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Twenty First Century Contact
Young people in care and their use of mobile
communication devices and the Internet
for contact

Jennifer E. Simpson

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Jennifer E. Simpson

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Abstract

Under Section 34 of the Children Act 1989 local authorities have a legal duty to make every effort to ensure that a child in care can maintain links with his/her birth parents and other wider family members. For a child in care contact enables him/her to continue seeing certain members of their family, in the main, birth parents. The type of contact that a child in care can have consists of direct contact (face-to-face meetings that are supervised or not) and indirect contact (telephone calls, letters and/or photographs). Traditionally contact for children in care and their birth families has been organised by social work practitioners and supported by foster carers.

The advent of mobile communication devices such as the smartphone; tablets and computers, as well as social media and other apps for example, WhatsApp have changed the way in which individuals now communicate. These changes in communication have also begun to impact fostering in the form of children in care and their birth parents making use of texting, email and social networking sites for contact that is not allowed or supported by social work practitioners. Unlike the traditional methods of contact for children in care and their birth families, as users of these mobile communication devices they have at their disposal a way to communicate that incorporates privacy; flexibility and choice. For children in care there is also the added benefit of increased connectivity to people within their familial and friendship networks via a range of devices and platforms. These developments have led to difficulties and challenges for foster carers and social work practitioners potentially in the form of placement breakdowns and on occasions, continued abuse by a birth parent towards a child in care.

The research that is available on this new phenomenon of contact has only begun to ask questions in relation to the practice, but there are gaps that include a lack of consideration as to the concept of contact in terms of the power differentials that are present, and the ability of children in care to negotiate the world around them as social actors in their own right. This empirical study that made use of a research paradigm of interpretivism and influences from the Foucauldian conception of power attempts to fill these gaps by asking three questions. The first is, are children in care making use mobile communication devices for contact with members of their familial and friendship networks, and if so, how. The second question is to what extent devices like the smartphone, tablets and computers either improve or hinder the communication that takes place between children in care and members of the familial and friendship networks. The final question is, how contact using mobile communication devices and Internet is being managed by foster carers and social workers.

A key finding from the study was that the young people in care were not passive recipients of their familial and friendship networks. They did not deem their interaction with friends and family via mobile communication devices and the Internet as contact, but rather as staying in touch. The characteristics of this new phenomenon of contact included immediacy and reach, communication in real time and duration which enabled them to control the who, how and when of staying in touch. However, this new found freedom was affected by the continual disciplinary gaze that the young people in care were subject to by foster carers and social work practitioners. A gaze which was motivated by a continuing rhetoric of vulnerability and risk.

The approach to monitoring and management of mobile communication devices and the Internet by foster carers exposed a complex picture of surveillance and monitoring, as well as day to day management that saw the use of parenting practices that consisted of physical tasks completed by the foster carer and the child in care, and also monitoring software.

Lay Abstract

Contact is a legal duty to be undertaken by a local authority to make every effort to ensure that a child or young person in care can maintain links with his/her birth parents and other wider family members. For a young person in care contact enables him/her to continue seeing certain members of their family, mainly their parents. For social workers contact can be used to do a number of things that include: the ability to keep family relationships going, which is particularly important where it is planned that a young person in care is to return to his/her family. Another important aspect of contact is that it provides young people in care with knowledge about their family and it can supposedly enable emotional wellbeing. The research available on contact points to the fact that it is not always beneficial for children and young people, and it does not always do those things that social workers would want. Research also highlights that children in care want contact with friends and other people outside of their immediate birth family.

The type of contact that a child or young person in care can have consists of face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, letters and it can also include photographs. Traditionally contact for children and young people in care and their birth families has been organised by social workers and supported by foster carers. The advent of mobile communication devices such as the smartphone; tablets and computers, as well as social media and other apps e.g. WhatsApp, has changed the way in which individuals communicate. These changes in communication have also begun to impact fostering in the form of children and young people in care and their birth parents making use of texting, email and social networking sites for contact that is not allowed or supported by social workers. Unlike the traditional methods of contact for children, young people and their families, as users of these mobile communication devices they are able to communicate in a way where they have privacy; flexibility; choice and ways to connect to people via a range of devices and platforms. These developments have led to difficulties and challenges for foster carers and social workers in the form of placement breakdowns and on occasions, continued abuse by a birth parent towards a child or young person in care.

Currently, research that is available on contact does not focus greatly on this emerging way of communication between children in care and their friends and family and therefore this research study attempts to fill this gap by asking three questions. The first is, how young people in care are making use of mobile communication devices for contact with family and friends. The second question is to what extent devices like the smartphone, tablets and computers either improve or have a negative effect on the communication that takes place. The final question raised is about how contact using mobile communication devices and the Internet are managed by foster carers and social workers.

As part of this research project, 12 young people in care aged 13 to 18 years of age, their foster carers and social workers were interviewed to find out how use was made of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact and how this was managed. The interviews were analysed using the Framework Method which focuses on the commonalities and differences of behaviours, attitudes and opinions of young people in care, their foster carers and social workers. In order to make sense of the data that was gathered the researcher took into account the way in which young people in care exercised their will and judgement, as well as what control and authority foster carers and social work practitioners had.

The research showed that for young people in care when they make use of mobile communication devices they do not see their communication with family and friends as contact but rather as a matter of staying in touch. Both foster carers and social workers were concerned about young

people in care staying in touch with their families because they feared by having contact with their families this might have a negative effect on the foster placement.

In terms of how foster carers monitored and managed contact this was done through a variety of methods that included physical activities and tasks such as staying in the same room and also a technological approach, for example making use of filtering software. These activities were often motivated by a desire to safeguard the young people in their care from what they considered to be a range of online risks. It was noted that the focus of foster carers was linked to risks associated with use of a range of mobile communication devices by young people in care, and not necessarily any threats posed by their family and friends. With regards to the social workers, they expected the young people in care to share every detail about who they were contacting with little attention or thought being given to privacy.

The research also showed that neither social workers nor foster carers had clear procedures or guidelines that they could make use of, and therefore their actions in terms monitoring and managing the use of mobile communication technologies was more often than not influenced by their own fears and concerns about the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet, as well as in some cases a lack of skill and knowledge on their part. The research finishes by highlighting the need for social workers and foster carers to appreciate that the use of mobile communication technologies by young people has changed the way in which young people stay in touch with their families, not least because they have both the choice and control to do so.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Preamble

How do young people in care make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet to be in contact with their birth families and friends? This thesis explores this question from the multiple perspectives of young people in care, foster carers and social work practitioners. Integral to the thesis is not just a description and discussion of the various practices and behaviours, but also consideration as to how the advent of mobile communication devices and the Internet has begun to disrupt notions and understandings of contact. Linked to this will be the response by foster carers and social work practitioners as they seek to safeguard and promote the welfare of the young people in their care in the face of challenges and complexities of unregulated contact using mobile communication devices and the Internet. Using a research paradigm of interpretivism and influences from the Foucauldian conceptions of power, childhood studies and the notion of risk the concept of contact will be fundamentally questioned, as will the roles and actions of foster carers and social work practitioners.

Notwithstanding what has been said already, the practice of contact has been regularly reviewed by governments as part of an exercise to look at fostering more generally (see Ofsted, 2014). The most recent review took place in 2016, the British government announced the commissioning of ‘national stocktake of fostering’. The aim of this exercise was to understand the state of fostering in England and to improve the outcomes of children and young people who are in care. As part of the exercise Baginsky, Gorin and Sands (Department of Education, 2017b) undertook a review of evidence in relation to fostering that identified a number of burgeoning issues and developments in the sector. These included the age range of children and young people entering care; the suitability of Special Guardians; the increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children entering care and the rise in the number of young people still in care at the age of 18 (Department of Education, 2017b:4). Baginsky, Gorin and Sands’ review of evidence (Department of Education, 2017b) also highlighted the ongoing academic and policy debate in relation to the concept of contact as defined by the Children Act 1989. The researchers commented that there is a difference between the concept of contact as defined by legislation, and its interpretation in terms of practice by children and young people in care. For children and young people in care contact means staying in touch with friends and other individuals beyond their immediate family. Baginsky, Gorin and Sands

(Department of Education, 2017b) added that, there are both benefits and difficulties associated with contact that range from enabling a child or young person in care to settle into a foster placement, to contact being undermined by birth parent(s) who do not want a placement to succeed.

A second exercise undertaken as part of the national stock was Narey and Owers' (2018) review of fostering that looked at the sector in its entirety. Their review made mention of contact from the perspective of it "*not always being in the best interests of the child*" (2018:82) and provided a series of examples as to why contact should be removed. Moreover, they reminded readers that the presumption in relation to contact had been removed by the Children and Families Act 2014. Narey and Owers (2018) then went on to make a series of recommendations in relation to contact. One of these was that social work practitioners should not shirk the responsibility to bring to the attention of judges the negative impact of contact upon a child. Shortly afterwards an article appeared in the Social Work publication *Community Care* which in effect was a counter-argument. The article by Featherstone et al., (Community Care, 2018) identified that research into contact shows it to be full of complexity and that the picture painted by Narey and Owers was far too simplistic. Featherstone et al., (2018) also made the point that the reference to the presumption of contact being removed was misleading, because although the Children and Families Act 2014 sees the insertion of additional clauses that strengthen local authorities' ability to refuse contact on welfare grounds, the obligation on local authorities to ensure contact for children and young people in care still remains.

What is seen here is that the concept of contact is contested and this has been the case across a number of research studies since the 1990s (see Quinton et al., 1997 and Brody, 2017), and is a feature that will be further examined more fully in Chapter Two. Against this backdrop of partisan views on contact what could be called a 'quiet revolution' has been taking place in the form of children and young people in care having contact with members of their familial and friendship networks via a range of mobile communication devices and the Internet (Bowyer, 2009; Cooper, 2009; Fursland, 2010; Stephenson, 2009; Simpson, 2013, Sen, 2010a and MacDonald et al., 2014). Baginsky, Gorin and Sands (2017) commenting on this new version of contact state that there has been very little research into the impact mobile communication devices and Internet has had on children's and young people's contact specifically with their birth family.

This study seeks to add to the existing knowledge of how young people in care aged between 14 to 18 years of age make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet to have contact with members of the familial *and* friendship *networks*, and the implications are foster carers, social work practitioners and fostering more widely.

Overview of the study

The study was located in a local authority in central England and like many other local authorities it had seen its population of children and young people in care grow. The study involved young people in care, their foster carers and their allocated social work practitioners as part of understanding the wider implications for those that have responsibility for their wellbeing. The study concentrated on young people in care who had been in a stable placement setting for a period of 9 months or more, as part of ensuring that neither the young people nor their foster carers were experiencing any difficulties associated with the breakdown or the start of a placement. As part of ensuring the anonymity of all participants and other named individuals in the study, pseudonyms devised by the author have been used throughout the thesis.

The study was carried out using a methodological approach of triadic semi-structured interviews, that is, interviewing the young person in care, his/her foster carer and social work practitioner. This approach was used to provide a more *“holistic and multi-dimensional”* understanding of this new phenomenon (Brownhill and Hickey, 2012:370).

Appreciating that each member of the triad would require a different approach, it was decided that the interview for the young people in care would be face-to-face and consist of two parts. The first part consisted of the young person in care completing an Ecomap that is, a visual assessment tool used to identify the relationships that form part of an individual’s familial and friendship network. The second half was a semi-structured interview that consisted of a series of questions about the young person’s use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact. Foster carers who took part in the study were subject to an in person semi-structured interview. The approach then differed slightly for social work practitioners who were interviewed via telephone. The analytical phase of the study was conducted using the Framework Method. This allows the researcher to capture both the commonalities and the differences within the data through the use of matrices that summarise the data in rows (cases) and columns (codes) thereby producing ‘cells’ of

summarised data (Gale et al., 2013). This ensured that the data within and across each triad was compared and contrasted, giving a holistic overview of the entire data set.

Rationale for the study

The background to the study stems from the author's social work practice field of fostering. As a Supervising Social Worker to foster carers the author came across a number of circumstances that involved children in care using their mobile phones to engage in unmediated telephone calls, texting and instant messaging to communicate with members of their familial and friendship networks, and others within their social network that were deemed by both social work practitioners and foster carers as harmful. Through a review of the literature on the history and legislation of contact and its current manifestations, parental digital monitoring and also subsequent reading across the areas of the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children and young people in general, children in care, and also childhood studies, as well as the phenomenon of contact using mobile communication devices and the Internet, the author has begun to draw the conclusion that contact for children and young people in care as presented in the literature was not merely a necessary component of a Care Plan that needs to be carried out as part of a court order. Rather, contact is concerned with a sense of connection, relationships, family, a child's sense of identity and personal belonging.¹

It is the author's fundamental belief that the emergence of mobile technology that permits anytime, anywhere communication (Kim et al., 2011) has begun to reveal underlying and unquestioned assumptions that have prevailed for possibly far too long about contact (Simpson, 2013). These unquestioned assumptions include the extent to which children and young people in care are seen as social actors, and they are able to exercise agency in terms of having contact with members of their familial and friendship networks. Moreover, in terms of underlying assumptions the extent to which foster carers and social work practitioners have continually exercised control and authority over this aspect of fostering.

¹ This is one perspective on what is not only a contested notion, but also the term itself is contestable as seen in the opening quote of the thesis. As will be later argued, the term is primarily the language of social work practitioners, and not one readily used by children and young people in care or their families.

Therefore, the author's area of interest is whether or not children and young people in care are using mobile communication devices to make contact with individual members of their familial and friendship networks; how this is being done; with whom and what the implications are for foster carers and social work practitioners. It is fully acknowledged that my area of interest should not necessarily be limited to the three social actors outlined; it could also include birth family members and the supervising social worker. Nevertheless, in relation to this study, the respondents have been confined to: young people in care, their foster carers and social work practitioners, on the basis that, the study is firmly located within the placement setting and is concerned with what happens in that setting, as opposed to other settings such as residential care. In other words, the aim is to describe the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care, and the response of foster carers and social work practitioners from each of their perspectives.

Research questions

This study presumes that the advent of mobile communication devices and the Internet has begun to challenge the concept of contact and its associated practice in terms of how it takes place and with whom. Children and young people in care now make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet to get in touch with family members and friends independently of their social work practitioner or foster carer (see Oakwater, 2012; Simpson, 2013; May-Chahal et al., 2014 and Sen, 2015c) When considering contact this study will make reference to both familial and friendship *networks*, as opposed to contact being simply confined to birth parent(s). This is because findings from a study undertaken by The Office of the Children's Rights Director for England (2009a) identified that children and young people in care wanted to remain in contact with people who were not only birth relatives, but also with those whom they had some level of connection e.g. close friends of the birth family or other acquaintances and peers (2009a:9). Since then, there have been a number of studies and reviews of children and young people in care that continue to substantiate the fact that children in care want to see a range of people including school friends, family, acquaintances and even pets (The Office of the Children's Rights Director, 2012b, Sen, 2015c and Children's Commissioner, 2017a).

With the overview and rationale for the study provided, the intent is to examine the phenomenon through the application of three overarching research questions:

- Do young people in care make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact with their familial and friendship networks, if so, how is this carried out?
- Does the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet enhance or hinder communication between young people in care and individuals from their familial and friendship networks?

Appreciating that both foster carers and allocated social work practitioners are significant social actors in terms of the phenomenon of contact, the final question takes into account their roles and responsibilities and is as follows:

- How do foster carers and social work practitioners negotiate and manage contact that is undertaken through the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care?

These questions attempt to acknowledge that contact is not just a process organised by social work practitioners but that it is the embodiment of existing familial relationships and connections that experience ebb and flow and are subject, like many relationships, to periods of intensity and misunderstanding. This is even more significant for children and young people in care whose communication with their familial network is arranged and, when necessary, supervised, by officials whose primary purpose is, as described by Sen and Broadhurst (2011b), to manage the tension between providing support to birth family members and focusing on the concerns that led the child or young person to enter the care system.

Definitions and terminology

It is important at the outset to alert readers to key terms and their definitions in order to ensure clarity whilst reading this thesis. As stated previously, a term that will be used throughout the thesis is the child in care's *familial and friendship networks*. This term relates not only to birth relatives and parents, but also step parents and siblings, as well as grandparents, aunts, uncles and close family friends. This broad church of individuals are described as part of the familial network that reflects current Human Rights legislation and also the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which identify the right to family life (UNICEF, 1989).

The other term that will be used is *mobile communication devices and Internet*. This term encapsulates the revolution in communication technology that, at the time of the fieldwork included: Android phones, iPhones, tablets, laptops and computers. These devices enable their users to communicate from anywhere across a variety of platforms that include text, Instant Message (IM), social media and telephoning (Nylander and Larshamma, 2012). Reference will be made to a variety of mobile apps and social media platforms² and therefore a glossary has been created that captures the individual symbol of each app or social media platform that is represented, and a brief explanation is provided regarding their features (see Appendix Q). It should be noted that since this study began the proliferation and sophistication of apps has changed and therefore, what the glossary essentially depicts a period in time when the fieldwork was being undertaken, from July 2016 to August 2017.

The term *children and young people* refers to the general population under the age of 18 years, but there is an appreciation that homogeneity does not exist. A further term that will be used throughout the thesis is *children in care* or *child in care*. These are generic terms that represents children and young people aged between 0-17 years who are in care. Additionally, *young people in care* is a term that will be used to denote adolescents aged 13-17 years in foster care as opposed to pre-teen children, this is because this description readily reflects the age group that was the focus of the study. The differentiation in age is crucial as part of appreciating that access to, and use of, mobile communication devices and Internet is influenced by the age and maturity as will be seen in both the literature review and findings from the study.

A further idiom that will be referred to is *parenting practices*. Within the literature of parental digital monitoring there are a variety of terms used to refer to the way in which parents and carers manage children and young people's use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. It is necessary to appreciate that the terminology of parenting style, parenting practices and proactive parenting are interchangeable terms used in the literature that is concerned with the way in which parents regulate their children's use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Evidence of this can be seen in Chapter Two, where different researchers make use of different terminology.

² A social media platform is a web-based technological solution that allows social media websites to run and be managed. It enables the creation of social media website and key functionality required for social media.

Spera (2005:127) argues that this should not be the case and citing Darling and Steinberg (1993) defines *parenting practice* as the *behaviours* engaged in by parents to socialise their children. An example of this would be if a parent wanted his/her child to use the Internet and social media safely s/he would demonstrate this by actively engaging with the child's use through undertaking joint searches for information; discussing the information that is revealed by the searches and supporting the information literacy of his/her child. With regards to *parenting style*, Spera (2005:127) states that this represents the *emotional climate* that children are reared in and is best illustrated through both the responsiveness to, and demands made by, parents of their children. For the purposes of this study the term parenting practices will be used to denote the way the behaviours of foster carers and how they involve themselves on a daily basis with the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care.

Continuing with definitions and terminology, it is important to clarify that for the purposes of this study, the type of placement that was common to all the young people who took part was *long term foster care*, as opposed to any other form of placement such as short term foster care, kinship care or residential and also mother and baby placements. Reference to why this type of placement has been made earlier, and will be repeated again in Chapter Four.

The final key term to be identified is *contact* itself. As has already been inferred the term is associated with social work practitioners, but in actual fact it represents a legal duty to be undertaken by a local authority (see Chapter 2 for further details). The statutory guidance that exists for contact describes it as, "*sustaining or creating links with their birth families including wider family members*". The guidance also indicates that contact is part of a planning process in relation to the Care Plan for a child or young person in care. (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2010:30). Contact can come in a variety of formats that Sen (2018d) usefully compartmentalises as 'direct and 'indirect'. Direct contact refers primarily face-to-face meetings and these can be either supervised, facilitated or supported. When contact is supervised this means a birth parent or relative is able to meet with their child but an independent adult is present (Slade, 2002:3). Sen and Broadhurst (2011b) point out that supervised contact is likely to be used for children under the age of 5 but, it also used where there are safeguarding concerns regarding the behaviour of the birth parent or relative. Regarding facilitated contact, this can often mean practical support is provided by the foster carer for example, transporting and picking up a child from contact. Non-supervised contact is where a birth parent or relative is able to meet with a child without an independent adult

having to be present. In terms of indirect contact this relates to letters, telephone, and email and in recent years the use of mobile communication devices to access social networking sites and apps such as WhatsApp (Sen, 2018d).

Other forms of contact include sibling contact, this is used in circumstances where children and young people in care are able to meet either directly or indirectly with their siblings. The arrangements for sibling contact can differ according to whether all the children from the same family are in care, or not. This type of contact can also differ for children and young people depending on their age and the response of adults in terms of being co-operative or unco-operative (Sen, 2018d). This aspect of contact will be further expanded upon in Chapter Two. Other definitions and types of contact to support sibling contact can exist, for example escorted contact and life story/identity contact, but these are linked to work that is carried out with an individual child in a Contact Centre³.

A further set of definitions will be employed to expand the definition of contact in three ways: firstly, the notion of contact; secondly the practice of contact and finally, the concept of contact. In closing, as this study is concerned with contact in a number of guises it may be that, as the thesis draws to a close there may be a revised definition of contact that reflects the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet.

Focus of the study

As stated previously, the focus of this study will be the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people who were in a long term of foster placement only, this is also inclusive if one respondent who was in a 'Staying Put'⁴ arrangement but, had been placement since the age of 7. However, what is noticeable is that the research literature available, will, on occasions, combine findings for young people in care and adopted children because the vast amount of empirical research in relation to contact takes into account these two groups. Where such occurrences have

³ National Association of Child Contact Centres: Types of contact (<https://naccc.org.uk/help-for-adults/types-of-contact>)

⁴ This is a duty that was placed on local authorities in England that was implemented in May 2014 (part 5 Welfare of Children (98)) of the Children and Families Act 2014. The responsibility of local authorities in England to monitor and support arrangements in terms of staying put until the young person reaches the age of 21.

arisen the aim has been to extract the relevant information in relation to contact as it pertains to children in care or to apply the findings to this group of social actors. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that there may be occasions where empirical research findings from the arena of adoption cannot be applied to fostering and visa versa. Furthermore, as part of Chapters Two and Seven reference is made to parenting styles in order to make sense of the findings that will be presented as part of this study. It is important to note that, at no point is the focus of the study concerned with specifically identifying and measuring parenting styles. Throughout the duration of the study neither foster carers nor allocated social work practitioners spoke about a specific style of parenting. Rather, foster carers shared details of the measures they used or what they thought was required to manage the use of mobile communication devices and Internet by young people in care; whilst social work practitioners spoke of their expectations of foster carers in relation to monitoring and management of mobile communication devices and the Internet. These details have been interpreted using the current literature on parenting practices, as well as theoretical constructs.

Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is demarcated by chapters. This first chapter is concerned with briefly providing a context for contact and also the rationale for the study. Stemming from the rationale for the study are the research questions, and importantly, attention has been given to key definitions and terminology that are used throughout the thesis.

The second chapter represents a review of the literature. What is presented to the reader is a lengthy exposition, this is because what is being shared embodies literature across more than one academic subject. Therefore, the reader is provided with empirical research regarding contact from the perspective of different social actors e.g. parents, birth family members, social work practitioners and foster carers. Additionally, the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet firstly by children and young people in general, and then by children in care, followed by the response of foster carers to this new phenomenon. The chapter begins with the legal definition of contact and then detail is provided regarding the scale and nature of children and young people in care. This is particularly important in order to avoid the presumption that children and young people in care comprise of one homogenous group. Having outlined the key characteristics of children and young people in care, the chapter goes on to include a description of how contact has been carried out and what the implications are through a number of research studies spanning the last 30 years. This is then followed by the concept of contact and empirical research that supports,

or not, the identified purpose of it. The argument is made that research in relation to contact is ambivalent about the usefulness and benefit of it for some children and young people in care. The second area of literature that is considered is mobile communication devices and the Internet and how they are used by children and young people in general. This will then be followed by a third area of literature in relation to digital parenting practices. The chapter will then close with the emerging literature in relation to adopted and fostered children and young people's use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact. In undertaking the literature review in this way what will be revealed are the gaps in knowledge in relation to this new phenomena of contact via mobile communication devices and the Internet.

The third chapter takes into account the theoretical constructs that informed the design of the study and were influential in making sense of the findings. The first theoretical construct that will be referred to is Foucault's interpretations of power, in particular Foucault's concept of disciplinary power that permeates everyday processes and systems (1977). The second is childhood studies (James and Prout, 1995 and 1996) where the argument is made that children and young people are not simply subjects of socialisation⁵, but rather, they are active social actors able to exercise agency and create their own meaning (James and Prout, 1996). The third and final theoretical construct that will be outlined is risk and how it appears in social work. The combination of these three theoretical constructs will allow us to consider the possibility that children and young people in care, as well as foster carers and social work practitioners all experience the pervasive nature of power that constitutes the care system, and that there is a complex interplay of how it is expressed between the three respondent groups in the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact. This power interplay potentially means that children and young people in care can be seen beyond a status that currently views them as confined by the label of 'vulnerable' and possibly passive, to "*complex social actors*" (James and Prout, 1996:49) who are able to exercise agency in a way that enables them to decide which members of their familial and friendship networks they want to maintain a connection with, and the way in which they want to do so, dependent on a preferred platform of mobile communication.

