

Friendship and social support of young people looked-after by
their local authority

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the
Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

by

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Statement of Originality

I confirm that this is an original piece of work. The literature review and research report contained within this thesis have not been submitted for any other degree, or to any other institution.

Thesis Abstract

Title: Friendship and social support of young people looked-after by their local authority

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Part One: Literature Review

Background: Children and young people who are looked-after by social services are at increased risk of mental health problems. This and their experiences of care may contribute to difficulties accessing friends and social support. The aim was to review the state of the literature on the friendships and social relationships of children and young people looked-after by social services.

Method: Five databases were systematically searched.

Results: Thirty seven articles were retained as relevant to the question.

Conclusions: The articles reviewed demonstrated some evidence of peer relationship difficulties for the looked-after population and identified contributing factors. However, the articles demonstrated areas of poor quality such as small sample sizes and highlighted areas for future research.

Part Two: Research Report

Introduction: Children and young people who are looked-after by their local authority are more likely to experience difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships but how they make sense of their experiences is not understood.

Aim: To understand the meanings young people who are looked-after construct from their experiences of friends, friendship and peer relationships.

Method: Seven young people looked-after by their local authority took part in semi-structured interviews. The co-construction of narrative in the interviews were analysed using Critical Narrative Analysis (Emerson & Frosh, 2004).

Results: The young people were all able to construct meaning from their experiences of friends, friendship and peer relationships and all had some experience of close and supportive friends that they valued. Some barriers to friendship were understood by the young people to be caused by having to move a lot and by individual characteristics within themselves.

Conclusion: Friendships were positive contributions to the lives of LAC and provided them with a source of emotional support.

Part Three: Critical Appraisal

Reflections regarding the overall research process are provided.

Word Count: 295

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Word Count

Part One: Literature Review	5343 words
References	1626 words
Part Two: Research Report	12460 words
References	1011 words
Part Three: Critical Appraisal	2401 words
References	87 words
TOTAL (excluding references)	20204 words
(with references/tables)	22928 words

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Part One Literature Review

Abstract

Background: Children and young people who are looked-after (LAC) by social care agencies are at increased risk of mental health difficulties. Early difficulties in interpersonal relationships in infancy have been theorised to contribute to difficulties with later peer relationships. Early experiences of maltreatment and experiences of the care system might also contribute to difficulties with friendships and peer relationships. The way these factors contribute to poor or resilient outcomes on different aspects of friendships for looked-after young people is not clear.

Aim: To review the state of the literature on the friendships and social relationships of LAC.

Method: Five databases were systematically searched for articles on the friendships of children and young people who are looked-after.

Results: A total of 37 articles were reviewed, 14 with direct relevance to the question.

Conclusion: The articles reviewed demonstrated some evidence of peer relationship difficulties for the looked-after population and identified contributing factors. However, the articles demonstrated areas of poor quality such as small sample sizes and highlighted areas for future research.

Keywords: Looked-after, Friendship, Peer,

Target Journal: Children and Youth Services Review.

1. Background

Children and young people who are ‘looked-after’ (LAC) are those under 18 years of age, who are placed under local-authority care, including: residential care, foster care or living alone under local authority supervision (Department of Health, 1989). In 2007, there were 44,200 children and young people recorded as being looked-after for at least one year by local authorities in England (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008). Also in 2007, 33,300 children became subject to a child protection plan under one of five categories: Neglect 44%, Physical abuse 15%, Sexual abuse 7%, Emotional abuse 23%, or Mixed 10% (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008). As one would expect, there are high levels of maltreatment experiences in LAC which are often contributory to young people being looked-after. Price and Brew (1998) conducted a narrative review of the literature on peer relationships of young people in foster care. They found similar difficulties with peer relationships were reported by studies on children who experienced maltreatment and those in foster care (Price & Brew, 1998).

Children and young people looked-after have been found to have higher incidences of educational difficulties, psychological, emotional and neurodevelopmental disorders than non looked-after peers (Ford, Vostanis, Meltzer & Goodman, 2007; Richardson & Lelliott, 2003). Prevalence studies suggest that children and young people who are looked-after experience difficulties with psychosocial functioning and support (Blower, Addo, Hodgson, Lamington, & Towlson 2004; Fleming, Bamford, & McCaughley, 2005).

The difficulties experienced by those who are looked-after and the relationship to outcomes measured for this group can be understood from different theoretical perspectives. Attachment, Object Relations and Social Learning theories all outline the importance of the interpersonal or social elements of early life for healthy development (Ainsworth, 1969). Whether talking in terms of formation of schema, or internal working models of

relationships, they are influenced by their early interpersonal experiences from their relationships with their first care givers, and their experiences of these influence future relationships. The social environmental impact on development has also been supported by neurodevelopmental research (Gerhardt, 2004). For example, children who have lived in stressful conditions or experienced maltreatment at a young age often have elevated levels of stress hormones which impact on brain development (De Bellis, Keshavan, Clark, & Casey, 1999; Gunnar & Donzella, 2002).

Children who have experienced difficulties or interruptions in their relationships in the early years are manifested in particular social, psychological and physiological consequences (Prior & Glaser, 2006 as cited in The British Psychological Society, 2007; Schore, 2001). Experience of such poor early relationships have been shown to impact on further relationships, influencing the way their peers react to an individual (Fagot, 1997). For example, experiences of physical abuse have been linked to young people not being liked by peers (Salzinger, Feldman, Hammer & Rosario, 1993).

Once in local authority care, young people can experience a high frequency of moves following placement breakdown, which can exacerbate difficulties already faced (Kenrick, 2000). Not only does this have implications for the opportunity to form family attachments and a 'secure base', but also raises practical difficulties in developing lasting friendships and wider social networks (Ridge & Millar, 2000). Also, practical problems in accommodation can make relationships difficult to maintain, such as environments that are not welcoming for friends (Ridge & Millar, 2000). Experiences that resulted in a young person being looked-after, and the impact of the looked-after system, seem to mediate problems in accessing friendships and emotional support (Rees, 2006).

For some young people, early experiences that would typically pose a threat to healthy development do not have such a negative impact. By researching those who seem to

be resilient to such negative experiences we have learnt that psychological impact such as anxiety can be reduced by good quality relationships with caregivers and friends (Legault, Anawati & Flynn, 2006). Collishaw, Pickles, Messer, Rutter, Shearer and Maughan (2007) found a small group of adults with a history of abuse to be resilient to mental health problems in adulthood. They found resilience to be related to a number of factors including, personality style, perceived parental care, quality of loving relationships in adulthood and adolescent peer relationships.

When considering the different aspects of friendship in the context of LAC research suggests multiple factors have an impact. The experiences that lead to a young person being looked-after by their local authority such as abuse, neglect or bereavement, in addition to the experience of being looked-after, could both impact on being liked by their peers, having good quality reciprocal friendships and having wide social networks. It remains unclear how these different factors and outcomes are related to one another.

1.1 Literature review question

What is the state of the literature on the friendships and social relationships of children and young people who are ‘looked-after’?

2. Method

A systematic approach to searching was undertaken with five databases: ASSIA, PsychInfo, Scopus, Social Care Online and Web of Science (Appendix A). The search terms: “looked after”, OR foster, OR adopt, AND friend*, OR peer, were used with variations appropriate to the search possibilities of each site. For example, for some sites it was possible to search for similar terms and to extend the search using truncations. All searches were limited to English language and journal articles or reviews where possible. No extra date restrictions were set for any database but each database accessed literature for varying time periods. This search yielded a total of 588 articles which was reduced by removing duplicates from within each database and removing those obviously unrelated to the topic or incorrectly retrieved, for example DVD resources.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria were set in order to review only those articles that were relevant to the topic. All research articles reporting on the friendships of children and young people of all ages, who were looked-after by their local authority, were included. Articles were also included if a social care organisation (public or private) was mentioned in relation to the care of the participants. This was done to include research conducted in countries where a different system to ‘local authority’ care was employed. All articles were excluded if they stated the participants were cared for by their natural parents without the involvement of a social care agency, or if the articles were not reporting findings on young people’s friendships, social relating with peers or relationships with non-family members.

By applying inclusion/exclusion criteria to the abstracts and the removal of 27 duplicates across each database the number of articles was reduced to 110. On closer scrutiny of the whole article 73 were discarded for being about non-looked after populations, about relationships with adults or carers, or for not being research papers but narrative reviews or position papers.

Of the remaining articles, 14 were deemed relevant to the topic and 23 as having marginal relevance or as being tangential. Articles deemed to have marginal relevance, mentioned aspects of friendship but this was not the main focus of the study. For example, Biehal and Wade (2000) recorded reasons why young people who are looked after might run away from care and reported one reason was 'to be with friends'. Alternatively, articles were included in this category if they reported friendships or peer relating of young people who had been maltreated but with no clear reference to looked-after status, the involvement of care organisations, or care by biological family.

3. Results

A total of 37 articles were retained for review. Due to the broad nature of the literature review question, it was anticipated that the content of the articles would be diverse. The articles were reviewed for their relevance to the question and main focus or aim. Based on the aims, the articles all fell into one of seven categories presented in Table 2 (Appendix B). The articles described in Categories A, B and C, were more relevant to the question than the remaining categories. Whilst the articles in categories D-G did not directly answer the review question they did contain elements that were relevant and it was felt important not to disregard their contribution.

3.1 Articles in categories A- C Table 2 (Appendix B)

The articles in categories A-C report the findings of research that is directly relevant to the review question. For these studies a systematic approach was used to evaluate quality of the research and to assess how the findings could best be integrated. Each paper was read through whilst answering a series of questions based on guidelines for reviewing quality within each study (Jones, 2007). Each negative response to a question flagged up a weakness in the study or report, presented in Table 3 (Appendix C). The aims, method, analysis and main findings are presented in Table 4 (Appendix D).

General Characteristics

All of the articles provided a rationale for their study that placed them within an existing body of research literature or a clear theoretical framework. With the exception of one controlled trial (Rhodes, Haight & Briggs, 1999) and a qualitative study (Ridge & Millar, 2000) the relevant articles reported studies that used a cohort design. It is not surprising that observational approaches be used for these studies, as it is impossible to control experiences that have led children to be cared for by social care agencies. Indeed, the studies here were

measuring the outcomes of being looked-after or maltreated not at what had caused these experiences.

As the control groups in the studies were often looked-after children in different types of care placement, and the nature of what was being measured was varied, it was not possible to compare participants across the articles. However, a total of 917 children and young people were identified in the articles as either cared for away from biological parents, or receiving input from social care agencies. Their ages ranged from 3-19 years and of mixed sex. Due to missing data, percentages were not possible to calculate. Some references were made to minority ethnic groups but as the studies were conducted in different contexts (for example, predominantly white rural areas and inner-city areas) this was not comparable across the studies. Only four studies made no reference to recording the maltreatment or trauma histories of participants (McIntyre, Lounsbury, Berntson & Steel, 1988; Perry, 2006; Ridge & Millar, 2000; Roy, Rutter & Pickles, 2004). These studies focussed on the impact of the type of care experienced.

Category A

Category A contained 7 studies on the friendship and social relationships of looked-after young people. One study focussed on young people in residential care (Blitz & Glenwick, 1989); one on young people living with their biological family but with the input of social services (Kaufman & Cicchetti, 1989); four on foster care (Leve, Fisher & DeGarmo, 2007; McIntyre, et al. 1988; Perry, 2006; Smith, 1995); and one on experiences of young people in foster and residential placements (Ridge & Millar, 2000).

Blitz and Glenwick (1989) hypothesised that boys in residential care who had been freed by their parents for adoption would experience this as rejection by their parents, and that this rejection would lead to increased difficulties with peers and behaviour problems. The study utilised two measures, one sociometric peer ratings of like and dislike of peers they

lived with, and the second was an average of care workers ratings on a child behaviour scale. Sociometric ratings of peers are common in studies of friendship and are often used (as in this case) to categorise children as either liked or rejected by their peers. Little information is available in the article on the behaviour rating scale, nor is there any comment on inter-rater reliability. However, more notable here is the small sample size in each category (17 in each), and the level of significance reached ($p < .10$). The study highlights the difficulties in assumptions about the relationship between behaviour problems, peer rejection and parental rejection, raising the question of causality.

Kaufman and Cicchetti (1989) evaluated the impact of different forms of maltreatment on children's social development and self-esteem. Ratings of children's pro-social, aggressive and withdrawn behaviour, self-esteem and sociometric ratings from peers were collected within the setting of a summer day camp for children both with and without a history of maltreatment. All data was provided by camp staff and peers, who were all blind to the maltreatment histories of the participants. Maltreated children were found to have significantly lower self-esteem and significantly more negative behaviour scores than non-maltreated children. Further analyses were undertaken to distinguish the individual impact of different forms of maltreatment but due to small sample size for different categories and a lot of cross-over between categories of abuse, results were not meaningful. However, children who scored highest on the aggression measure were found to be significantly more likely to have been physically abused.

Four studies observed the impact of foster care on friendships and social functioning (Leve, et al. 2007; McIntyre, et al. 1988; Perry, 2006; Smith, 1995). Young people in foster care were found to have a particular psychosocial pattern of development compared to non-fostered children that was suggestive of learned helplessness (McIntyre, et al. 1988). In the same article a second study demonstrated, via sociometric measures, that young people in

foster care were rated by their school peers as more disliked. The results suggested that foster children were accurately predicting a negative response from their peers (McIntyre, et al. 1988). Perry (2006) found significantly fewer young people in foster care reported their friends cared about them and they demonstrated higher rates of depression than in the general population. Also perceived strength (measured by how close, reliable or caring a young person reported relationships to be) in foster networks was found to positively impact on peer networks (Perry, 2006).

Leve, et al. (2007) reported maltreated girls in foster care were found to have significantly more behaviour problems and peer problems but not boys. However the authors acknowledge the results could have been impacted by the boys having more difficulty understanding what was required of them for the measures and highlight potential problems with child report peer measures for young children. Smith (1995) found that children in foster care who had been placed with a sibling directed significantly more positive behaviour towards friends than those separated from siblings. However a small sample size (once split into separate categories for analysis of placement effect) reduced the reliability of the results.

The final study in Category A, reported on the experiences of young people in both residential and foster care. Ridge and Millar (2000) found that young people valued friends as a source of support, someone to talk to, and as a source of protection but friendships were often difficult to maintain because of practical difficulties and because of multiple moves, or feelings of isolation. Their methodology involved in-depth interviews and ‘thematic indexing’ to analyse young people’s experiences. The article used direct quotes to highlight different themes. However, there was little description of the process of the analysis undertaken, which diminished the transparency and overall quality of the study.

Category B

Category B contained 6 studies on mediating factors in the friendships of looked-after young people with a documented history of maltreatment. Mediating factors included loneliness (Howe & Parke, 2001), information processing and behaviour (Price & Landsverk, 1998; Rogosch & Cicchetti, 1994; Rogosch, Cicchetti & Aber, 1995; Roy, Rutter & Pickles, 2004), and emotional regulation (Shields, Ryan & Cicchetti, 2001).

