constructed along traditional lines. However, the lived experiences of foster-fathers, as indicated in my study, contrasts with the secondary support role they are expected to adhere to within the traditional family discourse. It has been argued that both the gender difference and socially

constructed models have limitations and that the origins of sex differences can be understood from a biosocial perspective (Wood and Eagly, 2002). In common with radical feminism of the 1970s (Firestone, 2003), this perspective, by Wood and Eagly, argues roles are distributed by prioritising the interaction between the body specialisation of each gender and society's socio-economic structure. My study shows that parenting roles are interchangeable though the foster-father narrative is that men maintain traditional gender roles.

There is no comparable fostering research on how foster-fathers experience endings, though fatherhood and parenting studies have looked at transitions in fathering to include endings through children becoming separated from the father, either at independence or during childhood (by divorce, illness, death and child welfare concerns). There is also research focusing on stay-at-home fathers and the construction of gender roles within non-traditional families (Rochlen *et al.*, 2008; Rochlen *et al.*, 2010; Fischer and Anderson, 2012). However, how foster-fathers experience endings has not received academic attention. The findings presented in this chapter give voice to men's feelings about the endings of their fathering; a process of transience that they routinely experience as foster carers, especially in short-term placements. The findings and analysis is surprising as they present an unseen picture of men relating to endings of their fathering during fostering as they perform gender to construct feminised masculinity. The literature highlights the loss and bereavement experienced following the death of a father (Smith, 1994) and by fostered children removed from their birth family (Jewett, 1991) but there is no information on how foster-fathers experience endings to their fostering.

The emerging picture is a complex one as foster-fathers grapple with feelings that are not often attributed to men. The men perform gender differently as foster-fathers, especially in terms of subverting traditional gender stereotypes because they are warm and emotionally attached caring men, but their roles remain fixed within the gender binary matrix. The masculinities they project

highlight their attachment to fathering and the care of children. Foster-fathers show agency as they experience grief with the child's move which is more than 'doing' gender. Performativity through performances that re-enact gender differently is shown by the men as they use agency to overcome gender stereotypes. The ending of the relationship with a child is difficult for foster-fathers and they subvert traditional masculinity because they are not the traditionally distant disciplinarian fathers. Some foster-fathers perform gender when they would like to have some of the permanency associated with birth children. In redesigning and negotiating their versions of masculinity, the men present narratives which show they are deeply affected by the endings associated with their fostering experiences. However, gender continues to divide foster-fathers and foster-mothers, as foster-fathers expect women to retain the matriarchal role and when available to resume main caring duties. In the next section I present findings from the father-father narratives.

Findings from the Narrative Interviews

The data in this section was gathered from the narrative interviews with 23 foster-fathers and I link my data to the endings experienced by the men to theorise on the emerging trends from my data.

Regular endings – children and young people in transit

Regular endings are a naturally recurring feature of fostering because they are often temporary placements for children (Farmer *et al.*, 2005). The carers in the sample have tended to provide temporary placements for children. They describe through their narratives a process of coming to terms with the temporary nature of fostering. James described his hopes and feelings when discussing the movements of children he has looked after:

“You get used to this child and you go - ‘no it’s possible it’s going to start all over again’ - you know, so in the meanwhile you try to put as much joy into the life of this child where possible because sometimes the child won’t let you, but if it leaves just one fraction of thought in their heads in the years to come - that’s enough for me”.

For James his hope is to have a lasting and positive effect on the child and he understands the process is a series of beginnings and endings with different children. James thinks of fostering as a temporary period in a child's life, with the placement endings representing the final part of the man's journey in relation to each foster child. Through the tendency for a multitude of placements, many with negative endings (Sinclair, 2005), young people in care often develop insecure attachments and their subsequent feelings of loss result in them being at a disadvantage when forming relationships (Jewitt, 1991). James deliberately attempts to combine professionalism, by accepting the process of caring for different children, and emotionality through "joy" – his own and the child's. By choosing fostering James shows agency and through performativity he tries to offer children warmth and joy while they live with him. James processes fostering as he prepares and plans for each child's move on from placement. By preparing for a series of different children and the opportunity to promote long lasting change for them James performs gender that affirms masculinity. His aim is to provide joy for children, but not attachments as the temporary nature of each child's placement limits the ability for attachments to form.

Children, when they experience moves between foster families, are far less prepared than James as reported in a survey by the Children's Rights Team (Morgan, 2005). The narratives show men accept the inevitability of frequent comings and goings of children placed with them. Mike explained:

"We've had about a 130 kids through our hands in the past 26 years...Yes over 130 teenagers over the 26 years, but we've had some respite, short-term, long-term it just rolls on".

The rapidity of placement turnaround experienced by fostered children is a fact of life for foster carers and this acceptance of rapid movement for children reduces the need for nurturing. Mike's foster-fathering comes across as quite masculine as it belies any sentiment for individual children and we are presented a conveyer-belt type of fostering. The lack of sufficient preparation with children for these moves goes against advice offered by Fahlberg, who advocates for good

preparation prior to moves between placements (Fahlberg, 2001). The Children's Rights Team survey (2005) conclusion is that children should know where they are loved and wanted, but unfortunately many feel unsettled and abnormal as fostered children (Morgan, 2005). The temporary nature of fostering encourages men to perform gender in line with traditional masculinity which limits emotional connection between man and child. The tough and aloof man is not allowed to show emotions and the rapidity of placement turnaround, with some carers, reproduce traditional masculinity. Mike's narrative conjures the image of an assembly line of children coming and going, leading to standardised care which intuitively leaves the child feeling unwanted as found in the Children's Rights Team survey (Morgan, 2005).

Most of the foster-fathers experience grief when children move and show signs of intimacy far removed from a dispassionate professional. Alex, who described himself as the supportive carer, explained:

"I've shed a few tears like, he was here, and they were both here about 8 or 9 years, but 8 or 9 years hard work with somebody ...and [then] just watch them go out the door. That was very hard".

The normative gender roles are again challenged by this display of emotionality and intimacy as Alex grieves for children who have moved from his care and is acting contrary to tough man masculinity. The emotionality expressed by Alex is aimed at a specific child rather than automatic responses to generic children. It appears that men in the study, like Alex, have not been prepared for these endings to their fathering. Some foster-fathers would like to have some of the permanency associated with birth children and find the temporary nature of fostering difficult. Performativity does not regulate the normative; the normative regulates performativity by turning it into a performance of traditionally gendered tasks as men seek paternal relationships with children.

The attachments Alex forms with children are difficult for him as he finds it hard for children to move from his care. Foster care has been closely linked with promoting secure attachments for children and facilitating their move to long-term placements (Fahlberg, 2001). The display of grief and emotionality by some foster carers can be seen as going against the need for the child to move securely as fostering practice expects a carer to celebrate the planned moves for children, particularly as many fostering placements are assessed as short-term. Attachment theory has been closely associated with the maternal relationship where women perform gender to care for children. While my data affirm the importance of adult and child attachments, there is also data that questions attachment theory when it suggests that it is mainly women who bond with children, because the men in my study also bond with children. The attachments formed by some foster-fathers, who want a more permanent relationship with children, can ultimately undermine childcare planning. Foster carers are expected to promote childhood attachments that can be transferred to permanent carers with foster carers celebrating children's planned moves to longer term placements or independence. The way in which some foster-fathers formulate their attachments as they perform gender can undermine the childcare plan as they seek more permanent attachments with children. The emotionality expressed in these attachments is more real for the men than notions of professionalism or tasks based on care plans.

The desire for more permanent attachments linked with birth-parenting is highlighted by Ben:

"I had the best year and I think it's because we nurtured the little ones and we are thinking of going full-time with them and going to the Local Authority. They can [the social workers] just come and move them and what do you do then. They've been with us nearly three years. I know they can't just move them, but I don't want to go through that".

Ben is approved as a short-term foster carer and though he has bonded with the children he is concerned they can be moved onto a more permanent family. The experience Ben described is one

of a fairly settled family, with adults who are committed to the children in their care. As short-term foster carers, the initial plan for the children placed with Ben was for an assessment placement with a view to permanency elsewhere, but as this extended to a three year placement the personal attachments grew and developed. Ben expressed his own insecurity that the children may move as he is not seen to represent a permanent solution and is categorised as a temporary carer. The attachments he has formed with the children challenge masculine norms, constructed on aloof masculinity, as Ben seeks to emotionally claim the children he looks after. Ben shows that men can care for children and become attached to them and that attachments with children are not exclusively the domain of women. Attachments, as a systems theory, are complex as they can be both transgenerational (Fonagy, 2007, 2008) and change throughout life (Crittenden, 2000). Ben performs gender because he forms attachments to children which subvert traditionally masculine norms and moves to performativity, but the normative regulates performativity when he seeks more conventional and long-term paternal relations with children. As a foster carer he shows agency, but seeks more permanency than is ascribed to fostering as gender regulates masculinity and paternity. By emotionally connecting with children as a short-term foster carer Ben is at risk of disrupting a plan formulated around the children moving to alternative long-term carers. Paternity, and though there are multiple versions, is most usually associated with permanency and birth-fathering than with the temporary nature of fostering. Ben's gender identity encompasses manliness as well as childcare and he seeks permanent paternity with children because of the attachments he has formed with the children he looks after.

Moving to independence

Moving onto independence is both a planned ending and a positive outcome indicator for fostered children; the other outcome indicators are adoption or a return to birth family (Sinclair, 2005). The narratives show foster-fathers are committed to developing independence skills in children as part of the fostering task:

“I do enjoy the role and sort of seeing him progress in life as well and helping him to do independent skills around the house and things like that, so yes it is very rewarding that way” (Jeff).

This desire for men to promote independence in children has been well chronicled and this study confirms that men who foster are similarly committed to promoting independence as a process of maturation. Andrew showed a different perspective, when he stated:

“Naturally at 15, 16, 17 they go independent and their own ways ...and you end up with a big hole in your life”.

Several key concepts that relate to adolescence in general are transitions, attachments and independence. The child maturing towards adulthood develops increasingly independent behaviour. The transition to adulthood and adolescence is a period of rapid change for the child, with excitement tinged by anxiety (Sutton, 2000). The men’s narratives, from my study, reveal a more complex contribution in the lives of fostered children than the supporting role currently attributed to them as they show motivation not readily associated with masculinity. Performativity is a continuum, as most people perform around the normative, but the foster-fathers are subverting gender roles associated with men by blurring the boundaries of feminine and masculine and redesigning their own versions of masculinity that include negotiation and reflection with children, in preference to a hegemonic masculinity based on control over family. Their versions of masculinity place children at the centre of family, where men encourage childhood development and independence; but they also grieve for the loss of the child through this independence.