⁵ Socialisation denotes the process that children and young people engage in through interaction with their parents, other adults and institutions, for example school where they are able to learn the norms and practices associated with acceptable behaviours and attitudes

The fourth chapter explains the research design and methodology and how certain approaches were arrived at. Importantly, the ontological and epistemological positions are made explicit, thereby identifying the position taken by the researcher and showing how this has influenced the entire study. The chapter is then concerned with a description of two phases of fieldwork. The first phase recounts the recruitment and selection of the three respondent groups. The second phase describes how the fieldwork was completed. The chapter then continues by providing details as to how the data collected was analysed using the Framework Method (Ritchie et al., 2014). A further feature of this chapter is an explanation of the fieldwork challenges and limitations of the study. Here the reader will see the obstacles that needed to be overcome in order to complete the study, as well as the pragmatic decisions made. In terms of the limitations of the study, what is addressed in this section is how aspects, such as the research design and methodology, influenced the study overall.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven are essentially the 'findings' chapters that reflect the three research questions posed at the start of the thesis. Chapter Five provides an answer as to whether or not, as well as how mobile communication devices and the Internet are used by young people in care to make contact with members of their familial and friendship networks and how this is viewed by foster carers and social work practitioners. Chapter Six describes how young people in care are subject to varying forms of surveillance by foster carers, and how this is supported by social work practitioners. Chapter Seven gives attention to the experiences of young people in terms of the management of, and access to, mobile communication devices and use of the Internet within the foster home.

The final Chapter Eight, brings together the both the literature, the theoretical constructs and the findings to engage in a discussion that is aimed at describing the phenomenon that is the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact by young people in care. The discussion captures the capabilities of mobile communication devices, as well as the connection between the young people in care and their birth families. This chapter will continue with the argument that will be made throughout the thesis in relation to the power dynamic that is an inherent characteristic of contact, and in Foucauldian style will highlight the disciplinary gaze and show the techniques that all three respondent groups are subject to. The chapter will also ask a series of questions that arise as a result of this study and which in essence pave the way for further empirical research. Additionally, a section of this chapter will be given over to the implications for social work practice and the reader will see that there is a call for change on both a practice and a policy level.

Conclusion

In this opening chapter reference has been made to the most recent developments in fostering and the fact that contact continues to be contested. Moreover, what has also been presented are references to the fact that, contact through the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet is beginning to make explicit the underlying assumptions that have remained unquestioned. Details have been given of the rationale for the study and the research questions. More importantly, key definitions and terminology have been provided in order to ensure the reader has clarity regarding the use of certain words. Finally, attention has been given to the structure of the thesis, as part of helping the reader navigate the study and to locate, if wished, certain aspects that are of particular interest.

Chapter Two

Contact: History, Legislation and Practice

Introduction

As the title suggests, this chapter of the thesis takes into account the history of contact, the accompanying legislation and current practice from the perspective of different stakeholders, as well as the literature that informs the phenomenon of children in care and their use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact. This is followed by statistical information about children in care, to enable an understanding of the demographics of this populace and certain characteristics, such as age and duration of care, that might explain the growing use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact. In terms of practice, this is exemplified through a critical review of a series of research studies that are concerned with how contact is experienced, not just by the child in care, but also by birth parents, members of the wider familial network, foster carers and social work practitioners. As will be seen, this is done to highlight the taken for granted assumptions and, therefore, the gaps in the literature.

The second half of the review of the literature is concerned with the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children and young people in general and what the response has been from parents. This is presented to provide a broader understanding and make apparent the differences that might be experienced by children in care. More specifically, the final sections of the chapter will consider the use of such technology by children in care for contact, including those with disabilities, with the expressed aim of identifying gaps in the literature. Finally, the review will include the responses of foster carers and social work practitioners to the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children in care, and, in so doing, identify any gaps, that might exist in the current literature.

Contact: History and legal status

For the purposes of this study, the literature review begins with a focus on the history of contact and its legal status. It is believed by examining the wider context in relation to the concept of contact, this will help unearth presumptions about contact that have remained unquestioned. This very act will reveal if there are any gaps in the literature, and if there are, where they might be.

Contact, as an activity, is enshrined in legislation. As has already been noted in Chapter One, there is a presumption in favour of contact, meaning that there is an existing predisposition towards children in care continuing relations with members of their immediate birth family and other people. The Children Act 1989 emphasises the ideological assumption that children are best served by their birth parent(s), unless it is absolutely essential for the state to intervene. Other key principles contained in the Act include the concept of parental responsibility and the duty of local authorities to return a child in care to his/her family, unless it is not in the child's best interests. Local authorities also have a duty to *"endeavour to promote contact between a child in care and his/her parents or others"* unless it is not practicable to do so, or inconsistent with the child's welfare (Department of Children, Schools and Families: Guidance and Regulations: Volume 2 – Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, 2010: 2). What has been described above hides the evolution that has taken place since the 1940s, that there was not always a presumption in favour of contact. Hendrick (1994: 22-28) comments that the Children Act of 1948 signalled that children in the care of the local authority had the status of being an individual without rights or possessions. This meant that, wherever possible, such children were either to be placed with adoptive parents or returned to their birth families. At that time, there was not any guidance or procedures governing contact between children in care and their birth parents. More often than not, contact between children and their birth parents was subject to the discretion of social work practitioners. According to Macaskill (2002: 2), the issue of contact came to the fore again in the late 1970s as a result of adoption being considered a viable care option, even for children who had strong links with their birth families. Of importance was Rowe and Lambert's (1980) seminal study that was concerned with children and how long they were waiting for an adoptive family. Two suppositions informed this particular study; that every child had a right to a family and that adoption and fostering should not be thought of as separate categories (Barratt, 2010: 627). The study involved 2,812 children and was specifically targeted at children who were under the age of 11 and in long-term care. Their findings revealed that, while there were few children on adoption waiting lists, there was a large number of children left to drift in residential settings with no designated plan for either adoption or return to their birth families.

Moreover, Rowe and Lambert (1980) found that amongst the sample of children, 23% had regular contact and 35% had less frequent contact with one parent and that most of the children (41%) had no contact at all. In other words, the longer a child was in care, the less effort that was made to support his or her contact with birth parent(s) or other family members. Rowe and Lambert (1980) noted that the lack of support for contact was due to the limited investment of resources that social work practitioners gave to birth parents. Despite the seminal nature of the research and its

important findings, the study is not without its flaws, fostering and adoption were combined, even though the outcomes for the child are significantly different. That said, what should be taken from this particular study is the way in which practitioners controlled whether or not contact took place.

Macaskill (2002:2) at the time of writing, some seventeen years later, deemed the study by Rowe and Lambert (1980) as, *“highly influential and it ignited a new professional awareness of the significance of access”* (Macaskill, 2002:2). Yet, the supposed igniting of professional awareness did not signal an improvement for children in care in relation to contact with birth parent(s) and/or other family members. There continued to be a marginalisation of birth parents until the Child Care Act 1980 that imposed a duty on local authorities to notify the child’s birth parents and others, including the Guardian ad litem, of the cessation of, what at the time was called, ‘access’. From a legal perspective, the language of the Child Act 1980 included terminology that indicated that the local authority had *“custody”* and *“physical possession of the child”* (Maidment, 1981: 25-26).

In 1983, a Code of Practice on access to children in care was published. The Code offered guidance and information relating to the management of such interaction, where the underlying premise was the reunion of the child in care and his/her birth family. To this end, it was expected that local authorities would place a child as near as possible to his/her home and provide the birth parents with assistance in terms of travel by helping with related costs. Furthermore, the Code also specified the circumstances under which access could, if necessary, be terminated. Importantly, the Code ensured that social work practitioners were accountable to birth parents, because they had to explain all their decisions about access and follow it up in writing.

Unfortunately, despite the far-reaching purpose of the Code it was, according to Adcock (1995), never wholeheartedly implemented. It was not until the publication of Millham et al.’s (1986) study entitled *‘Lost in Care: The problems of maintaining links between children in care and their families’* that contact and how it took place, or not, became centre stage once more. The researchers undertook what they claimed to be a methodologically robust study involving 450 cases across five local authorities. They then focused on thirty families who were followed over a period of two years and undertook four detailed case studies. Their sample included all typologies of placements for children in care, i.e. residential, fostering (short-term and emergency) (Chaiklin, 1988). Once again, the findings from the study raised major concerns about the issue of access, as birth parents were

faced with a series of barriers that stopped them from maintaining links with their children. These barriers included travelling long distances and rules about visiting, in the form of foster carers and residential staff placing restrictions and providing minimal encouragement, or acceptance of access (Adcock, 1995: 17). In his review of the study, Chaiklin (1988) acknowledged that the findings of Millham et al. (1986) were alarming. However, just as disturbing was the failure of the researchers to firstly, recognise that they were observing informal power dynamics and secondly, not question this. It will become apparent that what was inferred by Chaiklin (1988) is one of the main themes of this thesis.

The concerns raised by Millham et al. (1986) were further substantiated by research published the following year by Rowe (cited in Bridge, 1997) that revealed that children in long-term foster placements experienced little access to their birth parents. The historical account provided by Adcock (1995) was substantiated by Bullock et al. (1991) who, as part of linking research to policy change, examined the success of Section 12 A - G of the Child Care Act (which was added to the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983). This section made it obligatory for local authorities to notify birth parents when they wanted to terminate access and also make them aware of their rights. Until this time, a stipulation of this nature that gave social work practitioners the legal authority to terminate 'access' on the grounds that it was not in the 'best interests' of the child had not existed. When such grounds were presented to birth parents, they did not have recourse to appeal against such a decision. Bullock et al. (1991: 88) highlighted the fact that the new legislation represented a major change in terms of moving from what was originally a "*professional decision to a legal one*". Therefore, building on what was observed by Chaiklin (1988) and what was missing from Bullock et al.'s research (1991), was the immense power at the disposal of the local authorities and, more specifically, social work practitioners, to remove contact altogether, even if the decision-making had moved from discretion to being based on legislation.

Further scrutiny by Bullock et al., (1991) as to the implementation of the legislation revealed that, although there were one thousand formal notifications that were sent to parents each year, this figure did not reflect the reality in practice. The research by Bullock et al. (1991) illustrated that for many children and birth parents, access was terminated because it did not immediately fit with the placement plans that included adoption and long-term placements. The researchers went on to note that the Code of Practice had not been widely read and that "*[it] usually lies at the bottom of the*

team leader's drawer buried under a pile of other circulars or is pinned anonymously on the social services notice board" (Bullock et al. 1991, 90).

In sum, for the period between 1948 until 1983, it can be said that how contact was managed and conducted was captured by a series of research studies that evidenced that children in care and their birth parents were not able to have 'access' due to a series of barriers that could be described as attitudinal, financial and geographical. This supposition has been confirmed through legislation such as the Children Act 1948 and the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983 that inferred that the child in care was the property of the local authority. With that, came the potential exercise of power in the form of discretion by social work practitioners who were influenced by the long-term plans for children that did not include them being returned to their families, or being placed for adoption. Other examples of undue influence being wielded were how the terms of access were being specified by foster carers and residential units (Millham et al. 1986).

The advent and implementation of the Children Act (1989) could be said to represent the defining moment in terms of contact. It changed how children in care were regarded by the State. The Act heralded the introduction of the concept of 'contact', as opposed to access. Macaskill (2002) has commented that this change in terminology placed an emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of the birth parent(s), as well as promoting partnership-working by statutory agencies. It also signalled that the principal objectives were rehabilitation and returning the child to the birth family. The change in terminology was not solely attributed to the introduction of legislation. There were also other developments, such as increased knowledge of child psychology. The influential work of Bowlby (1969) on 'attachment and beyond' focused on the detrimental effects of not having a positive attachment to the main caregiver. In his research, Triseliotis (1973)⁶ also identified the emotional cost for children of failing to have ongoing or continued contact with their birth parent(s) or relatives. This brief historical overview charts the progress made from access to contact and the way in which the status of children in care significantly changed from being possessions of the state to having specified rights. What is evident is that social work practitioners, foster carers and residential staff exercised formal and informal mechanisms of control that were put in place to limit the amount of access children in care had with their birth parent(s) and wider family. However, this situation has changed and there are now pre-determined rights for children in care to have contact

⁶ 'In Search of Origins: the experiences of adopted people'

with family members. As will be seen, the change in terminology, and the associated presumptions that accompanied it, did not immediately guarantee any changes in the informal power dynamics.

What is apparent about the Children Act 1989 guidance is that emphasises the need for children in care to be active participants in decisions about contact to reduce any sense of fear, and where possible, to allow them to have feelings of ownership over what was taking place. These requirements were not characteristics of the legislation that had come before it. Despite contact being a specific legal expectation of local authorities for the previous twenty-nine years, the presumption of contact was still being questioned, as seen in the arguments put forward by the then-Adoption Advisor to Government, Sir Martin Narey (2012a). His argument was based on discussions he had with adoptive parents about the effect of birth families' ongoing contact with their children. Narey's position was that contact should take place *only* when it was in the best interests of the child. Moreover, he believed that, both courts and social work practitioners should look critically at the amount of contact a child in care had with his/her birth parent(s) (2012:2). Some six years later, as part of the stocktaking exercise into foster care, Narey, but this time with Owers (2018), raised the same argument again. The scope of the argument being extended to children in foster care. Narey's continuing objection to the presupposition of contact once again exposes its contested nature (2012a and 2018b). The concept of contact is not simply about children and young people remaining connected with their birth family. Rather, it can be contended that, regardless of the legislation, what is being reflected is a series of value positions that are linked to the rights of the individual child and his/her family and the role of the state (Sen, 2018d). However, these value positions ignore the power dynamics that are exercised in, and through, contact. This lack of recognition in relation to power dynamics is noted below in a number of manifestations that range from the response of social work practitioners to the way researchers have questioned the beneficial value of contact.

[Format of contact and how it is experienced](#)

As a way of engendering some sense of the new phenomenon of children in care making use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact, it is suggested that there is a need to firstly understand what the current method of contact is and how it is experienced, not only by the child in care, but also by other key social actors, such as birth parent(s), members of the extended family, for example grandparents, siblings, foster carers and social work practitioners. As will be seen later in the thesis, this understanding will enable an appreciation of the way in which this new form

of contact is exposing both formal and informal power inequalities that have never before been made explicit or labelled by the empirical research that has been reviewed thus far. It is important to note that this section will specifically focus on the format of contact for children in care that are in long term foster placements. For these children and young people, their experience of contact can be in a variety of formats, each of which is dependent upon their age, understanding and the information contained in their Care Plan. The Care Plan is devised by the social work practitioner, in accordance with The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2010). The basic purpose of the Care Plan is to promote and safeguard the welfare of the child, as well as to seek to enhance life opportunities (ibid). A key element of a Care Plan pertains to the social work practitioner deciding on the nature and type of contact that should be put in place for the child in care and primarily his/her contact with birth parent(s) and relatives. Crucially, as part of this process the social work practitioner needs to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child in care (ibid: 31 para. 2.80). However, this aspect of the guidance is couched in words such as “*reasonably practicable*” and “*if s/he is old enough*”. This raises important questions regarding the extent to which the wishes and feelings of children in care are taken seriously by social work practitioners who are likely to be unduly influenced by the chronological age of the child in care and his/her their ability to make decisions. Other factors that may influence social work practitioner’s ability to hear a child in care, are the inherent status of vulnerability and the need to ensure that whatever decision is made, it is in the best interests of the child. Winter (2011:398) has commented that there is a need for social work practitioners to have meaningful relationships with the children, and that these should not be influenced by bureaucratic procedures, assumptions regarding behaviours exhibited by children or over attentiveness to the parental voice. It should be noted that one of the major complaints by children in care is that their feeling and wishes are not taken into account in relation to contact, leaving the impression that children in care are not seen as social actors in their own right, with the ability to exercise agency and make decisions. This supposition is one that will continue throughout the chapter.

Dependent upon the reasons as to why a child comes into care and also the assessment, two main types of contact that might be experienced are direct and indirect contact (for details see Chapter One). Where contact is direct it usually takes the form of face-to-face meetings and overnight stays with the birth family. Indirect contact may comprise of telephone calls and letters. Where necessary both types of contact may also include the involvement of a third party to effect one of a number of activities: supervise, facilitate or support (Sen, 2018d and Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2010). Contact is usually organised by the social work practitioner as part of a

Care plan. More often than not, foster carers may find themselves responsible for the practical organisation and management of contact between the child in care and his/her birth parent(s) in the form of transportation to and from contact; as well as monitoring phone calls. Alternatively, children in care may also be escorted by a social work assistant to the venue of contact and transported via private taxi hire. With face-to-face contact, where there are concerns about the child's wellbeing or it is being used as a form of assessment when there is a possibility of reunification with the birth family, it may be supervised by a contact worker or the allocated social work practitioner (Sen, 2018d).

Regarding the frequency of contact, this again is dependent upon the Care Plan as devised by the Social Work practitioner and the wishes of the child in care at that time. For example, it might be that a child in care may will have a weekly contact visit of a couple of hours a day, or for half a day. These arrangements can change particularly if any problems are identified. For example, a negative emotional response on the part of the child in care may result in contact being reduced or removed altogether (Neil, Beek and Schofield, 2003a and The Office of the Children's Rights Director, 2009a). Indications as to the patterns of contact as experienced by children and young people in care, is exemplified throughout the chapter, particularly in the section entitled *Contact, mobile devices and the Internet: a child and young person's perspective*'. Other literature such as that of Selwyn (2004) and Biehal (2007a), as well as studies, for example by Wade et al., (2011), indicate that there is a decline in contact for children and young people the longer they are in care. The reasons as to why such a decline happens over time and how this links to the feelings that parents have, are aspects of contact that will be focussed on later in this chapter.

Where face-to-face contact takes place, evidence from Cleaver (2000 p.35, p.140) and Triseliotis (2010), as well as information from children sharing their experiences with The Office of the Children's Rights Director (2009) would suggest that, often contact takes place in an environment that is not immediately familiar, and that this has an impact on the nature and quality of contact. This observation is substantiated in the guidance published by BAAF Coram *A Guide to Best Practice in Supervised Contact*' (Slade, 2010). This publication provides a series of learning points about how best to conduct supervised contact, in particular speaking to what was called the '*psychology of environment*' and subscribing to an approach of privacy and homeliness as a way of counteracting what is recognised as the "*abnormality and artificiality of supervised contact*" (2010:27). Eight years later Narey and Owers (2018), as part of the National Stocktake of Fostering found that, the settings

for contact were not “*conducive to a pleasant and successful experience for all parties*” (2018:88). In contributing to the review, key stakeholders such as Family Futures⁷ and academics such as Julie Selwyn, a childcare specialist, gave evidence that children and young people are upset, stressed and anxious, and that the activities leading up to contact, as well as the environment, contribute to such negative experiences.

Empirical studies have recorded the child in care’s emotional and behavioural responses to contact. These have included running away from the foster placement, becoming upset before or after contact. These may take the form of crying or angry/violent outbursts that may threaten and/or undermine the child’s placement in foster care (Macaskill, 2002; Biehal, 2009b and Moyers, Farmer and Lipscombe, 2006). There may also be physiological symptoms such as bedwetting and nightmares before or after a contact visit (Macaskill, 2002 and Wilson and Sinclair, 2004).

During the contact visit itself children and young people may be subject to the repeated harmful and rejecting behaviours that led to them being placed initially in the care of the local authority (Biehal, 2007). Alternatively, children during contact may be showered with gifts and promises of returning home within a short period of time which might be contrary to the details denoted in the Care Plan (see James et al., 2008; Murray et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2004b and the Department for Education, 2012). At this juncture it is also important to note that contact, particularly face-to-face and by telephone, can at times be associated with risk by social work practitioners. The longitudinal study by Schofield and Schofield (2005) followed the progress of 50 children and young people living with foster families on a planned long-term basis. Their study revealed that birth parent(s) had a number of difficulties that included physical and mental ill health, as well as substance abuse. The effects of mental ill health and substance misuse on birth parent(s) led the researchers to conclude that there was the potential of risk for children and young people to be abused again and therefore, were likely to experience repeated distress, if contact was not carefully monitored and managed. Macaskill’s (2002) study on contact provides further insight. The study was aimed at uncovering the experiences of adoptive parents and foster families, as well as children and young people. Her approach involved undertaking a detailed analysis of the factors that both enable and prevent face-to-face contact for children in permanent placement working satisfactorily. The sample consisted of 106 children in a combination of 76 fostering and adoptive families since the 1990s. The principal finding from

⁷ A not-for-profit adoption agency providing range of services pre and post adoption

Macaskill's (2002) research was that 25% of the children in the study found that the contact they experienced had a very negative impact upon them. A further 12% of children had a positive experience of contact; for these children's carers they "*believed that contact was beneficial for children*" (p.71) and they also developed respectful relationships with the birth parent(s). However, the majority (52%) of children and young people in her study experienced both a positive and negative impact. Macaskill (2002 p.72) sums up their experience as: "*Most wanted to see their birth relatives but the reality was full of emotion and at times quite overwhelming*". A minority of children (6%) appeared to be indifferent to contact. Macaskill (2002) identifies that this figure represented a sibling group, where one child was enthusiastic about contact and the other was not. A major criticism that can be levelled at this study is the fact that her data is taken from both permanent foster placements and adoptive families. Moreover, there is no consideration given to the notion that, children in care are able to exercise agency and that their behaviours might be a reflection of this. Simply put, Macaskill (2002), in keeping with other researchers, failed to adjust her findings to account for the differences experienced within these two distinct groups, leaving the reader with a singular interpretation of contact.

Similar research studies by Neil, Beek and Schofield (2003a) identified that face-to-face contact for adopted children was far less complicated, due to factors such as their age (they were young children aged between 1-4 years of age), their positive adjustment to their adoptive status and their adoptive parents being a 'secure base' for their anxieties (2003: 431). The researchers also found that the experiences of children in foster placements were the opposite, because they had "*more complicated life histories*" and, as foster carers were on the periphery of contact arrangements, their ability to assuage the emotional responses and difficulties of contact were limited. Unfortunately, the comment of the researchers did not extend to recognising contact as a means whereby power could be exercised either by social work practitioners, or that children could employ their agency upon a situation.

In 2009, the phenomenon of contact through the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet came to the fore in an article written in the social work sector press by Cooper (2009) who identified the associated risks and problems. These included children in care being emotionally ill-prepared, placement disruption and the breakdown of the placement in terms of the child returning home and refusing to return to the foster care setting. Following this, the phenomenon was highlighted in academia by Sen and Broadhurst, who identified that contact could be achieved

through the use of mobile phones, email and the Internet (2011: 305). At the time of their writing, Sen and Broadhurst (2011d) expressed concern about the use of such communication technology, highlighting that it could pose a risk because of harmful content, the presence of predatory adults and cyberbullying.

Given all the negativity associated with contact, it is little wonder that concerns are raised and that views in relation to the activity and concept itself are polarised. That said, there are instances of positive contact as seen in studies like that of McWey and Mullis (2004), but these tend to be few and far between. The lack of empirical evidence in relation to positive contact might be due to the type and nature of the empirical studies undertaken and the fact that researchers have neither shared or given due weight to their ontological positions and how this might have influenced their results. In other words, researchers have not explicitly stated their research paradigm, the implications in terms of respondents and how the data was viewed. Moreover, it can be posited that researchers have not yet begun to consider the power dynamics that are prevalent within contact and how these might impact on the type and nature of contact experienced. Furthermore, it can also be argued that whilst researchers have acknowledged the behaviours of children in care to contact and found plausible explanations, such as attachment (Bowlby, as cited in Fratter et al., 1991), little or no attention has been given to the ability of these children to be social actors in their own right, able to act and react to their surrounding environments.

The power differentials that are inherent in the contact experienced by children and young people in care are equally present for birth parents and the wider family. An understanding of contact from the perspective of birth parents and the wider family comes from studies such as Millham et al. (1986: 117), who commented on the decline in contact between children in care and their birth parent(s), as well as the feelings experienced: *“parents feel frozen out.....but it also reflects their powerlessness to intervene, their lack of role and their feelings of guilt and inadequacy”*. Millham et al. (1986) argued that the feelings experienced by birth parent(s) at the loss of their children can have a detrimental impact on parent-child interaction during contact. Such a finding was supported by the small case-based study involving nine mothers by Haight et al. (2001a) that was concerned with a description of their interaction with their young children (aged 24-48 months) during a contact visit (2001a: 327). The birth mothers spoke about how emotionally difficult it was for them to engage in contact. Whilst Haight’s study (2001) provides some insight into the difficulties that birth mothers experience during contact, the extent to which the findings can be applied to all

children and young people in care is open to question, as their study was primarily concerned with younger children.