Howe and Parke (2001) aimed to examine multiply abused children's interactions with peers and their perceptions of the quality of their friendships, in addition to feelings of loneliness. The children with a history of maltreatment (aged 4-11 years) were all placed in a residential treatment centre but were attending mainstream school. The study gathered sociometric data from class peers, observed interactions of friend pairs, completed questionnaires on loneliness, friendship quality, and a measure of verbal ability. The use of friend observations strengthened information gathered from the children, which as highlighted above can be problematic particularly for young children. They found children who had experienced maltreatment were not significantly different on peer ratings than non-maltreated children, but that maltreated children reported their friends cared less for them than non-maltreated children. Close friendships were found to act as a buffering system to protect against poor outcomes such as loneliness (Howe & Parke, 2001).

Price and Landsverk (1998) aimed to investigate the role of processing social information in the psychosocial development and social behaviour of maltreated children in foster care. Children were presented with pictures of ambiguous social situations and were asked to imagine themselves as the protagonist and provide an explanation of the actions of the other children featured. They were then asked to explain how they would react if the situation happened to them. Children's responses were placed into categories. In addition the Child Behaviour Checklist (Achenback & Edelbrock, as cited in Price & Landsverk, 1998) and Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales (VABS), (Sparrow, Balla & Cicchetti, as cited in

Price & Landsverk, 1998) were completed. The authors highlight the study was limited by stimuli that involved two steps in the processing of social information namely, interpreting another's intentions and social problem solving. However, the results suggest that competent social information processing was predictive of later adaptation and competence. Also, measures of social information processing accounted for at least 10% of the variance on Communication and Socialization domains of the VABS. Difficulties with processing social information were predictive of behaviour problems six months later.

Rogosch and Cicchetti (1994) compared non-maltreated children to those with a history of maltreatment that were receiving input from social care services. They collected information from teachers, parents and class peers of children aged 6-11 years. They found children with a history of maltreatment were rated by teachers as less socially competent and were more rejected by peers than non-maltreated children, with the greatest differences being found in children who had been physically abused. In a similar study Rogosch, et al. (1995) aimed to discover the extent to which experiences of maltreatment impacted on social relationships with peers through the mediation of cognitive and affective processing. They found that difficulty in understanding sad and angry affect contributed to rejection by peers in physically abused children.

More recent investigations of children's social cognitions have been undertaken using 'story-stems', whereby children are presented with ambiguous social situations and are asked to make sense of them. Shields, et al. (2001) used story-stems to assess maltreated and non-maltreated children's representations of caregivers, in addition to sociometric ratings, verbal ability measures and ratings of their emotional regulation by day camp counsellors. Maltreated children were found to give significantly less positive coherent and more negative constricted representations of caregivers. They were also rated as more disruptive, emotionally dysregulated, and less preferred by peers. All of the articles above reporting on

the impact of maltreatment on the processing of social information presented their findings within the context of early caregiver relationships being internalised and informing later relationships with peers. They used multiple measures and different informants in order to make results more robust and to avoid an over reliance on report measures based on memory, rather than directly observed responses or behaviours.

The final study in this category, by Roy, et al. (2004) compared children in residential and foster care on measures of intelligence, behaviour difficulties and on two composite measures of selectivity in caregiver relationships and friendships. These were supported by classroom observations. The main findings were that boys raised in residential care showed a significant pattern of lack of selectivity in friendships and carer relationships in combination with inattention and overactivity. However, the study used a relatively small sample size (19 in each type of care) particularly when broken down by gender for analysis.

Category C

Category C contained just one report of a controlled trial (Rhodes, Haight & Briggs, 1999). They described the impact of a mentoring programme on the relationships of young people in foster care. Those who were fostered were divided into sub-groups of relative and non-relative foster care and were compared with non fostered young people. Early experiences of abuse, trauma, physical or intellectual disability and records of arrest were described to be equitable across groups. However, those fostered were significantly more likely to have experienced a non-specified trauma.

In addition to measuring parental satisfaction with the mentor intervention, a 20 item measure of children's friendships was administered to all children at baseline and at 18 month follow-up (made up of five subscales: intimacy, self-esteem, pro-social support, conflict & inequality). By comparing the composite scores across the three groups there was no difference at baseline but at follow-up those in formal foster care scored significantly lower

on the overall scale. Comparisons across care groups and conditions were made on the individual subscales of the friendship measure. The results suggested some benefit of the intervention for those in foster care and a general increase in peer problems over time for those in foster care without the intervention. The sustainability of these results over time would be interesting to explore, particularly the impact of pro-social support once contact with the mentor had ceased.

A number of weaknesses were identified within the research paper that highlight the possible reduction in effect due to the small number of foster care youth in the overall study and potential biases of having a sample of young people whose parents/carers had sought out a mentoring intervention. It would seem that the intervention may improve the experiences that young people in foster care have of others, but not improve their feelings/thoughts about themselves. This could be understood in relation to research on the connection between identification with birth parents and increased self-esteem (Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994), and perceived levels of social support (Denuwelaere & Bracke, 2007).

3.2 Marginally Relevant Articles in Categories D-G Table 2 (Appendix B)

Category D articles show some evidence that looked-after children and young people are having some difficulty with friendships but this is not constant through different types of care experience. A number of studies compared young people in residential and foster care to non looked-after populations. They found that young people in alternative care reported their friends were more likely to be involved in problem behaviours such as substance misuse (Farrugia, Greenberger, Chen, & Heckhausen, 2006). They showed deterioration in social competence over time (Ahmad, Qahar, Siddiq, Majeed, Rasheed, Jabar, & von Knorring, 2005), or reported difficulties in social relationships (Rutter, Kreppner, Croft, Murin, Colvert, Beckett, Castle, & Sonuga-Barke, 2007; Schofield & Beek, 2005). Johnson, Yoken and Voss (1995) reported that young people in foster care missed the friends they had before moving to

new areas and that they only had occasional contact with old friends. They also found that the young people found it hard to make new friends. Reilly (2003) found young people in foster care with larger support networks reported more overall life satisfaction, and poorer outcomes for those with smaller networks. Montserrat and Casas (2006) found that young people placed in kinship care also reported high levels of satisfaction across multiple domains of their lives including friends.

There was some evidence of increased prevalence of abuse/neglect within the looked-after population (Schofield & Beek, 2005). For fostered young people who had a history of physical or sexual abuse, there was some impact on their coping strategies, with non-abused children being significantly more likely to turn to friends for support than those with a history of abuse (Browne, 2002).

Category E held six observational studies. Biehal and Wade (2000) used a cross-section approach to establish the prevalence of young people going missing from residential and foster care in the United Kingdom. They found those who ran away to be with friends were older and more likely to be from foster placements, likely to have gone missing for longer, were less likely to commit crimes and more likely to return voluntarily than other runaways. Grotevant, van Dulmen, Dunbar, Nelson-Christinedaughter, Christensen, Fan and Miller, (2006) used a longitudinal cohort design to identify influences on anti-social behaviour for young people who had been adopted, and found some potential negative influences of social networks. Marcus (1991) found the longer young people spent in care the more their peer support systems decreased.

The remaining articles report on cohort studies which focussed on factors of resilience for looked-after young people. The main findings suggested that resilience is marked by having peers who demonstrate positive behaviours and perceiving a higher number of good quality reciprocal friendships. These were associated with a number of positive outcomes

such as reduced anxiety and increased self-esteem (Edmond, Auslander, Elze, & Bowland, 2006; Flynn, Ghazal, Legault, Vandermeulen, & Petrick, 2004; Legault, et al. 2006).

Category F held two controlled trials for interventions with young people looked-after and an aspect of which was connected to peer relationships or social functioning. Finn and Kerman (2004) found there was a significant increase in the use of the internet for social support after a year of a computer based intervention. However, the quality of this study could have been improved had the two groups been better matched on computer use at baseline. Leve and Chamberlain (2005) reported on an intervention to reduce association with delinquent peers for young people involved in the justice system. Two groups of young people were randomly assigned to either treatment foster care or a group home. The results suggest the intervention to be significantly successful, but it would be useful to extend this research to report any increase in associations with positive peer relationships.

Category G held seven cohort studies on the impact of maltreatment and abuse on the peer relationships of young people that were not clearly in or out of the care of their birth families or social care agencies. The research in this area suggested experiences of maltreatment often led to difficulties with peer relationships; significantly more aggressive, hyperactive/ distractible behaviour which was mediated by their expectations of how peers would react to them (Anthonysamy & Zimmer-Gambeck, 2007; Bolger, Patterson & Kupersmidt, 1998; Bolger & Patterson, 2001; Haskett & Kistner, 1991; Salzinger, et al. 1993; Salzinger, Feldman, Ng-Mak, Mojica, & Stockhammer, 2001). Children who had experienced more frequent and chronic abuse were found to have fewer friends over time (Bolger, et al. 1998). However, some children were found to be resilient to the impact of abuse (Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Polo-Tomas, & Taylor, 2007).

3.3 Conclusions

The articles reviewed have demonstrated a number of methodological difficulties such as, small sample sizes, reliance on ratings by parents and sometimes young children, a lack of transparency in analysis and the measurement of outcomes impacted by multiple variables. However, despite these difficulties, there is evidence that looked-after young people value friendships and when they report good quality friendships or networks, they bring benefits of improved psychosocial functioning and protection against mental health problems. Yet predominantly looked-after young people are experiencing difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships and social relationships with peers. The problems experienced seem to be mediated by behaviour, social cognition and poor understanding or regulation of affect.

Further research could provide clarity on the way such influences interact. What remains lacking in the research is the extent to which difficulties measured are the outcome of individual differences, maltreatment experiences, experiences of care placement or a combination of these.

4. Discussion

The results provided support for the notion that friendships, peer relationships and social functioning are a pronounced difficulty for the looked-after population. These difficulties are often manifested as aggressive or withdrawn behaviour, assumptions or predictions that peers will treat them negatively and by difficulty in understanding emotional expression. For a group of young people already at risk from social exclusion, peer problems and increased prevalence of mental health and conduct problems could contribute further to poor outcomes. This highlights the potential for exacerbation of difficulties with peers that already exists.

The system of care for looked-after children can also hinder their friendships with frequent placement moves, changes in school and associated stigma. The literature indicated that young people who are looked-after value friendships and are unhappy when they are prevented from maintaining friendships if they move to a new placement (Johnson, et al. 1995; Ridge & Millar, 2000). This supports previous research findings that children and young people in the general population are unhappy without friends (Newman, 2004).

Also in support of research in the general population was the finding that when able to access good quality relationships and networks, looked-after young people experience benefits to psychological health and well-being (Edmond, et al. 2006; Flynn, et al. 2004; Legault, et al. 2006; Reilly, 2003). This fits with research findings that friendships and social support can offer protection against mental health problems (Demir & Urberg, 2004; Fletcher, Hunter & Eanes, 2006).

There was support for previous research on the difficulties with peers experienced by children with a history of maltreatment (Conaway & Hansen, 1989). The literature reviewed here found particular strength in results for those who had been physically abused (Kaufman & Cicchetti, 1989; Rogosch & Cicchetti, 1994), though this could be as they were more

represented within the samples reviewed. However, the literature reviewed was unable to clarify whether the difficulties with peers and friendships are the result of difficulties in early relationships, or if they are the result of being cared for away from their birth families and the associated isolation or stigma. Indeed, both factors could be contributory. The majority of the literature reviewed here was reporting the possible impact of both these experiences and few made any attempt at distinguishing them.

Limitations and future research

The review covered five databases that spanned literature published from 1823-present day but with no further attempts at hand searches. Changes in language and terms used to describe the population and differences in policy across different countries may have resulted in excluding articles in error. If further reviews of the literature were to be undertaken it would be wise to investigate first the differences in policy and systems of different countries or to focus purely on literature produced on looked-after populations within the United Kingdom.

The need to develop services that can meet the interpersonal needs of looked-after young people has been highlighted. The research reviewed suggests the interpersonal experiences could be improved by providing more social opportunities for young people to develop networks of friends, teaching young people to challenge overly negative social cognitions, manage their aggressive behaviours and by facilitating continuity in placement localities to enable young people to sustain relationships. However, such attempts would be best supported from a safe and stable care environment and a secure base from which the young people could develop (Ainsworth, 1979). The majority of the research reviewed was quantitative, limiting depth in the information gathered from the young people themselves. As there is no clear distinction between the impact of experiences that have led to young people being looked-after, and their experiences of being looked-after, then it would be

useful to explore this in further research and to understand how looked-after young people make sense of their experiences.

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Part Two: Research Report

Abstract

Introduction: Close and reciprocal friendships have been found to be protective against mental health problems. Children and young people who are looked-after (LAC) by their local authority are more likely to experience difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships but how they make sense of their experiences is not understood.

Aim: To understand the meanings LAC construct from their experiences of friends, friendship and peer relationships.

Method: Seven young people looked-after by their local authority aged between 14-17 years, took part in semi-structured interviews. The co-construction of narrative in the interviews were analysed using Critical Narrative Analysis (Emerson & Frosh, 2004).

Results: The young people were all able to construct meaning from their experiences of friends, friendship and peer relationships and all had some experience of close and supportive friends that they valued. Some barriers to friendship were understood by the young people to be caused by having to move a lot and by individual characteristics within themselves.

Conclusion: Friendships were positive contributions to the lives of LAC and provided them with a source of emotional support.

1. Introduction

We seek out and resist the breaking of social connections, and there are negative psychological and emotional consequences when prevented from fulfilling these needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Based on this premise it is asserted that, friendships are important for children and young people, and children without friends indicate they are unhappy (Newman, 2004). Not only do children gain developmentally from their friends through social and cognitive scaffolding but they also ease the stress of normal transitions such as changing school (Hartup, 1996).

Gifford-Smith and Brownell (2003) conducted a review of the research of children's friendships and social networks and highlighted that the ability to make and maintain friendships, to be accepted by peers and to be connected to a social network are all important for children's development and well-being. Intimacy in friendship pairs has been found to be low at age eight but to increase with age (Jones & Dembo, 1989). Adolescence typically signifies a time when young people begin to distance themselves from their parent's support and perceived support from friends increases with age (Helsen, 2000).

Friendships and social networks of children and young people have been found to be important to psychological health and well-being. Fletcher, Hunter and Eanes (2006) suggest children's psychological well-being is enhanced by their involvement with close social networks across different social contexts. Children and young people with good quality reciprocal friendships have been shown to be at reduced risk of poor emotional adjustment and this is independent of popularity (Demir & Urberg, 2004). Poor friend quality, low peer acceptance and fewer friends have been found to lead to greater maladjustment, as reported by teachers (Waldrip, Malcolm & Jensen-Campbell, 2008). Schmidt and Bagwell (2007) found that young people who more frequently reported experiences of others trying to hinder their social relationships were significantly more likely to be depressed.

Some groups of young people are at an increased risk of experiencing difficulties with peers. The literature suggests children with mental health problems are less likely to be liked by their peers if they appear more anxious (Verduin & Kendall, 2008), and those with low self-worth and symptoms of depression are less likely to report support from a close friend (Klima & Repetti, 2008). This could make it difficult for young people with mental health difficulties to access informal social and emotional support when they need it. Those who experience mental health problems are at increased risk of social exclusion which can result in a perpetuating cycle, increasing mental health problems (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004).