The child maturing towards adulthood develops increasingly independent behaviour. This can range from safely crossing the road to experimenting sexually or with substances. Attaining adult status is described as three interlinked transitions that are: from school to work; from families of origin to families of destination; and from living within a family to being independent (Walker, 2002). In their research Sinclair et al. (2004) found foster carers in their survey were concerned that social work

planning for independence had a destabilising effect on the child. The planning for independence, foster carers reported, caused tensions for the child, particularly when independence has the lure of a grant and freedom. The difficulties encountered by care-leavers have been documented by Stein who, as early as 1986, recorded how young care-leavers felt: rejected; isolated; lonely; bored; tended to be unemployed; and there was a basic threat to their well-being (Stein and Carey, 1986). In 2002 Stein commented that care-leavers are independent far younger than other young people. While it is usual for young people to experience difficulty in the transition to adulthood, young people in care have more to contend with, such as unemployment or being a parent at a younger age. Stein argues for specialist support built on good quality substitute care (Stein, 2002), particularly as young people report a lack of on-going support once they leave care.

In his narrative, Nigel shared his experience of caring for a young person following her move to independence and the ending he experienced:

“She’s got her own place and we’ve helped her quite considerably. Her family is not forthcoming with help. In fact the exact opposite - we’ll leave it there - and we do as much as we can to make her life as easy as possible, but it’s on a private basis there is no money, but we do it because the baby needs it”.

Nigel is critical of the failure for childcare services to provide follow-up and on-going support to young care-leavers. Nigel’s commitment to the young person is beyond fostering as a profession. He continued his story to express how his informal relationship with the care-leaver resulted in conflict with social services when he endeavoured to maintain support to the young person beyond her move to independence and the ending of formal fostering arrangements. Nigel wants a more permanent attachment as he does not want his fathering to end. His commitment is to the young person and not to the care system in general and he is unable to depart from the fathering role once fostering is terminated by the young person leaving care. Nigel may be trying to mirror the permanency of birth families when he finds the temporary nature of fostering difficult. He performs

gender as a caring patriarchal-figure who wants the best for the young person moving to independence.

It has been a noted factor for some time that childcare social work is focussed on entry into care with care leaving tending to receive less attention (Marsh, 1999). There is a vulnerability experienced by young people who leave care (Biehal *et al.*, 1995) due to the lack of emotional and physical support they receive (Stein and Carey, 1986). The role of the family in supporting a young person to independence is important (Marsh, 1999). This support from family is generally perceived to be important to enable the young person to succeed into independence. It is understandable that these relationships are somewhat uncertain for fostered children. The experience of being in care often does not equip the care-leaver with either the self-esteem or emotional ability to develop positive attachments. Most foster-fathers in the study described how their commitment to children extends far longer than the duration of the foster placement, as John stated:

“She’s kept in touch with us for the past like 5 years. She’s had a child that became a self-fulfilling prophesy as her child was taken into care. So, that child then became the third generation involved with social services which is horrendous; but she still kept in touch with us, because we were the only stable thing in her life. She knows the mistake she made which was leaving us had been the wrong thing for her, but she just couldn’t help herself which is a real shame”.

Endings are sometimes seen as bad decisions taken by young people who are encouraged by the system to think of fostering as temporary. Leaving care and care leaving is inevitable for children who are fostered. Regardless of legislative and regulative change, foster carers are the main source of support provided to fostered children. The performance of gender by foster-fathers moves to performativity when they become attached with children, but because normalised masculinity is linked with being able to influence future generations rather than accept the child’s identity they go onto perform gender within masculine norms. The relatively short preparation for a young person, in

foster care, towards independence contrasts with the long preparation associated with the move into independence from a birth family (Barber, 2004).

Fostering is all too often a temporary home for children and the adversities experienced by 'looked after' children continue on into adulthood which is no more tragically demonstrated than by David who recounted:

“One of them [young person] committed suicide which we couldn't understand because he had his girlfriend and a new baby and everything was going well. We saw him a couple of weeks before [partner] gave him some money, he was feeling a bit down and said well come on you've gotta get your life sorted out go and do it he wanted to move back here we couldn't, we are just not allowed to”.

This young person's sense of disconnection, and separation, with family is starkly demonstrated in David's narrative. Naturally, David was emotional in retelling the story with more than a little sense of guilt. The foster-fathers present diverse masculinities and perform gender roles that confirm and transcend the normative, but a common presentation is that of the heroic male who saves children. David's own journey to fostering, with its conscious rejection of male violence allied with the man as breadwinner, does not prepare him for this suicide. David's journey to fostering and his change in carer-giving status as he becomes more engaged with fostering is recounted in Chapter 5. However, this boy's suicide represents a permanent ending for David. David cannot understand this young person's suicide when he was about to become a father with its attendant emotions and responsibilities. The men's narratives highlight how they try to model positive manliness with the aim of developing responsible adults. David is grieving over the ending of life, but he also presents disappointment with his own inability to save the young person. The men in my study show they are motivated to help children develop independence skills and plan for their eventual care leaving move. There is evidence from my data to show men perform gender that promotes this aspect of fathering and also show a sensitive side to their fathering as many men experience grief and loss

following the child's move to independence. Narratives like David's and John's show foster-fathers take their responsibilities to promote future wellbeing for children seriously.

Unplanned moves: Allegations and placement breakdowns

Planned endings in fostering are common as it is largely seen as a temporary solution to children's inability, for whatever reason, to live with their birth families. Unplanned endings are more abruptly experienced through, for instance, allegations against the foster carer or the placement ending due to the child's behaviour. The risk and threat of an allegation for foster carers is a very real fact of life, with studies highlighting the relative frequency of allegations and complaints experienced by foster carers (Verity and Nixon, 1995; Minty and Bray, 2001; Swain, 2006). Studies show that as many as a third of foster carers may have an allegation made against them during their fostering careers (Swain, 2006). Allegations and the practice of safe caring are common themes from the narratives (which are also discussed in Chapter 7). The child's welfare is paramount and each allegation has to be investigated and acted on accordingly.

Adam told a story concerning an allegation he experienced and while it was found not to jeopardise his fostering the young person moved from his care. During his interview Adam said:

“We had an allegation. The young lady could get in touch with the social worker by just picking the phone up and he was there [when] we [or our support worker] tried to get hold of him he was no-where to be found and that young lady did leave scars”.

This forced ending for Adam was difficult as it challenged, at a very personal level, his ability to care for children. In this story Adam is frustrated at the allegation, which ended the placement for the child. The ending Adam experienced was due to the move of the girl who made the allegation. He is not frustrated necessarily with the ending to his fostering rather he seems to be more annoyed at the allegation itself. I include this narrative in the endings chapter as it explores the diverse endings men experience. This unplanned ending, and Adam's frustration at the allegation and social worker terminating the child's placement, highlight the range of emotions experienced by men in my

sample as they present emotions ranging from grief and a sense of achievement to anger and disappointment. Adam's feelings relate to his frustrations about the allegation and his gender performance reaffirms masculine norms based on control. The social worker, and allegation, took control from him and his reaction recreates normalised masculinity and he did not reflect on the girl's emotional distress resulting in the allegation.

Alongside allegations, another type of unplanned placement ending materialises as a result of the child's behaviour. Children who require fostering have often experienced traumatic events and fostering itself requires the removal of a child from their familiar environment and naturally the child can experience grief and loss through separation from birth family and family surroundings (Jewitt, 1991). Children in foster care, due to their own attachments (Fonagy *et al.*, 2007) and trauma (Cairns, 2004), may present challenging behaviours. The narratives at times show a complex intersection of hegemonic masculinity, child behaviour, professionalism and adult guilt. Foster carers experience a wide range of behaviours by children, ranging from violence and aggression to over compliance amongst many others, and it is testament to foster carers that they continue to care for children. Through his narrative Robert discussed the impact these challenging behaviours have on foster carers:

"I think often professionals at whatever level, they are inclined to think what you are doing is you are giving the kid a bed and a meal. And it just isn't like that because that person goes home at 5 [o'clock]. When you are a foster carer you just don't have time off. At 11 o'clock it could be ping you're on duty and if it's a volatile situation you know the cycle it's gonna peak [then] come down [with] the apologies and all of that and you just know that's gonna happen. So, foster care is a big commitment, it's an intrusion you agree to but it removes spontaneity and makes the foster carer's life much more regimented".

Robert's narrative showed him adapt to fostering and accept it as a professional role with him equating it to being on duty, although there was a sense of loss due to the intrusion put upon his personal life. He performs gender as a traditional man who manages children's behaviour by being the distant disciplinarian.

Managing the child's behaviour is an integral part of fostering and it can be very challenging to men, as Andrew related:

"Once a kid physically attacks you or [partner] you can't go back on it. There's no trust left. There's no trust, I'd say the trust is gone, but the feeling that's a step way over the line and you can't go back with that one [and] you can't live with it [the child] again. The good thing that's come out've it is 3 months down the line after the kid left, we heard through his social worker that he accepted [it] now. It was the biggest mistake he ever made".

Children's presenting behaviours, which men find problematic, are time-consuming and stressful, but also challenge them at a different level. There is the sense of loss concerning an ideal version of foster care and childhood involving trust and gratitude. Andrew presented himself as a disciplinarian man who will not accept disruptive behaviour from children which he feels is unacceptable. He recreated traditionally masculine norms and he justified his attitude by explaining the child recognised his mistake later on, but only after he had moved from the placement as a result of his behaviour. There is a strong sense of challenge by unwanted childhood behaviour which men feel at a deeply personal level. This challenge can be to their sense of masculine pride and control and it exhibits conformity to gendered and stereotyped masculinity. Gender is a regulatory discourse normalising masculinity with some men performing gender as distant disciplinarians to children. Both Andrew and Robert described themselves as supporting care-giving female partners. The ending to fostering resulting from the child's behaviour shows some men struggling with the stress of fostering and perceived challenge to their control within family.

Chris, who shared the care with his partner, described how a young person moved on to residential care following what he described as difficult behaviour, which his family could not manage:

“One [child’s name], who was terribly disturbed, who attacked me, and obviously had to go. Unfortunately, he went into residential [care], I think, and carers more skilled in handling his behaviour”.