Further insight into the experiences of older children and contact with birth parents was obtained from the empirical studies of Wilson and Sinclair (2004) and Moyers, Farmer Lipscombe (2006). Specifically, the latter study entailed repeated measures designed and centred on sixty-eight young people in long-term foster placements, their foster carers and social workers. Data from each respondent group consisted of reviewing case files and semi-structured interviews that were carried out at intervals of three, nine and twelve months after the commencement of the placement. Their findings highlighted that adolescents in care experienced difficulties with contact that consisted of repeated rejection and neglect (Moyers, Farmer and Lipscombe, 2006: 550). The study also highlighted the lack of engagement by social work practitioners with the birth parent(s) to actively change the nature of the relationship between the young person and his/her birth parent(s). Admittedly, the findings from this study are useful in providing an answer as to whether older children and adolescents experience difficulty with contact, as it is evident that they do. However, the level of confidence in that can be had in this study is open to question. This is because the researchers shared no details about what informed their design and made no reference to peer-reviewed quantitatively robust instruments, such as the Child Behaviour Checklist⁸ (Mazefsky, 2011), which is a widely-accepted academic tool for measuring behaviour.

A further study that captures the experiences of birth parents is that of Schofield, Ward and Young (2009b). The study is unique in that it was carried out across three nations; Sweden, Norway and the UK. Semi-structured interviews with thirty-two birth parents aged between twenty-nine and fifty-five and a focus group of social work practitioners were used as part of the methodology. The findings from the study revealed that birth parents experienced not only the loss of their child, but also their identity as a parent, which they often had to battle with social work practitioners to defend (2009b: 21). Parents spoke of wanting up-to-date information about their children and feeling “starved” when they had limited news (2009b: 20). A number of parents from the study also spoke of making daily use of their mobile phones to contact their children at specific times during the day (for example, bedtimes) and it was these moments that they most valued. The above studies capture the complexity of emotions, including anger, guilt, blame, detachment, hopelessness and

⁸ The Child Behaviour Checklist is widely used to assess emotional and behavioural difficulties in children and young people.

powerlessness, felt by birth parents. What the researchers have not highlighted or made explicit are the power differentials that exist in terms of contact. Triseliotis (2010c) in a paper that questions how social work practitioners assess and judge the quality of contact in the absence of empirically based guidelines and a standardised framework highlights the power differentials that exist in terms of contact. He provides instances of when birth parents felt that their behaviours were being observed and assessed and when their utterances were controlled during supervised contact or when contact was cancelled because birth parents arrived a few minutes late as a result of travel difficulties (2010c: 64). It can be surmised that the experiences of birth parents are marked by a range of negative feelings leading them to question their identity as parents. It appears that the very activity of contact creates a series of power differentials that range from (1) a lack of standardised frameworks, (2) observation and controls of behaviour and (3) subsequent negative emotions that left birth parents with a sense of powerlessness.

In terms of members of the wider family, researchers of both fostered and adopted children made references to grandparents (Moyers, Farmer and Lipscombe, 2006; and Neil and Howe, 2004b). It is recognised that for children and young people, these particular members of the familial network enable the maintenance of links to others within the wider family. A perspective of grandparents was contained in a longitudinal study by Neil (2006c) that involved seventy-two parents, and also a number of grandparents, whose children were adopted before the age of four. The study highlighted that grandparents, like birth parents, experienced negative feelings of loss, guilt and shame, but that the intensity of these feelings was dependent on the extent of participation that grandparents had in the daily care of the child. Worthy of note is the fact that limited reference is made to other relatives, such as aunts, uncles or family friends, in the overall literature for fostering, except when the children or young people repeatedly mentioned their desire for contact with individuals beyond the immediate family (The Office of the Children's Rights Director for England, 2009a and 2012b).

In contrast, the literature maintains that contact with siblings is seemingly less problematic. Extensive research has either promoted or referred to the benefits of sibling contact claiming that it has enabled the child in care to quickly settle into a placement (Rushton, 1980; Morrison and Brown, 1986; Heger, 1988; Staff and Fein, 1992; Hindle, 1995; Herrick and Piccus, 2005; Linares et al., 2007; Gusta and James et al., 2008; Gustavsson and MacEachron, 2010 and the Office of the Children's Rights Director, 2012b). Primarily, siblings were more likely to provide each other with emotional support and companionship, enabling the child in care to have a greater ability to cope with the

sense of loss (Timberlake and Hamlin, 1982 as cited in Hindle, 1995 and Herrick and Piccus, 2005). As a result, they are also able to retain a sense of family history and self-identity. However, James et al. (2008) were keen to express the fact that not all sibling relationships are beneficial, particularly those that mirrored the wider family dynamics that had led to the child's placement or when there are existing issues of sibling rivalry. This was a message that was repeated by Heger (1988) and Linares et al. (2007). In this aspect of the literature, once again, researchers do not pay attention to any power differentials that may appear in contact, nor do they provide any sense of the child exercising agency.

In terms of contact, it is imperative to consider what the social work practitioners' role is. In the section entitled '*The Legal Status of Contact*', it was noted how social work practitioners formally and informally controlled birth parent's access to their children from a legal and historical perspective. Triseliotis (2010) pointed out how informal control was exerted through resources for contact, for example, travel arrangements and the use of venues by birth parents. More formally, control can be exercised in terms of the frequency of contact and how it is carried out, for example, whether it is supervised or unsupervised. In an earlier piece of research into social work practitioners' experiences of contact, Cleaver (1998a: 36-37) identified that they found it difficult to strike the correct balance between the feelings and wishes of the child and the 'disorganised lives' of birth relatives (p. 36). This meant that regular contact was difficult to maintain, particularly when missed visits resulted in feelings of disappointment and anxiety for the child. Cleaver (1998a: 36) also noted that another factor that influenced the contact arrangements for a child was a birth parent's new partner, which impacted upon their commitment to contact and, on occasion, led to the deliberate disruption of the existing contact arrangements.

A study by Boddy et al. (2013) provided a more up-to-date insight into the social work practices of four European countries in relation to contact (England, Denmark, France and the Netherlands). Their cross-national study entailed a critical analysis of academic, policy and what they termed as 'grey literature'⁹. The research team undertook telephone interviews with six respondents from government, academia and service providers. These results were then supplemented by seminars

⁹ 'Grey' literature included government policy reports, issue statements and policy statements

where a group of 'expert stakeholders'¹⁰ were invited to provide comment (Boddy et al., 2013). The findings from the study revealed that immediate birth family members and individuals from the wider familial network were often placed at a distance once the child or young person was placed in care and social work practitioners had a fundamental ambivalence to working with parents (2013: 8). The interviews involving English stakeholders highlighted that the level of conceptualisation in relation to 'contact' was limited and that it was not prioritised, regardless of the child returning home or not (2013:15). This suggests that insufficient consideration was given to why contact was put in place and how beneficial it was for children in care. The study also identified that there was little recognition that children and young people in care may have more than one family that they relate to, and that, this led to complex relationships between various family members, for example, with step-brothers and -sisters. Crucially, Boddy et al. (2013) identified that although children and young people in care were removed from birth family members, their relationships remained '*psychologically present*' (2013: 13). Important messages come from this study, particularly in relation to the lack of prioritisation and conceptualisation of contact. In addition, children and young people remain psychologically present, and it is this factor that is not recognised or responded to by social work practitioners.

Therefore, the question to be asked is why there might be a lack of conceptualisation and attention given to contact? Returning to the study by Schofield et al. (2011d) that identified that social work practitioners were likely to have, what the researchers described as, "*powerful and contradictory feelings about their own role*" as this entails separating birth parent(s) from their children, as a response to safeguarding the welfare of the child. They argued that social work practitioners experienced feelings of loss and sadness which impacted on their ability to engage with birth parent(s). With regard to prioritisation, Schofield et al. (2011d) commented that this related to the attitude of social work practitioners as to whether the birth parent deserved their time and the level of empathy they had for them (2011d: 87). Cleaver's study (2000b: 23-24) also provided an insight into how social work practitioners managed contact. She noted that the characteristics of the child in care influenced social work practitioners' response to contact. For example, if a child came into care as a result of sexual abuse, all contact would be supervised because of the potential risk to the child. As a consequence, contact was less likely to continue. What became apparent from these studies is that contact is not only complex, but also highly challenging for social work practitioners

¹⁰ One representative of national policy; one senior local authority manager responsible for children in care, two academic experts and two senior practitioners or service managers working with families of children in care

because of the need to manage their own conflicting emotions and the emotional responses of parents. They also need to be alert to safeguarding issues, all of which could result in them adopting a unitary approach to contact, rather than one that is individual to the child in care. It would appear that it is not only complexities within the birth family and the emotions of social work practitioners that need to be considered, but also the response to risk. Overall, the above points towards such complexities being minimised and managed through the control of contact between the children and their birth parents. In so doing, it can be suggested that this control leaves both birth parent(s) and children seemingly powerless. Consideration has been made of the varying perspectives of birth parent(s), other members of the familial network and social work practitioners. Broadly speaking, what can be immediately seen is the complexity of contact and that birth parents and members of the wider familial network are not in positions to challenge the power differentials that exist within contact.

The final perspective that needs to be considered is that of the foster carers. Sinclair and Wilson (2004: 128) commented that common among the complaints of foster carers were problems related to the unreliability of birth parents who failed to attend a contact visit. Foster carers also faced the challenge of having to manage the pre- and post-contact behaviours of children and young people in care. Other insights in relation to foster carers and contact can be derived from the comparative study of contact in fostering and adoption by Neil, Beek and Schofield (2003a). Whilst there were differences in sample sizes and the methodology adopted¹¹ (2003a: 405), important messages could still be noted. First, foster carers had little knowledge or control in relation to contact and what took place. Additionally, despite feeling empathy towards birth parent(s), foster carers stated that contact would often take place at a time that was highly disruptive to the wider foster family. Another finding was the role confusion between foster carers and birth parents. If this was not skilfully mediated by the social work practitioner, tensions might arise. The findings from the 2009-2012 study by Austerberry et al. (2013) also indicated that foster carers complained about the failure of social work practitioners to take their views and those of the child into account. Other respondents spoke of limited communication. Austerberry et al. (2013) proffered that one explanation for this particular finding was due to the competing priorities that of social work practitioners had to deal with on a daily basis.

¹¹ Neil's (2000) study involved 168 children, whilst the study by Schofield and Beek (2000) had a sample of 58 children. It was noted by Schofield and Beek (2000) that children in care experienced placements moves, this was not the case for children who had been adopted.

The findings from the empirical studies mentioned thus far denote that contact is both problematic and challenging, not only because of a lack of conceptualisation in the United Kingdom (Boddy et al., 2013), but also because of the emotional labour experienced by children and their families as a result of separation and loss. In addition, there is a need for this to be managed by social work practitioners and foster carers in a fashion that was both empathic and positive (Schofield and Stevenson, 2009: 198). Additionally, the research that has informed these perspectives was not necessarily uniform, as pointed out by a number of reviews of fostering and contact (Sen and Broadhurst, 2011b: 306; Wilson et al. 2004b: 46 and more recently, Boyle, 2017: 30). The criticisms of the research undertaken to date is that it did not highlight (1) the differences in contact (direct and indirect), (2) the responses of contact according to age, (3) the types of placement (permanent or temporary); (4) small samples being small and therefore limiting the extent to which generalisations can be made and (5) what Wilson et al. (2004b) referred to as the “*weak measures of outcome and imprecise definitions of contact, as well as failing to control for confounding variables*”. Similar observations as to the methodological robustness of studies into contact were raised by Quinton et al., (1997) over twenty-one years ago and more recently by Boyle (2017). It can be observed that these criticisms, whilst valid, were primarily concerned with the methodology of research. A concern with methodology that has been used to study the phenomenon of contact is that it does not begin to acknowledge that the outcomes and perspectives could potentially be influenced by dimensions of power that are exhibited not only in the relations between the various social actors, but also in the methods and practices used to organise and support contact. The exercise and use of power as part of contact is a theme that has already begun to be raised and will be returned to it throughout this thesis. For now, the next section of this chapter is concerned with the demographic of children in care.

Relevant trends relating to Children and Young People in Care

As the title of the study suggests, the focus on children and young people means that an important aspect is to understand this populace in terms of relevant trends associated with their demographic details and, where possible, make links between contact and the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. For the purposes of this study, ‘demographic details’ referred to are age, gender, type of placement and the reasons why these children and young people came into care. Of additional importance is that these demographic details were used to develop the methodology for

this study. Before looking at these statistics, it is important to define what is meant by a child or young person in care. The definition provided by The Children Act 1989 is as follows:

“A child is looked after by a local authority if s/he is in their care by reason of a care order or is being provided with accommodation under section 20 of the 1989 Act for more than 24 hours with the agreement of the parents, or of the child if s/he is aged 16 or over (section 22(1) and (2) of the 1989 Act)” (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2010: 6 para 120)

Children or young people enter the care system primarily by one of two means. The first is under what is called a Section 20 (Children Act 1989). This is where a birth parent voluntarily places his/her child with the local authority. In these circumstances the birth parent is not able to provide accommodation. Other circumstances in which a child or young person will be accommodated under Section 20 is when he or she has been abandoned or there is no adult who will take parental responsibility. The second means by which a child or young person may enter care is if s/he is made the subject of a Care Order¹² under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989. Other ways in which a child or young person can enter the care system is where s/he has been made the subject of an Emergency Protection Order¹³ and this is then followed by an interim Care Order and also care proceedings¹⁴. Additionally, a young person may enter the care system when s/he has been remanded into care¹⁵ or a young person is the subject of a Supervision Order¹⁶.

The Department of Education and National Statistics (March 2018) provides numerical information in relation to children in care who reside in England (including adoption and care leavers). As of the 31st of March 2018, there were 72,590 children in care. This figure represents a 4% increase since 2017. As of the 31st of March 2018, 55,240 (73%) children in care were subject to a Care Order. The number of children and young people in care under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 was 14,500 (19%) (Department of Education, 2018: 5). Of the children and young people who entered the care

¹² A Care Order is granted where the Court has been presented with evidence that shows that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm if s/he remains in the care of his/her birth parents, or that the child is beyond the control of his/her birth parents.

¹³ An Emergency Protection Order is applied when it is considered that a child is likely to suffer significant harm. Either the Police or an authorised person can apply to the court for such an order. The Order also allows the local authority to investigate and temporarily gets parental responsibility for a period of eight days.

¹⁴ Care proceedings denote court proceedings in relation to a child or young person that are usually brought by a local authority in order to accommodate a child or young person.

¹⁵ This is where a young person awaiting sentencing from a youth court is placed in remand or foster care.

¹⁶ Used in circumstances where a young person is at risk of significant harm and the local authority has been ordered to provide advice, assistance and where necessary, accommodation.

system in the previous twelve-month period, 44,450 (59%) were placed *within* their own local authority. A total of 30,670 (41%) were placed beyond their local authority. In terms of the types of care arrangements, 73% of children and young people were fostered, 14% were placed with relatives and/or friends, whilst a further 11% were placed in secure units, semi-independent living or children’s homes. Finally, 6% of children were placed with their parents (Department of Education, 2018: 7).

The above information could be said to represent the statistical headlines yet, further scrutiny of the figures reveals the following in terms of age:

Age	1-4 years	5-9 years	10-15 years	16+
Percentage (%)	13%	19%	39%	23%

Table 1: Age range of young people in care as of March 2018 (Department of Education, 2018: 4)

The demographic details show that the majority of children in care were aged between 10 and 15 years of age. In her discussion of foster care for adolescents, Biehal (2009b), commented that these young people fell into two cohorts. The first was composed of adolescents who lived in long-term stable placements and those who had, what Biehal (2009b: 160) called, “*unsettled care careers*”. She added that these young people were likely to have multiple experiences of care that were characterised by numerous attempts at reunification with the birth family. She suggested that this was because adolescents who entered the care system were often placed in care with the aim of reducing the level of crisis and preventing long-term damage to family relationships.

As far as gender is concerned, there were more males in care (56%) than females (44%). In terms of ethnicity, 75% of children and young people in care as at 31st of March 2018 were White, 9% were of mixed ethnicity, 7% were Black or Black British, 5% were Asian or British Asian and 3% were from other ethnic groups. Non-white children appear to be slightly over-represented in the children in care population, in particular children of mixed or Black ethnicity. Children of Asian ethnicity tended to be slightly under-represented (Department of Education, 2018: 4). In the last five years, there have been small increases in the number of children of non-White ethnicities in care, which, according to the Department of Education (2018: 5), is likely to be a representation of the rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children entering the care system. The Department of Education’s statistical release for children in care also identifies that the majority of children and young people enter the care system as a result of abuse and neglect (63%). A further 15% enter

because of family dysfunction; another 8% enter due to the family being in acute stress, while 6% enter as a result of absent parenting (Department of Education, 2018).

From the statistical information available it is evident that, there has been a steady rise in the number of children and young people entering care since 2009 when the total number was 64,400 (Department for Education, 2010). Those who leave care are aged between one and four and between sixteen and eighteen years of age, meaning that children and young people between the ages of five and fifteen are staying in care for longer periods. The statistics also make clear that children and young people are entering the care system at the point of mid-childhood, which means that the child in care is likely to have significant and potentially long-standing relationships with members of their familial and friendship networks. This is likely to lead to a greater inclination to continue with these relationships despite being placed in care, and this can be achieved through the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet (Fursland, 2011; Simpson, 2013 and Sen, 2015d). Consequently, how does contact, as it is currently understood maintain and develop relationships? This question is important for the study as it provides both the context and motivation as to why contact should take place.

How is contact used to maintain and develop family relationships?

In providing an introduction and context to the topic of contact, Adams (2012: 1) states that it is a complex and challenging area of social work practice. Neil (2008d p.6), defines contact as *"...a dynamic, transactional process and all parties can influence and be influenced by the contact arrangements"*. Triseliotis (2010b: 59) wrote that it *"remains a mixture of art and science, possibly more balanced towards art"*. All of these statements infer a significant degree of difficulty and this might be because contact, as Neil (2008d: 8) put it, *"can involve conflicts of interest between parties and often raises ethical dilemmas about privacy, confidentiality, autonomy....deception and truth telling"*. These parties include the child in care; the birth parent(s), foster carers, adoptive parents, kinship carers, social work practitioners, and possibly other professionals who might be working in conjunction with the local authority or the child's family.

Adams (2012: 11), borrowing from Neil and Howe (2004b), states that there are three main purposes for contact that include (1) enabling the child in care to form a new attachment to their new carers in order to avoid the likelihood of idealisation of their birth parent(s); (2) providing the

child in care with a sense of his/her birth family history and self-identity and (3) allowing the child in care to heal from negative feelings associated with the birth family (Delfrabro, Barber and Cooper 2002; McWey and Mullis, 2004). Similarly, Sen (2018d) comments that the purpose of contact is therapeutic and is able to provide connection and identity. Departing from Adams (2012), Sen (2018d) also states that, contact is about assessment. As has already been discussed, there is a body of literature that supports the view that another key purpose of contact is to maintain sibling relationships, as well as with other members of the birth family (Morrison and Brown, 1986; Heger, 1988; Herrick and Piccus, 2005; James et al. 2008; Cossar and Neil, 2012). Thereby possibly having the added benefit of helping children in care to maintain a sense of family and identity.

Scrutiny of the literature in relation to contact begs the question if any of the purposes outlined above are achievable. McAuley's (1996) study is useful to consider from the perspective of children in care forming new attachments. Her study was concerned with looking at the emotional and social development of nineteen children who were fostered for a period of two years and aged between 4 and eleven years of age. The methodology employed included interviewing the sample of children and making use of the Family Relations Test to measure the children's view of their relationships with their new foster families over the duration of the study (Bene and Anthony, 1957, as cited by McAuley, 1996: 176). McAuley (1996: 175) found that children who were in middle childhood felt a need to gain 'permission' from their birth parent(s) to form an emotional attachment with the new foster family. Where emotional 'permission' was not granted by the birth parent(s), the children experienced a series of feelings ranging from sadness to anger. The study also identified that there was no meaningful increase in the level of emotional involvement even after the children had lived with their foster carers for a period of two years. McAuley (2006) was unable to explain why emotional involvement of the children who took part in the study was so limited, but her speculations included their previous care experience. Six of the children had only ever experienced residential care and three were in multiple placements. The care career of the sample of children used in the study calls into question the merit of her findings. It could also be said that the findings expose the fact that emotional involvement and attachment are not interchangeable and that, even after a period of two years, the children in her study had not experienced full assimilation into the culture, knowledge and values of their foster family. Despite McAuley's (1996) admission regarding her findings, it reveals that contact might not necessarily enable children in care to form new attachments. This may be due to the strong sense of loyalty children in care have with their birth family (Macaskill, 2002; Fursland, 2011; The Office of the Children's Rights Director, 2012b and

Simpson, 2013), or the choice that some children in care make not to form emotional attachments with their carers because of their expectations of returning to their birth family (Biehal, 2009b).

As stated above, a further reason why contact is deemed necessary is to provide a child in care with a sense of his/her birth family's history and identity. This is particularly the case where the Care Plan for the child is geared towards a permanent placement that is adoption. The importance of this is reinforced by Feast (2009) who identified that for a child to develop a sense of identity there is a need for him/her to grow up in an environment where the sense of family history is overt, and the child's place is in the form of a shared narrative that is secure and valued by all family members. However, in terms of adoption, the cohesiveness of the immediate and extended family unit is likely to be far more convoluted. As observed by Neil, Beek and Schofield (2003a: 404), the adopted child is split between his/her new family and the former birth family, and both have to negotiate the difficult terrain of separation and loss on a daily basis, which might be particularly difficult during transitional events. The same may well be true for the child in care whose placement is long term.

The notion that contact can be used as a means to help a child in care emotionally heal from the range of negative feelings is explored by Adams (2012). He states that this might be achieved when contact enables a child or young person to come to a realistic understanding of his/her entry into care and when a birth parent(s) is able to not only acknowledge, but also apologise, for his/her behaviour towards their child. Adams (2012) also comments that contact might help a child in care avoid feelings of complete abandonment by his/her birth parent, which suggests that some level of contact, despite the quality, is preferable to no contact whatsoever. This is particularly the case when contact seemingly repeats negative and damaging behaviours, such as overt rejection, the making of false promises and feigning illness (Macaskill, 2002 and Moyers et al., 2006). However, the available literature suggests that contact may also be a tool to provide a series of messages that can be called upon later by the post-care adult. These messages include the sense of interest and affection emphasised by the birth parent(s) at each contact meeting. Other messages might include foundations to re-open a relationship years later, as well as surreptitious messages of human frailty and weakness (see Adams, 2012; Schofield and Beek, 2005 and Trisieliotis et al. 2000).

Sen's (2018d) reference to assessment is linked to circumstances where there is a possibility of the child in care being reunited with the birth family. The extent to which an accurate assessment can be

undertaken is questioned by Triseliotis (2010) and other studies, such as Delfrabbro, Barber and Cooper (2002), who considered whether contact is a good indicator of reunification for children in care with their birth family. Biehal's literature review on reunification (2007b) led her to question a number of practice assumptions, including how contact contributes to the reunification of children in care child with their birth family. She contended that the available empirical research at the time was true on a descriptive level, but later became interpreted as true on an explanatory level by practitioners. One might suggest that this goes some way to explaining the academic pursuit of a correlation between contact and reunification (Biehal, 2007a: 813). Other studies by Farmer et al. (2011) and Wade et al. (2011) identified a number of factors other than contact that influence reunification, these are, tackling wider problems within the family, such as mental illness and drug abuse. Other factors included are improved planning and preparation for return and also monitoring once the child had returned home. Both studies also identified hindrances to contact, such as transport, child behaviour and the type of contact (unsupervised or supervised with restrictions). Above all, the existing literature indicated that there is little evidence to support a causal link between contact and reunification.

Once again, a number of empirical studies indicated that the potential for contact to achieve the outcomes identified at the beginning of this section is equivocal, possibly even aspirational, given the unknown and variable factors involved. In summary, one can contend that the concept of contact appears to contain embedded taken-for-granted assumptions. Moreover, that there is an absence of consideration given to contact involving a number of social actors, including the child in care. Depending on age and understanding, the child may be able to have an active role in the nature and type of contact with his/her birth parent(s). Instead, what can be observed from the research is that contact is studied from a positivistic paradigm where there is an expectation that variables can be controlled, which inevitably lead to a cause and effect. An argument in favour of the deconstruction of contact recognises that there is a failure to appreciate the influence of a power dynamic that underpins the concept and that all the social actors involved in contact are subject to it.