Children and young people who are looked-after (LAC), by their local authority have been found to be at increased risk of mental health problems (Ford, Vostanis, Meltzer & Goodman, 2007; Office for National Statistics, 2003). When young people enter local authority care they are likely to have experienced some form of abuse, neglect, or bereavement which led to them being looked-after (Rees, 2006). Children and young people with a history of maltreatment have been more frequently rated as having low self-esteem, aggressive or withdrawn behaviour than those without a history of maltreatment (Kaufman & Cicchetti, 1989). Children with a maltreatment history are also more likely to report their friends to care less for them (Howe & Parke, 2001); to be rated by their teachers as less socially competent, and more rejected by their class peers than those without a maltreatment history (Rogosch & Cicchetti, 1994). Young people with a history of maltreatment have also been found to have difficulty understanding sad and angry affect (Rogosch, Cicchetti & Aber, 1995), and difficulty with emotional regulation which could contribute to difficulties with social relationships (Shields, Ryan & Cicchetti, 2001). Research on LAC's friendships and peer relationships have also indicated they are at increased risk of difficulty with forming and maintaining friendships (Price & Brew, 1998).

In addition to the experiences prior to being looked-after, once in the care of the local authority young people often experience multiple placements and disruption. Indeed, Stanley, Riordan and Alaszewski (2005) found increased mental health needs in those who had experienced more placement breakdown. Ridge and Millar (2000) found that young people in both residential and foster care had difficulty maintaining friendships because of multiple placement moves.

The research suggests that LAC are experiencing difficulties with their social relationships. However, what is not clear is how the young people themselves are making sense of their social experiences and if they are able to gain any of the benefits of peer relationships found in the general population.

Research Question

What meanings do looked-after young people construct from their experiences of friends, friendship and peer relationships?

2. Methodology

An attempt to understand how looked-after young people (LAC)¹ made sense of their social worlds lent itself more readily to a qualitative methodology. Qualitative approaches value the depth and subjective meanings in a subject of inquiry. The subjective experiences and meanings of friendship and social relationships of LAC were largely absent in the existing body of research. Further, LAC are a marginalised and disempowered population (Del Busso, 2004). It felt important to adopt an approach that would recognise the influences of social power within these experiences. Narrative research takes a psychosocial approach to the understanding of individual psychological experience within the context of the social world (Crossley, 2000).

As our language develops we construct stories (narratives) about our own and others experiences. Such cumulative narrative knowledge makes our experiences meaningful (Bruner, 1991). We use the telling, retelling and listening of stories to develop our identity and sense of self in relation to others. Our stories help us make sense of and provide structure to, a mass of social experiences (Ricoeur, 1991 as cited in Crossley, 2000), and also, our stories are influenced in the telling by the audience and context in which they are told (Murray, 1997). In order to address the research question it was felt important to understand how LAC make sense of their experiences of friendship and social support and to recognise the co-construction of these stories in an interview context.

Design

The study used semi-structured interviews as the context to jointly construct narratives of friendships and social support with young people who are looked-after. Social Services Managers were approached for permission to recruit young people through their

¹ The abbreviation LAC is most frequently used in the literature to refer to children and young people living under the care of the local authority. Whilst the LAC abbreviation is used here, the study refers to the participation of young people not children.

service areas, in one city in the United Kingdom. When permission was granted, members of staff from the service area were asked to hand out information packs to young people who met the inclusion criteria for the study (Appendix E). These were: currently looked-after, over 12 years of age, able to participate in an interview and interested in taking part. Interview transcripts were analysed using Critical Narrative Analysis (Emerson & Frosh, 2004).

Sample

Through the recruitment procedure outlined above, four service managers were approached. One of the service areas declined taking part, and one area did not have any young people who met the inclusion criteria. Forty-two information packs were distributed, one person declined, 34 were unreturned and seven young people were interviewed. The participants were aged between 14 and 17, and included two males and five females.

Participant	Age	Gender
1	16	F
2	16	M
3	14	F
4	15	F
5	14	F
6	17	M
7	15	F

Table 1 Showing participant's age and gender

Two interviews were completed in the homes of foster carers and five in residential care settings. All participants had been looked-after for more than a year. The sample size was small but this was not surprising as research with looked-after young people has highlighted barriers to accessing this population (Heptinstall, 2000). The small sample was

not considered problematic as the aim was not to generalise from a representative sample but to understand the meaning generated from divergent and subjective experiences.

Ethics

The study was reviewed and approved by the Derbyshire Research Ethics Committee in August 2008 (Appendix F).

Procedure

Pilot: Interview questions were generated from a guide for narrative interviews (Crossley, 2000), adapted for the focus on friendships and social support (Appendix G). Two pilot interviews were conducted, one with an adult who had lived in both residential and foster care as a child and one with a young person living in kinship care. Following the pilot an additional question about how a young person would structure the story of their life in relation to their friendships was introduced.

Interview procedure: The interviews were directed by the interview schedule but remained flexible and allowed for spontaneous material from the participants. Interviews started and ended in a conversational tone around the participants' interests. They were digitally audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim by the researcher and anonymised. A copy of each transcript was sent to participants for verification. After each interview notes were made about the salient points of the interview environment, process and researcher reflections.

Analysis

Emerson and Frosh (2004) present the following definition of personal narratives.

“Personal narrative is (i) a respondent’s personal story that comprises a relatively discrete, discursively coherent and thematically interwoven subsection of interview text which is, nevertheless, (ii) jointly constructed over the real time of the interview with the interviewer in ways that (iii) privilege the researcher’s areas of interest qua research, but

(iv) that privilege the respondent's views, responses, voice, experience and meaning-making, in relation to those areas of research interest."

(Emerson & Frosh, 2004, p50).

This definition of a narrative was used to examine the experiences and meanings made by the participants within the context of the interviews. Firstly interview transcripts were re-transcribed based on 'micro' level coding of pitch, intonation, speech emphasis, pauses, idea units and lines. The transcripts were then re-organised around the 'macro' structures of 'Stanzas' (a collection of lines on a similar theme), 'Strophes' (related Stanzas) and 'Parts' (collections of Stanzas and Strophes that make up the story). Micro and macro coding are demonstrated in Appendix H.

The generation of the re-transcription required multiple listening and alterations and was felt to be part of the interpretive process (Mishler, 1991). That is, the inclusion of speech emphasis and talk from both the interviewer and interviewee allowed for analysis of the interactional and contextual factors sometimes lost. This allowed examination of the response to certain questions phrased in a particular way as well as the interviewer's response to the participant, creating a co-constructed account. By inclusion of pauses and speech emphasis the meanings presented by each speaker were preserved but with priority given to the meaning of the young person being interviewed.

After structuring the transcripts as outlined above, they were analysed using Gee's five interpretive levels of analysis namely: Organisation of speech, syntax and cohesion, mainline and off-mainline plot, psychological subjects and focussing system (Gee, 1992, as cited in Emerson & Frosh, 2004). The interpretive levels are hierarchical in that they each take account of the meaning generated from the ones below and with the first being based on the structure of the text. An exemplar of the contribution of the five levels with Participant 1 is presented in Appendix I. The definition of personal narrative, micro and macro analysis,

were used along with five interpretive levels of analysis to generate themes. The themes were built inductively across the interview transcripts. Regular supervision was used to check the development of the themes.

Researcher position

The researcher was a 34-year-old, white middle class woman, raised within a western culture. This meant the researcher brought a particular set of values and assumptions that would impact on the research process from conception of the research question to write-up. Equally the context for conducting the research as part of a doctorate in clinical psychology also impacted on this process. The researcher had begun the research process by talking to psychologists from looked-after services about her ideas and prior to interviewing she started to work in a service for looked-after young people. Whilst the theory and literature suggested she could anticipate young people may have difficulties with their social relationships, she felt the voices, experiences and meanings of the population had largely been unheard.

3. Results

What meanings do looked-after young people construct from their experiences of friends, friendship and peer relationships?

A thematic interpretation from each interview as a whole is presented below before drawing on commonalities. Verbatim extracts of the interview transcripts demonstrating emotionality, such as laughter and ‘breaches’ from dominant discourses are provided to support understanding. The extracts show speech from participants and the researcher (NA). The interpretation from each participant has been given varying amounts of space depending on the richness of the material presented in the interview. For each participant a brief description of the interview context is presented in Appendix J.

Participant 1: Learning and development through time

After introducing the start of the interview ‘the researcher’ (NA) asks both what a friend is and how Participant 1 (P1) has an UNDERSTANDING of this. As shown in ‘Stanza 6’ (below), P1 presents her answer as learning through the experience of having to move a lot and make lots of different friends.

Stanza 6: Process of learning what a friend is

33. NA: and HOW do you think YOU/ came to have AN UNDERSTANDING of/
OF THAT?
34. P1: erm [...] well I’ve BEEN to a lot of /DIFFERENT SCHOOLS / and MOVED
A LOT
35. NA: hmm
36. P1: so I think that like HELPS IT and that an
37. like HAVING to make /loads of DIFFERENT FRIENDS
38. and all the different SCHOOLS so
39. that’s HELPED ME to /understand WHAT a friend is

Later in 'Stanza 31' (below) NA re-introduced the talk on moving school a lot and asks P1 if this was difficult for her because she has made most of her friends at school. P1 responds that it was at FIRST and that it became EASY for her to MOVE ON and MEET NEW friends suggests she had learnt something of how to adapt. NA tentatively asks if the experience that taught P1 what a friend is, also helped her to learn how to make friends. Before responding, the 4 second pause suggests P1 is thinking this through. Her response highlights that she had learnt to adapt by not becoming TOO ATTACHED. The continuation of her response also indicates emotionality of finding it HARD to make friends. This is shown by the online speech repair at line 178.

Stanza 31: Getting used to moving schools

169. NA: and earlier on YOU SAID that / you know you've MOVED SCHOOLS quite a lot
170. P1: yeah
171. NA: and [...] erm your SCHOOL is where you sort of MADE friends/so has it been DIFFICULT for you /MOVING schools?
172. P1: erm, [...] suppose it was at FIRST/
173. but then I kind of GREW USED to it, so it was quite EASY for me to [...] /sort of MOVE ON / sort of MEET NEW friends.

Stanza 32: Outcome of moving schools (letting go; not being too attached)

174. NA: so do you THINK that's something that [...] /you said you know that it sort of HELPED you, erm, / do you think it, you meant it's HELPED you to /learn HOW to make friends?
175. P1: erm,[4 seconds] NO I don't think so
176. I THINK erm that in the situation I was IN/ it HELPED me to/ like sort of LET GO and / not become TOO ATTACHED.

177. NA: mm

P1 follows this up in Stanza 34 by emphasising the temporal nature of not being TOO ATTACHED when she was YOUNGER. This seems to serve as a way of placing it with the difficult past and is contextualised in the following Stanza 35 where she asserts NOW she is STABLE and able to establish PROPER friendships. This section highlights that P1 learnt to adapt to her experiences of moving a lot by not getting TOO ATTACHED, and to her experience of stability by establishing PROPER friends.

This section also highlights the strong connection between learning and temporal order. In order for P1 to have learnt she needed to have moved through time from a place of not knowing, through learning to knowing. This also sits with the way she views her friendships. P1 presents her friendships through time in relation to school. In ‘Stanza 8 and 9’ when asked about first friends P1 reports she can’t remember her first friends. It is not uncommon for looked-after young people to have difficulty remembering early years. It seems that P1 has interpreted this question to be specifically about SCHOOL FRIENDS. She suggests her first friends were her siblings and that it wasn’t until YEAR 4 of primary school, that she can recall a friend that she hung around with in SCHOOL.

Throughout the interview P1’s friends are discussed through learning and development and this is delivered through the temporal structure of school system. She meets friends by sitting NEXT TO them in her LESSONS. When NA asks her to recall a BAD TIME or LOW POINT it is the time in primary school (YEAR 6) that all CHILDHOODS have, where people fall-out over SILLY things. P1 presents her development both as the same as others through the subject positioning ‘we’ (shown at line 135, Stanza 24).

135. P1: well erm, we just GROW UP/ and CHANGE er like [1 second] erm ya/ your INTERACTIONS with people will have developed differently
She also presents it as particular to her (shown at line 143, Stanza 25).

143. P1: erm, well BEFORE when I had friends/ and they SAID something that had upset me I'd get QUITE/ UPTIGHT about it

144. NA: mm

145. P1: and NOW I just let it/ SLIDE over my head, so

This is picked up again later and summarised at the end of the interview with an exploration of how P1 has learnt through her friends over time. A shift in the subject positioning can be seen between line 355 and 360 (Stanza 60-62).

Stanza 60: What P1 identifies she has learnt

351. P1: things like [1 second] /well, HOW to not fall out over PETTY things

352. NA: mm

353. P1: and THINGS like that

Stanza 61: Temporal aspects of learning

354. NA: so do you THINK there is, can you think of a particular TIME/ a particular EVENT/ that TAUGHT YOU how not to fall out?

355. P1: well just a group of PEOPLE/ that I was HANGING OUT with /kind of I THINK /in primary school EVERY one falls out/ over SILLY things/ then the PEOPLE I was with towards / erm like MOST of the SECONDARY SCHOOL /they were erm [...] kind of TAUGHT me to / just LET GO of things /and NOT like get so WORRIED about /what they SAY and

356. NA: mm

357. P1: what they MEANT by it / and things like that and LET IT GO and

358. NA: mm,

Stanza 62: Friends help you

359. and what HELPS you /to LET GO of things do you think?

360. P1: erm, like again the PEOPLE you hang around with like/ like if er your friend's WORRIED about her appearance/ you'll worry about YOUR appearance /and if THEY'RE CALM about things /then you'll BECOME more calm about things/ I THINK, things like that yeah.

P1 attributes blamelessly having to move a lot in her early life, on her mother's influence. This is a time typified as problematic for her friendships. She presents her past friendships as not proper because of not getting too attached and as having lots of fall-outs over SILLY things. This is contrasted with her current and more developed friendships set up in the stable time she had in secondary school. This is typified by her narrative about her BEST FRIEND, the LONGEST FRIEND she has ever had, who she LAUGHS with and SHARE a lot in COMMON with and is the person she identifies as being the CLOSEST to. P1's current difficulties with making friends and being in CROWDS she attributes to herself rather than within the wider group. She suggests they are because she is a QUIET PERSON who STRUGGLES to make herself heard, who lacks the COURAGE to go up and TALK to people.

P1 demonstrates that her friendships provide her with emotional support and fun. The main themes of learning and development discussed may be related to the point P1 is at in her life, as a student and a young person. Her learning and development is strongly connected to temporal order and is closely linked with school. In addition to these themes P1 also suggests her personality has made it difficult for her to learn how to make friends despite lots of experience in doing so.