The ending of the fostering placement due to the child’s perceived challenging behaviour is fairly common and it is a feature of Chris’ story that the child obviously had to leave the placement once he crossed the line of acceptable behaviour. In his story, Chris acknowledged there are limitations experienced by foster carers as they are not always able to manage the child’s difficult behaviour. There is the sense, from these particular stories concerning children’s unwanted challenging behaviour, that men feel a sense of rejection by the child. By presenting unwanted behaviours, children challenge men’s subjective ideals of themselves as foster-fathers and of children who require care. Chris performs gender that confirms hegemonic masculinity because he is challenged by the child’s attack on him. The implication of this story is that the child could not live in foster care and went onto residential care. Chris as the disciplinarian was unable to keep order within his house due to the child’s behaviour. The challenge to his disciplinarian skills was averted as the boy could not, in his story, live in a foster-home. This affirms controlling masculinity as he performs gender by disciplining children. The story also demonstrates Chris’ boundary-setting of what is acceptable within his family and what behaviour is not, and once the child crossed this boundary the child had to leave the family. As Morgan (2005) relates, fostered children feel all too acutely the sense of impermanence by not truly belonging with the fostered family. Gender Performance defines masculinity and femininity within the heterosexual binary matrix (Butler, 1990) and Chris fits within controlling masculinity by being the boundary-setter and enforcer within the home.

The ways in which foster-fathers perform gender and move to performativity are not straight forward as they are complex and at times conflicting. While he performs stereotyped masculinity,

Chris also empathised with children because of his own childhood experience of being fostered. We glean a sense of Chris' own conflicting subjectivity relating to his childhood and desire to rescue children. However, there is the requirement for some response from a child in his care. Through his narrative Chris reflected on how he kept in contact with one young person who had left his care:

“The guy that we had that went to prison, I think, and by what he's says he's 20 now, and he says that he...values the seeds that we sowed with him. We showed him stability with love, friendship and he has got a voice where before he came he had to shout his corner to get heard. Here everybody listened to him then we discussed it... he writes to us regularly from prison”.

It is not necessarily the behaviour the child presents which Chris finds challenging; rather it is the sense of rejection by the child. It is obvious from Chris' story that he feels this young person accepted his support. This young person accepted Chris' support while the younger child did not and, therefore, had to move. The termination of the fostering placement, for the younger child, also brought into focus the support Chris expects from social workers:

“We have phoned up out of hours [support] when one of our charges [fostered child] attacked my [son]. We were told when the police took him away in handcuffs ‘you'll have him back tonight, no you'll have him back tonight it's not like he's slashed your son'. Now then...no...that's not on we called you for support”.

Though the placement ended for the child, professional detachment emerges in this story through the language used by Chris to describe the child as a 'charge'. In this story there is a lack of emotionality between adult and child and for Chris his birth-son takes priority. The professional side of foster care is insufficient to maintain the child's placement when carers' are confronted by challenging behaviour. It is not the violence which Chris finds difficult; it is the direction and intent of the violence, because Chris is ready to accept the young person who is in prison for violent behaviour. Men appear to become unsettled by behaviour from children when this behaviour is a

challenge to their authority and paternity, which in turn affects their relationships with particular children.

There is the impression that men feel their manliness can be threatened when children reject heroic (Whitehead 2005) and rescuing masculinity, which seems to challenge their gender identity at a deeply personal level. The ways in which they are challenged by children presenting difficult behaviour relates to an affront to hegemonic masculinity where the man is in charge. As Alex said:

“In the end he just broke the placement [sic]. He started stealing off us. My tools; quad went missing stuff like that. One day, and he got caught stealing something, and never came back. [The] police lifted him...they put him into a home. The lad needed help. He should never have been put in a home. I don't know where he is now. I think he's back with his dad which was totally the wrong thing to do”.

This narrative shows the dilemma carers experience with the ending of a child's placement. Alex acknowledged that the child broke the placement by his actions. However, Alex takes his argument further to criticise the fact that the child was moved from their home eventually to return to his father. Within Whitehead's triad of masculinity, I have argued that foster carers can associate birth-fathers with Whitehead's villain (Whitehead, 2005; Hearn and Whitehead, 2006). There is a strong impression that Alex has unresolved feelings due to the dissatisfaction with the child's unplanned move from his care. Alex seemed to want more time to complete the caring task and maybe move the boy away from the difficult behaviour he presented. Alex felt the boy had transgressed the acceptable behaviour line within his home, however, he did not agree with him returning to his birth-father. Alex, along with other men in the study, wanted a more permanent attachment with the child and felt challenged by the boy's move to his birth-father. Alex comes across as being powerless when confronted by the boy's behaviour, the foster care system and the boy's attachment with his birth-father. There is a sense powerlessness expressed by Alex, with the social worker and attachment with birth-father, as the child was moved from his care and returned to his

birth-father. He described this move as totally the “wrong thing to do” and we sense he feels that he has lost control over his fostering. The challenge presented by children’s difficult behaviour confronts masculine power within the home.

The performance of gender appears complex as men, in the sample, negotiate masculinity which is neither controlling nor violent and they show emotionality in caring for children; though they reproduce existing gender relations which normalise women as prime carers. Foster-fathers use agency to negotiate non-controlling roles though they continue to perform gender within traditional masculinity where control is important. There is a strong motivation, shown by many foster-fathers, to arrest a child’s behaviour caused by the negative male models that children are perceived to have experienced before fostering. Within Whitehead’s (2005) construct, some foster-fathers associate themselves with the heroic man and perceive the birth-father as the villain. These unplanned endings experienced by foster-fathers, due to children’s difficult behaviour, reaffirms male stereotypes as the challenge caused by a child’s behaviour and power relations with masculinity asks questions of men which can result in the placement for the child ending prematurely. The apparent rejection of the heroic foster-father would seem to challenge their gender identity at a personal level. It is difficult to know whether the foster-fathering stops when contested by unwanted behaviour, from the child, or at the termination of the placement. However, they continue to show some grief following the end of the placement regardless of the reason. The grief presented by many men is felt for the loss of the relationship with the child and it also reaffirms existing gender relations as these endings often challenge their gender identity as foster-fathers.

Relinquishing the home-space

Possibly the most interesting ending theme to emerge from my study is the way men relinquish the home-space to their women partners. There is evidence from my data to show that the home-space is a potentially contested area for several men, who as full-time carers recount a change to their role when an employed woman partner returns to the home. They experience these changes to their

fostering routinely and permanently. The routine changes occur when an employed female partner returns home each evening and permanent changes occur when a female partner ceases to be employed outside of the home. Mike was the main carer for many years to allow his wife to work full-time out of the home. His role changed following his partner's retirement, as Mike explained:

“I did everything – she was studying to be a [career] and doing her training for two years so she didn't have time to look after the kids so I did it all and it continued like that until she has retired and I've lost everything”.

Throughout his interview Mike described his caring role, recounting how important it was for him to foster. As the main carer and househusband, Mike performed gender to subvert masculine norms. Following the return of his wife to the home, Mike withdrew, albeit reluctantly, from the feminised domain of the home-space and he re-established normative gender relations by performing within traditionally constructed masculinity. The way Mike shifts his home-based roles seems to conform to Butler's (1990, 1993) ontological in the sense of performance, as performances are temporary when gender roles are acted out to show their flexibility. Subjectivity and performativity are expressed by Mike when he uses agency to become the main caring foster-father, a role he enjoys. However, gender as a normative discourse permeates these performances when main caring foster-fathers in my study come across as substitute figures who temporarily replace a woman as main carer. Gender as performance underlines how men and women should behave by creating a template from which to reproduce gender norms. Mike's wife performed gender to become the main carer within normalised femininity. It is interesting, and he is not alone amongst the men in the sample, that he almost passively steps aside for his wife to reclaim the feminised role of carer. Men appear not to be able to negotiate a lasting change in their roles when they perform gender to subvert masculine norms because they revert to the gender template to allow women to reclaim main caring roles.

Performativity challenges masculine and feminine norms when individuals perform gender differently, but becomes performance when women reclaim the home-space and perform gender

within feminine norms. There is more happening than 'doing' and displaying gender as regulatory discourses based on masculinity and femininity (involving sociocultural, linguistics, economic, historical, physiological and psychological elements) exert enormous pressure for the restoration of the heterosexual binary matrix and hegemonic gender norms. Mike, throughout his time as the main carer, retained his manliness and though he had reconstructed masculinity, it remained constructed within the binary logic of masculinity and femininity as he did not step outside of masculinity. Gender roles refer to behaviours and occupations in which a particular gender is expected to 'do' or perform gender. Mike's performance of gender was consciously within the feminised domain, though he presented himself as a heroic man who saves and rescues children and young people. In common with research focussing on stay-at-home dads, the foster-fathers in my sample are quick to point out that they still have strong interests in traditionally masculine activities such as DIY, sport and driving cars (Rochlen *et al.*, 2008; Fischer and Anderson, 2012). They may well act out different roles to those expected of them, but they do not break the gender template and they remain men defined by gender.

Mike's masculinity is more complex and rounded than those ascribed to men within the hegemonic masculine type though he, like several other men, was able to negotiate and perform a role that transcends the normative one of the man as breadwinner. Foster-fathers by becoming main carers do more than Walby's (1997) transforming gender whereby men take on new roles, such as chauffeuring and entertainment. However, these role changes are not stable as men and women will return to masculine and feminine norms when the time is right; because the gender template and the normative remain intact. This flexibility to gender roles highlights the interchangeability between fathering and mothering, at least at a practical level, as well as the flexibility in these norms. The endings to their fathering undermines their identification with caring for children particularly as some men, like Mike, take on female associated activities but retain their male-orientated interests.

This return to normative roles coincided with the woman's return to the home-space following time out at work. A study by Fischer and Anderson (2012), on stay-at-home fathers, reports that most fathers were likely to say both parents shared equally childcare tasks when both parents were at home. However, the study by Fischer and Anderson also found that mothers may sometimes serve as the gatekeeper over the father's involvement in childcare. They argue that the increased paternal input may result in the development of more positive attitudes in the mother and conclude by referring to the biosocial model developed by Wood and Eagly (2002) of gender, whereby there is some shift in gender characteristics when performing non-traditional gender roles. My sample of foster-fathers was divided into three sub-categories of main carer, supportive carer and shared carer. Data from my study illustrate how supporting men, who worked outside the home, performed fairly traditional gender stereotypes; this was also a feature of the shared caring men. The foster-fathers who were main carers performed gender that subverted gender roles more acutely than the other two categories. As main carers they negotiated the homemaking role with their women partners to become main carers and househusbands. However, when they are challenged by a female partner these men withdraw from the home-space; because they performed gender which actually reaffirms that, despite all the nurturing and fathering parental skills that they practiced, they reproduced existing gender relations rather than carving out new spaces for themselves to continue nurturing.

Peter, who is a main carer, performs gender to challenge masculine norms. Peter's wife works full-time away from the home and his narrative is constructed around his personal motivation to foster. Peter described himself as the homemaker, who performs the household tasks, as he did: "The cooking and the cleaning" (Peter). However, Peter went onto explain:

"Well, having said that [partner] does a lot of [house] work at the weekends, because generally she's off on weekends... The jobs you don't do every day like changing the curtains, washing nets and things like that, you forget about or I forget about and she'll

do the things like that, but the general running of the house day-to-day, making beds, washing, ironing cleaning the house I do all that and the cooking”.