[The use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children and young people](#)

The 'Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report' (2017) published by Ofcom detailed information about British youth and their parents' attitudes and understandings of mobile

communication devices and the Internet. The report specifically captured the views of parents in terms of their children's use of mobile communication devices and how they were monitored and supervised. The methodology applied was a quantitative tracking survey with 1,388 in-home interviews of parents and children aged between five and fifteen and 677 interviews with parents of children aged between three and four (2017: 18). The report identified that 83% of those aged from twelve to fifteen years of age owned a smartphone and 55% had their own tablet. The report corroborates the use of mobile devices and the Internet for entertainment purposes¹⁷. Additionally, 74% had their own social media profile, but they did not make use of Facebook. Instead, children and young people were using Snapchat for their profile. Common amongst the young people who took part in the study was the negative or inappropriate material they found online. It was discovered that 45% of those aged between twelve to fifteen years had seen '*something hateful on the Internet directed at a particular group of people, based on, for instance, their gender, religion, disability, sexuality or gender identity*' in the previous twelve months (Ofcom, 2017: 14). The report usefully provided up-to-date data on the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children and young people in general. However, there is a shortcoming in that there are few explanations provided for the findings made and, in that sense, the report can only be used to provide an overview.

Notably, Livingstone (2010e), reflecting on online risk, harm and vulnerability, commented that what was lost in attention-grabbing headlines was a context-dependent, nuanced account of children and young people's use of the Internet. Simply put, the "*Internet use both shapes and is shaped by children's lives*" (2010: 16). She meant that there cannot be a straightforward conclusion that the use of the Internet always results in risk. In the same article, Livingstone (2010e) described a number of factors that could increase the level of risk and vulnerability online and behaviours that were geared towards sensation-seeking and psychological difficulties. There were also protective factors, such as self-esteem and digital monitoring undertaken by parents.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that Livingstone (2010) did comment that children who were disadvantaged or at risk offline had a greater tendency for risk online. It has already been noted that such comments have been translated and affixed to children in care (Sen, 2015c). Echoing the line of argument taken by Livingstone (2010), the association between children

¹⁷ 90% use their devices for entertainment purposes, such as watching YouTube or music videos, while 77% use them for playing games.

with difficult backgrounds is not necessarily simple, as one has to consider whether or not these same children exhibit a different persona and attitude online, and therefore, behave differently and invite greater levels of risk. Livingstone (2010e: 25) asserted the following:

“In this sense, while the internet has added new sources of risk to children’s lives, the history of harm is as old as childhood. The harmful effects of any online risk are to be understood, as they always have been, in terms of physical harm, emotional distress, adverse psychological consequences or negative social outcomes. But today, as online and offline increasingly intersect or blur in fast-changing cycles of mutual influence and connection, the risk and protective factors that mediate the relation between risk and harm must be rethought”

It is important to note that the literature in relation to children and their use of the Internet was immersed in a rhetoric of risk (Livingstone, 2005b; Livingstone and Helsper, 2007c; Livingstone, 2008d and Livingstone and Brake, 2010e). However, what is included in this study is a range of literature that reflects the complexities and conundrums of Internet use by children and young people. A series of large scale studies have taken place in the United States over the years (Lenhart and Madden, 2007a, boyd, 2007 and boyd and Marwick, 2007 and 2011), the United Kingdom (Ofcom, 2017) and Europe (EU Kids Online, 2012). These indicated how mobile communication devices and the Internet were used and explored their impact on children and young people. Earlier studies, such as those by Lenhart and Madden (2007a), revealed that many young people used social media to manage their current friendships and retain contact with those individuals in their lives whom they rarely met. In particular, young people made use of social media to plan and coordinate events and activities with their friends. Another study by Lenhart et al. (2011b), looking specifically at the use of social media, used several focus groups and interviews with 799 adolescents aged between 12-17 years of age and their parents. The study revealed that the majority of young people using Facebook were posting status updates, commenting on friends’ posts, posting a photo or video and tagging people in forms of media. Lenhart et al. (2011b: 3) also reported that 88% of the adolescent respondents stated that they had witnessed other users being either cruel or mean in a social media environment. However, 78% reported that they had positive interactions online that supported their self-esteem and enabled them to feel closer to another individual.

The negative aspects of using mobile communication devices and particularly the use of the Internet are a significant feature of literature concerning children and young people. Concerns about them

experiencing social isolation were first raised by Nie (2001), whose work has since been developed by a series of other authors. Their concerns have included: the amount of time adolescents spend online and who they were talking to, unsolicited online sexual requests, sexual exploitation via gangs, violence, pornography, bullying and commercial exploitation (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Valkenberg and Peter, 2009; Berelowitz et al., 2013 Livingstone and Brake, 2010; Fursland, 2011; May-Chahal et al., 2012 and Ofcom, 2017). One of the major characteristics of social media is the way in which the lives of its users are made public and open to scrutiny. Marwick and boyd (2011a) made the argument that, although adolescents engaged in communication online that was part of a network that was visible to a number of onlookers, the fact remained that they were keenly interested in maintaining privacy (2011a: 1). According to Marwick and boyd (2011b: 5), this fact was anchored to the *need [for] control and personal agency*. Adolescents wanted to be in charge of the social situation online in terms of what information, and when and how it was divulged. Marwick and boyd (2011b) noted that the reality was that adolescents found it difficult to maintain any form of control over social situations online. This was not solely due to the nature of the technology that instantaneously makes information visible to others by the click of a button, but also the influence that adults had over their daily lives, particularly in the sense of confiscation of mobile devices and access to their social networking sites because of being added as a 'friend'.

Yet, adolescents sought to exercise privacy through a number of guises, including disguising important messages by 'hiding them in plain sight' through to what Marwick and boyd (2011b: 22) called 'social stenography'. They commented that in such circumstances anyone reading the post might assume that what was written was innocent and inconspicuous. However, for those who were able to decode the message, it could take on a completely different meaning. Other methods included: deleting every comment placed on an individual Facebook 'wall', expunging comments placed on other users' walls and setting up alternative Facebook profiles (ibid.). According to Marwick and boyd (2011b: 11), this commitment to maintaining privacy was based on adolescents accepting that their participation in the networked publics (social networking sites) meant that content was widely available and therefore the focus was not on what to publicise, but rather on what to exclude.

In the light of such risks, Livingstone (2005b) has commented that there was a confused discourse on child online safety that failed to appreciate that, whilst there was a recognised risk, this did not mean that it would necessarily materialise or that the child or young person would be subjected to

harm. It was also recognised that the fear and concerns in relation to Internet use were fuelled by anxious press reports that had a tendency to overstate the problems. However, there were genuine concerns that came in the form of the content children were exposed to, with whom they were in contact and also their conduct online (Livingstone and Brake, 2010e). The online risks for children in care and their use of mobile communication devices and the Internet are well-documented. Reference has often been made to their vulnerability, supposedly making it difficult for children to behave appropriately online (Fursland, 2011; May-Chahal, 2012; and Sen, 2011b). Citing information from the Office of the Children's Commissioner and Child Exploitation, Sen (2015c: 106) made the point that children who were previously abused were more predisposed to online grooming. However, scrutiny of the literature in relation to children and young people's use of the Internet indicated that the more they were online, the more opportunities *and risks* she or he would encounter (Livingstone, 2010). As noted above, the evidence in relation to online risk and harm remained inconclusive (Staksrud, 2013: 58).

The ubiquitous way in which mobile communication technologies have been adopted and adapted by children and young people means that the use of such devices is a normal characteristic of daily living. Yet, young people's access to mobile communication devices and the Internet has brought with it adult concerns in relation to the nature and level of inappropriate content that young people might inadvertently be exposed to, what behaviours are exhibited and type information shared. Adult parents and carers also associate other dangers with the Internet and social media, such as the risk of young people (1) providing too much personal information online, (2) being subject to unsolicited advances and (3) being victims of criminal and intimidating behaviours. It is with this in mind, consideration will be given to how parents and carers monitor and manage the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet.

Parenting Practices: responses by carers

As one of the research questions of this study is concerned with how foster carers and social work practitioners negotiate and manage the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet, it is useful to look to the wider literature on how parents manage their children's use of such technology before focusing on whether or not there are any tangible differences between foster carers and social work practitioners, both of whom have an explicit legal duty to safeguard and protect the welfare of children in care. In their research, Alvarez et al. (2013 p. 69) cited the studies of Valcke et al. (2010); Livingstone et al. (2012); Livingstone and Haddon (2008); Barkin et al. (2006) and Wang et

al. (2005), all of whom have identified five major concerns in terms of Internet use by children and young people. These concerns fall into the following categories:

- a) social relations - where children and young people may be subject to cyber-bullying, unsolicited sexual advances or a risk to their privacy;
- b) negative emotional impact - this is concerned with sexual, violent, racist or terrorist content on the Internet;
- c) physical health and wellbeing - where children and young people are engaging in a lifestyle that is too inactive and risking obesity, lack of exercise or the exercise of certain muscles leading to pain and discomfort;
- d) excessive use of the Internet - this relates to the ongoing use of the Internet that interferes with family activities and could possibly border on addiction; and
- e) the risks of commercial exploitation - the risk of responding to exploitative advertising campaigns or fraud.

In the study by Livingstone, Bober and Helsper (2005b), an early insight into how parents monitored and managed the use of the Internet at that time was presented. Parents of nine to seventeen-year-olds were asked by the researchers how they managed their children's use of the internet. The response of parents fell into two distinct categories: the first was those parents who sought to protect their child's privacy by telling their child not to reveal personal information, buy any goods online or make use of chatrooms, etc. The other category of parents restricted their child's peer-to-peer activities by telling their child not to make use of instant messaging, downloading material, playing online games or communicating via email. The researchers proceeded to group the parents according to what they described as 'monitoring practices'. The first group of parents who were deemed to be supportive of their children and described as adopting an approach that involved *"overt parental monitoring and co-use between parent and child"* (Livingstone, Bober and Helsper, 2005b: 18). The second group restricted their child's activity and covertly monitored their children's use of the Internet by checking their history and regularly looking at the content of their child's email account, were described in terms of being *"covert and monitors of their children's internet use"* (Livingstone, Bober and Helsper, 2005b).

Admittedly, this study is helpful in providing an overview of parental practices in relation to monitoring the use of the Internet by children and young people. Nonetheless, there is a shortcoming in terms of the experiences and behaviours for both parents and carers as they seem to be merged. Therefore, what is not distinguished is the potentially different way in which a foster carer may respond to the monitoring of activities by a child or young person in their care. Furthermore, information is not provided on the use of mobile communication devices that may reflect the availability of such technology to children at that time. Additionally, we need to remember that this study was conducted over a decade ago and the capability of mobile devices has substantially increased since then.

The more recent report by Ofcom (2017) revealed that parental trepidations about the Internet were similar to those already outlined. The study made use of different categories of parental practices¹⁸, but these were solely concerned with Internet use and not mobile communication devices. The key findings were that parents used a combination of the categories to manage their children's use of the Internet, particularly when the child was aged between 5 and 15 years of age. Furthermore, when home broadband was used, parents relied on content filters provided by Internet Service Providers (ISPs), meaning that unsafe content was blocked. They made little use of parental control software, such as Net Nanny.

The studies focused on thus far have provided an insight into the responses of parents to children and young people's use of the Internet, but not necessarily mobile communication devices. They have clearly indicated that there are specific approaches used by parents to manage use. Not content with undertaking research into the parenting practices adopted, researchers have also focused on specific variables in relation to birth parents and their children (Livingstone and Bober, 2004a; Livingstone, 2007c; Padilla-Walker and Coyne, 2011; Alvarez et al., 2013 and Ozgur, 2016). For example, in their study, Padilla-Walker and Coyne (2011) sought to examine two aspects: (1) an authoritative style¹⁹ of parenting that influenced the monitoring of media and (2) child variables in terms of age, gender and other media that might be available to the child. Their longitudinal study

¹⁸ The four categories of parental mediation include: parents talking to their children on a regular basis about staying safe online, having an understanding of the technical tools available i.e. Parental control software e.g. Net Nanny; rules in relation to being online and supervision when online (Ofcom, 2017: 234), regularly talking to children about staying safe online, rules about what children do online, supervision when online, and awareness and use of technical tools.

¹⁹ a style of parenting where there are high expectations of the child, but they are also given the support and means required to achieve success.

focused on the inner lives of families with children aged between eleven and fifteen. As part of the analysis of the parenting practices adopted, the researchers made use of the term 'cocooning' (also called restrictive mediation) to represent parents' attempts to restrict the use of certain media in the home to ensure that their children were not negatively influenced. Another term used by the researchers was 'prearming' (also referred to as active mediation), which involved parent/child discussions in relation to questionable material found on the Internet (2011: 206). This particular study is important in that it highlighted that prearming is a potentially successful strategy for monitoring an adolescent's use of the Internet. It found that parent-adolescent discussions about media content led to voluntary and honest disclosures about their use, which also had the effect of increasing parental knowledge about their use. Padilla-Walker and Coyne (2011) noted that 'cocooning' that was characterised by rules and regulations had the opposite effect with adolescents, as they more often than not, resented the parental rules, particularly if this was the only approach used by parents. Padilla-Walker and Coyne's (2011) study also highlighted that paternal, maternal and child variables influenced the nature of the media monitoring that took place. Despite the importance of these findings and what they stated about successful parenting practices, it has to be acknowledged that they were concerned with the inner workings of American family life, which is culturally and socially different from the UK.

Other examples of empirical studies that take the variables of parents, such as their age, gender and educational level, into account is a Spanish study by Alvarez et al. (2013: 71) and a more recent Turkish study by Ozgur (2016). Alvarez et al.'s study (2013) sought to investigate parental attitudes to three regulatory aspects of internet use: time spent online, internet content and the frequency with which parents offered guidance regarding the content seen. The methodology used by Alvarez et al. (2013) involved parents of children attending primary and secondary schools and made use of a Likert-scale questionnaire covering parental attitudes and regulations. A total of 1,185 questionnaires were sent to parents and the return rate was 60%. Ozgar's study (2016) was primarily concerned with children and young people's view on the parenting style they experienced. He made use of a convergent mixed parallel method²⁰ approach that relied on quantitative data collected from 1,289 children who completed an Internet Parental Style Likert Scale and a case sampling approach of twenty parents and their children (twelve males and eight females). The parents were interviewed and their children filled out the questionnaire (2016: 414).

²⁰ A methodology that involves both quantitative and qualitative data that is either compared or linked as part of the analytic approach and then interpreted.

The findings from Alvarez et al.'s (2013) study showed that mothers strongly influenced what their children saw on the Internet and younger children were blocked more from the Internet than adolescents. The researchers also concluded that younger parents were far more effective than older parents in their practice of communication and control with their children (2013: 76) and that the higher the parent's educational attainment, the more likely they were to employ a positive parental monitoring style. The study revealed that those mothers who had an under- or post-graduate education used an authoritative style of parenting²¹. Similarly, the findings from the Ozgur study revealed that younger children were subject to an authoritative approach and for adolescent children it was more laissez-faire, particularly for male children thereby highlighting that gender difference can be of significance (2016: 415-416). The study also showed that those mothers who had an undergraduate or graduate education used an authoritative style of parenting. The opposite was true for parents who had a lower educational level in that they had a tendency to use a laissez-faire approach.

Whilst these particular studies are helpful because they can be used to compare parenting style with a range of variables about both the parent and child, the results presented reflect the cultural dynamics of American, Spanish and Turkish parenting. Alvarez et al. commented that Spanish parents had a tendency to restrict their children's use of the Internet because of concerns about content that may be accessed and the social contacts their children had (2013: 76). Ozgur described Turkish parents as being influenced by "*extreme love and control in contrast to the balanced love and tolerance in Western societies*" (2016: 421). One can argue that caution should be applied to these studies because of the different cultural dynamics. Although this argument is plausible, what cannot be denied is that parents, regardless of country of origin, were using similar methods to manage their children's use of the Internet in terms of time, frequency and content and the application of a series of rules. It is acknowledged that what was missing from all three studies were details in relation to the platform used to access the Internet, for example, mobile phones, tablets or computers.

It can be concluded from the above that the nature and style of monitoring adopted by parents is motivated by concerns about the content seen and the interaction their child may have online. It is evident that younger children and those in their early teens are subject to greater levels of

²¹ A style where the parent communicates with their child sharing ideas and being supportive of the child's skills and behavioural traits.

monitoring compared to older teenagers. It has also been seen from the research available that there are two broad categories describing parental practices when monitoring the use of the Internet by children and young people. On the one hand, there is the warm, supportive and proactive approach, and on the other, there is the method that restricts use and is reliant on the rules and regulations within the household. The findings from the studies also show that there is a link in terms of the age and educational level of the parent and the type of parenting style adopted. As stated above, the studies only refer to parents and their children and do not take account of carers who have a unique position in terms of caring for a child. Consequently, the gap in the literature appears to be how foster carers and social work practitioners, who have a responsibility for the wellbeing of a fostered child, monitor and manage the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet and if there is an effect on their ability to make use of such devices for contact. This gap in the literature will partially be attended to as a way of making sense of the phenomenon of young people in care's contact with members of their familial and friendship networks. In keeping with the gap in the literature already identified, there is no mention of the power relations that exists between children and adults regarding the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. It can be presumed that this is a taken for granted assumption, but what is more likely is that it is a reflection of an attitude in which children are not seen as social actors capable of asserting their own will independently and negotiating their immediate online and offline environments.

Kinnunen, Suopäjärvi and Ylipulli (2011) considered the extent to which qualitative research on the use of mobile phones in home and work environments, as well as public places, were inclusive of a perspective on power. They posited that the concept of power and mobile phone use is *"rarely applied"* (2011: 1071) and no consideration was given to the micro-level social processes and meanings of mobile phone use. Kinnunen, Suopäjärvi and Ylipulli (2011: 1071) noted:

"Thus far, power is a rarely explicated concept regarding research into mobile phone use which can simply be noticed by looking at the indexes of the relevant literature. Micro-level social processes and meanings of mobile use have rarely been analysed with prevailing power theories."

The authors (2011) emphasised that many of the studies undertaken were concerned with 'domestication', which was defined as culture-bound contexts in the acceptance and use of mobile phones. By confining empirical studies to the use of mobile communication devices to adoption in daily life, what was missing were the structural relations and, more specifically, how power was enacted in mundane tasks. Kinnunen, Suopäjärvi and Ylipulli (2011) argued that the mobile phone

was challenging existing hierarchies. Taking this point one step further and applying it to the arena of fostering there is an indication that, the use of the mobile phone by children in care is beginning to challenge the existing power dynamics that are existent within contact, as the children take it upon themselves to maintain links with members of their familial and friendship networks.

Kinnunen, Suopäjärvi and Ylipulli's (2011) observations clearly point to the fact that there is a significant gap in the literature about the use of mobile phones more generally, its replication of existing power inequalities and the introduction of new power dynamics. Given that this is the case for communication technologies. What kind of effect, therefore is this having in terms of contact for children in care?, By virtue of their status as children associated with risk and vulnerability, these children could be regarded as having little or no power. In keeping with the aim of this study and the research questions asked, the engagement with the literature on parenting practice indicates that a new form of parenting is now required for the twenty-first century. It is a type of parenting that is characterised by seeking to minimise online threats that would threaten the financial, emotional or physical wellbeing of children. However, as noted by Kinnunen, Suopäjärvi and Ylipulli's (2011), there has been little acknowledgement at this stage that an implicit part of digital monitoring is, in essence, a power struggle between parent, child and other interested parties. The next section examines the literature in relation to how foster carers are responding to this new form of parenting and its impact in terms of contact.

Foster carers' monitoring of mobile communication devices and the Internet

It has been noted on a number of occasions throughout this section that there is no specific robust empirical research in relation to foster carers and how they manage the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children in care for contact. Whilst this is true, there are a series of reports that are emerging, which describe how foster carers are seeking to respond to the challenges. One such report is the *Online Safety Foster Carer Survey of 2016* (Guardian Saints, 2017). Guardian Saints represents a group of parents and foster carers who are concerned about the constant dangers of the online world for children and young people. A purposive sampling method was used for approximately 1,000 foster carers from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and the local authorities, who were required to complete a questionnaire. This was followed by a telephone interview. A total of 329 (33%) foster carers completed the questionnaires.

The findings from this survey revealed that 58% of foster carers were caring for children and young people between the ages of eleven and seventeen (Guardian Saints, 2016: 10). When asked about

the potential risks that young people in their care faced, foster carers gave a similar response to those raised in the previous studies with parents. Foster carers also highlighted challenges in relation to mobile devices, such as mobile phones purchased by birth parents and the use of free Wi-Fi hotspots (Guardian Saints, 2017: 12). They also noted that mobile phones were particularly difficult to manage as they were unable to apply controls to the devices in the same way that they could with computers and their own personal Wi-Fi.

Of the foster carers who took part in the survey, 21% identified that they had experienced incidents of cyberbullying and unmediated contact between the child and their family members. The remainder of the survey reported on the methods employed by foster carers to manage the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. The typologies were similar to what has been outlined thus far, but there were differences in terminology. 'Hard controls' that represents devices, such as router restrictions and parental controls, while 'soft controls' were related to restrictions in terms of the duration the WI-FI was able to be used for and also supervised access (Guardian Saints, 2017: 19). Unfortunately, a difficulty with the terminology used in the Guardian Saints report is that it created a false divide between technical and human methods of parenting style, thereby making it difficult to distinguish which strategy was most successful with which age group. The empirical studies that have already been referred to do not create such a divide and treat the technical methods as part of an overall parenting approach (see Ofcom, 2017; Ozgur, 2016; and Alvarez et al., 2013). Furthermore, there is no further explanation provided about those foster carers who prohibited or strictly monitored Internet access.

Another important finding from the survey is the age of foster carers and their confidence with technology. Some foster carers responded by stating that blocking content was far too complicated for them and that the children in their care had a better understanding. A supposition is made that this finding may be due to the age demographic of foster carers, with 50% of respondents being over the age of fifty and a further 17% over the age of sixty (2017: 7). Undeniably, the response rate for the survey by the Guardian Saints is very encouraging. However, there were a number of limitations that included the follow-up telephone calls. Data in relation to this aspect of the methodology was not made explicit, so there are few means of ascertaining whether any further in-depth data was obtained as part of the survey.

A report of a similar nature was completed by The Children's Commissioner's report (2017), as part of the Fostering National Stocktake. The small-scale study involved children and young people in care from three residential homes and a secure unit, as well as a group of children in foster care. For fostering placements, the report identified that access to the Internet was dependent upon the foster carers' own digital skills. The report noted that the foster carers' lack of digital skills led to an alarmist and overly-cautious approach. Within the Commissioner's report, there was an admission that foster carers had no real knowledge as to what digital access looked like. This survey, whilst small-scale and only partially concerned with residential care, has findings that complement those of the Guardian Saints survey.

A study by MacDonald et al., (2014) also provided useful information about how foster carers specifically managed the use of mobile phones for contact. Notably, MacDonald et al.'s study made no mention of Wi-Fi, either in the foster home or via the use of mobile phones. This omission could be deemed as a fundamental gap in the study. That said, in many respects, their findings mirror those of the Guardian Saints (2017) and The Children's Commissioner (2017) in that they also identified the parenting practices used by foster carers and the difficulties experienced, as well as the lack of support from social work practitioners. However, this study differs from what has been outlined thus far in that, it described the parenting practices that foster carers had in place. Importantly, the young people were involved in negotiating the rules and regulations for the fostering household, but, in the first instance, these negotiations were often met with resistance by the young people in care.

Importantly, 45% of the foster carers surveyed also said that they did not think that the use of a mobile phone had a detrimental effect on the placement. This was confirmed in the conclusion drawn:

"However, overall, the general perception was positive, strengthened by the pragmatic view that mobile phones are a way of life for all children, not just children in care. Negotiation and explanation were both thought to be central to making it less problematic." (MacDonald et al., 2014: 37)

In bringing together the findings from the Guardian Saints, the Children's Commissioner and MacDonald et al. (2014), as well as the empirical studies mentioned earlier, it can be seen that foster carers share many of the same concerns as parents. Moreover, they seemingly make use of the same technical tools in terms of managing and monitoring the use of the Internet and mobile communication devices. However, there are differences in the sense that foster carers stated the

challenges of managing the use of mobile communication devices, especially when they have been provided by a birth parent. A further divergence that is apparent is that the findings do point to some foster carers who are prohibiting access to the Internet, potentially as a result of their own lack of skill and a cautionary approach. What is not provided are the views of social work practitioners, meaning that the report only provides us with one vantage point of the adults who have a caring responsibility. That said, what is prevalent is that the access to Wi-Fi and the Internet is firmly within the grasp and control of adult carers. The literature regarding foster carer management and supervision of mobile devices is limited, but the little that there is, points towards a power differential between foster carers and children in care.