Participant 2: True friends and identity

Participant 2 (P2) introduced the concept of TRUE friends in Part 3 of the interview. This was picked up and explored by both P2 and NA resulting in a shared understanding of P2's network of relationships through the subsequent stanzas in Part 3. P2 identifies two

different types of friendships, MATES who are people that he ROLLS WITH and has a LAUGH with and friends who he is CLOSE to and are willing to RISK things to HELP each other.

P2 also explains (in Stanza 14) that a LOT of people can be COOL with you one minute and TELLING people your business the next. The point of this section of text seems to suggest that P2 has learnt not to trust people unless they prove they are worthy by risking something for him. Once deemed worthy he too will reciprocate.

Stanza 16: Scouted

107. NA: yeah, cool/ and if you think back over like ALL of your friendships /and all of your LIFE/ it's quite a BIG scope of thinking about things. / WHAT would you say has been a particular/ sort of HIGH point?

108. P2: playing for [NAME OF FOOTBALL TEAM] [2 seconds]

109. NA: can you tell me a bit MORE about that

110. P2: yeah, when I was 13 I was playing for SCHOOL /and then I got SCOUTED by [NAME of football team]/ and I ended up joining their school of EXCELLENCE [.] / and then SHATTERED my kneecap four months later.

111. NA: oh GOSH [2 seconds]/ so HOW/ WHAT was erm /sort of the ROLE of your friends/ in ALL that

112. P2: like I WOULDN'T have got through it if it wasn't for my friends / cause I was off, I couldn't WALK for nine months [.] /

In the extract above P2 provides an account of an emotional experience of being scouted by a football team. This part of the story positions him as someone with a great talent that is highly socially desirable and impressive. It is coupled after a brief pause (possibly adding dramatic effect) with a terrible outcome of lost hopes and possible futures. This emotional transition is marked in NA's response (GOSH) and a 2 second pause where she

then recovers from the impact and negotiates the reintroduction of her intended focus, friendship.

P2 then explains the role of his friends in supporting him through this intense experience and provides a summary of his friend's involvement that is linked to his identity in the present. P2 suggests his friends not only saved him from his own self destruction but contributed to his sense of self, that is, a young man supported by his close friends.

P2's friends have been connected with the formation of his sense of himself a couple of stanzas later after P2 has given an account of a time when he had a LAUGH with a group of friends that resulted in them all being injured. The mood is recaptured in the telling and both P2 and NA share in the humour of the story. At the end of the account NA asks how old P2 was when it happened and this leads P2 to comment that he has always hung around with people older than himself. P2 explains he believes this is because his friends are people he has known for a long time from the area he was from. NA, curious what it is about him that has led to this prompts another account about P2's early identity formation in connection with his social status and the social discourse of the 'loveable rogue'.

Stanza 22: A little bastard but you loved him

145. P2: I was a little MAD man

146. NA: were you [laughs]

147. P2: I was KNOWN /ALL over like because I grew up around [NAME of area1, NAME area 2]/ and I was known ALL OVER/ I was a little NUT job/ everyone used to crack JOKE off me/ because I was one of them LITTLE kids that like/ who was a little BASTARD/ but you LOVED him.

148. NA: mm

Stanza 23: P2 enjoyed being widely known

149. P2: like it was WICKED cause like /e, EVERYONE knew me/ like I'd be WALKING down the STREET /and like they'd be KIDS/ my mate's MUMS on about "you alright [name of P2] rah rah rah"/ I'm ONLY about seven eight and stuff like that/ it was MAD /but I THINK it was just / because [...] like I was just KNOWN for being a little NUTTER really/ and I DON'T KNOW /how it HAPPENED to be honest/but it was FUN though /I had some WICKED times

This account is clearly a fond memory for P2 and positions him historically both as well known and LOVED. P2 presents himself as if a well known character "one of them LITTLE kids" and this is strengthened by talking about the character as separate to himself using 'who' and 'him' to refer to himself. Although P2 is not sure how this came about, the underlined section above shows where there is evidence of the online meaning making whereby P2 links being KNOWN to being a little NUTTER, interpreted by NA as reputation. When NA tests this out P2's response "like YEAH, that's th WHY I am the way I AM like" is confirmation. However, P2 then goes on to explore the idea of his reputation and links it to his desire for his alternative future where he 'calms down' and 'sorts himself out'.

P2 provides examples of how bad the world is that he lives in with his experiences of stabbings and the impact this can have on people. P2 later explains the gravity of what he owes his friends with an example of an event that he says he limits the detail of. This demonstrates that he believes he literally owes his friends for his life.

212. BUT /I think if it want for them lot BEING THERE that night/ I'd have DIED/ I'm, he would have SHOT me/ that NIGHT/ and how I see it is/ a FEW of my friends that night SAVED MY LIFE/ you KNOW one of them/

Stanza 44: P2 feels he owes his friends

213. and if they ever need me for ANYTHING/ I'll risk my life for THEM like they did for me.

This draws on P2's belief stated earlier that he will do things for people who do things for him. Ultimately this presents P2 with the dilemma of how to accommodate his friends in his preferred future. He recognises that whilst he owes his friends and feels he is unable to leave them, staying with them will "drag me DOWN". P2's belief that he owes his friends and that he is unable to walk away from them is compounded by his value of loyalty. He labels this (across Strophe 30, stanzas 72-74) as 'thieves' honour' (line 332).

P2 observes that until he started going out at night and met his friends he was alone and that during this time he matured for his age. NA reflects that P2 seems to suggest his friends were the first people that really cared about him (Line 358). P2 expands this as he identifies that "my FRIENDS were my FAMILY" (Line 359).

This highlights another connection between P2's identity and his friends. P2 is positioning himself as responsible for his friends and making a connection with friends being his family. This is explored further towards the end of the interview when P2 discusses his brotherly relationship with two of the people he lives with and he is very close to.

440. P2: and I'm quite CLOSE to [name of resident2] I haven't mentioned her yet/ but ME and [name of resident2] are quite close/ we're like BROTHER and SISTER really.

This also links back to the very start of the interview when P2 first identified that he has always been brought up to put his family and close friends before himself (Stanza 4, line 18).

17. NA: okay, and HOW/ do you think YOU /sort of CAME to have an understanding of /that as BEING what a friend is?

18. P2: well LIKE/ how, how I'VE been brought up is /my FAMILY comes first but like /within my CLOSE friends/ I've GOT quite a few close friends /and PERSONALLY how I see it is/ I put my FAMILY /and my close friends

BEFORE myself/ that's how I've ALWAYS have been, that's how I was
BROUGHT UP so

19. NA: Mm, so you think its
20. P2: it was just
21. NA: sort of
22. P2: DRILLED into me from when was young really

This core value that P2 has had DRILLED into him, permeates all his close friendships that he positions as siblings and his strong beliefs about his relationships are closely interconnected with the formation of his sense of who he is. P2's friends prove they are worthy of his trust by helping him, once trust is established P2 will put the needs of his friends before his own. However, P2 is questioning his allegiance and is struggling with the costs and benefits of his reputation.

Participant 3: Good friends but they're criminals

Early in the interview NA asks what Participant 3 (P3) understands a friend is and she responds that a friend is someone who is there for you when you need someone to talk to and looks after you. This she claims to have learnt because that is how all her friends are but she then adds "apart from they're just criminals" (line 20). Initially NA does not pick up this point so P3 repeats it a few lines later, demonstrating its importance to be heard.

Stanza 7: Good friends but criminals

23. NA: SO, you're FRIENDS have all been people that have like /BEEN THERE for
YOU and
24. P3: yeah
25. NA: like you can TALK TO and stuff
26. P3: yeah EVEN THOUGH like [...] they're CRIMINALS
27. NA: mm, yeah, ok

The use of 'even though' suggests P3 is challenging an assumption, that one would not expect criminals to behave in this friendly way. It also indicates that P3 expects NA as her audience might hold this assumption. The theme of criminality runs through the interview and is explored in more detail at Strophe 21. P3 explains she has friends who are ALL CRIMINALS because she LOVES it. She also links CAUSING trouble as being something to do that avoids SITTING down being BORED, PISSED OFF and turning out like an ANNOYING person.

P3 introduces the subject of being out all night as her usual routine in Stanza 28. She explains that she is waiting for a new phone and she will never GO OUT without a PHONE (Line 152). She explains that when she has a phone she will be out again. This leads to an exploration of how this has become her routine.

168. P3: I've been running round the STREETS/ since I was five years OLD.

169. NA: mm. So did you have like FRIENDS/ since you were FIVE/ like on the STREET kind of thing?

170. P3: yeah,

Stanza 31: Mum is a bully

171. because my MUM /ALWAYS used to /kick me OUT

172. NA: mm

173. P3: She's a big fat BULLY [2 seconds]

Strophe 13: What P3 does when out

Stanza 32: Blaze a spliff

174. NA: so WHAT would you DO/ with your TIME/ when you're out on the STREET?

175. P3: Normally it just be like BLAZE a spliff/

The extract above shows not only the beginnings of P3 being out on the street at an early age but that she blames her mother for this. Here P3 describes her mother as a bully and later in the interview expresses feeling that her mum has treated her like a ‘DICKHEAD’ and that she therefore treats her the same way in return. This experience has contributed to P3’s belief that she will treat other people how they treat her. P3 also identifies that her ‘mates’ have BEEN there MORE than her MUM and she is GUTTED about this because her MUM’S the one who’s SUPPOSED to have been THERE for her and brought her up.

P3 also justifies the reasoning for taking drugs and doing CRIMINAL stuff, as because there is very little to do for young people her age. She explains that people will get bored if they have nothing to do and then after a pause shifts in subject positioning to what happens when she doesn’t have anything to do.

Stanza 34: Smacking people

185. because if we just SIT down yeah/ your just gonna get BORED, PISSED OFF and just gonna GO OUT and just like [1 second] like if when I’M pissed off, if someone LOOKS at me/ and they don’t KNOW me/ and are just STARING at me/ then I go up to them and SMACK EM /like I did in TOWN TODAY

186. NA: is THAT so that you’ve got sommat [.] just TO/ kind of keep you ENTERTAINED sort of thing

187. P3: yeah

188. NA: because you feel BORED

189. P3: yeah, then I GET PISSED OFF /if I am BORED

190. NA: mm [1 second]

P3 describes using the same method of ‘smacking people’ when she feels uncomfortable in other situations in the interview. She explains she can’t tolerate: being in places where there are lots of people (stanza 64); people the same age or younger than her

make her MAD (line 224). She ‘smacks’ the people in her class, that are the same age as her (line 229). She finds older people more fun and describes them as ‘not PUSSIES’ implying people her age and younger, are weak.

This highlights a contradiction in P3’s stories of getting involved in violent attacks on others. Whilst she will ‘smack’ people who she feels have wronged her, she will also be violent to stick up for people who are being bullied. She gives a number of examples of experiences of sticking up for her younger siblings both with the police and other young people. P3 explains why it is important to stick up for people that are being bullied.

346. P3: cause it’s NOT really nice/ to get BULLIED

347. NA: yeah, so it SOUNDS like/ you STICK UP for /quite a LOT of people

348. P3: yeah [2 seconds]/ cause if you just walk BY yeah/ and SEE someone/ just getting pick, BULLIED/ SHIT like that/ then, then REALLY feeling GUILTY inside/

Stanza 59: life wasted

349. I just like, just like as FAR as anyone KNOWS/ they could have a KNIFE on them/ and just STABS em

350. NA: mm

351. P3: then that's another PERSON/ who’s life been WASTE

352. NA: mm [5 seconds]

353. P3: may as well stick up for the PEOPLE/ who’s DIED

The extract above shows P3 constructing the feelings of not helping someone who is being bullied (Line 343), and also seems to be linked to other people’s conversations about knife crime. Therefore P3 expresses she should stick up for others in a vulnerable position but also admits to ‘smacking’ people whom she feels are weaker.

Best Friend

In Stanza 8 early in the interview P3 introduces her 'best mate' who died recently. Her best friend, she explains, was the only person she could TALK TO. This emphasis highlights the gravity of her loss. Indeed later in the interview P3 reveals she has experienced the death of a lot of friends and family and this is something she is getting USED to (Line 128). Having no-one is discussed again later in the interview as is P3's best friend who died. P3 returns to her times with him when asked to recall good times with friends.

106. P3: all I can remember /is mostly [NAME of best friend].

107. NA: was that your BEST mate? Yeah.

Stanza 21: Taking siblings to the park

108. What kind of GOOD times/ come to MIND/ when you think about HIM then?

109. P3: we always used to GO out/ we used to take like my little SISTER out /to the PARK and stuff like that/ like if I needed, like if I wasn't IN/ my little sister wanted to go to the PARK/ [NAME of best friend] would TAKE her

110. NA: mm

P3 can be seen to be constructing a positive picture of her best friend and to be reflecting on the good things he did and the fun they had together. NA asks about P3's best friend's involvement with the rest of the family in response to her saying he was there for them all. P3 explains that his role with the family was secondary to his friendship with her.

119. P3: I USED to LIKE/ just bring him round the HOUSE/ TAKE [.] my little SISTER to the PARK, take my little BROTHERS to the PARK/ BLAZE a spliff/ then we used to GO [laughs]

120. NA: mm

121. P3: drop the KIDS off/ when we had a SPLIFF /and we just used to stay OUT all night

The extract above shows how P3 corrects the story to suggest a moral decision not to have a SPLIFF when looking after the KIDS. This correction allows P3 to keep her best friend and herself in a position of being a good person, whilst at the same time talking about being out all night and using drugs. P3 identifies her best friend as being someone who would DRINK, take DRUGS and was a CRIMINAL in stanza 65 but combines this with a picture of him as being a GOOD person to have AROUND. P3 describes that the experiences she had and the things in her head were similar to that of her best friend. This seems to be an indication that P3 felt her best friend understood her. In the remainder of the interview P3 highlights that she has no-one to support her or who she can talk to, despite feeling that she needs someone to talk to 'everyday'. Instead P3 copes by locking things inside her head and smoking drugs to stop her thinking about it.

P3 presents her involvement with a criminal world and this seems to provide her with some excitement and perceived social status. P3 finds it difficult to tolerate large crowds and peers she perceives as weak. She also expresses concern about being treated badly by others and is clear she would treat them badly in return, as is the case with her mother.

Participant 4: That was then and this is now

Participant 4 (P4) describes herself as "a HARD working pupil" and observes that she is unusual both for this and because she has a clear focus for her future (Stanza 2). Throughout the interview P4 separates her experiences with friends at her transition from primary to secondary school, possibly because her current focus is on school and what she can achieve there. In primary school, although she had friends P4 spent much of her time on her own. In secondary school she gradually built a large network of varied friendships and a close best friend. P4 introduces this narrative in response to NA's question about making friends (line 51). P4's response highlights a difference between making friends at secondary school and primary school and allows for the subsequent narrative (see below).