Peter, while explaining he was the househusband, also reaffirms traditional gender roles because his wife is better than him at being the homemaker. Peter does not simply replace his wife in the home, as he acknowledges she continues to be the prime homemaker in his family. Peter’s explanation implies that his wife resumes the homemaking duties when she is home because she is better at it than he is and he can “forget” to do some household tasks, even though he does the general running of the house. This phenomenon of the foster-father relinquishing the feminised home-space to the woman partner is performance that affirms normative gender roles based on the woman as homemaker. Masculine realities are created by gender as people perform tasks with the reproduction of new realities through lived experiences. Through agency and performativity new gender roles can emerge, though in the end the normative regulates performativity and the hegemony of the gender binary, based on the logic of masculinity and femininity, restores existing gender relations to recreate traditionally gendered norms. Peter, like other foster-fathers, reaffirmed throughout his narrative his male-centric attitude and activities; he enjoyed evenings out playing darts and explained that his wife is a better homemaker than him because she is a woman. Men are able to perform mothering tasks by becoming main carers and househusbands though the men in my sample continually referred to these as feminine, and women’s roles, throughout their interviews.

Alan, who took part in both interviews, experienced a change in his fostering as his wife had stopped working between the interviews. Like Peter and John, Alan negotiated a change of gender roles within the home to facilitate his wife’s employment out of the home and he became the househusband, but he experienced a reversion of roles when his wife resumed the homemaking role. As he explained: “We both work in the home now... [Partner] is now a full-time foster carer”. This change is acutely felt by Alan, as he explained during his second interview:

“Oh yes [it’s] made my life [different]. [Before] I could please myself... it’s just like the same as the mum really like [partner] taking over cooking again and she takes over them roles whereas that was always my job because I was a bloke at home whereas now she has taken over”.

Alan reverted back to the secondary role within the home following his partner’s return to the home and her resumption of domestic tasks. During his second interview, Alan talked about his understanding of a matriarchal process that means his wife is the homemaker who performs the mothering role. Gendered identities are more than conscious expressions of self as they are socially and unconsciously reconstructed through gender performances. Through his role reversal, as househusband, Alan did not assume the matriarchal mantle as he performed feminised caring tasks while his wife worked out of the home. This does not mean his performance, as main carer, is any less real for him and during his interviews he identified with the caring aspects of fostering.

Though he was temporarily the homemaking main carer Alan expected his wife to hold onto the intergenerational matriarchal mantle. Men in my sample may have taken over the household tasks, but only after negotiation with a female partner and then they acted more as substitute homemakers. The reflections by men in the interviews are more than doing and displaying gender because they clearly identify with their new roles as homemaking men. By becoming main carers, foster-fathers show an aspect of their subjective self that challenges traditional masculinity and by becoming main caring foster-fathers they mimic neither women nor other men and new realities, albeit it only temporarily, are enacted. However, these new realities, created by main caring foster-fathers, are not fully stable and in the end they continue to reproduce the gap between men and women. Alan can become the main carer, but only when his wife is unavailable to perform this role herself. Alan and the other main caring foster-fathers in this study perform gender to subvert gender norms, but they do not become matriarchal-figures as they remain masculine. In this way we are able to explore the deconstruction and reconstruction of masculinities within new and old versions

of patriarchy as foster-fathers remain manly though some perform feminised tasks as they care for children. Performativity may be the mechanism to subvert masculine norms, but through performance gender is repeated and mimicked to re-establish gender norms. The normative regulation of performativity establishes performances that conform to the gender binary and the reproduction of masculinity.

Throughout my study the home-space continues to be seen as a feminine place. With Peter we see how he believes that parenting and household roles are constructed on gender differences as he thinks women are more equipped to undertake household tasks, while Alan accepts that his wife will reclaim the home-space as a matriarchal-figure. The performances by men to become main carers are real as they represent subjective identities, but they are not permanent performances. Through these roles we see glimpses of their subjective identity as caring men though the normative gender discourses regulate their performances as they return to 'do' gender and perform manly roles. Though Peter, Mike and Alan may become main carers, these men persevere with the understanding that there is a difference between the genders. The men accept women are able to reclaim the home-space because they continue to think of them as being more diligent household practitioners and gatekeepers of the home-space. Women through gender discourses are expected to gatekeep the home-space and there is no need to renegotiate traditionally gendered roles, when they return home, as they perform gender to reproduce existing gender relations. When men perform roles that confront gender norms they also perform gender to reassert these norms, as these norms retain their predominance in defining gendered relations. Foster-fathers performed gender in the home-space to subvert normalised masculinity, but only within existing gender relations and they continue to think of the home-space as a feminine place.

The single gay couple in my study negotiated diverse roles on breadwinner and homemaker within the families of choice discourse (Weeks, 2001). Performativity, and the recreation of normalised

masculinity and femininity, regulates gender performance with men returning the home-space to women. The family of choice discourse is that same-sex couples negotiate non-gendered roles and Giddens (1998) argues choice can also be transferred to heterosexual couples. Men show agency in negotiating roles with partners and children though this resumption by women to the home-space is less than agency on the men's part as it is not voluntary. Men move from performativity to performance as they are obliged to act within traditional gender roles to maintain their relations with their partners when they step aside from main caring to become supportive partners to a main caring woman. As Butler argues (1990), performativity is more than agency and voluntary because it is a discourse regulated by normative constructs of gender. Most social workers and foster-fathers who took part in this study seem to adhere to the non-interchangeable parenting discourse that segregates men and women's roles; by performing gender that subverts masculine and feminine roles some foster-fathers also challenge this discourse, though many retain their adherence to a distinction of roles based on gender differences.

Though their fostering is not terminated or ended, as the child remained in placement with them, part of their fathering ends as they stop being the main carer to become co-carers or secondary carers. The construction of gender roles, evidenced through the narratives, highlights the performance around the normative. The return, for whatever reason, to gender stereotypical roles set alongside male-centric activities and attitudes do not provide evidence of a shift in gender characteristics within the biosocial model developed by Wood and Eagly (1999, 2002). The foster-fathers negotiate versions of masculinity which, though subverting gender stereotypes, are clearly male orientated. The performances do not represent identity as men perform gender to act out roles that are socially understood as we get a sense of Butler's ontology by way of performance (1990, 1993). Men perform masculinities that are based on childcare and negotiation and are consciously removed from the violent controlling version, but they continue to include elements of hegemonic control based on a heroic model (Whitehead, 2005) of masculinity. Women perform

gender to gatekeep and reclaim the home-space, while men go onto relinquish the home-space to restore masculine norms regulated by gender. Men in this study continue to be defined by gender as they remain foster-fathers and while parenting roles are interchangeable existing gender relations that see women as main carers are continually reproduced.

Conclusion

The material and evidence from this study lead to conclusions and thinking that are somewhat different to the perceived concept of masculinity and gender roles attributed to men. Masculinity and the performance of gender are more complex than suggested by a strict adherence to traditionally gendered norms. The narratives from my data show foster-fathers to reflect on fostering, their care of fostered children and to how being a man limits their fostering. Gendered notions of fostering fall within the binary matrix of heterosexuality and performances are regulated by a gender template constructed on normative roles. The evidence I present in this chapter demonstrate how performing gender actually reaffirms, despite all the nurturing skills shown by men, foster-fathers adopt traditional male roles, when confronted either by a child's placement ending or their wives picking up the reigns of fostering, rather than carving out new spaces for themselves to continue to nurture children. Their roles are not fixed by gender difference, as there is some interchangeability between mothering and fathering tasks, but they are heavily influenced by social constructs of family and gender. Personal agency and identity, along with the sociocultural, combine with time and place to influence how men perform gender within the family. Personal agency is not the sole regulator as performativity is not purely voluntary and hegemonic gender roles maintain their influence. Nevertheless, foster-fathers perform gender and develop relationships that are subversive in that they contradict the normative understandings of gender roles. The men are more than breadwinners and they overwhelmingly reject male violence and hegemonic control within the home. Rather, their masculinity is based on caring for children and negotiation within the home though they reproduce existing gender relations with women as prime

carers and homemakers. The emerging picture is a complex tapestry of different gendered roles within fostering families.

This subverting masculinity is a new and emerging trend within fostering. Furthermore, this male subversion includes hegemonic masculinity as they do not just passively receive masculinity rather they are reflective, negotiate and are shown to have personal agency in the roles they play. Men in my study present a version of masculinity that men are carers, men will support their wives and partners and men will look after children. As foster-fathers they are constructing a new version of masculinity based on their own lives as foster carers. In redesigning and negotiating their versions of masculinity, the men present narratives to show they are deeply affected by the endings associated with their fostering. Within fostering there are a variety of endings, planned and unplanned, and they are a recurring feature of fostering as they are often temporary placements for children (Farmer *et al.*, 2005; Morgan, 2005). Men in my study take on an active role in caring for children, but in the end, and despite taking on different roles, existing gender relations are largely reproduced by foster-fathers.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In this thesis I set out to explore how men experience fostering, using feminist concepts of intersectionality and performativity, and argue that men negotiate roles that are not attributed to them in the literature. Through my data, I have demonstrated that men perform gender as foster-fathers which both subvert and reaffirm masculinity. Foster families have become the main placement of choice for children 'looked after' by Local Authorities (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). Fostering has evolved from a largely unregulated and voluntary activity to one that is heavily regulated with foster carers assessed, supervised and annually reviewed. Most fostering families include a foster-father, but their role has been under-theorised and under-researched (Gilligan, 2000). It has been argued by Nutt (2002) that there is little understanding about the day-to-day lives of foster carers and most research has focussed on women who foster (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). The findings in my study highlight how some social workers believe there is a difference between the genders which defines fathering and mothering as distinct roles that are non-interchangeable. Concurrently, I have presented signs of evolution in social work practice and a growing recognition that gender roles change as men become increasingly involved in fostering. Social work practice is not uniform, though it is heavily influenced by managerialism with its need to meet organisational requirements and outcomes. It seems that at the individual level, practice is influenced by personal beliefs which allow for some diversity in practice.

Many tasks taken on by foster-fathers undo gender, but through the performance of gender they reaffirm masculinity. By performing gender, men maintain the binary gender logic of masculinity and femininity, though as Butler (1990, 2004) suggests there is considerable flexibility in defining masculinity and femininity. Foster-fathers in my study did not fully subvert masculinity as they remained within the general parameters of masculinity and manliness, and existing gendered relations were retained. Through their performances we can see aspects of the men's subjective

identities, and at the same time we see performances acted out socially that conform to expected norms. I set out through this study to address a significant gap in our knowledge concerning foster care by focusing on the experiences and understandings of foster-fathers. In this concluding chapter I begin by reviewing key findings from my research generated in interviews with foster-fathers, their observational diaries and questionnaires completed by supervising social workers. I reflect on the implications for practice, discuss new knowledge arising from my study and offer suggestions for future research.