Social Work Practitioners

The majority of the literature in relation to social work practitioners and the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet is primarily concerned with how social media is being used in child protection work and the ethical implications (see Stott, MacEachron and Gustavsson, 2017; Sage and Sage, 2016; Boddy and Dominelli, 2016; Breyette and Hill, 2015; Mishna et al., 2012 and Reamer, 2013). The literature about the response of social work practitioners to the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children in care is limited. This literature tends to be a commentary on what is happening in terms of the risks posed to children in care by the Internet, rather than based on empirical research. Fursland (2011) referred to the risks that children in care are exposed to by the Internet, thereby reinforcing the narrative of risk. Simpson (2013) focused on why children in care pursue unregulated contact and, in doing so, referred to the neural and cognitive development of adolescents and the associated impact of attachment (2013: 382). Referring to Howe (2009), Simpson (2013) explained that the trauma experienced by a child who has entered the care system as a result of maltreatment may be an emotional and behavioural dilemma whereby the child simultaneously wants to be close to a birth parent and plans to escape. According to Howe (2009, as cited in Simpson, 2013: 383), this dilemma leads to contact that is continually detrimental to the welfare of the child. Simpson (2013) puts forward a series of solutions that began with a call for social work practitioners to have a change in mindset by recognising that mobile communication devices were a normal aspect of life and that the risks and the rights of children in care need to be balanced. Another solution highlighted was for social work practitioners to ask children in care about whom they wanted to stay in touch with and discuss how they should be

supported to do so through emotional scaffolding²². Through emotional scaffolding, the young person can return to the emotional base of the foster carer who tells the child that they understand their need to continue having contact with the members of their birth family. In a similar vein, both Ballantyne, Duncalf and Daly (2010) and Willoughby (2018) posited that what was required by social work practitioners was an understanding of the risks and opportunities of mobile communication devices and social media.

Contact, mobile communication devices and the Internet: A perspective from children in care

Contextually speaking, it can be argued that, children and young people in care have agency that is secured by legislation, such as The Children Act 1989 section 22 (4). This clause in essence states that before a local authority makes a decision in respect of contact arrangements for a child the social work practitioner must ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child, as far as practicably possible. Moreover, the guidance also states that social work practitioners should give due consideration (this includes taking into account age and understanding) to the wishes and feelings expressed by the child. Additionally, children have the opportunity to share their views about their Care Plan, which includes contact. Evidence from The Office of the Children's Rights Director (2009a and 2012) about children and young people's experiences of being in care, identified that this is the area that was of greatest frustration (The Office of the Children's Rights Director, 2009a and 2012b). For example, some authors have questioned why so many children in care consistently comment about unsatisfactory contact and their desire for more (Timms and Thoburn, 1997; The Office of the Children's Rights Director, 2009a and 2012b; Wilson and Sinclair, 2004). The literature points to a number of factors that include the unsatisfactory way in which contact is organised and where it is located. Additionally, there is often dissatisfaction about the duration, and type of contact that children in care are allowed to have. As highlighted by The Office of the Children's Rights Director (2009a and 2012b), children felt that they were not consulted by social work practitioners about the decisions made about contact.

It has already been established that there is a limited amount of scholarly attention paid to the growing impact of mobile communication devices and the Internet on contact (see Chapter One).

²² This involves demonstrating to them that they are 'kept in mind', particularly during their numerous transitions (ibid: 386).

Recognising that the topic of this study is concerned with children in the care and their use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact, what information and research actually exist? The literature that is available tends to be geared towards the needs of social work practitioners. This was particularly the case in Fursland's (2011) *Fostering and Social Networking*. This publication helpfully identified a range of opportunities available to children in care that came from making use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. These included the development of friendships, gaining support, being part of a community and staying in touch with birth parents and other relatives. Within the same publication, Fursland (2011) also identified a number of challenges that were linked to the vulnerabilities of children in care and their supposed lack of skill to communicate and behave appropriately whilst online. These challenges included sharing too much personal information online, cyberbullying and sexting (Fursland, 2011: 26-27). Great attention has been given to the consequences of the adversities experienced by some children and young people either before, or whilst, in care: "*emotional, social and behavioural difficulties*" and that these might have resulted in "*expressed behaviours which make them vulnerable online as well as in the real world*" (Fursland, 2011: 25).

This view of children in care and their use of mobile communication devices and the Internet is countered by a body of useful information found in a series of reports by the then Children's Rights Director for England. In particular, the report entitled '*Keeping in touch*' (2009) was concerned with children in care and their contact with members of their familial and friendship networks. The study consisted of a survey completed by 311 children and young people in care, 54% of whom were living in a residential setting and 41% were living with foster families. Additionally, there were six discussion groups involving ninety-two children and young people and another group of sixteen who were asked a number of questions to which they responded by voting. In total, 370 children and young people shared their views. In the survey, there was a clear indication that respondents thought that email and social media provided a good method of staying in touch with their birth parents and members of their familial network (2009: 13). The respondents also identified that these methods of communication were useful, as they enabled contact to take place with members of the family that they were not used to meeting in person. What was also apparent was their sense of dissatisfaction with social media in that it was not recognised as meaningful in comparison to face-to-face visits. However, there was an admission that both emails and social media were particularly useful when something difficult had to be said to a birth relative. A key finding from respondents was that some foster carers withheld access to computers, but no explanation about the reason for denial was provided. Respondents also reported their own fears regarding the use of social media

believing that their conversations would be hacked, or that social work practitioners would discourage use because of the danger of inappropriate sexual contact (2009: 13).

The respondents also shared their views about the need to have more say in terms of contact and the role of social work practitioners in terms of making decisions and its organisation. It was evident that certain children and young people who took part in the study had experienced inconsistencies in that some social work practitioners supported contact, while others did not give it a priority (2009: 18). It was also noted that arrangements for contact needed to work well because of its importance, but that this did not always happen, particularly when social work practitioners failed to check with the birth parent(s) (2009: 18). Whilst this report provides a helpful insight into the views of children and young people in care and their thoughts about contact, there are a number of failings, including that the findings did not provide information on age, which is a critical factor not just in the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact, but also for Wi-Fi access more generally. Importantly, there is also the need to acknowledge that access to mobile communication devices and the Internet is very likely to be different from when this report was produced.²³

There have been a number of studies (Greenhow, 2017; McDonald et al., 2016 and Wilson, 2016) from both the fostering and adoption sectors in recent years that have provided greater detail as to how children in care make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact, specifically with members of their familial network. Reference is made to the two studies with the aim of highlighting both the similarities and the differences. Greenhow's study (2017) involved a total of ten adoptive families, inclusive of eleven adoptive parents and six adopted children aged between fourteen and twenty-two years. With these respondents, Greenhow explored what she called the 'virtual contact'²⁴ and the practice implications for adoptive parents and social work practitioners. The study was the first of its kind to examine contact via mobile communication devices and the Internet where the children have been adopted from public care (2017). A similar

²³ In the 2013 version of the *Children's and Parents' Media Use and Attitudes*, it was reported that four in ten children aged between 5-15 (43%) had a mobile phone of some kind and that three in ten (29%) children aged 5-15 had a smartphone (2013: 25). The 2017 version of the report identified that seven in ten children aged between 5-15 used a mobile phone (68%), and that the use increased with age, rising from 29% of 3-4-year olds to 93% of 12-15-year olds (2017: 34)

²⁴ Greenhow (2017) defines virtual contact as post-adoption contact activities between adopted children and birth relatives via social networking sites, e-mail, video calling or text messaging (2017: 45)

study focusing on children in care was undertaken by MacDonald et al. (2014). This research entailed an examination of how children and young people in both residential and fostering placements made use of mobile phones for contact. The methodology involved reviewing policies and interviews with eight senior managers. In addition, twenty home care managers were interviewed. A survey was created for foster carers that yielded a 15% (no.=128) return. For young people in either foster or residential care, a survey was designed. The authors found that due to the 'gatekeeping' stance of allocated social work practitioners, returns from this particular respondent group were limited.

Greenhow (2017) identified that virtual contact reflected a pattern of communication that began with regular exchanges, but this reduced over time and was replaced by infrequent communication and information coming from online updates on social media. It was not specified whether it was the adoptee or birth family members who were posting. The study by McDonald et al. (2016) noted that children and young people benefitted from having immediate family contact via mobile communication devices (2016: 834). Furthermore, they recognised that for those children and young people who did not want to have direct contact with certain members of their familial network, they were able to keep the lines of communication open through the use of mobile communication devices. In a comparable fashion, Greenhow's study (2017) identified that there were positive opportunities associated with virtual contact for adopted children. These included the adopted child being able to ask and receive answers to questions about their identity and their lives. It was also noted that the informality of contact allowed adoptive children and members of their birth family to engage in natural family-like communication (2017: 49).

What is common to both studies is the response of the foster carers and adoptive parents who expressed concerns regarding this new means of contact and their difficulties managing it. They agreed on a dearth of policy and procedures to support foster carers, adoptive parents and social work practitioners. This suggests that, contact using mobile devices is an emerging area of practice that requires an effective response. However, MacDonald et al.'s (2014) study differs in their description of how rules in relation to the daily management of mobile communication devices are carried out. These rules referred to switching off the phone at a certain time, leaving it downstairs at night and not taking the phone to school. There are a number of weaknesses in both studies. The most obvious is Greenhow's study (2017), whose sample of children were adopted from public care and involved their adopters. With regards to MacDonald et al.'s (2014) study, even though the size was admirable, the problems associated with the recruitment of children in care means that the

perspectives of adults are only provided and not those of children in care. What is common to both studies and to all those mentioned in this section, is the lack of consideration in relation to the agency of children in care and both adults' and children's manifestations of power.

The work of Wilson (2016) came from an entirely different perspective, referring to an 'economy of dignity' (Pugh, 2009 as cited by Wilson, 2016: 282), which was grounded in mobile communication devices having the ability to sustain pre-existing relationships. In a deliberate and concerted effort, Wilson (2016) pointed out that the use of mobile communication devices by young people was often characterised by risk. However, risk also had to be balanced alongside the way in which the devices were used and the benefits they could bring to young people. Her qualitative study was concerned with the sensory, material and spatial construction of (not) belonging with young people who were not living with their biological parents (2016: 285). A total of twenty-two respondents from the ages of ten to twenty-three were interviewed from a range of varying care arrangements that included foster and kinship care, as well as secure and residential care. Unsurprisingly, respondents spoke about the importance of social networking sites they were able to access via their mobile phones. An important interpretation made by Wilson (2016) was that young people in care were able to exercise self-care through the use of mobile devices and the Internet, as part of a strategy to block out current stressful situations and bring calm. Examples were given of young people playing music to remove the sense of emptiness they felt or playing computer games as a way of working out difficult family experiences (Wilson 2016: 290 - 291). Unlike studies referred to thus far, Wilson (2016) was firmly ensconced in the position that mobile communication devices could not only be used positively, but they could also promote self-care. Such a position goes beyond the usual rhetoric of risk that is commonly associated with mobile communication devices and the Internet by children in care.

[The use of mobile communication devices by people with learning disabilities](#)

It has been seen that the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet has enabled easy access at any time and allows for communication to occur in all spaces. However, this is not an opportunity afforded to young people in care with disabilities, because of assumptions based upon their welfare and vulnerability (Fermestad et al., 2006). Seale (2014):223 argued that:

“[i]n health and social care settings, concerns regarding the abuse and exploitation of children and adults with learning disabilities and fears regarding litigation over client and employer safety influences risk practices.”

In Seale's (2014) review of the literature in relation to the use of mobile communication devices by people with learning disabilities, she aimed to identify to what extent, if any, support, risk or safety emerged as factors. Seale (2014) noted that risk emerged as a dominant factor. Her review was inclusive as it took into account the role played by what she calls 'supporters' (2014: 223), whom she identified as parents, carers, teachers and other professionals who work with people with learning disabilities. Seale (2014) acknowledged that the proficiency and readiness of 'supporters' to enable the use of mobile communication devices was linked to the child with learning disabilities' aptitude, knowledge and familiarity with not only these devices, but also the Internet. Where this was limited, it proved to be a "significant barrier" (2014: 224). In Seale's review of the literature, she highlighted the behaviour exhibited by support workers who made choices for the individuals with learning disabilities, rather than promoting an environment or ways of working that would encourage independent thinking. What is notable in the literature review is the number of references made to the lack of choices and controls that adults and young people with learning difficulties experienced. In reaching a conclusion on her literature review, Seale (2014) stated that there were issues associated with control and protection, which in turn, particularly influenced how the Internet was viewed. Seale (2014) made an argument for positive risk-taking by adults and adolescents with learning disabilities:

"Positive risk-taking involves developing strategies so that the risks of an activity or option are balanced against the benefits. This might require an element of creativity in terms of how risks, problems, possibilities and opportunities are conceptualised or reframed" (Seale, 2014: 228).

In doing so, she acknowledged that positive risk-taking was likely to take supporters into a territory of anxiety and discomfort and that required their creativity. In closing, Seale (2014) echoed a key theme that has been explicated throughout the latter half of this chapter, which was that perceptions of risk and safety influence how adults and young people with learning disabilities can and do make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Moreover, where there is the potential for positive risk-taking to take place, Seale (2014: 231) accepted that this will be "mediated by powerful others: supporters (professionals and parents)".

Conclusion

As part of this review, a range of literature has been considered. Initially, contact from a historical and legislative perspective was contemplated. Looking through the long lens of history, it was found that once a child entered the care system, they had no rights and were considered the property of the local authority. This lack of rights also extended to birth parents who, it could be said, were faced with a series of attitudinal, financial and geographic barriers that limited the contact that they could have with their children. At this point in the discussion, it can be posited that the understanding of the history of contact gained thus far does not include any reference to inherent power differentials that might exist. Next, an examination of the format of contact and how it was experienced by social actors, including the child, birth parents, members of the extended family, foster carers and social work practitioners, took place. The literature reviewed highlighted the complexities and difficulties for children in care and their birth parents, who were often left feeling powerless. It also revealed that there was a lack of considered conceptual understanding of contact and that social work practitioners experienced conflicting emotions. In terms of practice, it was apparent that there has been an unwillingness to prioritise contact. Foster carers also experienced difficulties with contact. Yet, despite this, there have been both formal and informal power inequalities that have characterised the organisation, delivery and experience of contact for children in care and their birth families.

A brief examination of the statistics for children in care took place, which revealed that children were entering care at a much older age and a tentative link was made between these children and a greater sense of loyalty with their birth family, because of the time spent living with them before entering the care system. The review then explored the usefulness (or not) of maintaining contact with family relations. The examination of the literature led to the conclusion that a range of empirical research studies showed that the ability for contact to achieve new attachments with a foster family, to provide for a child with a sense of self-identity and to emotionally heal and be of therapeutic worth was questionable. Researchers have seemingly been preoccupied with finding a correlation between contact and reunification but, had not given consideration to the possibility of a power differential within the process of contact. Equally, concern was not expressed for child in care being a social actor in his/her own right who was able to negotiate and manage the immediate environment as part of the human interaction that takes place in contact. It is important to note that what has been outlined as part of the literature review refers to England only. It is appreciated that across the remaining countries of the UK there are structural and legislative differences that can be said to be more accommodating of a child in care's agency. An example of this is the Scottish model

of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIFREC) where the emphasis is on consideration of the wider influences on the child.

The wider literature about the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children and young people in general was examined alongside the response of birth parents to managing this new phenomenon. This was followed by exploring the use of such technology by children in care and found that there are few differences in terms of use for friendship networks. With regards to the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact, the literature indicated that children in care were making use of the technology to speak to members of their familial network. In a number of empirical studies, the parenting practices used by birth parents to manage the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children and young people were noted. These methods had a number of typologies that included one approach, which was supportive and engaged with their child's use of technology and another, which consisted of rules and regulations. In the case of foster carers, it was identified that they made use of similar approaches, but there was a tendency towards either limiting or prohibiting the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. It was also evident that foster carers were challenged technically in terms of managing use. In keeping with the argument posited throughout the chapter, it was highlighted again that the literature to date has given little consideration to any power differentials that might exist between children and adults more generally and, more specifically, within the fostering arena.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Constructs

Introduction

As stated in the introductory chapter of this thesis assumptions have remained unexamined regarding contact as a concept and also in terms of practice. It has been noted that no attention has been given to the agency of children in care or the power dynamic that is inherent within contact. It has been posited that evidence from the emergence of unmediated contact through the use of mobile devices and Internet by children in care has begun to expose these. Thus far it has been identified that the literature in relation to contact is seemingly overly concerned with seeking to establish whether or not a causal link exists between contact and the reunification with a child in care to his/her family (Sinclair et al., 2005; Biehal, 2007; Farmer et al., 2011 and Wade et al., 2011). It is also apparent from the review of the literature on contact how researchers have documented and described its effect on children and young people in care (McAuley, 1996; Delfrabbro, Barber and Cooper, 2002; Macaskill, 2002; Neil, Beek and Schofield, 2003 and Moyers, Farmer and Lipscombe, 2006). Complexities of contact from the perspectives of birth parent(s) and wider family members; foster carers and social work practitioners have been engaged with and it has been noted that each perception points towards the challenges that exist. Yet there has been no argument, other than that which has been presented in this thesis which has deconstructed the concept of contact and has highlighted the absence of any discourse in relation to the theoretical notions of power, the agency of children in care and contact and the management of risk in the form of surveillance.

As part of enabling us to further disrupt the notions and understanding of contact use will be made of a number of theoretical constructs that have been deliberately selected because they speak to the gaps that appear in relation to the academic literature, which as has been identified are the agency of children, power and risk. In the light of this, one can contend that it is through engagement with these theoretical constructs and their application to the use of this new phenomenon of contact that will enable sense making, and what this might mean for those that have caring responsibilities such as foster carers and social work practitioners. It also has to be said that these theoretical constructs will not just be useful for sense making, they have played a key role in informing the design of this study in terms of trying to ensure that the voice of the child in care is heard where possible throughout the study.

As has been previously inferred from Chapter One, consideration will also be given to the Foucauldian conceptualisation of governmentality and disciplinary power. Furthermore, attention will be given to considering the agency of children in general, and more specifically those that are in care. The final theoretical construct that will be given consideration is risk, but as it pertains to surveillance. At this juncture the question might be asked why risk in terms of surveillance? The answer is that it is a common theme not only in the Foucauldian conceptualisation of disciplinary power, where it is concerned with monitoring and observing; it also appears as a component of risk, a concept that is an integral aspect of social work. It needs to be added that a deliberate decision was made not to include Donezelot's policing of the family (1979) primarily because his assertions are concerned with the social policies and regulations that are used to achieve a well-functioning family that both strengthens and enhances society (Carrington, 2009:108). For the purposes of this study, the focus is on children in care who are not located within their birth family unit and therefore, as will be identified, are subject to a different set of apparatus and techniques²⁵ that control their actions.

Issues of Power

To this point a central underpinning argument has been that the concept of contact has not been adequately deconstructed and neither has it been examined from the perspective of power. Instead, what is seen are a number of attempts by academics to find out if there is a correlation between contact and reunification. In the absence of such a correlation there has been the polarisation of views as to the usefulness and worth of contact for children in care, and the continued unquestioning acceptance of a practice assumption in favour of contact by social work practitioners. What has become apparent is that the emergence of mobile communication devices and Internet and their use by children in care to make contact with members of their familial and friendship networks has begun to raise a number of anxieties and questions. These have mainly been from the perspective of safeguarding, and how unmediated contact may potentially lead to difficulties within foster placements, and at times might result in the breakdown of placements. But as yet, none of what has been learnt thus far has been examined from the perspective of power. This is unusual bearing in mind that integral to social work are the notions of anti-oppressive practice and empowerment (Tew, 2006:34). At this point it is important to emphasise the theories of power that will not be used as a lense through which to make sense of the findings. These include the Weberian, Marxist and Parsonian perspectives. This is primarily because power is considered by these theorists

²⁵ Foucault (1979)

as a 'thing' to be held either by a group, an individual, or society as a whole, and which as a characteristic flows from a central form, and is to some extent, if not completely, repressive (Sawicki, 1991). Certainly, the Weberian notion of power easily aligns itself to existing Westernised thinking in that it includes ideas of individuality and the exercise of will. The Marxist perspective depicts power as being controlled by the bourgeoisie via the economy and state and is best encapsulated in a top down model. The Parsonian perspective relies on power being a "*guarantor of social cohesion, moderating and channelling*" (Tew, 2006:35). In other words, it is legitimate for power to be vested in certain individuals and institutions for the good of society in order to get things done. The shortcoming of these theoretical perspectives is that they promote a stance that sees power staying with those in elite and dominant positions. The structuralist approach to power with its emphasis on oppression by dominant groups through mechanisms such as economic manipulation, colonialism and the threat of violence, represents another form of power which again repeats the top down determinism, and does not take account of the multiple identities that individuals now see as explaining their experiences and understandings (Tew, 2006:37).

The theoretical perspective taken by Michel Foucault is markedly different in that he rejected outright the juridico-discursive model of power (Sawicki, 1991:20), and instead considers power to be exercised, meaning that on both macro and micro levels, individuals whatever their position, are subjects to power in a dynamic and complex fashion. The perspective of power as proffered by Foucault recognises that power is not just repressive; it can also be productive and is not confined to a top down model. Foucault through his technique of historicizing discourse identified that, power could take the form of being disciplinary, meaning that this type of power regulates the population and in effect makes the population docile through the use of institutional apparatus, for example policies, procedures and legislation, and their associated techniques, such as assessment, completion of forms and provision of certain information (Sawicki, 1991; Moffatt, 1999 and Hall, 2005:75). Parton (1991) comments that within social work the disciplining mechanisms of surveillance, normalizing judgment and examination are used in an attempt to modify the behaviours of individuals.

Although it has been noted by Garrity (2010:199) that the concept of disciplinary power was used by Foucault to describe certain organisations such as prisons and mental asylums, she adds that Foucault's perspective of power cannot be easily transferred to social work settings. However, this has not prevented other academics within the field of social work seeking to employ it as a way of

analysing taken for granted ways of working and normative assumptions (Chambon, 1999, Healy, 2005 as cited in Garrity, 2010; Fook, 2002 as cited in Garrity, 2010 and see Moffat, 1999). Taking the above into account, it should be possible to question the normative assumptions in relation to contact and the exercise of both foster carer and social work practitioner authority even with the overarching discourses of vulnerability of children, safeguarding and best interests. For example, through the use of assessment, is it possible to judge the level of connection children in care have with one or more members of their familial network, and at what point are children in care not capable of making decisions as to who they want to remain in contact with. Gilbert and Powell (2010:17) express it this way, *“A Foucauldian approach is not content to take appearance at face value, it challenges and reconstructs professional assumptions”*.

The use of a Foucauldian framework is not just confined to interrogating existing social work practice. It also offers the opportunity to examine how power is exercised less obviously through institutional processes i.e. governmentality (Chambon, 1999:64), and how it influences the behaviours of social actors in relation to one another, as well as constraining them. It should be noted that the Foucauldian perspective of power is not without its critics, the first of which is that, as Foucault has said himself, it was never his intention to analyse the phenomenon of power. Rather, his intended purpose was to *“create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects”* (Foucault, 1983:1, cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). The argument is not misplaced but what Foucault’s theorisation of power does enable is the chance to go beyond what Procter (2002:40 as cited in Tew, 2006) has stated as the *“monolithic, unidirectional and oppressive”* understanding of power, and towards a representation of the concept that is much more dynamic and complex in nature.

Another criticism that could be levelled is that social work is primarily concerned with the individual who is at the centre of any intervention undertaken, and credence is given to human characteristics such as self-determinism, individualism and temperament (Chambon, 1999). This stance is entirely at odds with the Foucauldian perspective of power that sees the exercise of it as not deriving from individual social actors. Rather, it is a body (not necessarily human) that is an entity which is influenced positively and negatively through the use of various apparatus and techniques. However, Chambon (1999) notes that through the theoretical work of Hartman, (1993 as cited in Chambon, 1999: 59), Laird, (1993 as cited in Chambon, 1999: 59), as well as Sands and Nuccio (1992 as cited in Chambon, 1999:59) both service users and social work practitioners have been relocated within the

realms of societal and organisational contexts, and their associated arrangements of power. Furthermore, Chambon (1999) is quick to point out that despite Foucault protestations regarding the individual, he does recognise the effect of power at the miniscule level, stating that power “*reach[es] into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives* (Foucault, 1980:23 as cited in Chambon, 1999:19).