52. P4: at SECONDARY school yeah

53. NA: mm

Stanza11: Friends not with me/on my own

54. P4: at PRIMARY school/ I HAD friends/ BUT /they WEREN'T/ [...] ALWAYS/
[...] WITH me

55. NA: mm

56. P4: CAUSE they/ they CHOSE hobbies/ over FRIENDSHIP/ so I was /pretty
much on my OWN/ in PRIMARY school

This response suggests the transition to secondary school as a pivotal point in P4's friendships. Exploration of P4's primary school friendship experiences later in the interview, suggest a more negative experience than this initial introduction. P4 has some difficulty understanding why she had been rejected by her peers. She explains it to be about her friend's choice of playing sport over her, others not being COMFORTABLE around her, wanting friends on her terms, and possibly not being seen as happy by others.

99. P4: [3 seconds] I've NO idea/ I DON'T know/ if I was DEPRESSIVE/ around
THEM/ cause all I'VE known about/ being at PRIMARY school/ was that I was
always HAPPY

100. NA: mm

101. P4: BUT/ I DON'T know/ whether I was just/ happy for MYSELF/ or happy for
OTHERS/ cause [...] how THEY see me/ and how I see MYSELF/ would be
DIFFERENT

P4 suggests she has benefited from being on her own by getting her work done FASTER and not experiencing some of the negative aspects of friendship in primary school. The correction at the start of the extract below suggests P4 is creating this meaning as she speaks.

Stanza 20: Friends might hurt me/ make me cry

112. P4: CAUSE then/ I WOULD/ I couldn't HURT myself/ I couldn't make myself CRY/ I couldn't FALL OUT with MYSELF/ I'd still have a LAUGH with myself/ but it would BE a bit STRANGE [laughs]

When prompted, P4 identifies a point at the end of primary school where she thought she needed something different in terms of her friendships.

Stanza 35: Pivotal moment

206. P4: CAUSE/ [.] everybody was saying GOODBYE to everyone/ and I had EVERYBODY/ coming UP to me/ and hugging me and saying GOODBYE [NAME of P4]/ we're gonna MISS you/ but I'M thinking/ how can you MISS me/ when you was never AROUND me

207. NA: mm

208. P4: so I THOUGHT/ well at secondary school I'm gonna DO something/ to make sure that I HAVE people/ that MISS me/ and ARE gonna miss me

The experiences in primary school are contrasted with much more positive secondary school experiences. P4 describes how GOING to a new school where she didn't know ANYBODY was SCARY but gave her the chance for a FRESH START (Stanza 25). Whilst at secondary school a spur of the moment decision to collect signatures in a notebook led to P4 making new friendships for herself and other people in the school.

166. P4: the LAST year/ of year NINE/ that's WHEN/ MOST people/ started TALKING to me/ cause I went round/ with a MASSIVE notebook/ and got EVERYONE in our year/ to SIGN it/ even though I didn't KNOW them/ so I got MORE people involved in/ talking to OTHER people/ that they DIDN'T know/ and, a LOT of people/ that I introduced together/ and I got introduced to/ are friends NOW/

She also describes her relationship with her best friend as being the centre of a wider group of friends that are attracted to them because they have such a good relationship.

217. P4: erm, well at the MOMENT/ there's ME/ and my BEST FRIEND/ AND/ together we're LIKE 'Bonnie and Clyde'/ erm, we're 'TWO peas in a pod'/ and, whenever we're TOGETHER/ it's always LAUGHING/ there's NEVER/ a DAY where/ WHERE it goes by/ when we're not together and we're LAUGHING/ SO/ we cause WE know/ almost EVERYONE in our year/ erm, loads of PEOPLE/ come and talk to US/ instead of us going to THEM/ cause like ME and my best FRIEND/ are really really CLOSE/ like we're always WITH each other/ especially in the HOLIDAYS/

P4 uses examples to describe her relationship with her best friend that are culturally accepted examples of close relationships, such as the idiom of two peas in a pod. She also places emphasis on LAUGHING together which suggest this aspect of their friendship to be important and possibly the reason why her, and her best friend are popular. P4 later identifies her best friend as important to her because no MATTER what she goes through, her best friend HELPS her to UNDERSTAND it or will try and take her MIND off it.

P4 identifies a number of things that helped her either to understand friendships and her role in them or contributed practically in helping to build her friendship group. These examples are interwoven within the interview and are co-constructed in P4's responses to NA's questions. For example, NA asks P4 when she noticed a change in being able to talk to people about how she felt. P4's response is shown below.

Stanza 88: Training

451. but then the TRAINING/ erm, we had to show people HOW/ like a little DRAMA thing/ where you had to SHOW people/ how you would react to

somebody that was UPSET/ and I reacted as if/ as how I wanted THEM/ to react to ME if I was upset/ so I managed to pass THAT/

Stanza 89: Applying the drama experience

452. so I realised THEN/ that what happened in PRIMARY school/ SHOULDN'T have been/ me on my OWN/ so THEN/ erm, in SECONDARY school/ I knew that I had to make FRIENDS/ so I wasn't on my OWN/ so I had PEOPLE to talk to/ when I was UPSET/ and THEY could/ be around ME when I was upset/ as I was in the DRAMA production / so I could UNDERSTAND that

In the extract above we can see that P4 learns that her experiences in primary school do not match the culturally accepted narrative of what experiences with peers 'should be'. It is this mismatch that led her to realise that she wanted to have people around her. The experience of being a peer listening counsellor not only highlighted for P4 difficulties she had experienced in her previous relationships, it also gave her experience of managing conflict. She acknowledges that the experience of her role has MADE her learn more about what a friend IS and HAVING a friend is (line 454).

Whilst the main theme of P4's interview is the change from being on her own to having friends, she has also changed in a way that allows her access to support from her family. She explains she now asks her mum for help if she has a problem and learns through her extended families experiences of growing up how to make the most of what she has.

At the end of the interview NA asks P4 if she wants to add anything. At this point P4 expresses again that she is different to other young people and particularly contradicts the STEREOTYPICAL version of a young person in CARE (Lines 514-522). She believes that her experiences of being in CARE have not affected her FRIENDSHIP and that her experiences in primary school were about her not wanting to RUN AFTER people to make friends. This section of the interview suggests P4 does not want people and particularly NA,

to ascribe her experiences as being due to being looked-after. She hopes to challenge the negative stereotypes and is concerned that her early experiences do not do this. It is therefore more in congruence with her belief that she challenges the dominant negative views if the difficulties she experienced were due to her, not her circumstances.

P4 makes a clear distinction between her current positive peer relationships which are supportive and fun, and those of her past which were inaccessible. She makes sense of the time she spent alone as being due to her disposition and lack of motivation to be with people.

Participant 5: Treating everyone the same

Although the interview with P5 had the same structure as the other interviews there was very little deviation from a question and answer format. P5 rarely introduced ideas not within this format and mostly answered using subject positions that imply a general answer rather than a personal one. This style seemed to imply P5 was careful not to let NA get close to her. This was further supported when NA tried to explore how P5 made friends in stanza 8.

Stanza 8: Being introduced

32. NA: mm so when you think about YOUR friends/ or people that are your friends NOW/how did YOU /kind of MAKE friends with them
33. P5: through OTHER people/through like my OTHER friends
34. NA: mm so you KIND of/ WAS it like/ that you got introduced to THEM or
35. P5: yeah
36. NA: so THEY [3 seconds] so you said you got INTRODUCED to them/ through OTHER friends/ so who were your FIRST friends
37. P5: some OTHER people [laughs]

When P5 talks about her first friendship experience in primary school she does discuss some personal information about how they met and what her friend was like. P5 explains that after moving to secondary school friendships are BETTER but she doesn't know why. P5's

current friendships involve GOING out together to TOWN and to PARKS. NA asks her if there are any particular people friends that she would do this with and at this point P5 introduces two themes that are then followed through the remainder of the interview, trust and treating all of her friends the same.

94. P5: ANY of my friends/ I can TRUST/ ALL of my friends

P5 suggests TRUST is an integral part of friendships. In response to NA asking what makes a good friend P5 indicates TRUST to be the factor that determines good from bad friends (stanzas 26-28). P5 summarises her beliefs about trust and friendship at stanza 42.

Stanza 42: People you meet who you can trust

235. how do you THINK you know/ you've sort of learnt HOW make friends

236. P5: I DON'T know/ just MAKE friends really/ you CAN'T HELP who you meet as a friend/ because once you're their FRIEND /you know that you can TRUST them/ but if you CAN'T trust them/ then you KNOW/ that they're NOT the friend for you

P5 reiterates this in relation to both friends and family towards the end of the interview at stanzas 59-60.

Stanza 59: Friends you know you can trust

334. P5: because there's only ONE thing/ that you need to KNOW/ about FRIENDSHIP/ and that's that you if you know you can TRUST your friend/ you know it's the RIGHT friend for YOU/ if you CAN'T trust your friend/ then you know that it's a BAD choice of friend

335. NA: mm

Stanza 60: Trust your family who you will end up with

336. P5: and your FAMILY/ you've ALWAYS got to trust your family/ because that's the person, PEOPLE/ that your gonna be STAYING with/ and the person you're gonna end UP like with/ for the REST of your life

337. NA: mm

338. P5: so [5 seconds]

This suggests that P5 believes trust to be integral not only to friendships but also family relationships. P5 makes little distinction between her different relationships, not just in relation to trust but also in the way she treats and expects to be treated by others. This becomes explicit in response to NA enquiring if P5 has any best friends (stanza 35).

189. P5: NO/ I don't HAVE best friends/ all MY friends/ are the SAME

190. NA: mm so you treat them ALL the same

191. P5: yeah

192. NA: and do THEY all/ treat YOU the same

193. P5: yeah

Stanza 36: Fair to treat everyone the same

194. NA: mm and do you think YOU prefer it/ like THAT

195. P5: yeah

196. NA: mm why do you THINK/ THAT is

197. P5: I just DON'T like treating like/ ONE friend/ DIFFERENTLY to the others/ because I DON'T think/ it's very FAIR

198. NA: mm

199. P5: and then I don't THINK/ I DON'T like my friends/ treating me differently to the OTHERS/ because it's NOT fair/ on the others EITHER

Distancing herself from the content of the majority of the interview makes the content of P5's personal accounts more prominent. She emphasises the importance of trust in friendships and the fairness of treating everyone the same.

Participant 6: Friends help you out

Early in the interview NA asks Participant 6 (P6) what a friend is and how he has learnt this. P6 states a friend is someone that's THERE for you, who'll HELP you out (stanza 5). He recalls that he learnt what a friend was when he met his current friend who was living at the same place as him at the time. She has since moved out but they are still good friends and spend a lot of time together.

P6's first friends were his mates from school this was a time when he had LOTS of friends and he remembers playing on the park with them. However after this period P6 experienced difficulty making friends at the bigger schools when he had to move a lot.

65. and WHAT about/ erm, kind of AFTER little school [laughs]/ when you moved
UP / to the BIGGER school

66. P6: I didn't really MAKE friends/ in the BIGGER schools

67. NA: mm

68. P6: because I USED/ to get MOVED about

69. NA: yeah

70. P6: quite a LOT of times

71. NA: so did that make it HARDER for you/ to MAKE friends/ mm

72. P6: yeah

The emphasis on USED to get MOVED (line 68) places this experience in the past and allows P6 to move forward in time to after this experience. There seems to be a marked change for P6 in moving HERE, to his current address where he STARTED school and was THERE for a while (line 76). P6 recalls that he had quite a few friends but can't remember

most of their names. P6 does remember one friend from the time when he first lived at his current home.

85. NA: mm how did you KNOW /that [NAME of friend] was your friend

86. P6: er, [3 seconds] because he HELPED me/ and stick UP for me and everything

87. NA: DID he/ mm so who was HE/ sticking UP for you/ AGAINST kind of thing?

88. P6: SOMETIMES/ I used to get BULLIED at school

89. NA: did YOU

90. P6: yeah

P6 stated early in the interview that friends help you and this example of a friend being helpful has been memorable for him. P6's best friend is also centred round his current home. They met when P6 returned after a two week break away and she had moved in. They got TALKING and became MATES, P6 and his best friend talk about ANYTHING and EVERYTHING. However, also while living at his current home P6 has experienced some difficulties with other residents taking advantage of him.

162. P6: right there's ANOTHER lad here/ and he, I THOUGHT I was mates with him

163. NA: mm

164. P6: and he used to TAKE me out/ get me ARRESTED

After this experience P6 KNEW that this 'lad' wasn't a proper FRIEND (line 183). P6 presents himself as a vulnerable young man who has experienced bullying and being 'taken' to get arrested. This vulnerability has led him to need help from friends. He has also experienced being helped by his best friend when he used to get STRESSED OUT with the staff. Under these circumstances his best friend told him it's not WORTH it, which STOPPED him from getting into TROUBLE. In addition to the help and support P6 experiences from his best friend, if he has a problem P6 talks to his family, particularly his sister, and to staff at his home. These are also the sources of support he expects to access in

the future when he has left his home. P6 therefore not only presents himself as being vulnerable but also well supported with good friends who help him.

Participant 7: Helping and sticking up for

This theme was interwoven through the interview with Participant 7 (P7) from the first talk about friendship. P7 identified “a friend is who looks AFTER you/ who comes to you if you need SOMEONE/ or if you’ve got any PROBLEMS/ they’ll come and sort it OUT with you” (line 15). This is further qualified by P7’s explanation that her friend always sticks up for her and that if someone BULLIES P7, then her friend will tell her so that P7 can have a GO at them (stanzas 5-6). This protecting and helping relationship is reciprocal as they help each other with ‘ARGUMENTS and all that’ (LINE 137). P7 is also protected against bullies by her boyfriend who will challenge people who are talking about her (stanza 77).

P7’s best friend also helps protect P7 against damage she can do to herself through her behaviour, because her friend recognises when she is on her bad side.

386. P7: I THINK it’s because/ I COULD get/ like REALLY upset/ and I can GO on my BAD side

387. NA: mm

388. P7: THEN it can cause/ loads of TROUBLE/ like getting EXCLUDED / and all THAT from school

389. NA: right

390. P7: so it can like cause DAMAGE

391. NA: mm

392. P7: to MYSELF

P7 also suggests her mother offers her some help with her behaviour by saying how BAD it is (line 492) but then contradicts this later by suggesting that even though her mother

tells her to stop DOING IT (something naughty), P7 can see in her FACE that she is thinking ‘yeah CARRY ON’ (stanza 98).

P7 offers to protect her friend’s sister who comes to her with her problems. However, at the first discussion of this P7 acknowledges her limitations in this role (stanza 28). She is also approached by others for help with their behaviour (stanza 84). P7 also highlights that having friends is protective against bullying for any young person today (stanza 58). She is also helped by having friends who understand her experiences of living in CARE because they too have similar experiences to her and KNOW what it FEELS like (Stanza 47-48).

Being approached by others

P7 has made most of her friends by others approaching her and this seems to have become a trend since her first friendship when she was at primary school.