In this study I conclude that despite the challenges and changes to gender roles, traditional gender relations are maintained as foster-fathers perform gender. I argue that:

- Men can foster;
- Foster-fathers challenge elements of masculinity;
- Foster carers work in private space while the divide between the public and private spheres is maintained;
- Foster-fathers are seen as supporting foster-mothers;
- Social workers need to be able to assess men as carers and look beyond the risk-asset dichotomy regarding men's behaviours;
- Men, as foster-fathers, can be both assets and risks and need specific assessments of their capabilities.

Through this thesis, I set out to answer three research questions and in the next section I relate the findings to each of the three questions.

The Research Questions

The questions that I have addressed through this study are:

1. How do men reflect on and value what they do as foster carers?
2. What are the tasks and roles which men undertake as foster carers?

3. How do social workers relate to men as foster carers?

How do men reflect on and value what they do as foster carers?

The foster-father narratives show how much men value their contribution in the lives of fostered children. The emerging picture from the narratives is a complex tapestry of gendered roles within fostering families. The foster-fathers did not passively receive masculinity; rather they were reflective and exercised personal agency when they negotiated their roles, both internally within the self and externally inside family, which contrasts to notions of hegemonic masculinity that controls family. The men in my study reflected on their roles within the family as they negotiated their roles and tasks. The men in my study have given witness to their own experiences of being fathered with the father-figure often becoming the foundation for men's identification with masculinity, while some foster-fathers rejected their own childhood father-figure. For some men this identification with masculinity is about reproducing good childhood experiences with their current family, while for others it is more about providing different versions of masculinity. This study supports the argument that role modelling (Gilligan, 2000) through active fathering is undertaken by foster-fathers. On a practical level this is achieved by taking an interest in the fostered child (Gilligan, 2000), closely associated with the emotional benefits of having an involved man in a child's life (Newstone, 2000). Alongside role modelling, my data show that foster-fathers identified with versions of paternity and positive fathering, which they often felt fostered children had not encountered prior to fostering. I have found that some foster-fathers presented a heroic masculinity which they contrasted with villainous birth-fathers.

My study shows that men reflect on their fostering and relationships with children and partners. Fostering is an emotional activity, because it involves caring for children who have often experienced adversity and trauma (Cairns, 2004). Fostering is moving towards becoming more professional (Wilson and Evetts, 2006; Kirton, 2007), which has arguably made it more accessible to men (Hojer, 2004). While professionalisation may encourage men to become carers, the current recognition that

men are more fearful of allegations than women (Minty and Bray, 2001; Wilson *et al.*, 2007) could limit their involvement in fostering. My data show men reflecting on the professionalising discourse and the risk of allegations at a practical level as they practiced safer caring (Slade, 2006) with children. The men in my study reflected on their fostering and the roles they perform as carers. Their reflections made it possible for me to explore their role in fostering in terms of performance and performativity.

The foster-fathers' narratives show men reflecting on fostering when they create and recreate families with father-figures regulated by gender. In these narratives, children are portrayed as central to the foster-fathers' constructions of family with their parenting roles negotiated internally within the family to include childcare tasks. In these negotiations within the family, men involved children as they endeavoured to fashion experiences to develop children's independence skills. The foster-fathers negotiated versions of masculinity which consciously moved away from the hegemonic and controlling masculinity that they perceived children to have experienced prior to fostering. The masculinities they created include heroic versions as they appeared to seek to save and rescue children. Foster-fathers portrayed a heroic masculinity (Whitehead, 2005), which was constructed around their understandings of manliness, in contrast to the villainous version they attributed to fostered children's birth-fathers. The men in my study overwhelmingly saw themselves as assets in children's lives, though they tended to perceive that others, including social workers, overlooked them as foster carers.

What are the tasks and roles which men undertake as foster carers?

This study supports work already published elsewhere (Gilligan, 2000; Hojer, 2004; Wilson *et al.*, 2007) to show men undertake distinct roles as foster-fathers. These roles are grouped around traditional and non-traditional roles as men perform gender. The traditional roles are closely associated with those already attributed to fathers and men, such as support to a woman partner, and there are new gendered roles constructed around role modelling, transporting children, child

entertainer and activity coordinator. In performing these roles men in my study operate within masculine norms, though these roles seem to be evolving. This evolution seems to mirror societal changes as gender patterns are shifting. Walby (1997) refers to new emerging gender roles, with men becoming chauffeurs and entertainers, as transforming gender along specific lines where women remain responsible for caring. Although women do transport children, the general chauffeuring of children and family is more associated with men. The foster-fathers' narratives in many ways correspond to this transformation of gender though seven foster-fathers, in my sample, are seen to extend beyond Walby's transformation of gender by becoming main carers and househusbands.

The men in my study performed gender to take on new and unheralded roles. They placed children at the centre of family as men traditionally have done, but this study shows that they placed children at the centre of family as carers and this challenges traditional masculinity. Traditional masculinity limits men's roles with children to breadwinner and though the focus of their breadwinning may be to promote family with children they do not traditionally provide the care to children. My study has shown that some of the foster-father discourses to emerge from the data are a surprise; namely those in which men value negotiation and emotionality with children. Through their narratives foster-fathers presented an ethic of care exceeding that of being a professional care-worker, and they negotiated versions of masculinity based on looking after children. The narratives show men who recognise children's need for emotional connection. Some men in the study wanted to provide children with a nurturing and emotionally warm environment and to do this they performed tasks within families that subvert stereotypical gender roles and masculine norms. There is evidence, from the men's narratives, to show a process of male carers reconstructing masculinity to include emotionality as they become foster-fathers.

While I have drawn on performing gender, performativity (Butler, 1990) and intersectionality (Walby, 2007) to form the theoretical framework for this study I also introduced several alternative theoretical concepts: family practices (Morgan, 1996); doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987); displaying family (Finch, 2007; James and Curtis, 2012); social capital (Putman, 2000); and reciprocity in family relationships (Furstenberg, 2005; Furstenberg and Kaplan, 2007) to reflect on gender relations (Edwards, 2004a; Edwards, 2004b) and foster-fathers. While these concepts do not form the basis of my study I introduced them because they show the variety of ways family and gender can be reflected on and these concepts, like performativity, have not routinely been applied to fostering. The men perform masculinities, and paternities, as foster-fathers that subvert gender roles associated with men, which are both manly and interchangeable with mothering roles that involve nurturing and intimacy with children. By performing gender as foster-fathers they blur boundaries of femininity and masculinity to redesign their own versions of masculinity that include negotiation, reflection and emotionality with children, rather than accept hegemonic masculinity based on control over family members. The performances are at times contradictory and at other times they are expressions of identity as they re-enact gender differently and at other times act out roles to 'do' gender constructed around paternity and manliness. Through performativity foster-fathers at times perform gender to 'undo' gender by taking on feminised and mothering tasks, though they do not transgress into patriarchy which is retained for women. In my study men are shown to move from performativity and subjectivity to performance, which is beyond personal agency as the actor is regulated by gender and they do not transcend masculinity because they remain foster-fathers who are defined by masculinity.

The foster-fathers performed highly gendered roles though these roles become blurred when many fostering tasks are interchangeable between fathering and mothering. The narratives show some men take on main caring roles, only to relinquish these roles when women are present in the home. Evidence emerges from the data to show men reconstructing masculinity when they perform gender

to become main carers and then return to former manly roles once the woman returns to the home-space as these reversals of roles are not stable. This return to gender norms coincided with the woman's return to the home following time out at work. The role of women as gatekeepers, of caring roles, and men's withdrawal in the home-space reaffirms gender performances in fostering households because masculine and feminine norms are reproduced within existing gendered relations. This evidence is supported by comparative work on non-traditional and stay-at-home dads taking on homemaking roles (Eagly and Wood, 1999; Rochlen *et al.*, 2008; Fischer and Anderson, 2012). Women were able to reclaim the home-space without recourse to negotiation because they reproduced existing gender relations constructed around the woman as homemaker. The data highlight the flexibility between masculinity and femininity though the difference between the two continues as it is based on gender as regulator.

The male narratives that emerged from my data correspond to findings produced elsewhere on matters such as professionalism (Schofield *et al.*, 2013) and male roles (Inch, 1999; Gilligan, 2000; Wilson *et al.*, 2007; Gilligan, 2012) to show how foster carers manage gendered caring relationships with children, where there are distinct roles attributed to men. My study illustrates how men negotiate their role as foster-fathers to include children. The men in my study were motivated to care for children and show emotionality not currently attributed to them as foster carers. They are shown to deconstruct masculinity, founded on aggression and control, to become foster-fathers and in reconstructing their role they combine professionalism and caring; however, they remained manly and reproduced masculinity rather than creating an alternative to masculinity. Allegations and the sudden removal of a child are seen as barriers to their fostering, again supported by studies undertaken elsewhere (Bray and Minty, 2001; Swain, 2006). However, my study locates the barrier within a welfare discourse that sees men as risk or asset alongside the 'good dad-bad dad' binary (Furstenberg, 1988; Pleck, 2004). Foster-fathers, therefore, take on roles that are associated with

traditional masculinity and others that are not, though the outcome is that these roles remain regulated by gender.

How do social workers relate to men as foster carers?

My study supports evidence presented elsewhere to show that social work assessments limit the role of men (Scourfield, 2006; Dominelli *et al.*, 2008). The conceptualising of gender difference, along the lines of masculine and feminine, continues to influence social work childcare practice and the engagement of men (Scourfield, 2006a; Scourfield *et al.*, 2012) and the 'good dad-bad dad' binary (Pleck, 2004), resulting in under-assessed fathers (Featherstone, 2003, 2004). The construction of problematized masculinity, as male power is closely interlinked with social problems, belies the diversity of male discourses and identities (Hearn and Pringle, 2004). The underrepresentation of foster-fathers in the literature corresponds to an apparent perception that men, in general, are somehow difficult to engage in childcare. Social work assessments can overlook the potential contribution men play in children's lives by not recognising the diversity in family practices which allow for men to be main carers.

Foster-fathers, though assessed, approved, supervised and reviewed by social workers, are marginalised in the care of fostered children. However, by recourse to traditionally gendered roles, such as male breadwinning, homemaking is seen to be located in the private family sphere that is associated with women. As a service provided by families, fostering interacts with both private and public spheres and it has been argued the private and public spheres are highly gendered ideological concepts (Edwards, 1990; Ribbens and Edwards, 1995). How foster-fathers negotiate the public and private domains is a phenomenon that has received little attention. In my study I argue that social workers can overlook foster-fathers through an over reliance on non-interchangeable constructs of mothering and fathering. Social work practice by definition brings the public domain into private family, but mainly with client-based work that problematizes certain families as failing. Social work, therefore, does not routinely enter private family life unless there are problems (Dominelli, 1999;

Dominelli, 2002b). This ideological assumption, underlying the private family domain, tends to remain unchallenged by social work practice with foster carers.