In summary, the Foucauldian perspective on power offers a theoretical construct in which to locate the study. It provides the necessary room to consider normative assumptions in relation to contact, as well as social work procedures and practices from a variety of social actor positions, it also accommodates the consideration that power can operate in multiple directions and through various means, and that this can be inclusive of those who could be deemed as having the least power, that is children in care.

Having settled on why the theoretical construct of power by Foucault is the most suitable for this study, the intention now is to look at the notion in greater detail. Foucault stated that, power is neither repressive and nor could it be possessed. Instead, it is exercised. (Foucault, 1975:26). He described power as being microphysical, being present in everything and rooted in a series of practices, “*.....power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effect of domination are attributed to ...dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings that one should decipher in it a network of relations*” (Foucault, 1975:26) Foucault’s perspective of power is based on the relationship between the state and individuals, in the sense that the institution would essentially exert control over the individual. He also argued that the power exerted by an institution over an individual was situated in normal daily practices that took place and did not constitute a struggle between the individual and the state as power is situated in and embedded deep within society as a whole (Howell, 2013).

Gilbert and Powell (2010) explain that Foucault also makes use of the notion of resistance to explain why the effects of power may partially succeed within certain social contexts, because there is all at once challenges to, and changes in, the existing power interactions. For example, one can assume that social work practitioners exercise the greatest level of power in relation children in care and contact with their birth parent(s) and wider familial network. However, foster carers can also

exercise power at a level that is more immediate by not allowing agreed and prescribed telephone contact because on a particular day it conflicts with an activity the child in care is taking part in at school. Furthermore, birth parent(s) through the use of mobile communication devices can resist contact plans and externally wield power in a placement by texting their child on a daily basis and asking him/her about the placement which might result in unsettling behaviours being exhibited by the child in care. The placement then becomes difficult for both the foster carer and social work practitioner to effectively manage. Through the examples given one can see that power is exercised through practices and techniques used by foster carers and birth parents. This in turn creates uncertainty, as well as unpredictability on the part of each social actor which provides an opportunity for them to exercise other techniques for example, foster carers to remove mobile phones and turn off of the Wi-Fi connection (Gilbert and Powell, 2010).

A central tenet that sits within Foucault's work about power is the notion of discourses. He postulates that discourses involve *"the general domain of all statements sometimes as an individualised group of statements"*. One could interpret vulnerability, risk or even safeguarding as discourses that are used extensively in fostering (Foucault, 2002:90). Furthermore, Foucault explains the notion of discourse encompasses a series of planned activities that account for the statements that have been made. These are deemed as a norm, and as such are unwritten, and more often than not, unquestioned. Moreover, these discourses ultimately result in a set of statements that lead to certain ideas and what Foucault describes as *"combination of utterances"* (Foucault, 2002:90). Furthermore, discourse constructs the topic, which in turn defines and produces objects of knowledge, meaning that through the topic that is discussed and interpreted, this influences which concepts are put into practice and how they are used to regulate the behaviour of others (Hall, 2005:72). This is evidenced in relation to the discourses that constitute how contact is perceived by both social work practitioners and researchers, and how this has influenced what research is undertaken and its focus. Discourses are therefore encapsulated in multiple texts, in the actions of social actors, empirical research and also institutions. For example, within the realm of fostering there is the discourse that children in care are vulnerable and need to be safeguarded. This results in a series of activities such as supervised contact, where the actions of birth parent(s) and their children are monitored, where details of the contact are recorded for a variety of purposes that may include assessment, and ultimately a decision in relation to reunification. These activities are influenced by national and local policy, as well as guidance that is adhered to across a number of institutions such as children's social care services and contact centres meaning that the discourse of vulnerability and safeguarding is continually repeated in more than one arena.

Governmentality

Governmentality, according to Kendall and Wickham (2007) was Foucault's response to critics who highlighted that his interpretation of power did not stretch to include state power. For Foucault governmentality was a way of describing the practices of government as they emerged in the eighteenth century. O'Malley (2008) has associated governmentality with two key facets. The first is that governmentality is not located within the realm of the state, rather it is carried out in every strata and is inclusive of self-government of individuals. The second facet is that, governmentality is concerned with the 'how' therefore, the process of analysis may be driven by questions in relation to how has a specific policy has been created, how it will be converted to a method of working that is practicable, and how will a specific profession charged with the responsibility of carrying out the responsibility respond. Consequently, for a researcher governmentality represents a frame of mind that is influenced by a sensitivity to the rationalities of how power is exercised through various mechanisms and activities as they take place on a daily basis. It is important to make clear that the author has not and will not be making use of Foucault's approach of historical investigation (archaeology). Instead the aim is to engage with the 'how' of children in care's use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact, and the way in which it is managed by foster carers and social work practitioners. Nevertheless, before the questions in relation to how can be asked it is also important to consider two other aspects of Foucault's theorisation of power, one is risk and the other is disciplinary power.

Lupton (1999:89) contends that risk is a governmental strategy of power that controls both individuals and population and is governed through a variety of professionals, organisations knowledges and also practices. It is through the ongoing process of collecting information about risk and it being analysed that subsequently leads to it being problematised, and in doing so leads to the assumption that risk can be calculated and managed. As part of this process individuals and groups are labelled as being 'at risk', the consequence of this is that they require certain knowledge and interventions. According to Lupton (1999:95) discourses on risk are a valuable tool to control the body meaning that individuals police themselves in order to ensure their wellbeing. For those members of the population identified as either being *at risk* or being *a risk*, for example children in care; this leads to the monitoring and identification of potential risk as opposed to precise dangers or specific behaviours. In sum, the label of 'risky' brings with it the techniques of firstly surveillance and secondly, regulation of future behaviours. Importantly, because an individual is labelled and categorised as being part of a risk group the interventions that are provided are based on the characteristic of the group, rather than the individual (Lupton, 1999:96).

The fact that Foucault's interpretation encompasses risk and the idea of risky individuals is highly significant as it enables us to encompass the risk discourse that is associated with children and their use of mobile communication devices and the Internet in general. As has been seen this discourse takes on even greater meaning when applied to children in care, whose status is often synonymous with vulnerability and they are seen as being in need of protection not just from the dangers of the Internet but also members of their own familial network and others known to them.

Agency of children

What has been seen from Chapter 2 is that the theories that underpin contact make no mention of children in care being willing or able to make choices about who they want to relate to. This is despite the fact that guidance clearly states that children in care are to be asked by social work practitioners about their wishes and feeling in relation to contact. This absence may be due, as will be seen later, to how children and young people are perceived. The notion of a child being considered and acknowledged as a human being who is able to exercise self-determinism, can leave some adults oscillating between ideas of precociousness and the application of the children's rights agenda (Neale and Smart, 1998:2). This oscillation undoubtedly has its origin in how children and childhood have been understood (Neale and Smart, 1998; Alanen, 1998 and James, 1998). Hendrick (1990:34) is of the view that from the 1800s to the present day that the institution and construction of childhood has been developed by professional middle-class adults. Other leading sociological commentators such as James and Prout (1990:7b) have described childhood as '*an actively negotiated set of relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted*'. These academics agree that the concept of childhood is socially constructed and continues to be as society changes and is influenced by social change (Alanen, 1998 and Woodhead, 2002). Alternatively, Qvortrup (1987:5) draws the conclusion that childhood is an integral part of society and that what constantly takes place is a '*dynamic interaction*' between the adult and child populace and that this is subject to ongoing reformulation. From an entirely different perspective Lavalette and Cunningham (2002:9) comment that childhood as a period in life is associated with protection and freedom exemplified by learning and play, and that it should be free worries and responsibilities.

Thus far what has been provided are a number of explanations of childhood however, a further explanation can be found in the taken for granted assumptions and views about children and childhood that have been guided by the dominant narratives of the biological and psychological development of children. The dominant narrative of the biological development of children is

characterised by immaturity, dependence, physical weakness and the need for protection (Lansdown, 1994 as cited in Morrow and Richards, 1996:97). James and Prout (1990b:10) explain that in terms of psychology it is based on the idea of natural growth where a child gradually develops competence as they mature (Woodhead, 2005), in other words 'growing up' to full competency as an adult. In summary, the concept of childhood as informed by psychology and biology represents an evolutionary model "*where the child as [s/he] develops into an adult represents a progression of simplicity to complexity of thought from irrational to rational behaviour*" (James and Prout, 1990a: 24).

One might, at this point, ask in what way are these two dominating narratives connected to the agency or self-determination of the individual child. The answer to this question is more than adequately explained by James and Prout (1990b:11) who contend that because childhood is seen as a stage of development where maturation has not yet been reached this means that the activities of children, such as their play, language and interaction with adults, is seen as primitive. Therefore, the combination of 'primitive thinking' and lack of maturity means that children are not deemed by adults to be capable or able to make decisions and carry them through as adults would.

It has only been since the 1970s that consideration has been given to the experiences of children and the understanding of their reality and this has led to a change in the way in which they are seen, as participants in the world that they occupy, and not simply as passive (James and Prout, 1990a; James and Prout, 1996; James et al., 1998; Lavalette and Cunningham, 2002; Woodhead, 1990 and 2005; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998; Neale and Smart, 1998; Eekelaar, 1994 and Alanen, 1998).

James and Prout (1995 and 1996) have taken the idea of competency in children one step further by suggesting that the individual child moves in and out of different social environments e.g. from home, to school, to the children's football club on a Saturday morning. They argue that within each of these social environments children will be exercising different levels of agency. They go as far as suggesting that children may have "*multiple identities and subjectivities, each both have an effect and a cause of the environments within which they engage*" (James and Prout, 1996:48). This particular argument is significant. It leaves room to deliberate that children are able to use a variety of complex strategies in varying social environments. The consequence of that is, "*children [are] complex actors in, and interpreters of, a complex world*" (James and Prout, 1996:49). Such a view is

in stark contrast to the notion of socialization²⁶ that sees children as having little interaction with their external environment other than absorption. Despite what has been said about the competency of children, there is a need to realise that even when it is exercised it can be tempered by a number of factors. These include the social context in which the individual child is operating in may have a containing and constraining effect (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998).

Where children and young people have been recognised as having agency, this has also led to the realisation that they are a social group in their own right; they are in actual fact often disadvantaged and powerless because they are minors who have, as has already been noted, characteristics that equate to not being fully developed or formed either physically or cognitively. This lack of maturation has ultimately led to the assertion that they need to be defended and this, according to Qvortrup, is the motivation for adults to not only claim power, but also exercise it over children (1987:11). He adds that this supposed need for children to be defended is linked to the notion of their need for protection. Qvortrup (1987:11) keenly argues that this protective measure in actual fact conceals a range of other possibilities that may involve constraints on children's behaviour and therefore, subsequent denial of their rights. Generally, the contention made by Qvortrup (1987:11) is that *"the protection of children can be interpreted as a protection of the interests of adults"*. The quintessential issue therefore, is that, children, unlike many other social groups in western society are subject to a collective judgement that sees the denial of opportunities and rights that are equal to those of adults (Qvortrup, 1987).

In so far as competency can be exercised by children it is done so based on an adult's ability to assess a child's developing competence. Yet, the individual child is able to use a number of strategies in order to have his/her own goals met. These strategies will involve being able to interpret adult thinking and expectations, engage in tussles for power, negotiate various relationships and also prioritise the needs of others (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998:9 and Woodhead, 2005). The universal picture of childhood that has been presented thus far is one that is predicated on the understanding of a human being in the making who is vulnerable, dependent and lacking cognitive maturity. In contrast, childhood studies allow room for children to be considered as human beings in their own right and who experience and contribute to their various social worlds. This sociological perspective challenges taken for granted assumptions about children and

²⁶ where children are taught social expectations and norms in relation to the family and wider world

childhood. Moreover, this perspective calls into the question the adult decision-making in relation to 'best interests' and the assessment of children's needs (Eekelaar, 1994 and Woodhead, 1990)

Neale and Smart (1998:16) also note that this sociological perspective allows for children's experiences *"to be grounded within the realities of their everyday lives, particularly in contexts where they interact with adults. This stance ultimately challenges the perspective of adults who are in roles of authority to the extent that there is a need to acknowledge the process of growing up is relative and not absolute"* (Woodhead, 2005:95).

The engagement with childhood studies is deliberate and twofold. Firstly, it has been seen from the previous empirical studies on contact that the effects can be either positive or negative dependent upon a range of factors linked to the behaviour and age of the child in care; the willingness of foster carers to support contact; social work practitioner plans for reunification and the motivation of birth parents. The empirical studies into contact have taken great care to describe the impact on the child or young person in care, and some researchers have even gone as far to both capture the views of children in care, but the shortcoming would seem to be that researchers have been blind to the fact that children and young people in care are not passive beings and therefore they interact and influence their environment, and this may explain why the correlation between contact and reunification to this date has never been confirmed. Consequently, there is a gap in terms of the literature not recognising the agency of children and failing to undertake empirical research with this as the ontological position from the outset. Relatedly, consideration of childhood studies allows us to contemplate the agency exercised by children in care when making use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact, thereby enabling us to make sense of how this phenomenon, that is currently missing from the literature, is deployed. Thus, the premise for this study is address this gap by anchoring the study in an ontological position that recognises that children in care have not only exercised agency, but as social actors, they are involved and influence the power dynamic that is inherent in contact.

To reiterate, if the perspectives of childhood and children as outlined by James and Prout (1996) and Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998) are to be considered as a stage of human development in which the exercise of agency and competence is as valid as that of the adult world, then one can begin to understand, and guess why, children in care often complain about contact. Their complaints could be representative of the fact that they are not able to exercise competence in one of the most

important areas of their lives. Instead, decisions regarding who children in care want to see and when, are left to adults. Although aware of their wishes and feelings, these adults are likely to have failed to give these due weight and consideration. Rather, they dismiss these wishes and feelings as merely childish desires that are infused with irrationality (James and Prout, 1990a *ibid*). Above all, it would seem that, there is the need to recognise current understandings of contact have been informed from an adult perspective. All the studies conducted to date have been predicated on the social construction of childhood through various historical periods and have not attributed to children in care the ability both to influence and be influenced as social actors in their own right. In other words, there has been little or no research that has entirely entered the world of the children in care, as lived and enacted on a daily basis in relation to contact with members from their familial and friendship networks. If the perspective of children in care as being social actors is accepted, then there is room to explore how these children maintain, expand and actively promote atrophy in terms of certain family relationships, as well as that of friends. Moreover, this perspective demands that children in care do not have contact 'done to them' but rather have an active part in contact.

The conceptual perspectives outlined thus far leave us room to critically question the presence of power dynamics in relation to contact. It has already been noted from researchers such as Rowe and Lambert (1980) and Millham et al., (1986) that social work practitioners before the Children Act 1989 exercised far too much arbitrary power. It can be contended that as one deconstructs the concept and practice of contact one is able to encompass the following queries: if children are to be recognised as social actors, how do children in care negotiate the power dynamics that exist, and is their use of mobile technology and social media an exercise of their personal agency and competence? Other questions that can be raised include: how do current contact arrangements that children in care experience enable them to exercise agency and competence in terms of maintaining family links (Millham et al., 1986) with people that are important to them? In closing, the consideration of childhood studies and how it might apply to contact as it is currently understood has raised a number of significant questions that have so far not been answered by even the most recent literature that exists for the phenomenon of contact using mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact. As stated above the intention of this study is to respond to the stated gaps in the literature.

Risk

It has already been inferred that under a perspective of childhood that is informed by biological and psychological discourses the response from adults is to protect. For children who are in the care of the state an integral aspect of the role of both social work practitioners and foster carers is to protect and safeguard. In the case of children in care protection and safeguarding are encapsulated in decisions by social work practitioners about what is in the child's best interests. However, social work practitioners' more often than not make decisions that are not just based on best interests, but also the management of risk (Smith, 2008a). The consideration of risk and its management is a central and enduring component of social work practice, and it is this notion that this chapter will finish on.

Key theorists in relation to risk, Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) have been influential in providing conceptual thinking in relation to the increasing emergence of risk in society. Both theorists suggest that the current preoccupation with risk has emerged as a result of the complexity of modern day society that increasingly is characterised by complications and insecurity. Smith (2008a and 2010b) explains that, a combination of factors such as globalisation; the breakdown in family and the loss of confidence in science has meant that society has not been able to achieve the predictability desired and this has led to a greater sense of uncertainty. Parton (1996) states that the emergence of risk within social work stems from the decline of welfarism with its links to community and citizenship and the ascendancy of individual responsibility for self. Consequently, those charged with the management of risk, that is 'experts' which includes social work practitioners need to deal with complex problems and ensure a predictive and positive outcome through the use of investigation, assessment and control (Smith, 2008a:4).

On a similar and more explicit note, Horlick-Jones argues that, in public sector organisations in certain Western countries they have become saturated by the language of risk and the application of risk techniques (2005:94). In answer to these responsibilities and the expectations, it can be posited that, social work practitioners have had to manage risk on the basis of reducing and minimising harm. This has meant dealing with uncertainty in the face of circumstances that are not fully known, assessments that change rapidly because of new or conflicting information, and a course of interventions; the consequences of which may not be known for some considerable time afterwards (Macdonald and Macdonald, 2010).

It is important to note that the notion of risk is not just a feature of wider society, it is also associated with childhood. Simpson (2013: 98) argues that, the sanctity of childhood and the ongoing sense of social anxiety that surrounds children and young people is leading to a moral panic, which Clapton, Cree and Smith (2012) describe as occurrences of social alarm that capture the public imagination and are characterised by deviancy, a moral dimension and disproportionality. The moral panic we are seeing in relation to the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children and young people in general stems from the fact that, these methods of communication are highly individualised, meaning that there is an inherent privacy and self-development that is out of the immediate sight and reach of parents, foster carers and social work practitioners. Such view is corroborated by Buckingham (2007) who remarks that with the advent of mobile communication devices and the Internet adults may experience a loss of control as children and young people are able through communication technology and the Internet to communicate with anyone of their choice and at great speed.

Summary

It has been noted from Chapter 2 that the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children in care seems to be synonymous with risk, as will be seen later in the study how social work practitioners and foster carers deal with this 'risk'. Meanwhile, by taking account of conceptual constructs such as Foucault's governmentality and disciplinary power (1977), as well as the agency of children and risk and its place in social work, one has, as stated previously, put in place a series of lenses through which it is possible to make sense of the findings that will be reported as part of this study. However, before considering the findings it is necessary to make explicit the epistemological and ontological positions of the author and how this has subsequently influenced the research design and methodology of the study.

Chapter Four

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain those aspects of the study that are concerned with the methodology of data collection and how this data was analysed. This chapter is in four parts. The first section details the strategy employed to answer the research questions posed in Chapter One. Importantly, this includes the ontological and epistemological positions of the researcher and how these influenced the research design. Information is provided on the respondent groups of young people in care, their foster carers and social work practitioners all of whom contributed to the study. In keeping with good research integrity particulars will be given regarding ethical considerations; informed consent; confidentiality and anonymity. The second section delineates the operative aspects of the fieldwork that was carried out. This includes: choice of locale; piloting research material; and negotiating access. Attention has also been given to the challenges of the fieldwork and how they were overcome. The third section of the chapter focuses on the analytical phase of the study. This includes specifics regarding the analytical strategy, the argument for adopting a thematic approach of the Framework Method, and details as to how this Method was carried out. The final section of the chapter covers the limitations that were associated with the research design and methodology.

The Research Problem

In Chapters Two and Three there was a rehearsal of the fundamental contact rights of children and young people in the care system either through reasons of abuse or neglect, or having been voluntarily placed in care by birth parent(s). This right is captured in the Children Act 1989 s.34, as well as in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and also human rights legislation. The responsibility for ensuring that a child in care remains in contact with members of his/her familial network falls to individual local authorities. The local authority has a legal duty to *“endeavour to promote contact between a child in care and his/her parents or others, unless it is not practicable to do so”* (Children Act 1989 s.34). Children in care have regularly voiced their desire to have more contact with members of their familial network and to maintain a connection with individuals outside of the immediate birth family (see The Office of the Children’s Rights Director 2009 and 2012). This desire has proved extremely difficult to realise until the recent advent of mobile telecommunication and devices such as the smartphone. This technological development has

meant children in care are no longer confined by the traditional boundaries as described by Rowe et al., (1984); Millham et al., (1986) and Bullock et al., (1993), as described in Chapter Two. The smartphone has allowed children in care to have contact on their own terms, in a time and place that suits them, and without the mediation of foster carers and social work practitioners. Evidence suggests that this new form of contact cannot be readily managed by foster carers or social work practitioners (Bowyer, 2009; Stephenson, 2009; Cooper, 2009; Fursland; 2010 and Simpson, 2013). Consequently, children in care, as well as birth parent(s) are, through mobile communication devices and the Internet, taking it upon themselves to have contact that sometimes may be in direct contravention to the Care Plan and instructions issued as part of a Care Order (Adams, 2012; Fursland, 2010 and Schofield et al., 2009). The literature in relation to this is concerned with the effects of unmediated contact through the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. But little evidence is available as to how this contact takes place and with whom. This is a gap that this study will seek to address.

Contact remains a contested concept and there is no clear and concrete empirical evidence to support whether or not it is beneficial for children in care. It is also apparent that the empirical evidence is ambivalent in relation to contact being able to achieve a number of outcomes that include: enabling a child in care to form new attachments; providing a child with a sense of his/her family history and self-identity, healing from negative feelings and also being of therapeutic worth. This ambivalence, as has been seen, is due in part to the methodological approaches undertaken in relation to research into contact (Quinton, 1997 and Boyle, 2017). However, an argument has been posited in Chapter Two that current empirical evidence fails to adequately deconstruct the concept beyond its practice implications and the impact on children in care and birth parents, as well as those that have to organise and support it i.e. social work practitioners and foster carers. It has also been contended that this failure to question the concept of contact has meant that researchers and policy makers alike, have seemingly not taken into account the power differentials that are prevalent within the contact process, and also the agency of children in care. Rather, researchers and commentators have viewed the outcomes in relation to contact as being linked to poor attachment, the inadequacies of birth parent(s), poor processes in the form of unsuitable venues for contact and the lack of prioritisation by social work practitioners (Cleaver, 2000; Delfrabro et al., 2002; Schofield and Beek, 2005; Schofield, Ward and Young, 2009; Triseliotis, 2010; Wade et al., 2011; Boddy et al., 2013 and Narey and Owers, 2018). There has also been a rather singular focus on

establishing whether or not a correlation exists between contact and reunification and this has meant that there has been no acknowledgement of the power inequalities that exist in contact. The argument has also been made that the emergence of mobile communication devices and the Internet and their use by children in care to make contact with members of their familial and friendship networks has, as seen in Chapter Two has begun to expose the power differentials that exist within contact which do not exist solely between adult and child. It can also be contended that such differentials exist between adults i.e. foster carers, social work practitioners and birth parents. Given the way in which this new phenomenon is disrupting notions of contact as currently perceived the attention and interest of academics has been captured and research has been undertaken (see MacDonald et al., 2014; Greenhow et al., 2017 and Wilson, 2016). Yet it would seem that these researchers have repeated the same omission of failing to account either for any power dynamics or the agency of the child in care, as part of this new form of contact. This constitutes another gap in the literature and therefore the aim of the study is to address this also.

A further gap identified in the most recent literature (Willoughby, 2018; Children's Commissioner, 2017 and Guardian Angels, 2016) is how foster carers and also social work practitioners are responding to this new found form of contact. There are common themes from this new area of literature that include: risk; breakdown in placements, that children in care are conversant, and more able in their use of the technology than foster carers and that there is limited training for foster carers and social work practitioners on how to effectively manage use. However, a minimal amount of evidence is available regarding how mobile communication devices and the Internet are managed and the impact that this has on children in care's ability to have contact with members of his/her friendship and familial networks. This study will aim to provide a more in-depth understanding of how foster carers manage and negotiate use of mobile communication devices and the Internet in the fostering setting. With regards to social work practitioners the literature is primarily focused on the ethical implications of how they, as part of a profession, make use of mobile communication technology for child protection work (Doel et al., 2010; Reamer, 2013a; 2013b; Breyette and Hill, 2015; Sage and Sage, 2016 and Simpson, 2016). Consequently, there is a gap in the literature as to how social work practitioners manage use. The gaps that have been outlined indicate that there is a need to build on the existing knowledge base further as part of gaining a much more in-depth understanding of the new phenomenon and to help us begin to question taken for granted assumptions.

Therefore, this study will seek to respond by addressing the gaps in the literature by asking the following questions:

- Do young people in care make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact with their familial and friendship networks, if so, how is this carried out?
- Does the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet enhance or hinder communication between young people in care and individuals from their familial and friendship networks?