40. NA: so can you think of times WHERE/ you’ve MADE friends

41. P7: ah, erm WHEN like when I was in PRIMARY school/ and I’d like keep on MOVING/ and I couldn’t STICK with ONE friend/

Stanza 12: More settled/ she came to me

42. but then when I went IN to this PRIMARY school/ I had her for like three or four YEARS

43. NA: mm

44. P7: because I THINK it was BECAUSE/ I sat in this corner CRYING about something/ and she came OVER/ and she started TALKING to me

The extract above suggests that P7 needed a bit of time in one place so she could stick with one friend and she later comments that this was an AWFUL time because she couldn’t get to KNOW the people (line 57). Once P7 had stopped moving for a while she was able to make a friend who she portrays as being very kind and herself as being polite. The correction

at the end of this extract and the emphasis on ‘thank you’ suggests P7 is stressing the importance on how well mannered she was.

69. P7: LIKE/ we was PLAYING really nicely/ and all THAT/ we were SHARING/ because ONE time/ she brought these SWEETS in/ and she DIDN'T LIKE em/ and she said “do you WANT em”/ and I'm like YES, yes THANK YOU/

After another period of moving P7 spent time with her sister's friends before being approached by her own set of friends.

115. P7: and then LOADS of people just came up to me/ and goes “do you want to be with US instead of your sister”/ and I'm like “ok THEN”/ so I went OVER to them/ and PLAYED with them

This pattern of making friends was repeated with her current best friend

159. P7: erm, at FIRST/ I known this PERSON who known her/ and because I known this PERSON a quite a while/ everybody used to TALK about me/ because they thought I was one of them NAUGHTY girls/ who did something WRONG/ and so [NAME of friend] heard my NAME/ and everything and she goes like go near the [NAME of place] / and so she CAME over didn't, one day/ and hanged around with ME/ for like TWO days / and she just carried ON/ hanging around with ME afterwards SO

NA and P7 explore this pattern and P7 suggests people probably approach her because they think she is FUNNY, which she thinks could be the case SOMETIMES.

P7 makes her friends by being approached by other people, either because of her reputation or a perception that she is funny. She presents a positive view of herself and her friends as providing help and support for each other. However, her positivity about her peer relationships came after a school based intervention.

Commonalities

The themes of learning and development; true friends and identity; good friends but they're criminals; best friend; that was then and this is now; treating everyone the same; friends help you out; helping and sticking up for, and being approached by others, all suggest that the young people who took part in the interviews were experiencing friendships that were important to them and helping them negotiate their lives.

A number of commonalities ran through the interviews with participants. Some close friendships were referred to as being like family (P2, P3). The assigning of the family role for these two participants seems to be in place of care traditionally given by parents, with friends being the first people who cared for or understood them. These were often friends made on the street at a young age and who they had grown up with. However, this did not seem to be the case for those who perceived they had lasting support from their birth families (P4, P5, P6, P7) despite being looked-after. For all of the participants, there was some talk about family relationships whether current or past.

Trust was a feature of talk about friendships for some of the participants and they discussed having learnt through experience that some friends may not be trustworthy despite initially seeming so. A worry about being taken advantage of seemed to be related to trust (P2, P3, P5, P6, P7).

The impact of frequent placement breakdown and moves not just from placement but moving school, had meant a few of the participants had been prevented from forming friendships in the past (P1, P6, P7). School and the education system were highlighted as places for effective interventions for friendship difficulties (P4, P7).

In addition to these external factors, some of those who discussed experiencing difficulty making friends reasoned their experiences were due to themselves, rather than their early experiences, such as lacking confidence or motivation to make friends, or being a bully

(P1, P4, P7). Also for those who discussed difficulties in their past friendships, their stories were ones of triumph over adversity (P1, P4, P6, P7).

The thematic interpretations of the interviews with all participants offer some understanding of how the young people are constructing meanings from their experiences of friends, friendship and relationships with peers. The interpretations offered are not the only ones that can be made from the interviews but they do offer a perspective that is grounded in the meanings generated by the young people themselves. The meanings generated suggest that the friendships the young people had experienced were complex but were a positive aspect of their lives.

4. Discussion

Summary of main findings

All of the participants had some experience of positive influence or emotional support from their friends. They had all made friends that they felt close to. For a couple of participants this experience came later in their lives and after interventions. All of the young people constructed meaning from their experiences of friends and friendship.

Strengths and Limitations

The methodology employed was one with a focus on the meaning generated by the young people who took part. The interpretations made have prioritised the meanings generated by the young people themselves whilst acknowledging the way the narrative produced had been co-constructed. This approach demonstrates the possibilities for avoiding difficulties of ascriptivism and appropriation (Emerson & Frosh, 2004).

There was never any expectation that the findings would be generalisable to the wider population of young people who are looked-after (LAC), and the relatively small sample size compounds this position. However, there is value in generating depth of understanding from the subjective experiences of just a few young people. This is particularly true for this area of study where the voice of the population is largely missing from existing literature. The aim here was to hear the varieties of young peoples' personal experience and to understand how these positions have been constructed.

Whilst LAC are known to have experienced high incidences of abuse and neglect these were not explored either with the young people themselves or through case note reviews. Neither were relationships with caregivers explored beyond that which they volunteered. Therefore it is not possible to link the young people's friendship experiences to those of maltreatment histories based on the narratives, as is predominant in the literature. However, based on the comments made by the young people in their interviews we can infer

that the majority of them experienced some form of maltreatment that contributed to them being looked-after, and what is unique about this perspective is that it prioritises the here and now experiences of LAC.

Findings and previous literature

The literature on the friendships and peer relationships of LAC is predominantly focussed on deficits and difficulties. Namely behaviour, social cognitions and inability to recognise or interpret affect, are all said to undermine the ability of LAC to form or maintain friendships (Kaufman & Cicchetti, 1989; McIntyre, Lounsbury, Berntson & Steel, 1988; Rogosch, Cicchetti & Aber, 1995; Shields, Ryan & Cicchetti, 2000). The results of the current study suggest more positively that young people who identified they had difficulties forming friendships because of their behaviour, discussed these difficulties as either in the past, or had formed friendships despite them. For those who identified their difficulties as being in the past, they also indicated these had improved through school based interventions that helped them to understand the social rules of friendships.

For the young people who engaged in criminal behaviour with their friends, their friendships tended to be non-school based and they were deterred from making friends that did not engage in criminal behaviour, for fear this would impact on their reputation or because such people were positioned as weak. These findings reflect previous research that suggested adolescent girls considered 'at risk' were more likely to have friends without a focus on school, at different life stages to themselves and to have made these friendships on the street (Pawlby, Mills, Taylor & Quinton, 1997). This also suggests that research on the friendships of LAC that focussed on collecting information either at schools or on school-based friendships may not reflect the complexity of the friendship experiences of those whose friends are predominantly made elsewhere. For these young people school-based friends may

not be a possibility or a desirable prospect for fear of damage to their 'reputation' and status outside school.

The previous research on the difficulties LAC face with recognising or regulating their emotion may be of relevance to the young person here who expresses difficulty managing her negative feelings without substance use or the use of violence (Shields, Ryan & Cicchetti, 2001). The other participants discussed the ways they were able to use their friends to help them regulate their emotions. This was only discussed in the context of close friendships which the participant who reported difficulty in regulating her emotions did not have. This is supportive of previous research that indicates associations between emotional regulation and positive social relationships qualities (Lopes, Salovey, Côté, Beers, & Petty, 2005). However, it is not clear if the ability to regulate improves friendships, or if friendships help to develop emotional regulation.

All of the participants in the current study made some reference to connections with their birth families. Family was often positioned as supportive by the young person and their identification with family may have contributed to their self-esteem (Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994). For the young people who did not report positive family support their access to sources for self-esteem were limited to their friends. By drawing on research on gang culture, the meanings generated by these young people can be understood in terms of experiences of marginalised groups and access to self-esteem, social identity, surrogate family, social status, security, social support and re-directed anger (Gibbs, 2000).

A theme that had some commonality across the interviews was one of multiple placement or school moves. The young people reported these times as negative influences on their ability to form friendships. In one instance the young person was able to adapt to this experience by not becoming 'too attached' to friends. The experience of multiple moves has not only been found by previous research to be a practical difficulty in maintaining

friendships (Ridge & Millar, 2000) but an increasingly traumatic one (Kenrick, 2000), with increased association with mental health problems (Stanley et al., 2005). However, all of the young people who reported periods of multiple moves also reported they had made friends when they had periods of being more settled.

Attachment theory suggests that LAC could be expected to construct internal working models of themselves, others and relationships based on their early relationships with birth families that serve to undermine their ability to make friendships and that these models would be expected to become increasingly fixed with age (Bowlby, 1997). This is further supported through the application of neurodevelopmental research (Schoore, 2001). The young people who indicate their experiences of friendship difficulties to be a consequence of internal factors, such as lack of confidence or motivation, suggest a fixed pattern of relating as suggested by attachment theory. However, based on the young people's ability to form relationships with peers after previous difficulties, the current study suggests at least a relatively fluid rather than fixed pattern in the formation of relationships. Therefore, the current study would suggest support for the literature on resilience which indicates that some young people can have positive relationship experiences despite poor early experience (Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge & Lapp, 2002).

Implications

The current findings suggest that positive peer relationships are attainable for LAC and based on previous literature this could be protective against mental health problems. For young people whose behaviour undermines their ability to make friends, there may be some benefit from teaching them social rules of friendship and these may be appropriately delivered within school settings. For young people who form friendships on the streets and outside of school, their friendship networks should be given recognition. If attempts are to be made to change behaviours that could limit their future well-being, then it would be

important to recognise the security and emotional support gained from such networks and the importance of positive aspects within them. Therefore, Clinical Psychologists could usefully apply systemic or community therapeutic models with young people who identify their friendship networks in this way.

Whilst policy documents do indicate the importance of continuity of placements, education and health care (Department for education and skills, 2007; Department of Health, 2002), the reality of placement breakdowns makes the ideal often unobtainable. With this in mind, if placements do breakdown then it would be worth investing effort in finding placements for young people that enable them to maintain stability in other areas of their life, particularly school, as participants within this study often made their friends at school. Where a young person is not able to access security from their home-based relationships, then extra efforts should be made for them to access security within school-based relationships.

Although no attempts to explore the impact of early experiences were made in the current study, some of the participants did make connections to their relationships with their parents, and the impact this had on their friendships. When young people reported negative relationships with their parents these were instrumental in them forming friendship networks, typically on the street, and this was a finding of the study that would be interesting to explore in future research. This could be undertaken by researching the network formation histories and experiences of parental relationships with street gangs. It would also be interesting to explore the application of community psychology interventions with networks of LAC.

Conclusion

The young people who took part in the study were able to construct meaning from their friendship experiences. All of the young people had experienced close positive friendships. Friends were presented as being positive contributions to their lives and provided them with emotional support. Memories of times when it had been difficult to access

friendships were understood by them to be related to placement moves, changes in schools and individual characteristics of the young people.

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Part Three: Critical Appraisal

Critical Appraisal

The research process from conception to write-up has been a journey that is usefully structured as a temporal account around key themes.

The start of the journey

Although the necessity to complete a piece of research in order to qualify as a clinical psychologist was part of the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy), I had started on my journey to complete the piece of research prior to starting the course. I first became interested in the mental health of children and young people looked-after (LAC) by their local authorities, when I worked as a researcher in an academic unit of child and adolescent mental health. Through my involvement with research on Tier 4 services I was able to learn of the associations between mental health risk and the LAC population.

Once I had started the DClinPsy, I decided to approach local clinicians who worked with LAC to discuss my research ideas. This helped me to focus on the area of friendship and following this meeting my reading of the narrative research and writing of Michael Murray made me think about the meaning of friendships. I was particularly interested in the possibilities of research involving Story Stem techniques as these had been used in attachment interviews with children.

Research Panel

As part of the DClinPsy course I was required to draw up a research proposal to be reviewed by course staff. The feedback at this stage was particularly helpful and led me to question my proposed methodology. One particular comment “so you will find what you want to find” stayed with me as I explored alternative possibilities. At this point questions raised were driving me to explore epistemological positions and the bearing they would have on my evolving research question. The main questions at this stage included: would it be possible to understand a young person’s experience that would be different to my own; at

what age or developmental stage could a young person express how they feel and what they understand about the things they have experienced; does meaning change through experience and could discussing an experience change its meaning; how do qualitative researchers preserve the richness of the data they collect, and how would I ensure not to impose my ideas and those of the existing literature onto the data produced by the young people who might take part.

Answering questions

By exploring the literature and talking to other researchers the question of young people's ability to take part in research interviews was easily answered. In order to explore questions about friendship, adolescence would be the time when young people would typically be spending more time with their friends and this would coincide with an ability to construct responses that may require some reflection on experiences.

I attended workshops and training events that were related to my unanswered questions and I started to develop a way of understanding them. One particular event helped me to consolidate my position. At a training event, I had been required to read two transcripts, they were both essentially the same story, told by the same person and yet my emotional response to each telling of the story was very different. This highlighted for me the subjective and contextual nature of experiencing and understanding about the world.

By thinking about and applying evidence of the possibilities for change through talking therapies, I believed that meaning could change for people through discussing experiences. It was also apparent that it would not be possible to completely understand the subjective experience of another but it would be possible to co-construct meaning through the meeting of two subjective positions or intersubjectivity. That is, whatever a young person were to tell me of their experience would be affected by their prior experiences, what I represented to the young person and the context in which they told it. What I interpreted from

what I had been told would be affected by my own experiences and the context. The exploration of the questions had resulted in me being more confident in a social constructionist position and of the possibilities of narrative research.

Going back to the literature

As part of rewriting my proposal it was necessary to go back to the literature. At this stage I took a critical stance to explore aspects of social capital and mental health for young people, with particular focus on ‘Community Psychology’. I could see how LAC had been marginalised through poor access to social resources and social institutions such as work and leisure, and how this could impact on their mental health and well-being. I became more determined that the voice of LAC should be prioritised in my research.

I explored ideas about friendship through the literature and applied these to narrative interview schedules designed for experience based and life history narratives (Crossley, 2000). At this point I was feeling that the research project was starting to come together and I wanted to test out my interview schedule with a couple of pilot interviews. The first pilot interview was with a young person I knew well and I was confident that he would feel comfortable to give me feedback on my questions and ask for clarity when needed. As the interview was progressing I realised I needed to do much more than originally planned to explain the point of the interview and to give a clear indication that it was his story that I was interested in. I realised at this point that by reading about narrative research I had created the expectation that in exchange for a few carefully worded questions, I would get long and detailed responses. This was not to be the case. I realised that I may instead get brief and concise responses and that the way I framed my questions may deviate from my plan depending on the mood of the interview context. I searched for other narrative research with young people and a similar picture was emerging. This search also led me to ‘Critical Narrative Analysis’ by Emerson & Frosh (2004).

Overcoming obstacles

Having developed my social constructionist position and found the narrative approach I wanted to take, the next step was to find appropriate supervision. I was aware that I would benefit from supervision from a clinical psychologist working with the population but would also need separate supervision for my chosen methodology. The search for supervision involved contacting potential supervisors, explaining the research and my need for supervision and few people were unable to meet this commitment. Through perseverance I was able to access regular supervision for field and methodological aspects of the project, and feel this has made a significant contribution to it.

The process of gaining ethical approval was relatively straightforward. This was probably due to the lack of threat posed by the prospect of young people talking about friendships and the way young people would be recruited, through social services managers and social workers.