Gendered notions of fostering fall within the binary matrix of heterosexuality. My study presents evidence to show that parenting roles are not fixed by gender difference because foster-fathers negotiate their roles, though they are heavily influenced by social constructs of family, masculinity and femininity. My study data highlight how some social workers continue to be influenced by these social constructions of gender that define non-interchangeable mothering and fathering roles. It has been argued that fostering in Britain is based on the ideological primacy of the Western nuclear family (Butler and Charles, 1999; Nutt, 2002), involving clearly defined gender parenting roles. Data from the social worker questionnaires question the objectivity of practice that relies on a stereotyped notion of gender. Evidence from my study indicates that social work practice does not challenge ideological assumptions based on private family constructs that see women as carers and men as breadwinners. I argue that this is a gap in practice when this assumption is undermined by the experiences of the foster-fathers in my study.

The foster-fathers' relations with social workers are not seen as wholly positive. Foster-fathers presented a cautious relationship with social workers, who they feel overlook them as carers and may even view them as potential risks to children when they perform gender to subvert masculine norms. Men's narratives show they favour team work, but they feel they are not fully accepted as professionals by social workers. Social workers appreciate the threat of allegations to men, but there is little evidence of specific support provided to men, either to promote their role or protect them from possible allegations. Foster-fathers are largely neglected as a resource and stereotyping limits their role as foster carers. Safeguarding children is necessary and allegations have to be investigated though my study highlights how men are both assets and risks as suggested by Dominelli et al. (2011). Allegations and the sudden removal of a child are seen as barriers to men fostering, again

supported by studies undertaken elsewhere (Bray and Minty, 2001; Swain, 2006). Social workers are shown to perform gender that reproduce masculine and feminine norms and can see potential risk when men undertake tasks contrary to masculine norms, such as delivering personal care to children.

The evidence from the social worker questionnaires points toward some shift in practice. There is some variety and diversity in social work practice, noticeable at the personal level where attitudinal values impact on decision-making. Social work practice overwhelmingly promotes women as carers, as evidenced by the social workers' visiting patterns, though several social workers recognised how gender relations are changing. This study supports arguments for reflective practice (Ruch, 2007) involving men and fathers (Featherstone, 2003; Scourfield, 2006b; Dominelli *et al.*, 2011) and more robust, less prescriptive, social work assessments based on professional judgements (Munro, 2011) applied to fostering. Foster carers are social agents acting within a myriad of social systems, which include those associated with their fostering, family and childcare, to name a few, and these social systems intersect to influence foster-fathering and their identity. The overarching theme is that social work practice is often restricted by stereotyped notions of gender, therefore it can be speculated assessments are not always robust. While some social workers reported that gender roles were changing, my data show most social workers promoted existing gendered relations founded on the man as breadwinner and woman as homemaker. Most social workers in my sample thought that foster-fathers have a distinct role in fostering, though they seemed to view men as auxiliary to a woman main carer and allocated them a secondary role in fostering.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations to the study. First, as a qualitative study with a relatively small sample from one independent fostering agency, it is not possible to generalise from the findings. Second, the study relates to the exclusive collection of data from men who foster. I did not seek to

include foster-mothers and fostered children as there is already a lot of information in the literature about foster-mothers and foster children. However, this does not relate to their relations with foster-fathers. The perspectives of foster children and foster-mothers on foster-fathers are potential areas for future research as they would provide further insight into our understanding of men who foster. Exploring birth children's relations with foster-fathers is also a point for future research because this is different (or can be) from foster-mothers' and fostered children's perspectives on foster-fathers. Third, this study is limited as it included men with established partners. Male only fostering households account for approximately 1-2 percent of the foster carer population (Kirton *et al.*, 2003), which is replicated in the IFA. It is difficult to know how many single men foster within the IFA as its statistics for male only households (at 2 percent of all the IFA's fostering households) include male same-sex couples as well as single men fostering (see Table 1 page 97). As no single foster-fathers were identified by the fostering agency I was unable to include any single men in the study. Despite these limitations which prohibit generalised conclusions, the individual narratives present a picture which is both surprising and more complex than currently accounted for in the literature. In the next section I detail the original contributions to knowledge arising from my study.

Original Contributions to Knowledge

This study has made several original contributions to knowledge and I have been able to take forward foster care research in a number of ways. There is only a small body of literature on foster-fathers (McDermid *et al.*, 2012), and while this is not the first study of foster-fathers (Wilson *et al.*, 2007), my study has added to the small literature on foster-fathers by presenting the narratives of men who foster. My research has demonstrated that the perception of fostering by foster-fathers and social workers is highly gendered, though the men's narratives have shown greater detail than has previously been reported. My initial original contribution to knowledge is that these narratives reveal that men are highly involved in foster care and highly motivated to foster. The narratives reveal that all the foster-fathers in the study were motivated to become foster carers at some level.

Some men were the main motivators in their families choosing to foster while others were motivated to support a woman partner, but all were motivated to foster. These motivations to foster are very personal for each of the foster-fathers in my study. The narratives convey a real sense of how men value their fostering experiences along with their contributions to childcare, though these contributions vary between the men in the sample. Previous research (Triseliotis *et al.*, 2000; Sinclair *et al.*, 2004) has focussed on women fostering and, therefore, foster-fathers' motivations to foster have gone unnoticed in the literature.

A second original contribution arising from my study concerns the flexibility of gender roles. The data confirm that men play a wide range of roles and tasks in fostering, such as role modelling, entertainer and disciplinarian. While these roles have been reported on elsewhere (Wilson *et al.*, 2007), my study has revealed that roles in fostering are not strictly gendered and there is some flexibility between mothering and fathering roles. This flexibility and interchangeability between mothering and fathering roles was shown when men took up tasks usually performed by women, such as nurturing and close personal care, and when they underwent role reversals to become main carers when a woman was unavailable in the home. Several men (N=7) in the study took on main caring roles; however, these men only temporarily replaced women in the home as they relinquished main caring when a woman partner returned home. The flexibility of foster-fathering roles revealed in my study illustrates that there is a dynamic to foster families which has not been reported on elsewhere. The role of men in fostering has been under-researched and under-theorised (Gilligan, 2000; Newstone, 2000; Wilson *et al.*, 2007) which has resulted in an over-emphasis on traditional roles, while my data show that foster-fathers perform a combination of traditional and non-traditional roles, such as emotional involvement with children.

A third original contribution of the thesis was achieved through the use of feminist concepts to explore men's involvement in fostering. As a result, I was able to reveal gender roles in fostering are

not governed by gender difference; rather their roles are socially constructed. I have drawn extensively on Butler's (1990) notion of performing gender and performativity to show that foster-fathers' masculinity is constructed on a continuum, which allow for different versions of masculinity. Although Connell's (2002) research suggests there is not one singular version of masculinity, the insights offered by Butler's idea of performing gender highlight the flexibility and resilience of gender as a regulatory discourse. Foster-fathers in my study performed gender to subvert masculine norms; however, they retained their manliness because gender continued to influence not only their self-perception but also the ways in which others perceived them as carers. While the foster-fathers who became main carers (N=7) were seen to take on new non-traditionally masculine roles they continued to see themselves as manly and breadwinners. What is new about my study (small as it is) is that it applies the concepts of performance and performativity to foster-fathering to show that men can and do provide children with appropriate caring. However, the exercise of agency by foster-fathers in a society that is embedded in the performance of traditional (or hegemonic) gender relations, and regulates social interactions according to its norms, means performativity reaffirms traditional masculine norms (as outcomes of the process of subverting them). Foster-fathers do not simply become foster carers because gender as discourse establishes a template of how to be a man or a woman, a discourse that is hard to change. Gender, therefore, retains its regulatory function and continues the divide between foster-fathers and foster-mothers.

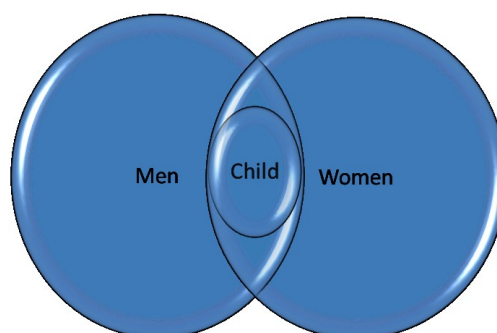
A fourth original contribution relates to social work practice with foster-fathers. Evidence from my data show that social workers did not routinely visit foster-fathers and there is little evidence to show that they provided any specific support to male carers. The relationship between foster-fathers and social workers has not previously been researched. My findings point to social work practice which tends to routinely overlook men as carers. The dynamic nature of family practices and gender performances can go unseen by many social workers. The foster-fathers in my study reported they were not fully engaged by social workers. The complex picture emerging from my study suggests a

process of change within foster families that presents a challenge for contemporary social work practice that does not seem to recognise how men are becoming carers within fostering families. This has implications for social work practice when it is constrained by seeing gender through the prism of stereotype and limit social work support to maintain traditionally gendered roles within fostering families. Therefore, social work assessments of those applying to foster as well as on-going support of fostering families should move to engage and assess men more comprehensively than they were seen to do in my study.

Implications for Policy and Practice

In this section I discuss implications for policy and practice and suggest some recommendations arising from my study. I also introduce a visual guide (Figure 9) for working with foster-fathers. While I refer to ‘social workers’, my practice recommendations primarily relate to supervising social workers as they work directly with foster carers. My findings call for more robust and personalised assessments that see beyond men as gendered individuals. In Figure 9 I present a visual representation of gender relations in foster families. While existing gender relations are reproduced by foster-fathers, with women as primary carers, they create new masculinities that are both traditional and non-traditional.

Figure 9 – Gender relations in foster families



In Figure 9, the child is placed at the centre of the family, which for most fostering families includes a man. This figure highlights that the child is the centre of the family, with men and women sharing only a few roles, where the circles overlap. The larger parts of the circles show high levels of

differentiation between men's and women's roles. My data show foster-fathers take on traditional roles, such as role modelling, and other roles associated with men, such as chauffeuring and coordinating leisure based activities. Foster-fathers were also seen to take on roles more often associated with women, such as negotiation with children and some men became main carers. However, the gap between men and women remained as foster-fathers continued to perform gender as men and did not take on the primary caring role when a woman was available to do so. The thinking behind Figure 9 encourages social workers to recognise that being a foster-father does not limit them to traditional masculinity. This visual prompt is intended to demonstrate that most foster-fathering activities are seen as manly, but as foster-fathers perform gender and care for children they can move toward roles that have traditionally been undertaken by women.