Appreciating that both foster carers and allocated social work practitioners are significant actors in terms of the phenomenon of contact, the final question takes into account their roles and responsibilities and is as follows:

- How do foster carers and social work practitioners negotiate and manage contact that is undertaken through the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care?

Methodology

This study constitutes a micro-level approach to the phenomenon of young people in care who use mobile communication devices and the Internet to make contact with members of their familial network that is inclusive of birth or wider family, for example step parents and siblings, as well as grandparents, aunts, uncles and close family friends. This broad church of individuals described as part of the familial network reflects current human rights legislation as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNICEF, 1999) both of which identify the right to family life. However, it is important to note that contact can also extend to the child in care's friendship network under the auspices of Section 34 Children Act 1989. The study is specifically concerned with the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care to facilitate communication with a range of people including those named in their Care Plan. As part of the recruitment of respondents the study has sought to deliberately exclude those young people in care who have been identified as having contact with individuals, who are deemed by Children's Social Care as posing a safeguarding risk to the young person's wellbeing.

Research Strategy

In order to answer the research questions posed, an abductive strategy was employed that included elements of an inductive and deductive approach which allowed for maximum flexibility. The inductive approach was linked to the existing use of the literature, whilst the deductive approach recognised new themes that were identified from the data that informed a number of original notions in relation to children in care and their use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact. The combination of the approaches enables, in the first instance, not only a description of the phenomenon but also a series of conclusions to be reached that also include an association. Where this is followed by a deductive approach there is the necessary room and flexibility to explain the association (Blaikie, 2010:86). A retroductive research approach was discounted because of its concern with discovering the underlying configurations of the phenomenon as it presents in its context this was considered a potential distraction in terms of not allowing the various meanings from respondents to be adequately described or represented.

Ontological and epistemological positions

The literature in relation to contact has highlighted the contested nature of the concept in terms of what it is able to achieve and its usefulness. Yet despite this dichotomy there has been consensus on how research into contact has been undertaken. A positivist framework has been used for empirical research, that has taken the form of large scale studies (Sinclair et al., 2005 and Wade et al., 2011) that were focused on reunification, as well as the measurement of relationships (McAuley, 1996); and the use of scales to measure behaviours e.g. Conduct and Hyperactivity Scale (Delfrabbo, 2002). The overall findings in relation to contact and what it is able to achieve can be summarised as equivocal (Quinton et al., 1997 and Boyle, 2017). The various findings of empirical research undertaken over a number of years have led to a series of observations that have become social work practice truths (see Biehal, 2007). Other research studies that have examined the impact of contact on children and their birth relatives report similar messages in relation to the potential harm to children in care (Macaskill, 2002; Neil, Schofield and Beek, 2005; McWey and Mullis, 2004; Beek and Schofield, 2005 and Sen and Broadhurst, 2011), but once again, none made any reference to a potential power dynamic within contact.

Viewed from another perspective it can be posited that there has been the emergence of what Kuhn has described as a 'paradigm' (1970 as cited in Moses and Knutsen, 2007:177). That is, within social

work there is a like-mindedness that extends to a common set of tenets and methodological approaches. These build upon one another leaving little room for any other inferences in relation to the concept of contact. This situation has occurred because researchers have been keen to discover causality and patterns in terms of reunification and child wellbeing whilst not fully appreciating that the respondents were involved in familial relationships in which the nature and level of interaction cannot necessarily be quantified (Millham et al., 1986:9-10 and Hancke, 2009). Lately, there has been a departure from this approach in a number of studies that have made use of a qualitative approach to examine mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact (see MacDonald et al., 2014; Sen, 2015b; Wilson, 2016 and Greenhow et al., 2017). Regrettably, there is no evidence to suggest that consideration has been given to power dynamics or the agency of the children in care. For the purposes of this study an epistemological presumption in favour of an interpretivist paradigm that uses an inductive and deductive approach has been employed. It should be noted that a deductive approach was also made use of because it created an opportunity to build a series of associations from the patterns that were revealed as a result of studying the phenomenon of children in care and their use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact.

Research Design

Using triadic semi-structured interviews of young people in care, their foster carers and allocated social workers, an exploration was made of how these young people engaged in contact via the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet, and the wider implications for those that have responsibility for their wellbeing. The Framework analytic method (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) provided the opportunity to analyse the various attitudes, as well as complementary and contradictory perspectives of young people in care, their foster carers and social work practitioners.

As a methodology, triadic interviews have been extensively used amongst researchers in the medical profession. They have used it for empirical studies involving patients, their carers and medical staff (see Gysels et al., 2008; Kendall et al., 2009 and Roberto et al., 2011). It has also been used for multi-generational interviewing in family studies (see Baxter et al., 2006; Hernandez et al., 1994; Brody et al., 1983 and Hatchett, 2014). Where the method of the triadic interviews has been used, researchers have acknowledged that there is an opportunity to gain a *“more holistic and multi-dimensional understanding of the problem”* (Brownhill and Hickey, 2012:370). This particular method of qualitative analysis also has the added advantage of ensuring that a *‘holistic, descriptive overview of the entire dataset’* is obtained (Gale et al., 2013).

As stated above, the approach allows for complementarity and contradictions. It also enabled the needs and perceptions of individual participants to be recorded (Kendall et al., 2009 and Brownhill and Hickey, 2012). This aspect of the triadic method is expanded upon by Brownhill and Hickey (2012:373) who comment that as part of their research involving farmers, agricultural researchers and policymakers, they noted the subjective nature and response of each individual interview. For the purposes of their research they interpreted them as partial because of the way in which each narrative account overlapped with others. Such an outcome for the purposes of this study is liable to provide a complex picture of data that includes the individual experience, the dynamic of the fostering setting and also the wider care system that all three respondent groups (children in care, foster carers and social work practitioners) function within. What this meant in terms of this study was that, the author was able to contrast and compare the responses from each respondent group, and in doing so, was able to observe the manifestations of power not just across relationships within individual triads, but also across respondent groups.

In Chapter Three it was seen that one of the theoretical constructs that will be relied upon to make sense of the findings from the study is the agency of children. Therefore, as part of acknowledging the influence of this construct, and also to reflect the ontological and epistemological stance that recognises children as experts of their own lives, the decision was made to make use of semi-structured interviews (Gallagher, 2011:67). Another benefit of semi-structured interviews was the opportunity to find out what others feel and think about the phenomenon thereby providing nuance and complexity (Rubin and Rubin, 1995 and Mason, 2002). Applying the triadic method with young people in care, provides an opportunity to understand how key people such as the foster carer and social work practitioner, fit into the world of the young person, and to assess what influence they may or may not have regarding the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care for contact. This method also acknowledges that across the individual triad there is not just one reality; rather the meanings shared by each member of the triad are socially constructed (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). In particular, the use of semi-structured interviews avoids the problem of a limited set of responses that are rational in nature and ignore the emotional dimension that is inherent within the realm of contact (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

Consideration was given to a range of other qualitative methods including focus groups, unstructured individual in-depth interviews, structured interviews and ethnography which could be

employed in order to answer the research questions. As the study was concerned with gathering data from three different groups of respondents, there was the strong possibility of making use of the focus group method. A key advantage of such a method for child respondents is that it can make the research environment far more comfortable because they are in the company of their peers (Gallagher, 2010 citing Hall, 2006). However, there are a number of challenges as outlined by Tisdall et al. (2011) these include the problem of group dynamics that are influenced by a lack of trust, dominating personalities and behaviours, and also a perceived lack of privacy. It was considered that a possible way of mitigating these influences would be through the use of more creative methods such as photographs, music, drawings and drama. However, as other researchers have found to their cost there are implications in terms of resources, behaviour management and compatibility for this type of data alongside the more traditional forms, such as interviews and questionnaires (Tisdall et al., 2011; Beazley, 2009 and Alderson and Morrow, 2011). It was noted that, the shortcomings of this method include the likelihood that the data would only provide answers at a general level, as a result of not necessarily being able to govern the emphasis of the focus group and also the group dynamics.

As part of the research design thought was also given to unstructured in-depth interviews. It was assumed that this method would provide the opportunity to gather data rich in complexity and enable a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. However, it was recognised that the method may have some appeal for adult respondents, but the same might not necessarily be true for child respondents who would be involved in the study (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). This is because of the nature of the unstructured in-depth interview. Only one or two topics may be covered in the period of time allocated for each interview because the researcher would have limited control over what was discussed. Thus, the concern was that not all the areas of interest would be adequately covered and this therefore, would limit the depth and breadth of the available data. Similarly, it was considered that there could potentially be difficulties with a structured interview as it was thought that this was unlikely to promote a child-friendly approach. It was also thought not suitable to adopt an ethnographic approach for the study because that relies on understanding a particular phenomenon from observation. It also needs to be added that this approach could have presented considerable ethical challenges that may not been addressed effectively by a small scale study with a limited timeframe. Furthermore, the research questions posed are concerned with the 'how', as well as the views and perspectives of the respondents groups, which means that the approach would not have been suitable.

Having settled on the data gathering method of semi-structured triadic interviews and building on the experience of other researchers who have used this method (Kendall, 2009: 33; Brown and Hickey, 2012; Gysels et al., 2008; Roberto et al., 2011; Miller-Karnieli et al., 2012; Kendall-Scott et al., 2009 and Baxter et al., 2006), the ideal envisaged was to speak face-to-face with the respondent groups of young people in care, their foster carers and social work practitioners. In keeping with the epistemological and ontological approach outlined earlier, the decision was made to undertake face-to-face interviews with the young people in care first, as part of recognising their standing as social actors who are able to describe their lived experience. This would then be followed by semi-structured face-to-face interviews with foster carers and finally social work practitioners. However, because of the challenges in securing social work practitioner time it was deemed necessary to interview them by telephone (Hepinstall, 2000 and Gilbertson and Barber, 2007). It was also decided that where there was a likelihood of incomplete triads (in other words an interview is achieved with the young person in care, but not with the other adult members of the triad (foster carer and/or social work practitioner) the triad would be abandoned. However, the data from the respondent would be kept and used primarily because of the small number of triads that were recruited to the study. Furthermore, it was accepted that although the triad was incomplete the data could still be effectively used in various combinations, as part of identifying key themes that might be common across respondent groups.

The sample size consisted of twelve triads consequently, the number of young people in care recruited was twelve (4 female and 8 males) In terms of their age a third (no=4) of the respondents were fourteen years of age. Three young people in care were seventeen years of age and another young person in care was eighteen years of age and in a Staying Put arrangement. Two young people were aged fifteen. The sample also included three young people with a learning disability. In terms of foster carers, there were thirteen recruited, this was inclusive of a married couple (male no=4 and female no=9). They ranged in age from forty-five to seventy years of age. The social work practitioners recruited was eleven and they were all female (there was one social work practitioner who had responsibility for two young people who took part in the study).

[Design of the semi-structured interviews](#)

The epistemological and ontological stance taken for this study meant the creation of three separate interview schedules. These would allow for a level of interaction between the author and the

respondent groups that in essence would constitute a 'conversation with purpose' (Mason, 2002: 67). At the same time it was recognised that the semi-structured interviews could potentially allow the opportunity to nudge each respondent towards sharing their perspective of the complexities of the phenomenon in a fashion that would enable the author to identify the multiplicity of meanings, experiences and understandings that were either singular to a particular triad or were prevalent amongst the individual respondent groups (Mason, 2002; Fontana and Frey, 1998 and Ritchie et al., 2014).

The interview schedule was designed to allow for deliberate links via analysis to be made between each respondent group or within triadic relationships. As a consequence, the schedules (*see Appendices A, D and E: Interview Schedules for child/young people; foster carers and social work practitioners respectively*) contained details about the study in terms of the purpose, the amount of time required for the interview, confidentiality, consent and also data collection. The schedule then moved on to a series of simple fact finding questions and then into the main body of the interview. The schedule ended with a series of closing statements that provided each respondent with the opportunity to share any further information and what would happen to the data that had been shared.

Appreciating that there might potentially be difficulties in relation to young people in care not necessarily being comfortable answering questions in a one-to-one setting (Cree, 2001; Alderson and Morrow, 2011 and McCarry, 2012), a traffic light system²⁷ was designed to manage the pace of the semi-structured interview. It was also reiterated to the young person in care that he/she could stop the interview without any fear that it would prove personally detrimental, in the sense of not affecting their contact arrangements or resulting in the confiscation of their mobile communication device. For the young people in care, their interview comprised of two distinct parts. These were aimed at adopting an approach that was child-centred and activity based (Punch, 2002 and Gillies and Robinson, 2012). The first half of the semi-structured interview saw the use of an Ecomap that had been designed to identify those individuals named in the Care Plan, as well as other important friends and family members (*see Appendix B: Ecomap Template*). An Ecomap is a visual assessment

²⁷ A traffic light system of cards (green representing that the interview can continue; amber that there is a need to pause the interview and red meaning that the interview should be stopped altogether, or a question is to be passed over).

tool that both identifies and measures the strength and weakness of the relationships that form part of an individual's familial and friendship network (Fink, 2008). For the purposes of this study an Ecomap was used to record the type of relationships, familial or friendship (*see Appendix B (i) Ecomap for Jane and Appendix B (ii) Ecomap for Lamar*). The Ecomap was also used to capture the frequency and style of communication that took place. As part of the development of the semi-structured interviews it was recognised that some of young people in care from the sample could be disabled, and as such adaptations would need to be made to the semi-structure interview. For example, making use of assistive technologies or an interpreter for those young people in care whose first language was not English. It was found that for three young people who took part in the study had recognised learning disabilities, but they made the choice to not make use of assistive technologies. Furthermore, valuing that young people in care can exercise agency, it was realised that they could be involved in communication with individuals deemed by Children's Social Care to be a risk. Therefore, a written notification appeared on all the literature about not sharing details regarding persons not known to their social work practitioner or foster carer (*see Appendix C: Information bundle for young people in care*)

With regard to interviewing the remaining respondent groups of the triad (foster carers and social work practitioners), the questions provided an opportunity for the adult respondents not only to comment on how contact had taken place previously but also their experiences of this new phenomenon and their reaction to it. The adult respondents were also able to comment on how they negotiated and managed the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet when use was made for contact (*see Appendix D: Interview Schedule for Foster Carers and Appendix E: Interview Schedule for Social Work Practitioners*).

A critical aspect of the study was the intention to build a participatory approach for young people in care that reflected the ontological position stated previously. This meant that young people in care would influence the design of the interview schedule in terms of how the Ecomap could best be used and also the questions asked as part of the semi-structured interview. This was to be done as part of a Youth Advisory Panel. A specific amount of time had been set aside to create a Youth Advisory Panel. Unfortunately, it was not possible to recruit young people to a Youth Advisory Panel and therefore, the decision was made to use the first young person in care interview as a pilot, and the feedback from this was then used to inform the remaining semi-structured interviews involving young people in care. The fact that a Youth Advisory Panel was not able to be formulated was highly

disappointing, as to the aim was to illustrate, as a characteristic of this study, the ability of young people in care to influence research and make choices in how a study relating to their peers could be designed.

The second challenge that was encountered was difficulties in piloting the remaining interview schedules for the other two respondent groups of foster carers and social work practitioners. It was originally envisaged that the piloting would be carried out within the local authority hosting the study. However, being aware of the potential work involved and the likelihood of this reducing the chances of a local authority being willing to host the study, the decision was made to externally carry out a pilot for the semi-structured interviews through the author calling on existing professional and personal networks. This approach did have a number of shortfalls in the sense of not being able to obtain unbiased feedback about the semi-structured interviews that was purely concerned with the questions because the individuals approached were invested at some level in a personal or professional relationship with the author. With this in mind when conducting the first interviews with foster carers and social work practitioners, the author was alert to the reactions of the respondents to the questions and changed the semi-structured interviews accordingly.

Ahead of the actual semi-structured interviews with each respondent group there was a period of piloting. This pilot phase revealed that all the semi-structured interviews required amendments to the order of the questions posed, the terminology used, as well as increasing the number of open questions. It was noted that the need to increase the number of open questions was particularly in relation to the social work practitioners' experiences and knowledge.

Ethical Considerations

As the study focused on young people in care who were deemed vulnerable, consideration needed to be given to any distress that might be inadvertently experienced as part of the research process (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Consequently, work was undertaken in partnership with both the allocated social work practitioners and foster carers, as well as the young people in care regarding contingencies that could be put in place e.g. referral to counselling and support services and reiterating their freedom to withdraw at any point.

At the start of the thesis reference was made to the author's status as a qualified registered social work practitioner, whose specialism is in fostering. Admittedly, the author's practice expertise influenced the ethical considerations that were made in relation to the study. As the study involved interviewing young people in care there were considerable ethical issues in relation to their emotional wellbeing; child protection, confidentiality, participation and payment (Alderson and

Morrow, 2011 and Tisdall et al., 2009). Less immediately obvious was the possibility that the author might be drawn into the expectation of a pseudo cathartic counselling relationship, particularly with foster carers who might still be experiencing feelings of anger, loss and guilt in terms of their caring role (Schofield and Beek, 2004). The author prepared for such a situation by deciding that foster carers would be reminded of the purpose of the research, whilst seeking to neither alienate nor dismiss the import of what was being said (Bechoffer and Paterson, 2000:70).

The literature regarding contact does not shy away from the fact that the majority of young people who come into the care of the local authority will have experienced a form of abuse and/or neglect from their main caregiver, and that they will remain in care for a period of more than 12 months, and will live with foster carers (Statistical First Release, Department of Education, 2017).

Furthermore, many of the young people in care will have experienced feelings of loss, fear, grief, guilt and, possibly, concern for siblings that have been left in the care of the birth family. It could be argued that a study centring on a young person in care's relationship with his/her familial and friendship networks could destabilise an existing placement because of the negative emotions that might be reawakened. As will be seen in Chapter Five this was a concern that was raised by social work practitioners. Efforts were made to mitigate these possible effects by building within the research design safety in relation to the emotional welfare of the young people in care. This was achieved by providing extensive information about what the young people in care's involvement would entail; informed consent along with signposting to support agencies; and the right of withdrawal taking place at any time (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). A traffic light system had been created to manage the pace of the interview and where required would allow the young person in care to withdraw from the interview.

When contemplating the issue of vulnerability further, it was realised that there was a need to remember that, any decision made by adult gatekeepers was likely to be informed by the normative models of childhood, specifically that children in care being seen as vulnerable and in need of protection (Lansdown, 1994 as cited in Morrow and Richards, 1996 p.97). Recognising that adult gatekeepers would want to be confident that sufficient thought and planning had been assigned to the issues of child protection and safeguarding, assistance was sought from a practising social work practitioner that could be referred to if any safeguarding concerns arose. An application was made to the British Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) at Enhanced Level. Furthermore, a course in child protection provided by the NSPCC and another online course concerned with keeping children safe online were completed. In accordance with the School of Social and Political Science's Research

Ethics Policy Procedure, ethical approval at Level 2 was sought in November 2014. With the University's procedure being informed by the Research Ethics Framework (Economic and Social Research Council, ESRC 2010) this meant that my research proposal was subject to scrutiny in order to ensure that it complied with the School's own ethical principles.

Informed consent

In terms of informed consent two approaches had to be adopted, one for adult respondents (foster carers and social work practitioners) and another for the young people in care. Adult respondents, were provided with an information bundle consisting of: Explanatory leaflet, Respondent Confidentiality Statement and Respondent Consent Form, that set out the purpose of the study and why they should take part in the research, its format, how recruitment of respondents would take place, as well as the types of questions that will be asked (*see Appendix F: Information bundle for adult respondents*²⁸). Within the information leaflet reference was made confidentiality and also to organisations that could be contacted after the semi-structured interview for further support. At the end of the information leaflet all potential respondents were invited to make further contact with the author if they required. Before any adult respondent was interviewed, they were required to sign two forms; the first was a consent form and the second was a Confidentiality Statement that set out in detail how data from the research would be anonymised and how confidentiality would be maintained.

With regard to the young people in care, depending on the nature of their legal status (Section 20, Sections 31 or 38 of the Children Act 1989) it was necessary to seek consent from their social work practitioner as parental responsibility was either solely with the local authority or shared between the local authority and the birth parent(s). In such circumstances it was usual practice for the young person's social work practitioner to liaise with the birth parent(s) unless there were circumstances that made it difficult to do so e.g. a formal complaint was being investigated or legal action was being undertaken.

During July 2013 when the study was being undertaken there was an amendment to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations in relation to Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case

²⁸ 21st Century Contact Explanatory Leaflet; Consent Form, Confidentiality Statement and Adult Consent Form to Child/Young Person participation

Review that meant authority for day-to-day decisions about a child or young person in care could be delegated to a foster carer, unless there was a valid reason not to do so. Moreover, a further requirement of the amendment was that the child or young person in care's Placement Plan would need to record who had authority to take particular decisions about the child (Department of Education 2013:4). The introduction of this amendment had considerable implications for fostering services in terms of reviewing and updating details for all children and young people in the care of the local authority. Because of this, the author was of the view that it was more than likely that consent would still need to be initially sought from the young person in care's social work practitioner and then further advice taken as to who should be approached next. Exploratory discussions with social work practitioners at the time revealed that as part of daily practice the decision regarding consent to a young person in care's involvement in the study would need to be given by the social work practitioner. The birth parent(s) of the young person in care would be notified and their wishes sought but the final decision would rest with the young person in care's social work practitioner. When the study began in earnest and consent was sought, the author's experience was as the practitioners had described.

Therefore, when the young person in care's social work practitioner was contacted, a discussion regarding the young person in care's possible involvement in the study took place. Once initial consent had been given contact was then made with the foster carers, a further discussion was had regarding the details of the study and how it might apply to the young person whom they were looking after. This was then followed by an introductory conversation with the young person in care, details of the study were shared along with an information bundle consisting of Explanatory Leaflet, Confidentiality Statement and Respondent Consent form (*see Appendix C – Information bundle for young people in care*). When the young person's involvement had been confirmed, the author returned to the young person's social work practitioner who then signed the consent form. Working from a premise that consent was going to be ongoing, the approach that was taken throughout the study was to provide each young person in care with information about the study and where necessary, answer any questions that they had. Given the ontological and epistemological stance that had been taken in relation to the study it was necessary to ensure that young people in care who took part could exercise choice. Therefore, an opt-in research approach was adopted even though consent had been previously sought from the young person in care's social work practitioner and his/her foster carer beforehand.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality was deemed an integral and important aspect of the study. To this end a number of activities were undertaken to maintain confidentiality throughout and after it finished. The need to ensure the confidentiality of the young people in care, as well as the adult respondents was premised on the fact that children and young people have similar rights to confidentiality as adults (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). However, it was appreciated that the limits of confidentiality could not be extended in the same way for the young people in care, as would be applied to the adult respondents because of the requirement to respond to any allegations, as part of ensuring that the author would be receiving expert advice. The requirement to report abuse or harm was highlighted in the Information Leaflet provided to the young people in care (*see Appendix C: Information bundle for young people in care*). As previously stated, the author had made arrangements with a qualified social work practitioner to refer to for specialist advice and support ahead of reporting any disclosure (Alderson and Morrow, 2011:31).

As indicated earlier, both the young people in care and the adult respondents were asked to sign a Confidentiality Statement that detailed how their identity and that of others, would remain anonymous (*see Appendix D: Interview Schedule for Foster Carers and Appendix E: Interview Schedule for Social Work Practitioners*). Secondly, the individual used to transcribe the digital recording of the qualitative interviews was asked to sign a separate Confidentiality Statement (*see Appendix G: Transcriber Confidentiality Statement*) that stated that the confidentiality of the young people in care and the other adult respondents would be respected at all times, and that the digital recordings should be stored securely. Moreover, that under no circumstances should the data from the qualitative interviews be discussed with anyone other than the researcher.

In terms of how the data was transcribed, clear instructions were given that included ensuring that all communication in relation to each transcript used initials only to identify respondents (*see Appendix H: Guidance for Transcription*). The instruction given directed that all names should be changed to initials only and that each transcribed Microsoft Word file would be encrypted so as to ensure no one other than the transcriber and myself could access the data. This meant that all electronic files were encrypted and needed a password to be accessed. With regard to the hard copies of the transcripts, these were stored securely in a locked file that would only be accessed by the author. As part of maintaining anonymity all respondents were given pseudonyms and details in relation to geographical location and potentially other identifying information were immediately

removed from the original transcripts as part of ensuring that the data was cleaned before it was analysed.