I had felt confident that recruiting young people to take part in the research would be fairly straightforward. I had made some contacts in social services departments at the start of the process, just to ascertain if it would be viable. Once I had gained ethical approval I was keen to get started on my recruitment and was dismayed to discover that nearly all my contacts had left their positions or were on sick leave. This left me with a relatively short time to build new relationships with people that had previously taken almost a year to develop. It also highlighted that the systems I was recruiting from were experiencing some stressful situations and my research would understandably be a low priority. Indeed this was then compounded by announcements of job losses from social services.

It has been acknowledged that accessing a sample of young people who are looked-after can be problematic and my experiences were certainly consistent with this literature. As Heptinstall (2000) suggests, there are several gatekeepers placed to protect young people but

this also means there is an additional hindrance to young people being able to express their views and beliefs through the research process.

In order to speed up the process I arranged to meet with social services staff and to explain the project, with particular focus on the role I hoped they would take. I was also persistent in contacting social service managers that needed to give me permission before I could continue. After several months and assistance from my field supervisor, I did start to get responses from young people. Responses came in slowly but this made it easier to pace interviews, transcription and re-transcription.

Interviewing

The population of LAC are often interviewed by professionals about aspects of their care, in preparation for court proceedings and as a result of experiences of neglect and abuse. As both a trainee clinical psychologist and previous roles as a research associate I have gained considerable experience in interviewing. My skills in engaging participants helped me to put the young people at ease and I found it helpful to establish the focus on the young person's interests at the start. This created a relaxed feel to the interview and also contextualised the focus of the interview to be on the young person. Based on my social constructionist position the interviews were semi-structured and included my input. This was in contrast to alternative interviewing styles, such as those drawing on psychoanalytic theory using techniques of 'free-association' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

I approached the first interview with some excitement due to what had felt like a long wait. Immediately after all of the interviews I noted down salient points about the context (see Appendix D). The process of transcribing the first interview made me question what I had thought would be narrative material. At the points in the interview where I had prompted for examples, this seemed to break the flow. Both listening to and transcribing the interviews reinforced the importance of the co-construction of meaning across the interview as a whole.

I could see and considered reflexively how I was influencing the interview. The young people on a couple of occasions explicitly made reference to psychology and I had responded to this with more interest than other subjects they raised. The re-listening to the interviews and the attention to co-construction highlighted where I had emphasised my own meanings. As I started the first re-transcription I realised how arduous and time consuming this part of the process was going to be. I was increasingly appreciative of my supervision at this stage. It helped me to stay motivated through the painstaking stages of transcription, re-transcription and preliminary analysis. I was also reassured through supervision that even the interviews that initially felt devoid of narrative accounts would be meaningful.

In supervision sessions with my field supervisor, the ethical issues around consent were discussed. As part of the consent process, young people under sixteen needed additional consent from carers. The social services managers and corporate parents had given permission for young people to take part in the research and yet some carers in residential services were reluctant to sign consent forms. All of the young people were considered competent to make the decision to take part in the research but the anxiety about providing consent as carers seemed to reflect a lack of understanding about the responsibility of such a role.

The interviews also raised ethical considerations about some of the material that was being produced. Some of the participants disclosed criminal acts that they had been involved in. All of these were discussed either in the context of past events that had already involved police attention or had been brought to the attention of staff working with the young people. However, despite the not warranting further action, the experience raised an interesting point to consider in relation to material disclosed in the interviews.

Requirements of the course

The process of analysis and interpretation was again time consuming and required considerable attention to detail. This created a conflict between meeting the requirements of the DClinPsy expectations around sample sizes and the amount of work that would be manageable within the time constraints. The aim of qualitative research is not to generalise from objective findings but to explore depth of meaning and variety in the subjective. For those undertaking narrative research there is great variation in sample sizes. This possibly reflects the variety of approaches to narrative analysis in addition to practical aspects, such as available time. The guidelines for conducting Critical Narrative Analysis as I have used here suggest using small sample sizes due to the focussed attention and time required (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). Therefore, I chose to stop sending out requests for participants once I had reached six and chose to complete the final interview from the seventh respondent.

By applying the five levels of interpretation to the interview transcripts, I generated a large amount of data. This created yet a further dilemma of how to reduce this down to meet the limits of the word counts. I was keen to preserve the aspects of the interpretation that demonstrated both the co-construction and prioritising of participant meaning making. I was aware that the sections of interviews used to demonstrate interpretations, would cause a degree of necessary repetition and needed to be carefully selected. I decided to use evidence of emotionality and participant meaning making to help make these selections but monitored what had not been selected for presentation through regular supervision.

Quality

The traditional quality checks of reliability and validity used by quantitative and indeed other qualitative approaches to research are not meaningful for critical narrative analysis from a social constructionist position (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). A number of narrative researchers have proposed aspects for quality assessment, such as persuasiveness of interpretations and checking interpretations with participants (Reissman, 1993). In keeping

with the method of analysis undertaken, I judged quality initially in how confident I could be in my interpretations. I used the transcripts to display the development of my interpretations. My aim was to be transparent and believe the approach I took provided a clear explanation of the analysis and built interpretations inductively across a number of instances in the text.

Finally, I have made no claims that my interpretations are 'truth'. I present one of many possibilities. I believe there is value in a plurality of approaches and encourage dialogue around difference.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Table of systematic searches

Date of search	Database and date covered	Search Terms	Limits set	Results
18/09/08	ASSIA (applied social science index and abstracts)	Foster* or Adopt* or 'looked after' AND friend*	English Language Journals	150 retrieved 1 duplicate 149 reviewed for relevant titles, abstract or keywords 29 kept for further analysis
07/12/08	PsychInfo/ Psycharticles/ Psychextra 1887-present day	Foster* or adopt* or looked after AND friend* or peer	English Language Journal Articles	27 retrieved and reviewed for relevant title, abstract or keywords 20 kept for further analysis
14/09/08	PsychInfo/ Psycharticles/ Psychextra 1887-present day	Friend AND Foster with similar terms	English language Journal articles Human participants	118 retrieved 5 duplicates 113 reviewed for relevant title, abstract or keywords 20 kept for further analysis
07/12/08	Scopus 1823-present day	"looked after" or "foster care" And friend*	Article or review not physical sciences	139 retrieved for relevant title, abstract or keywords 32 kept for further analysis
12/08/08	Social Care Online	Friend* or Peer And "looked after" or foster*	Topic search	0 retrieved

12/08/08	Web of science/ web of knowledge	Friend* AND Foster care	Topic searches	37 retrieved and reviewed for relevant title, abstract or keywords 33 kept for further analysis 17 retrieved and reviewed for relevant title, abstract or keywords 3 kept for further analysis
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Table 1 Searches by database

Appendix B: Categories of articles reviewed

Category	Number of Articles	Relevance
A: Articles reporting aspects of friendship/ relationships with peers of young people who are looked after	7	Relevant
B: Articles reporting on mediating factors in the friendship/ peer relationships of young people who are looked after	6	Relevant
C: Articles reporting the impact of an intervention on relationships with peers	1	Relevant
D: Articles reporting the impact of care experience on multiple aspects, including social relating with peers and friendships	8	Marginal Relevance
E: Articles reporting the impact of friends/ relationships with peers on other factors	6	Marginal Relevance
F: Articles reporting the impact of an intervention with young people looked after and an aspect of which is connected to peer relationships or social functioning	2	Marginal Relevance
G: Articles reporting the impact of maltreatment/abuse on peer relating with no clear looked after status	7	Marginal Relevance

Table 2 Included articles categorised by relevance and main aims

Appendix C: Quality questions based on Jones (2007).

Aspect of Assessment	Questions Asked
Conceptual framework:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Are the aims clearly stated and research questions clearly identified? — Does the author link the work to an existing body of knowledge?
Study design:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Are the methods appropriate and clearly described? — Is the context of the study well set out? Did the research design account for possible bias? — Are the limitations of research explicitly identified?
Research analysis:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Are the results clearly described, valid and reliable? — Is the analysis clearly described?
Conclusions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Are all possible influences on the observed outcomes considered? — Are conclusions linked to aims of study? — Are conclusions linked to analysis and interpretation of data?

Table 3: Quality assessment questions as reported by Jones (2007).

Appendix D: Review table of relevant articles

1 st author/year	Aim	Sample	Method	Analysis	Main findings	Limitations
Category A						
Blitz et al 1989	To investigate whether being freed for adoption would be perceived as rejection by parents and lead to rejection by peers and more behaviour problems.	17 boys freed for adoption & 17 matched on age, IQ and residence, not free for adoption. All living in a residential treatment centre. Mean age 10. All participants had a history of neglect or abuse.	Cohort Sociometric ratings Behaviour ratings of peers	Statistical X^2 <i>t-test</i>	Results not powerful enough but general trend was for those freed for adoption to be more rejected by peers than those not freed for adoption.	Results were only significant to $p < .10$, but accepted as significant. Only 17 participants in each group. Lack of discussion of measures, reliability and potential bias or limitations. No links between findings and previous research.
Kaufman et al 1989	To assess the impact of different forms of maltreatment on socio-emotional development.	70 maltreated children (all receiving input from social services agencies) 67 demographically matched non-maltreated 5-11 year olds in US day camp	Cohort Camp counsellor reports on Q sort rating of self-esteem, behaviour questionnaire, peer sociometric ratings	Statistical Generation of composite self-esteem score. MANOVA & Pearson correlations Principal Component Analysis	Maltreated children had significantly lower self-esteem and pro-social ratings, and significantly higher withdrawn behaviour than non-maltreated children. Children who experienced all forms of maltreated scored significantly higher on peer nominations of disruption than any other group.	No bias or limitations discussed.
Leve et al 2007	To examine if foster placement was associated with poor peer relations at entry to school whilst controlling for behaviour. If so, if there was a sex difference.	117 maltreated children placed in foster care and 60 controls. All participants were recruited prior to starting school	Longitudinal cohort design. Parents completed 3 monthly follow-up assessments over two years. In addition children answered questions about their peer relationships and teachers completed questionnaires about social skills and peer competence	Multiple groups path analysis in structural equation modelling.	Foster care has a significant association for poor peer relations in girls. Behaviour problems were significantly correlated with foster care status for girls.	Limitations discussed: some children unable to comprehend what was required, potential inter-rater reliability difficulties. Causality not clear (foster care or maltreatment).

McIntyre et al 1988	To provide empirical support for clinical consultation. To establish if psychosocial development is different for foster children with no signs of pathology and home reared children.	Study 1: 29 foster children with no known clinical disorders, 93 children home reared classed as living in poverty and 47 home reared not living in poverty. All matched on IQ, age, gender and race. Study 2: 17 children in foster care (mean age 9 years 11 months) and their non-fostered classmates.	Cohort Study 1: All completed measures of emotional development. Study 2: peer sociometric questionnaire generating like/dislike scores for each class member.	Study 1: X^2 and discriminate function analysis. Study 2: t-tests and person correlation	Study 1: A specific and virtually exclusive foster group psychosocial pattern was found that is suggestive of learned helplessness and external locus of control. Study 2: foster children are rated as disliked by their classmates significantly more than non-fostered peers.	No mention of length of time known to classmates, foster children are often moved and are new members to a class group. This raises the issue of causality.
Perry 2006	To compare primary relationships of young people in foster care and the general population and to explore relationships between network disruption strength of ties and psychological distress.	154 adolescents in foster care with an average age of 16.4 years and a stratified random sample of 4,062 from the general population with a mean age of 16.44	Cohort study with interviews, questionnaires and measures of depression/anxiety, network variables for family of origin, current carers and friends.	Statistical X^2 and ordinary least squares regression	Young people in foster care had higher rates of depression than the general population. They had experienced an average of 4.11 placements suggesting they had experienced some form of network disruption. Significantly fewer of the foster care group reported their friends care about them. Having strong networks across the three domains was associated with fewer symptoms of depression. Perceived strength of foster care network is positively related to strength of peer network	No limitations identified but the level of network disruption within different types of out of home care was not explored as all types were grouped.

					and vice versa.	
Ridge et al 2000	To explore the meaning and value of friendships for young people looked after.	16 young people, 11-19 years either currently looked after or having been.	Depth interviews	Transcribed interviews, Thematic indexing	Friends were important as a source of support, someone to talk to, as a source of protection. The care system caused difficulty in maintaining friends with many losses reported and disruption to school, stigma of being looked after and practical problems in day to day friendship activities caused by the system. Young people reported feeling isolated and that school was very important for access to friend networks. Too much focus on care experiences can be a problem if all your friends are in care.	No explanation of analysis, beyond reporting 'thematic indexing'.
Smith 1995	To explore differences in friendships of maltreated children in foster care with matched maltreated children not in foster care, in addition to the impact of separation from older siblings.	Three groups of children aged 3-6 years: 13 foster children separated from siblings, 25 foster children placed with at least one older sibling and 13 children receiving input from services but placed with biological parents and at least one older sibling.	Cohort Guardian/maternal reports and measures of: child's friendships, relationships with siblings, behaviour and emotional problems, and social competence.	X ² , Pearson correlation, ANOVA and paired t-tests	Foster children were more likely to be friends with people they lived with but were unrelated to. The comparison group were less likely than either foster group to spend more than half a day with their friends. Foster children separated from their siblings were reported to direct significantly more negative	Small sample size once divided into categories for analysis.

					behaviour towards their friends than the other groups. Foster children placed with a sibling directed significantly more positive behaviour towards their friends than the comparison group.	
Category B						
Howe et al 2001	To address inconsistencies in previous research on friendship quality and status of severely abused children and how this is related to adjustment in terms of loneliness.	35 severely abused children living in a residential treatment centre and 43 matched non-abused children. All aged between 4-11 years.	Cohort Self report measures and observation rating scales of socio-metric data, friendship behaviour and quality, loneliness and verbal ability	ANCOVA, hierarchical multiple regression.	Found no significant difference between abused and non-abused children in terms of popularity ratings by classmates. Abused children reported significantly less caring and validation and more conflict and betrayal by their friends. Unsurprisingly children with friends were less lonely. On observed behaviour abused boys were significantly more negative than other children. The main effects suggest that close friendships seem to buffer negative outcomes such as loneliness.	Small sample size for multiple analysis but calculations suggest sufficient power. The paper highlights potential limitations of investigating friendships in a residential treatment centre that the results may not extend to those outside of this environment.
Price & Landsverk 1998	To investigate the manner in which maltreated children in foster care process social information	124 children aged 5-10 years, 12 months after entry to foster care with a history of maltreatment	Longitudinal Cohort Measures of social information processing 'attributions of others'	Hierarchical regression	After controlling for age and sex irrelevant attributions to hypothetical stories were significantly	The paper identified the information processing was limited to two types.