The findings arising from my research have implications for policy to encourage a movement away from organising fostering on main and support carer categories. Fostering is a complex system and social work practice currently does not reflect this complexity, because fostering is too closely linked with women. The Equality Act (2010) has nine protected characteristics. National and agency policy have to be compliant with the Equality Act (2010) and not discriminate with regards to gender as it is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010). The assessment recommendations from my study are: firstly, that policy is developed to promote anti-oppressive practice to facilitate more robust and individually tailored assessments; Secondly, the assessment of foster carers should involve critical and reflective practice; and thirdly, social workers move away from assessments constructed around non-interchangeable mothering and fathering roles which fail to appreciate the lived experiences of foster carers. The findings point to a gap in social work knowledge in the assessment of men as carers and in the next section I detail my recommendations for social work practice with foster-fathers.

Recommendations for social work practice with foster-fathers

My findings show that men develop caring alone in isolation away from social workers. I have shown men take part in activities not associated with traditional versions of masculinity, such as nurturing and bonding with children. By doing this they negotiate new roles and masculinities as foster-fathers. My research highlights that there is the potential for social workers to engage men and support them to take part in non-traditionally masculine roles as foster carers. The following proposals are designed to address social work practice issues raised by my research in relation to working with foster-fathers:

- Develop training for social workers to help them to analyse gender relations in fostering families and look for foster carer's capacities to move beyond traditional masculinity and femininity.
- A clear distinction should be made between working with men and women, because current practice overlooks men. In developing this distinction between working with foster-fathers and foster-mothers, practice should be constructed on anti-oppressive practice as this will move away from stereotyped versions of gender.
- Provide supervision tools and documentation which social workers can use when working with foster carers that encourage social workers to think reflectively and critically about how they engage with foster-fathers.
- Social workers should routinely see foster-fathers during home visits to the carer's home and involve foster-fathers in the support and supervision process.
- The roles of foster-fathers should be incorporated into the child's care plan, placement agreement and the foster carer's household safer caring policy.
- The annual foster carer review should be seen as an opportunity to review the roles undertaken by foster-fathers and promote their capacity to develop new and non-traditional roles.

My data suggest that social workers should acknowledge the roles men perform as foster-fathers and the potential to negotiate and create new roles for men that are unusual and currently seen as risky, such as providing personal care or emotional comfort to a child. This opportunity for social workers to work with foster-fathers is constrained by current practice that formulates men within traditionally gendered and relatively rigid mothering and fathering roles.

Recommendations for Future Research

Through this study I have explored the role of foster-fathers and their interactions with social workers as they perform gender. I have demonstrated how men in the sample negotiate new versions of masculinity as they subvert and reinforce gendered notions of parenting to foster children. Having established the potential usefulness of intersectionality and performativity this opens up new questions for possible future research. For example:

- How can we change gender stereotypes that operate within social work and the wider society?
- How do men negotiate power relations within fostering?
- How do social workers assess the risks and benefits of family practices and performing gender?
- How do women who foster perform gender and display family practices?
- How do we relate performing gender to the professionalisation discourse in fostering?

There are a number of limitations to this study which future research could aim to rectify by:

- Undertaking a larger-scale study to incorporate foster-fathers and social workers from several agencies, including Local Authorities;
- Undertake a study involving single male fostering households to explore the viability of the findings in this study and how they compare to men in couple relationships;
- Undertake a study of foster-mothers and their understanding of foster-fathers;
- Undertake a study of fostered children and their relationships with foster-fathers.

In this study I utilised a narrative approach to fostering, an approach which enables the emergence of themes. The next stage would be to interrogate these themes by further research using alternative methodologies, such as quantitative sampling and longitudinal studies, undertaken over a period of time to assess the generalisability of these themes.

Conclusion

Foster-fathers should be viewed as a resource and not as either assets or risks. The assessment of men as foster carers should include their potential as carers and not restricted to them as stereotyped gendered adults. My study shows that roles are not fixed because there is considerable flexibility between masculinity and femininity. The apparent movement towards professionalism may well encourage more men to foster, but this alone does not account for their motivation to foster. I provide evidence, through this study, that men are motivated for non-financial reasons to care for children. The sociocultural environment alongside agency and identity combine with time and place to influence how men perform gender within the family. Foster-fathers are more than breadwinners; their masculinity is based on caring for children and negotiation within the home. The emerging picture is a complex tapestry of constructed gendered roles within fostering families. Men in my study present a version of masculinity that they are carers who will support their partners and will look after children, who are central to the men's narratives. Through my study, foster-fathers were seen to have both predictable roles as well as new and less predictable ones. However, while foster-fathers performed gender to produce new masculinities, which allowed them to negotiate new ways to care for children, existing gender relations were largely recreated because in the end men continued to support women as primary carers.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Letter of invitation to participate in the study

Appendix 2 – Study information sheet

Appendix 3 – E-mail inviting social workers to take part in the study

Appendix 4 – Consent form

Appendix 5 – Interview schedule

Appendix 6 – Social worker questionnaire

Appendix 7 – Observational diary

Appendix 8 – Second interview information sheet and topic guide

Appendix 1 - Letter of invitation to participate in the study

Letter of invitation to participate in the study

Philip Heslop
School of Applied Social Sciences
Durham University

Dear

Research Study: Men Who Foster.

I am undertaking research to understand the experience of men who provide fostering placements for children and young people as part of a PhD study with Durham University. The study is entitled "Men who Foster" and I have enclosed an information sheet about the study. My University Supervisors are Gordon Jack and Lena Dominelli of Durham University. I also work for the IFA as the Learning and Development Manager in North East England.

As part of the study, I am organising a series of interviews and a diary record of men who are currently approved as foster carers. Your name and address has been given to me by your fostering agency and I would like to invite you to take part in the interviews for the study.

The purpose of the interviews is to hear male carers' views and experiences of fostering, the challenges they encounter and learn about the rewards and resources men use to provide fostering placements for children who are in need. If you are able to take part in the study, I will initially interview you on a one-to-one basis in your home at a time which is convenient to you. Following this initial interview I may then ask you to record what it is that you do in a diary and to take part in a second interview, which is again one-to-one and in your home at a time which is convenient to you.

Each interview will last up to two hours. In order to make sure that I can represent people's views accurately, I will record interviews on tape and then put them into a written format. For the observational part of the study I may ask you to keep a short diary for up to two weeks, through this you can record what you do as you do it.

The information you and other male carers provide in interviews and the diary will be summarised and analysed in order to build a picture of the lives and experiences of men who foster and draw some conclusions about how men care for children through fostering. The information you give me will be kept in secure storage, including password protected where information is electronically stored and your identity will be anonymised. The recording and written materials will only be seen

or heard by me and my Supervisors at Durham University. Your personal comments and views will NOT be shared with your fostering agency, Social Services or their representatives. While your anonymity will be maintained overall lessons from the study may be fed back to those who work in childcare and fostering through presentations, lectures and publication. Your name will not appear in any way in my study and you will not be identifiable to anyone who reads about my project. All tape recordings and my notes will be destroyed when the study is complete.

I will call you in the next few days to answer any questions that you may have about the research and to find out if you are able to take part in the study. If you need to contact me you can telephone me on 07967 381133 or you can e-mail me on p.a.heslop@durham.ac.uk

I hope you will be able to contribute your time and views to this study as I believe it is very important that men who foster have a say about how practitioners and policy makers can best support foster care. I shall be very grateful for any time you can give me to help other foster carers in this way.

Yours

Philip Heslop
PhD Student

Appendix 2 – Study information sheet

Research information sheet and consent form Interview participants



What is the research about?

Foster care and fostering is a unique way of looking after children that creates families that are both flexible and stable. Foster carers face many challenges and rewards in looking after children who are in need. However while foster care has been the subject of much research little is actually known about how it is influenced by gendered concepts of caring and more specifically the role of men who foster. This study aims to fill this gap in our knowledge.

Who is working on the research?

The research is being undertaken by Philip Heslop, a PhD student with the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University. Philip has worked with foster carers as a social worker and trainer for nearly two decades. He currently works with IFA where he is the Learning and Development Manager in North East England.

Philip is the main contact for the study and he is supported by Gordon Jack and Lena Dominelli of Durham University. The study is taking place between April 2010 and September 2013.

What questions are being addressed?

To study male foster carers this research aims to address the questions:

- How do men reflect on and value what they do as foster carers?
- How do social workers relate to men as foster carers?
- What are the tasks and roles which men undertake as foster carers?

How will the research be carried out?

The research will have three stages:

Social work connectedness and opinion: - as a component of the foster carers network a postal or internet questionnaire will be forwarded to supervising social workers to ascertain the connectedness, opinion and influence to male carers.

Male carer narratives: - the narratives of a sample of male carers will be gathered through two interviews. The first interview will reflect upon the carer's perspective with the second one following-up to look at themes within each narrative.

An observational record: - by the male carers themselves about their daily activities. The observational data will be gathered through the carers keeping a diary to record their activities, for a period of two weeks. The diary will then be analysed to reflect upon the carer's daily routines and tasks.

How can you help?

We are seeking men who foster who are willing to take part in a couple of interviews and to keep a diary record of their time for two weeks. The purpose of the interviews and diary is to represent the views and experiences of men who foster - the challenges and the rewards - and to learn how men adapt to fostering. The men who participate in the study will represent different stages of fostering, family life and roles; some will look after teenagers while others will look after younger children. The aim is to draw on as many different male perspectives of fostering as possible so as to best represent the diversity of men who foster.

We are also looking for Supervising Social Workers who work with foster carers to complete a questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire is to reflect on how the Supervising Social Worker interacts with the male foster carer. The information gathered from the Social Workers, who participate by completing the questionnaire, will be helpful in the later stages of the study when we interview male carers.

What will happen to the information that is collected?

The information provided in the questionnaire, interviews and diary will be summarised and analysed in order to build a picture of the lives and experiences of men who foster and draw some conclusions about how men care for children through fostering. Each interview will last up to two hours. In order to make sure that I can represent people's views accurately, I will record interviews on tape and then put them into a written format. For the observational part of the study I may ask you to keep a short diary for up to two weeks, through this you can record what you do as you do it.

The information you give me will be treated anonymously and kept in secure storage, including password protected where information is electronically stored. The written questionnaire, interview transcripts and diaries will only be seen by me and my Supervisors at Durham University. Personal comments and views will NOT be shared with the fostering agency, Social Services or their representatives. The only situation in which information may be shared would be in the very

unlikely event where there are any child protection concerns and a child may be at risk. While your anonymity will be maintained overall lessons from the study may be fed back to those who work in childcare and fostering through presentations, lectures and publication. Your name will not appear in any way in my study and you will not be identifiable to anyone who reads about my project. All questionnaires, transcripts, tapes, diaries and my notes will be destroyed when the study is complete.