	and later psychological adjustment and behaviour problems.		adaptive and behaviour measures.		related to internalising problems, seeking an adult for assistance was related to externalising problems 6-8 months later, ineffective problem-solving strategies were significantly correlated to later internalising problems, and unbiased interpretations of others intentions and competent problem-solving were linked to later adaptive functioning and competence.	
Rogosch et al 1994	To explore patterns of aggression and withdrawal in peer relations and related social competence and effectiveness among peers in children who have a history of maltreatment.	115 school aged children (59 maltreated, on social services caseloads).	Cohort Peer evaluations and teacher assessments measures of behavioural problems, social competence, California child Q set. Child rearing practices report from parents	MANOVA, ANOVA and regression analysis	Maltreated children scored significantly less adaptively than non-maltreated children on teacher measures of social competence, behaviour problems and social acceptance. There was a tendency for peers to reject maltreated children, with active isolation particularly for those who had been physically abused. For children with an aggressive-withdrawn pattern of social behaviour, maltreatment strongly predicted	No limitations were discussed in the paper.

					social competence.	
Rogosch et al 1995	To examine the extent to which cognitive/affective processing abilities could serve as mediators between a history of maltreatment and peer difficulties.	46 maltreated children being served by social services and 43 non-maltreated children.	Longitudinal Cohort Interviews, teacher ratings of actual behaviour, and measures: interpersonal functioning, verbal ability, behavioural problems, and personality, cognitive and social functioning.	Principal components factor analysis, regression analysis.	A history of maltreatment predicted lower social effectiveness and higher behaviour dysregulation. Maltreatment was found to be related to more difficulty in inferring negative affect in interpersonal situations. A history of physical abuse was found to contribute to difficulty in understanding sad and angry affect and to contribute with rejection by peers.	No discussion of social services involvement. No discussion of potential limitations.
Roy et al 2004	To examine the extent to which overactivity/inattention in children reared in group care co-occurred with difficulties in attachments and selective friendships.	Children placed in care before the age of 1 year, 19 in residential care and 19 in foster care. All average IQ	Cohort, Observation of behaviour in class, questionnaires on behaviour, family background and selective relationships, psychometric measures.	T tests ANOVA and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient	Children raised in group care were found to be significantly less selective in friendships. A lack of selectivity in relationships is associated with inattention and overactivity, all were shown to be features for boys reared in residential care and not girls.	Small sample size n=19 in each group.
Shields et al 2001	If and how narrative representations for at risk young people are related to peer rejection from new social groups.	Seventy six maltreated children with input from social services and 45 non-maltreated 8-12 year olds. All attending a day camp.	Cohort, Coding of story stems, sociometric and verbal ability measures and emotion regulation ratings.	Principal components analysis, ANCOVA, MANCOVA & Path analysis	Maltreated children's representations were less positive/coherent than non-maltreated children even when controlling for age and verbal ability. Maltreated children's representations were found to mediate peer	No limitations discussed.

					reactions to them. Maltreated children were rated by peers as more likely to start fights, and be disruptive, and less co-operative than non-maltreated children and as being more emotionally dysregulated by camp counsellors.	
Category C						
Rhodes et al 1999	The extent to which a formal mentoring programme helped to improve the peer relationships of young people in foster care.	Young people aged 10-16 years assigned to a mentoring intervention or 18 month waiting list, 12 from foster care, 78 from kinship care and 90 from the care of biological parents.	Randomised controlled trial. Measures of parental satisfaction, history of abuse/trauma, mentor relationship and child friendships. Baseline and 18 month follow-up.	MANOVA	Fostered young people in the control group experienced a decrease in peer prosocial support over time, whilst the fostered young people in the intervention group experienced an increase over time. All those not fostered experienced an increase over time. Fostered young people also showed improvements in their self-esteem over time.	Numbers in foster care too small for individual effects so grouped with kinship care. It would have been more rigorous to have an attention placebo for the control group. Otherwise the measured improvements could simply be about the time spent with another person rather than the specific mentor.

Table 4 Aims, Sample, Method, Analysis, Findings and Limitations of relevant articles reviewed.

Appendix E: Information sheets

Appendix F: Ethics approval letter

Appendix G: Interview schedule

Appendix H: Re-transcription guidelines

Stages of re-transcription began with micro coding of speech emphasis, idea units and lines (shown below). Uppercase denotes emphasis and “/” denotes a change in idea unit.

Figure 1 Original transcription of interview with Participant 2 and the researcher (NA).

68. P2: it's always good to have friends but just know who your true friends are really
69. NA: mm, and how would you know that
70. P2: you can like, a true friend is someone who you know you'll be able to phone at three o'clock in the morning and they'll be round your house within five minutes if something goes wrong, that's how you know they're your true friend

Figure 2 Re-transcription of interview with Participant 2

68. P2: it's ALWAYS good to have friends/ but just know who your TRUE friends are really
69. NA: mm, and HOW would you know that
70. P2: you can like/ a TRUE FRIEND /is someone who you know you'll BE ABLE to phone at three o'clock in the morning /and they'll be round your house within FIVE minutes if something goes wrong/ that's how you know they're your TRUE friend

After this micro layer of analysis a move to the more macro structures of the interviews were considered (shown below). This involved identifying the patterns in which lines of speech were structured. It was noted where lines changed perspective, topic or context. These groups of lines on a similar theme are called Stanzas (Gee, 2005). Stanzas tend to come in related pairs, or Strophes and these form parts of the whole story (Emerson & Frosh, 2004).

Figure 3 Macro analysis of transcript from interview with participant 2.

74. P2: it's ALWAYS good to have friends/ but just know who your TRUE friends are really

75. NA: mm, and HOW would you know that

Stanza 12: What a true friend is.

76. P2: you can like/ a TRUE FRIEND /is someone who you know you'll BE ABLE to phone at three o'clock in the morning /and they'll be round your house within FIVE minutes if something goes wrong/ that's how you know they're your TRUE friend

Appendix I: Exemplar of interpretation from Participant 1

Level 1: Organisation of Speech.

The interview was structured in a typical question and answer layout with the researcher (NA) leading and in a position of power as an adult interviewing a young person. However, there is evidence of the flexibility in the interview structure to allow for P1 to construct her own meanings. In ‘Stanza 28’ NA asks P1 if it is better to have just a few or lots of friends. P1’s response using “it depends on DIFFERENT people” allows her to introduce difference and the topic of temperament as an explanation for the difference. It also allows her to follow-up with positioning herself as different to others because “I’m a QUIET PERSON” and “I dunno I just don’t like being in big CROWDS, so”.

Level 2: Syntax and Cohesion.

This level demonstrates how “language practices are used to create cohesion” across the micro and macro structure of the interview (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). The false starts and speech repairs of the interview with P1 indicate real time meaning making. As part of the interpretive process these indicate the focus or shift in meanings for both P1 and NA. An example, (Line 243) where P1 responds to NA asking when she changed in the way she fell-out with friends. P1 discusses her move from one school, to another and compares her position within one group and her position within the next group. The first underlined section (below) demonstrates how P1 has some difficulty in distinguishing between both schools from her past in her example, and then whilst still on this line, she uses the name of the County to focus attention onto the school she is making reference to. In the second underlined section the repeated “we were” seems to indicate P1’s focus on her move from the difficulty she had just experienced, to the introduction of the next part of her narrative of the group who were forever falling out.

Stanza 46: Forever falling out when younger

240. NA: yeah, and is THAT /something that you think is DIFFERENT/ from when you were YOUNGER?

241. P1: yeah

242. NA: can you remember a point when that CHANGED?

243. P1: erm,[10 seconds] /YEAH I suppose so /cos the SCHOOL before I went to from the one I WAS at /which was in [DIFFERENT COUNTY] / erm there was a group of us THERE / and we were we were forever FALLING OUT

Level 3: Mainline and Off-mainline Plot.

This level of interpretation asks, what is the main point of what is being said and what deviates from it? Building on the same section of the interview (from above) we can see in the next few lines how the main focus of the narrative is on how P1 has changed from being with a group of friends who always fell-out to being with a more stable group who didn't fall out so much. The main meanings generated are on P1's learning and development since being more stable. She also presents her current friendships as being good and any difficulties being in the past. At Line 244, P1 adds with some humour an exception to her main point of her more recent friends not falling-out because other members of the group had fallen-out completely. This material makes the telling of how she has moved to a more geographically stable group of friends, more personal to her. The new found stability in this new group is hers and is not shared throughout the wider group.

Stanza 47: More recent stability less falling out

244. And then we I came to the school I was JUST AT an /we'd all like had a STABLE FRIENDSHIP throughout /EXCEPT 3 of them which FELL OUT completely so [laughs]

245. NA: mm

246. P1: but the REST OF US maintained a /STABLE relationship /and we didn't
FALL OUT so much

247. NA: mm

248. P1: so

Level 4: Psychological Subjects.

This level focuses on the subject of discussion such as I, (S)HE/THEIR. Where there is a change in subject, interpretations can be made as to why this might be. In the example below, P1 wants to position herself as being the same as other young people, using YOU as a replacement of ONE to indicate common experience. Where she responds with "I" and "MY" she is setting her experience as different to others. P1 often interpreted questions from a general perspective rather than a subjective reflective one. This can be seen by the way she responds generally to questions using the subject positions of "YOU" and "YOUR" instead of "I" and "MY". This may also have served to keep emotional distance.

Stanza 15: Going off with someone else

92. NA: can you THINK of / a particular BAD TIME/ or a LOW POINT /in terms of
FRIENDSHIPS?

93. P1: erm, [10 seconds] well there's been LOTS through CHILDHOODS/ WHERE
/ I guess EVERY childhood has them where erm like/ [1 second] **you** know **you**
just FALL OUT with someone

94. NA: yeah

95. P1: and then **THEY** go off with someone else, / or **YOU** go off with someone
else /and its THINGS like that

Level 5: Focusing System.

This level of interpretation was concerned with the emphasis placed within the text, shown in the sections above by the words in uppercase. As explained above, these indicate

the words that carry the emphasis in a pitch glide and signal the focus of meaning by the speaker. The first section of personal narrative in P1's interview falls in Stanza 6 (below). In this personal narrative P1 is telling what 'HELPS' her to have an understanding of what a friend is through experience of making loads of 'DIFFERENT FRIENDS' and having BEEN to a lot of 'DIFFERENT SCHOOLS'. However, she is also emphasising 'HAVING to' make loads of different friends because she 'MOVED A LOT'. Something she presents as being forced upon her but that has helped her understanding of what a friend is. Therefore, the emphasis highlights the elements of the speech that P1 wants NA to pick up as important. Whilst these elements are then closed down they are picked up later by NA for a further exploration in 'Stanza 31'. The theme of learning and having to move a lot are brought in once more by P1 in 'Stanza 56'.

Stanza 6: Process of learning what a friend is

40. NA: and HOW do you think YOU/ came to have AN UNDERSTANDING of/
OF THAT?
41. P1: erm [...] well I've BEEN to a lot of /DIFFERENT SCHOOLS / and MOVED
A LOT
42. NA: hmm
43. P1: so I think that like HELPS IT and that an
44. like HAVING to make /loads of DIFFERENT FRIENDS
45. and all the different SCHOOLS so
46. that's HELPED ME to /understand WHAT a friend is

By applying this level of the analysis across the entire interview transcript and incorporating the meanings from the previous interpretive levels, we can see how meanings are carried across the interview and co-constructed by both NA and P1. The speaker's

emphasis across the interview generates the themes from which interpretation of the narrative can be made.

Appendix J: Interview contexts for each participant

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) was interviewed in her home with her foster mother in the house. On a few occasions, her foster mother walked through the room where we were conducting the interview, interrupted the conversation and could be heard nearby throughout. NA felt P1's foster mother wanted her presence to be felt.

Participant 2

The interview with participant 2 (P2) was conducted in a room in a residential unit. There was broken glass waiting to be cleared up, that had been caused by another resident. NA chose to sit on the floor for the interview whilst P2 was lying on a sofa. This was mainly because the furniture was so spread out that NA was worried the digital recorder might miss something if they were spread out but it also created a less formal atmosphere. On a few occasions the interview was interrupted by staff from the unit and by residents outside the room. The environment felt chaotic but friendly.

Participant 3

The interview with participant 3 (P3) was held in a residential unit. The room was large but the interview was conducted in one corner of the room near the door as this is where P3 had been sitting when NA entered the room. Throughout the interview P3 was swinging on her chair and commented on several occasions on her involved activity with the chair "I think I've broke it", "the chairs bullying me". Whilst conducting the interview NA became aware that some of the questions were confusing to P3 and was pleased that she was able to ask for clarification when she didn't understand something. P3 gave NA the impression that she wanted to be impressive or shocking through her recounting of violent and criminal acts.

Participant 4

The interview with participant 4 (P4) was conducted in a room of a busy house with lots of young children. On a few occasions the interview was interrupted by the children and

P4 had to leave to intervene in them playing with a hose. This gave the interview a fun and lively atmosphere. P4 was very much engaged in the interview and was keen to present herself as a capable high achiever.

Participant 5

The interview with participant 5 (P5) was conducted in a noisy and busy residential unit. There were interruptions from televisions, phones ringing and other resident young people banging doors. P5 spoke quietly and seemed not to want to talk much about her personal experiences. She showed little interest in the process, was texting or looking through her phone and yawned a number of times during the interview.

Participant 6

The interview with participant 6 (P6) was conducted in a residential home at a quiet time of day. P6 was very quietly spoken and some of the questions NA asked were too complex for him. NA attempted on a few occasions to restructure questions to make them more accessible to P6 but regularly he was unable to elaborate on his responses.

Participant 7

The interview with participant 7 (P7) was conducted in a busy and noisy residential home with doors banging loudly and with residents and staff walking past noisily throughout the interview. On the occasions when the doors were banging P7 seemed to speak loudly as if more aroused and on one occasion exclaimed 'oh god' when a door banged loudly nearby. P7 was very easy to talk to and the interview felt quite playful with lots of humour.

Appendix K: Epistemological stance

Epistemological Stance

The researcher took a social constructionist position. This can be seen contrasted with other paradigms in table 5 below.

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
Positivism	There is one knowable and true reality	Objectivity of researcher can uncover truth through measurement	Experimentation of cause and effect. Testing hypotheses.
Postpositivism	There is one true reality but can only approximately known	Attempt to be objective but acknowledge the impact of the researcher	Falsification
Critical Theory	Reality is historically contextual and is shaped by social, political, gender, ethnic etc now crystalised	Researcher and researched are interlinked and researcher's values will influence	Communication of marginalised perspectives with a view to social change
Constructivism	Reality is subjectively constructed	Transactional subjectivity	Hermeneutic dialecticism

Table 5: Paradigm assumptions (based on Guba, & Lincoln, 1994).²

The aim of the research was to understand how young people constructed meaning from their experiences of friends, friendship and peer relationships. Had an alternative position been taken then the value of each young person's subjective experience may have been diminished in the search for a collective experience that was 'reality'. Under such circumstances the dominant positions may prevail and the value of diversity could be lost.

² Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). London: Sage.

There would also be no understanding of how meanings are jointly constructed in dialogue. The analysis of the interviews demonstrates both the interviewee and interviewer contributions to the development of the narrative. A lack of attention paid to the co-construction could result in the researcher's position, or that of the dominant research base being ascribed to the participants.

Appendix L: Chronology of research process

Appendix M: Guidelines for authors from target journal