Please note: you are free to withdraw from the study at any time and this will not have any impact on you as a foster carer nor the service which you receive.

If you would like any further information before deciding to take part the please contact Philip Heslop on 07967 381133 or by e-mail at p.a.heslop@durham.ac.uk

Appendix 3 – E-mail inviting social workers to take part in the study



E-mail letter of invitation to participate in the study

Philip Heslop
School of Applied Social Sciences
Durham University

Research Study: Men Who Foster.

Dear colleague

I am undertaking research to understand the experience of men who provide fostering placements for children and young people as part of a PhD study with Durham University. The study is entitled “Men who Foster” and I have enclosed an information sheet about the study as well as a questionnaire for Social Workers. My University Supervisors are Gordon Jack and Lena Dominelli of Durham University. I also work for IFA as the Learning and Development Manager in North East England.

As part of the study, I am circulating this questionnaire to social workers who are currently working with IFA at the onset of the study. I am forwarding the questionnaire through the internal IFA intranet to all IFA social workers and I would like to invite you to take part in the study by completing the questionnaire, which I have attached to this e-mail.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to reflect the views and experiences of practitioners who work with male foster carers. This is a unique study which aims to add to our knowledge of men who foster. Fostering is a complex activity that interconnects with other systems, ecologically and psychosocially. While there has been much research concerned with fostering there is a paucity of reflection on how gendered concepts influence fostering and more specifically men as foster carers, this is a systemic gap in our knowledge.

Because I know that you are busy I have designed the questionnaire to be quick and easy to complete, and it should not take too long to fill it in. Once completed please either return the questionnaire to either my IFA e-mail address Philip.heslop@k or Durham University e-mail address p.a.heslop@durham.ac.uk or post it to me at 19 Portland Terrace, Jesmond, Newcastle Upon Tyne.

The information you provide in the questionnaire will be summarised and analysed in order to build a picture of the lives and experiences of men who foster and draw some conclusions about how men care for children through fostering. The information you give me will be kept in secure storage, including password protected where information is electronically stored and your identity will be anonymised. The written questionnaire will only be seen by me and my Supervisors at Durham University. Your personal comments and views will NOT be shared with the fostering agency, Social Services or their representatives. While your anonymity will be maintained overall lessons from the study may be fed back to those who work in childcare and fostering through presentations, lectures and publication. Your name will not appear in any way in my study and you will not be identifiable to anyone who reads about my project. All questionnaires and my notes will be destroyed when the study is complete.

I hope you will be able to contribute your time and views to this study as I believe it is very important that we are able to understand more fully how men foster and how practitioners and policy makers can best support foster care. I shall be very grateful for any time you can give me to help other foster carers in this way.

If you need to contact me you can telephone me on 07967 381133 or you can e-mail me on p.a.heslop@durham.ac.uk

Yours

Philip Heslop

Appendix 4 – Consent form

Consent form - interview participants

I agree to the following (please tick)

- To take part in the study (which is to be interviewed twice and that I will complete a diary record for two weeks)

I understand that (please tick)

- I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, and should I do so that this will not have any impact on my role as a foster carer nor the service which I receive.
- The information I give will be treated confidentially (except where child protection is an issue) and will only be used as part of this research project with Durham University.
- All information I give will be made anonymous. It will be summarized along with any information given by other participants and my name will not appear in any reports, papers or journal articles produced by the researchers

Print Name

SignedDate

Appendix 5 – Interview schedule

Interview Guide

First Interview

1. Can you tell me in your own words how your life has led you to become a foster carer?
 - a. **Supplementary question** - why you initially applied to foster?
2. Can you tell me what life is like as a foster carer?
 - a. **Supplementary question** - who is it that helps you to look after children?
3. Can you tell me how you would describe to another man what it is like to look after children as a foster carer?
4. Can you think of how being a man has affected what it is that you do as a foster carer?
5. Can you tell me about any difficult situations that you have found yourself in as a foster carer?
6. Can you think of any ways (as a man) in which being foster care has changed your life?
7. Can you tell if there is anything else you would like to say about being a foster carer and how it affects you?

Second Interview

- Internal narrative:- to develop those discussed in the first interview through a free narrative discussion
- External narrative: - to introduce themes from the literature review, social worker questionnaire and project interviews that have not already emerged from the first interview. The themes include masculinity, child development, working with social workers, family roles and allegations. These will be introduced in a narrative manner, i.e. can you tell me in your own words how you think masculinity affects how you foster?

Appendix 6 – Social worker questionnaire

Supervising Social Worker Questionnaire

Research Study: Men who Foster

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

Please read the attached e-mail / letter for information about the study.

Background (Social Work)

1. I am **Male / Female** (please delete which is incorrect)
2. How long have you been a Social Worker (please indicate in the box below with an X)

Less than two years	
Between two and five years	
Between five and ten years	
More than ten years	

Foster Care

3. On a scale of one to five how important do you think gender is to fostering?
(Please indicate on the table below with an X)

not important	1	2	3	4	5	very important

Please explain your answer

4. Approximately how many fostering households have you worked with (please write your answer below)

.....

5. What proportion of these fostering households would you say included a man as a foster carer (please write your answer below)

.....

6. In your experience how much of a role do men play in fostering? (Please indicate on the table below with an X)

No role at all	1	2	3	4	5	Very active role

Please explain your answer

7. Men make successful foster carers? On a scale of one to five do you agree or disagree? (Please indicate on the table below with an X)

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

Please explain your answer

--

8. Do you think that men and women have different roles in fostering? (please delete which is incorrect) :- **Yes / No / Don't know**

9. Can you list the three (3) main tasks which in your experience men who foster perform (please write your answers below)

1	
2	
3	

10. Are there any fostering tasks men cannot do as well as women - **Yes / No**

If you answered yes can you please list them:-

--

11. When you visit foster carers in their homes would you say that (Please indicate on the table below with an X)

I mostly meet with women	
I meet both men and women together	
I mostly meet with men	

12. Can you describe a positive fostering experience provided by a male carer

13. Any other comments on men as foster carers


Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. Your answers will be really helpful in helping us to know more about men who foster.

For more information please contact Philip Heslop at:

Address: - Telephone: - 07967 381133

Email: - p.a.heslop@durham.ac.uk

Appendix 7 – Observational diary

Men who Foster
 Durham University School of Applied Social Sciences

CARERS REFERENCE NUMBER

Carers Reference:

Number of Children in placement:

Age(s) of children in placement:

Have any children moved during the two weeks observational period

Yes / No

If yes how

Relationship status:

Employment status:

Length of time fostering:

Date observation diary distributed:

Date observational diary returned:

GUIDANCE TO COMPLETING THE DIARY

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

As part of the study please complete a daily record of what you have done by filling in the observational sheet. The purpose of this is to record and reflect on what you as a male carer have actually done as you foster.

Please complete an observational sheet for each of the 14 days during a fortnight and number each sheet as you go along.

The observation sheet is broken down into 9 sections and each section has some guidance on how to complete it.

Please remember that there is no right or wrong answer because I want it to reflect what it is that you do. However while I have asked some specific questions for instance about activities and professionals it is for you to define these, so therefore activities may be leisure, hobbies, meetings or any other activity that you wish to include similarly for professionals

Should you forget to fill in a sheet for a day don't worry and please don't then stop. The information which you provide will be very useful in helping us to understand more about men who foster and as such will go towards helping other carers. So if you miss a day just number it and leave it blank and go onto the next day until the two weeks are finished.

What happens when you have finished?

I will either agree to collect the pack from or will have left a stamped addressed envelope for you to return it in the post.

Should you have any further questions or would like to talk about this further then please contact me on my mobile which is 07967 381133 or you can e-mail me on Philip.heslop@thefca.co.uk or p.a.heslop@durham.ac.uk

Thank you for your participation in this research

Philip Heslop

Observation sheet number (1-14)

Weekday or weekend (please delete)

1) **Have you had any contact with professional(s) today:** Yes / No Frequency: ☐
Nature of contact: phone, letter, meeting, in person (please delete which doesn't apply)
Type of professional(s).....

2) **Have you transported a child(ren) today:** Yes / No Frequency: ☐
Where did you transport the child

3) **Have you been involved in any activities with child(ren):** Yes / No Frequency: ☐
What was the activity.....

4) **My contact with the child today was** (please circle below whichever one applies most)
Very frequent frequent infrequent occasional there was none
What was the interaction.....

6) **Was there anyone else in the home with you today:** Yes / No
If yes who

7) **Using a rating of 1-5 (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest) how satisfied are you with your role as a foster carer today? -**
 1 2 3 4 5 (please circle your answer)

8) **How would you describe what you have done today.....**
.....
.....
.....

9) **Any other comments about today.....**
.....

Appendix 8 – Second interview information sheet and topic guide

Research Information Sheet

Introduction

This information sheet presents some initial findings from the “Men who Foster” research.

To date 70 Supervising Social Workers have returned a questionnaire, 23 men who foster have been interviewed and of these 16 have returned an observational diary. The initial findings are derived from the information provided through these questionnaires, interviews and diaries.

Key Findings

- **Attitudes about Fostering:** All of the men were positive about fostering, many saying that it had helped them to become more skilled, caring, patient and a better person and the diaries showed that most men were satisfied with fostering on most days. Supervising Social Workers similarly valued men as foster carers with over half saying that they had different roles than women and they value the male perspective and father figure role which male carers provide to children.
- **Distinct Roles:** The men identified many tasks which they undertake in fostering, the most prevalent ones being - an entertainer through activities, providing emotional support to the child and being a role model, these were closely followed by attending meetings, being an educator and by setting boundaries (or discipliner) within the home. The diaries showed that men were involved in activities with children on nearly two thirds of the days recorded and that this was closely followed by transporting children.
- **Motivation to Foster:** Most of the men chose to foster alongside their partner and have tended towards concentrating on fostering as their main employing activity. Slightly over half said that fostering was similar to being a father and the children were like part of the family.
- **Limitations and Frustrations:** Most Social Workers referred to a limiting factor to men fostering and these tended to be the risk of an allegation and safer caring practice. This is very much mirrored in the male carers’ interviews where the main frustrations of the male carers were around safer care, the threat of an allegation and the childcare “system”.
- **Professional Contact:** The diary showed that the male carers had some form of professional contact for nearly half of the days recorded (which included weekends) and the professionals that they had contact with ranged from social workers and teachers, to the police, psychiatrists and dentists.
- **Support:** The carers own family tends to be their main source of support, and they were mostly positive about this family support. However more than half of the men were fairly negative about the child’s Social Worker, though they appeared to be more positive about their own Supervising Social Worker. Social Workers, while valuing men and recognising that there are distinct risks to them, do not seem to focus on visiting or supporting male carers.

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