Payment

According to Alderson and Morrow (2011:68) the payment of children and young people for their involvement in research can be made for a number of reasons. These reasons stem from reimbursement for their outgoings all the way through to recompense for the time and effort they have given to a study. Payment was provided to all the young people in care who took part in the study regardless of whether they withdrew part way through into a semi-structured interview or not. This principle was based on the fact that the young people had given of their time in terms of participating in the study before being interviewed, for example making arrangements to meet and signing all the necessary forms. As part of an informed consent process both foster carers and social work practitioners of the young person in care were informed of the payment. As a way of avoiding any interpretation that payment to the young people in care was an incentive a set of guidelines was devised that clearly set out the type of payment, how it would be paid and when. This detail was then added to the information literature about the study and details were again contained in the consent forms that were made available to young people in care and their foster carer(s) and social work practitioner (*see Appendix I: Participants Payment Guidance*). Payment was not provided to the adult respondents as there was an expectation that they would engage with the study based on goodwill and their interest in the topic.

Operative aspects of fieldwork

Choice of locale

The choice of locale was originally between several individual urban and rural local authorities that were situated within reasonable distances from my home town. Those urban and rural local authorities approached were made up of at least one local authority where the author had personal and professional contacts. The idea of using existing contacts is not unusual, Clark states that where there is a pre-existing positive relationship between the researcher and gatekeepers this can be exploited to gain access to the target respondents (2011:487). The search for a local authority that was prepared to host the study took place between January 2015 - May 2015. This process involved identifying individuals from the research and governance section of the several urban and rural Children's Services Departments. In order to increase the chances of an initial conversation, an

information bundle consisting of a summary document detailing the study, evidence of ethical approval and a credentials letter from the lead supervisor from the University was forwarded (see *Appendix J: Information bundle for Local Authorities*). Despite efforts to attract both interest and confidence in the study the approach proved to be unfruitful.

Speculation was made as to whether or not it was the effect of recent austerity measures on hard pressed local authorities that meant that they neither had the staff nor the resources to support the study. Such a view is plausible given that, since 2010 local authorities have had the challenge of continuing to deliver services in the face of a 40% reduction in central government funding (Local Government Association, 2014). The supposition was that the continued squeeze on local government finances meant that there was little capacity internally within such organisations to host empirical research. Clark (2011) and Munro, Holmes and Ward (2005) also point out that if an organisation is going to assist in research, then the reality consists of finding information, providing links, answering queries, and approaching participants, all of which divert resources away from the central aims and purpose of the organisation.

Reflecting on the process undertaken to find a local authority that would host the study it was noted that, one local authority had explicitly stated that it did not have enough staff resources, another said that it had been subject to an Ofsted inspection (Ofsted, 2017) and therefore could not afford either the time or resources to host the study. Such a response brought with them the stark realisation that local authorities are not static organisations but are subject to change and flux.

In April 2015 the author made the decision to complete the ADCS (Association of Directors of Childrens Services) Research Group process. This group has an advisory role to the Association that provides counsel on research priorities and issues, as well as considering applications for the approval of research that involves local authority Children's Services Departments (Association of Directors of Childrens Services, 2015). It is also the vehicle by which studies can be publicised amongst local authorities throughout England and interested local authorities make contact with researchers. The paperwork was completed and having achieved approval from the ADCS to publicise the study (see *Appendix J: Information bundle for Local Authorities*). Two further attempts were made to contact local authorities that would host the study and reference was made to ADCS approval. On the seventh attempt success was achieved. On reflection the conditions that led to this success were, firstly, approval from the ADCS. Secondly, the local authority in question had just

completed the Ofsted process in conjunction with its Local Safeguarding Children's Board and it was found not to have any widespread concerns. The success achieved in securing a local authority to host the study was also dependent upon the willingness of one individual who saw the relevance of the study to the organisation. Consequently, it was realised that the success of any research undertaken, however interesting or worthwhile will be dependent on timing, the favour of senior managers, and also sufficient staff resources in order to proceed.

Identification of respondents

As stated previously, the study involved triads that consisted of a young person in care his/her foster carer(s) and the allocated social work practitioner. The aim was to recruit up to 15 triads in order to answer the research questions in relation to what can be deemed a micro social phenomenon (Blaikie, 2010 p.164). Use was made of theoretical sampling, this is a specific form of non-probability sampling where the process of sampling and data collection is influenced either by specific theory or explanation. For the purposes of this study the 'how' (explanation of the phenomenon) was the focus and therefore the identification of respondents, coding and analysis of the data was influenced by this (Mays and Pope, 1995). Consequently, when seeking young people to be involved in the study there was the need to rely upon the knowledge of social work practitioners who were working with young people in care and knew about the nature of their placements (Haight et al., 2003; Gilbertson and Barber, 2007 and Hedin, 2012). The sampling approach required a criterion in order to minimise any potential placement disruption to the young people in care who would take part in the study and also to discount those placement arrangements that were short term in nature. It was considered that a placement of a temporary nature was likely to be influenced by factors such as the young person in care living in a new environment and the challenges associated with that, such as getting to know members of the foster family, settling into a new school, and possibly coming to terms with the grief and loss associated with a placement breakdown or having been removed from the birth family as a result of care proceedings. It was also noted that, where a young person in care was returning home, there may be greater likelihood of increased contact with the birth family as part of the reunification process. This in effect was at odds with the study as the focus was concerned with young people in care who were in long terms placements with little chance of returning home (Cleaver, 2000; Biehal, 2009 and Wade et al., 2011).

Therefore, the sample of young people in care was based on a stable placement setting of 12 months or more. The specificity of 12 months or more related to previous research findings that

suggest that young people in care are in some form of routine and possibly settled, thereby not experiencing any immediate emotional turmoil that can accompany the start or breakdown of a placement (Biehal, 2009; Farmer, 2011 and Haight et al., 2003). Furthermore, it was hoped that this timeframe would provide the added advantage of enabling the adult participants to provide an informed perspective on the contact arrangements and the possible impact of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Where the young person in care had been in a stable placement for 12 months or more this would allow the opportunity for all members of the triad to provide data that reflects patterns of communication that takes place between the young person in care and members of their familial and friendship networks. In terms of the age group of the sample of young people in care to be interviewed, this reflected current statistical trends which show that 39% of all children in care are between the ages of 10- 15 and that they are staying within the care system for longer (see Chapter Two). Specifically, the age of 12-16 years was chosen for respondents, as a supposition was made that children and young people in care within this age range would have access to their own mobile communication device, and they would be able to make use of any other device, if allowed by the foster carer. It was identified that the young people in care would be either subject to a Care Order or Interim Care Order under Section 31 or 38 of the Children Act, 1989, or in care as a result of a voluntary arrangement under Section 20 of the Children Act, 1989.

Recruitment

Efforts to recruit young people in care began with speaking directly to social work practitioners. The other means of recruitment of young people in care was through attendance at the host local authority's Children in Care Council²⁹. An opportunity was given to speak to the Council about the study and also to seek participants. Appreciating the importance of it the presentation was prepared with the distinct aim of capturing not only interest but also involvement in the study. This entailed appealing to the universal experience of both adults and young people in care in the room about the importance of the mobile phone and how it helps individuals to communicate with each other. A number of the young people in care made the choice to be involved in the study willingly however, there was still a necessity for the author to make contact with their social work practitioner to ascertain whether or not the young person in care could join the study. Once consent had been given by the social work practitioner it was still a requirement to contact the foster carer

²⁹ A group of young people in care who are cared by the local authority who are consulted with and share their views and experiences that is integral to shaping corporate parenting

to seek access to the young person in care. The other groups that were enlisted to help me identify participants was firstly, a presentation to senior and team managers as part of introducing the study to the local authority. This was then followed by an appeal to the team of Supervising social work practitioners³⁰ who worked with local authority foster carers. This group of practitioners helped by identifying stable placements of young people in care and foster carers who wanted to be involved in the study.

Negotiating access

Discussions were had with the Head of Service regarding access. Details concerning the study in terms of timescale and staff involvement were agreed. Having experienced initial difficulties with finding a local authority, a deliberate choice was made to make the methodology as attractive as possible in terms of highlighting the amount of time that would be required from social work practitioners. Roesch-Marsh, Gadda and Smith (2011:9) have identified this approach as '*adapting to a culture of scarcity*', so as to minimise the demands on the organisation. It was also agreed that the local authority would be provided with a summary report of initial findings, as a means of promoting the benefits of the research to the organisation (Nutley, Walter and Davis, 2007).

The meeting with the Head of Service was used to identify a method whereby a cascaded approach to raise awareness about the study was employed. It was agreed that a joint management and senior manager' meeting in July 2015 should be attended. At this meeting details of the study were shared, emphasising the time requirement for social work practitioners. So as to promote confidence in the study, background details including professional practice was shared. It was recognised that, as a novice researcher there could potentially be room to be relegated to the outer edges and beyond in terms of pressing work priorities (see Roesch-Marsh, Gadda and Smith, 2011:6-7). Knowledge and experience as a social work practitioner was emphasised to legitimise the research and its value to the organisation as a whole and importantly, to the managers who oversaw individual teams of practitioners. What was obvious was that, as an outsider to the organisation reliance was placed on the social work practitioner role to appeal to an audience of very influential gatekeepers. In essence, use was made of a particular identity and as the recruitment continued a

³⁰ A Supervising social worker is employed by either a local authority or Independent Fostering Agency to support foster carers in their role as carers to promote the wellbeing and life chances of the child in care

range of different identities were used in order to achieve my goal of recruiting respondents to the study (Roesch-Marsh, Gadda and Smith, 2011).

Whilst the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 12 clearly points to children and young people having right to express their views and opinions in all matters affecting them, this has not necessarily been realised in terms of their involvement in research and therefore it proved necessary to approach a number of gatekeepers (Tisdall et al., 2009 and Alderson and Morrow, 2011). One of the informal gatekeeping groups approached was Supervising social work practitioners. This was based on personal experience that these individuals had an insight into placements and there was also the ability to appeal to this group for help because of a former professional role as a Supervising social work practitioner. Previous experience from this role was used to speak to these practitioners using a language and terminology that was instantly identifiable to them, therefore acquiring the role of an insider within a short period of time. Meaning that their trust and support had been gained which was hugely beneficial (Roesch-Marsh, Gadda and Smith, 2011). The opposite was true in relation to speaking to teams of social work practitioners who had responsibility for children in care (Roesch-Marsh, Gadda and Smith, 2011). It was an altogether different experience. There were some teams who vocalised a positive regard for the research being undertaken, whilst other teams either gave no comment or questioned the usefulness of the research if the focus was not on those children and young people in care who were engaging in unmediated contact. Such responses confirmed that the identity of social work practitioner was not enough, and that it was necessary to persuade social work practitioners as to the value of the research even when it was aimed at a group of children that had not been identified by them. The experience mirrors that of McGee's observation (1999:45):

"The process of negotiating with gatekeepers to gain access to research subjects or agency files is probably the most overlooked but problematic of all stages in successfully completing a research project."

Attempts were made to capture as much information as possible when attending team meetings. Details were taken of young people in care who might have been willing to take part in the along with details about the social work practitioner. Within days of a meeting with efforts were made to make individual contact with the named social work practitioner. However, before doing so it proved necessary to speak to administrative staff who would take a message for the social work

practitioners. In each of the encounters with administrative staff it became apparent that the conversation taking place was with an informal gatekeeper and again it proved necessary to persuade these individuals about the purpose of the study (Hayes, 2005:1196). Once again, the role of outsider to the organisation came emerged even with reference to the fact that permission had been by senior managers to undertake research within the organisation this meant little. A further role was then taken on, that of grateful recipient. The administrative staff were appealed to on the basis of the role they had, emphasising the difficulties and complexities of it. It was realised that the administrators because of their status and working relationships could facilitate trust and access with the social work practitioners that had been identified via team meetings (Hayes, 2005:1196 and Munro, Holmes and Ward, 2005).

As has been evidenced, the efforts described above did not lessen the necessary exertion required to identify young people in care and then negotiate access to them. Beginning with identification of young people in care, this proved to be particularly difficult because of the lack of engagement by social work practitioners who were concerned that the study could potentially disrupt fostering placements. As a consequence of such a reaction, the original research design of recruiting children in care who had been in placement for a period of 12 months or more had to be abandoned. This criteria was revised to children in care who had been in placement for 9 months and more. Whilst I had no power in relation to the young people and foster carers who were recommended to the study, I was able to speak to social work practitioners informally about the importance of the child in care being well known to the foster carer and because of this the sample of young people in care included a number of youths who had been in care for three years or more. The problem of identification also affected the final number of triadic groups involved in the study. In wanting to ensure that the study had a sufficient number of respondents to strengthen the reliability and validity of the research, the original number settled on was a total of fifteen triads. Instead, a total of twelve triads were recruited because of the timeframe involved in seeking to complete the fieldwork within a reasonable duration to allow sufficient time to interrogate the data. Reflecting on the period of time it took to prepare the data for analysis and then undertaking the actual analysis, it can be argued that the number of triads recruited were satisfactory for a small scale study.

The related problem, as mentioned above, was negotiating access to the young people in care. This particular problem has captured the interest of a number of researchers. Hepinstall (2000), Campbell (2008), Punch, (2002 as cited in Campbell, 2008:36) and Gilbertson and Barber (2007) have written

frankly about the difficulties that can arise when conducting research with children in care. In particular, they highlight frustrations in contacting social work practitioners and being advised that access to a child in care is no longer possible because of tensions that have suddenly arisen. The explanation given by Hepinstall (2000) stresses that the difficulties experienced appear because of the variety of adults who act as 'gatekeepers'. A similar difficulty was experienced by Campbell (2008) who records that it took 8 months before his first interview with a child participant could be undertaken. Campbell (2008:33) comments that the reason for the delay was due to 'the presence of gatekeepers'. A similar experience was encountered. The gatekeepers in the form of social work practitioners, foster carers and other professionals perceived the young people in care as being extremely vulnerable and therefore in need of protection because of their previous adverse experiences. Consequently, issues of access and consent could in no way be underestimated. The meta study by Gilbertson and Barber (2002) is a case in point. Gilbertson and Barber (2002) used three separate studies on placement instability to highlight a significant trend in non-response rates. Gilbertson and Barber (2002:257) point out that the lack of participation was due to two critical factors. The first concerned access being denied at an agency level, the other was the lack of co-operation by social work practitioners because of concerns associated with how the research might impact negatively on the young people in care. Both factors meant that children and young people in care were not able to actively engage in research and have their voices heard.

In an attempt to gain access to young people in care it was necessary to go through a number of formal and informal gatekeepers. This entailed making on average at least 4-5 telephone calls to each social work practitioner. This was interspersed with a number of emails during a period of approximately four weeks. For the period of August 2015 to January 2016 sixty phone calls were made and upwards of eighty emails were sent which represented less than half of the all the triads that needed to be formulated and subsequently interviewed. It became necessary to alert the Head of Service as an advocate because of the lack of progress. Unsurprisingly, his involvement and that of his deputies, prompted phone calls from the social work practitioners who had been previously contacted. The approach appeared drastic, and though mirroring the experiences of other researchers in terms of the lack of access, none of these had resorted to the action of going back to the most senior person within the host local authority to seek help (Heath et al, 2007; Hayes, 2005; Campbell, 2008; Hepinstall, 2000 and Gilbertson and Barber, 2002). It was particularly concerning that the action taken had seemingly gone against what was understood as consent being an informed decision on the part of the respondent, as opposed to an obligation because of pressure from senior management.

In seeking to access children in care the action of seeking the support of a senior represented an ethical dilemma. Previous observations by researchers about access has been concerned with the difficulties and how these can be eased through support of an advocate within the organisation (Munro, Holmes and Ward, 2005 and Roesch-Marsh, Gadda and Smith, 2011). The circumstances were such that, the advocate called upon was a senior manager, this resulted in what Bell and Nutt (2002) have identified as a sense of divided loyalties. That is, multiple responsibilities and sensitivities. Responsibilities in terms of identifying and completing interviews with respondents within a reasonable timeframe, and sensitivities, relating to how the action would be viewed by social work practitioners. An instruction from senior managers could potentially antagonise social work practitioners and look as if there was a lack of appreciation about the work pressures they faced (Munro, Holmes and Ward, 2005). More worryingly, the action taken might affect the semi-structured interviews that had yet to be completed, as well as the dynamics of power that are inherent within them. The act of calling upon a senior manager went beyond the roles of social work practitioner, student and researcher, to one where assistance was sought through using the help of an advocate who had tremendous power.

On speaking to each social work practitioner it became apparent that, it was pressures of working part-time, along with their workload and individual case emergencies that had meant that they were unable to respond to either my emails or phone calls. The experiences of Gilbertson and Barber (2002:257) as well as Campbell (2008:36) highlight that the lack of response by social work practitioners is not unusual and could indicate one of two circumstances. Firstly, the tensions that exist between social work and research are predicated on a working environment that is not conducive to research because of the role definition of practitioner, and the way in which his/her work is organised and managed (Epstein, 1987). Secondly, the wider organisational environment within which social work takes place makes it difficult to conduct empirical research because of the ethical challenges of conducting a study with vulnerable service users. The experiences at the fieldwork stage of the study resonated strongly with Epstein's stance; that practitioners had little physical or cerebral time to engage actively. In an attempt to enable participation in the study a Children in Care Council was attended, this gave the opportunity to present the aims of the study and recruit direct from an audience of children in care. That said, it was still necessary to seek permission from social work practitioners and foster carers before the young person in care could take part in the study.

Above all, access to the young people in care and their foster carers was dependent upon the benevolence of the institutional gatekeepers; that was social work practitioners (Morrow and Richards, 1996) and foster carers. This is despite the fact that adult gatekeepers, though charged with the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of children and young people, have no legal power to do so in terms of participation in research (Heath et al., 2007).

Respondents

The study consisted of 12 triads consisting of young people in care, their foster carers and allocated social work practitioners. Details of the sample are found below. As stated previously pseudonyms have been used to maintain the confidentiality of all respondents. The age of the young people in care who took part in the study ranged from 13 years to 18 years of age. One young person from the sample was aged 18 and could be deemed as an adult. However, he had only just turned 18 years of age a couple of weeks before being interviewed.

Young person in care	Age	Foster Carer	Social Work practitioner
Jane	17	Betty	Nadia
Nora	14	Toni	Cath
Kaitlin	14	Perry	Camlyn
Matt	15	Bev	Margaret
Lamar	17	Mary	Zayla
Justine	14*	Laura	Verone
Leo	14	Nanci	Carissa
Leighton	15	Todd	Candice
Jaiden	18	Madaline and Rex	Bernice
Bradley	17	Rose	Casey
Kayne	16	Piers	Candice
Darrell	13	Rayanna	Elaine

Table 2: Details of respondents by triad

*Justine withdrew 15 minutes into the semi-structured interview but the interviews with the foster carer and social work practitioner was completed.

The young people in care had been in fostering placements for a period ranging from 9 months to 15 years. The intention was to have young people in placement for 12 months or more however, this criteria proved difficult to fulfil because of gatekeeping difficulties experienced (*see the section entitled Fieldwork challenges and limitations of the study*). Their legal status ranged from voluntary placements (Section 20, Children Act, 1989), Interim Care Orders (Section 38, Children Act, 1989) to

Care Orders (Section 31, Children Act, 1989). The other members of the triad were 13 foster carers who had a wide range of experience in terms of looking after children in care. For example, there was the female carer, Mary, who had been fostering for a period of 18 years but had only cared for 25 to 30 children during this period. At the other end of the spectrum was the male carer who had cared for over 150 children during a period of 11 years. There were a number of foster carers who were involved in the study who could not recall the number of children and young people they had cared for over the years. However, it was evident during the course of their interviews that they had cared for multiple children, suggesting that they had substantial experience. A further characteristic of the sample of foster carers was the fact that half had more than one child in placement at the time they were being interviewed. The foster carers who took part in the study represented a wide range of experience in different types of placements that included short term, long term and emergency; mother and baby, as well as respite. Further details regarding the sample of foster carers and their caring career can be found in *Appendix K: Table of key characteristics of triad respondents*.

The social work practitioners that took part in the study were all female, in keeping with the gender representation of the profession as a whole (Department of Education, 2017b). Nevertheless, there were differences in age as well as experience. One practitioner had been working in children's social care for twenty years, other practitioners had been qualified for approximately one month. The remainder of practitioners had worked for a duration of 6.5 through to 20 years. Half of the social work practitioners (no=6) involved in the study who had worked in the field of child and family social work for less than 5 years, this is likely to reflect what has been a characteristic of this area of the profession, which has a high turnover in staffing (Department of Education, 2017b). The median length of experience was 4 years (see *Appendix K: Table of Key characteristics of triad respondents*)

Interviews

A total of 35 respondents were interviewed, that is, 12 of each respondent group consisting of young people in care, foster carers (one married couple) and also a social work practitioner who had responsibility for two young people who took part in the study. All the young people in care were interviewed face-to-face and their interviews took approximately 40 minutes in length. These interviews began with focusing on confidentiality and consent, for some young people in care this produced a level of impatience. Such a response at this point in the interview highlights the extent to

which my work as a researcher and an adult was disconnected from that of the young person in care (Davis, 1998). In addition, it also highlighted the power relations between the author and the young people in care, meaning that, the demands for research integrity, as set by adults outweighed the priorities of the young people, which was to move into the main part of the interview far more speedily. In order to ameliorate the situation, the young people were advised in advance that this aspect of the interview was probably the least exciting, but also the most important as part of ensuring that they understood what they were getting involved in. Furthermore, as another means of seeking to address the power differential that existed between the researcher as an adult and the young people in care that were interviewed the author did not hide her ignorance as to the capability of the smartphones that they had and also the variety of applications (apps) that were in existence and how they used them. This willingness to abandon the role of the adult researcher enabled the young people in care to take control of this aspect of the semi-structured interview that involved completing the Ecomap. It was noted that the assertion of knowledge by the young people in care during the first part of the interview gave them confidence to respond to the remaining questions.

As noted earlier, the number of foster carers interviewed was 13, ten females and three males. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour (for the married couple). The analogy of Kvale and Brinkman (2009:48) of the interviewer being a traveller, best describes the author's experience of interviewing the foster carers. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) describes the interviewer as being a 'traveller' in that s/he co-creates with the respondent new knowledge by way of participation and negotiation of meaning. This notion of co-creation of knowledge is also supported by Gubrium and Holstein (2011:150) who also recognise that interviews are not neutral and interviewers are not passive.

Coy (2006:426) in explicating her experiences as a researcher interviewing young women working in the sex industry comments that the process of participation led to change. In a similar way as the research proceeded it was possible to hear the concerns raised by foster carers about the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet, but also inadvertently challenge perceptions when posing the question on access, as well as monitoring and management, in the face of a young person in care maturing. This was because the researcher had formerly held the role of a Supervising social worker. An example of this was in an interview with one foster carer who remarked that the

researcher had made her think about the fact that the young person in her care could no longer be denied access to the Internet and that it would be necessary for them to work together on how access should take place. That interview, more than any other, demonstrated the journey taken by the researcher and the foster carer which was both transformative and heralded change.

Even with foster carers being aware of the researcher's professional background this did not necessarily guarantee a series of interviews that were without problems. It was found that, there was a risk of complicity (Bell and Nutt, 2002) in the sense that this respondent group assumed that the researcher understood and therefore, spoke in what Bell and Nutt (2002) labelled as professional discourse (Bell and Nutt, 2002). In order to avoid the risk of complicity and misunderstandings responses were made in a fashion that highlighted the researcher had not been in practice for a number of years. Such a response reflects the fact that, the roles adopted to achieve this part of the fieldwork, that of former social work practitioner, student and researcher were not static. When required, it was possible to emphasise a role dependent upon what information was being shared and by whom. Consequently, a performance was taking place to a greater or lesser extent in relation to certain roles as a means to access respondents and obtain data.

The final group interviewed were the social work practitioners. This group of respondents were all interviewed by telephone, meaning that two forms of semi-structured interview had taken place as part of the study, one that was face-to-face and the other by telephone. This aspect of the fieldwork was not dissimilar from that of Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) who found that there was no marked difference in the amount and quality of data. That said, what was evident was that there was a lack of knowledge in relation to the young people in care, primarily because a number of social work practitioners had only been allocated their cases recently. Therefore, it was not the means by which the data was collected or the interaction that took place that affected the quality of data. This situation created a social work dilemma in the sense of having to resist sharing information about the young people in care in the absence of knowledge held by the social work practitioners (Bell and Nutt, 2002). This was particularly the case in relation to a young person in care named Kayne, whose foster carer was making use software to monitor all his texts, emails and telephone calls, a level of monitoring which I believed clearly disregarded the young person's privacy. It was apparent when the young person was being interviewed that he had created a series of strategies to minimise the level of monitoring that he was subject to, but the sense of unease that his social work practitioner

was not aware of the situation highlighted the difficulties that exist as a practitioner researcher, where the individual is cognizant of both practitioner and researcher ethics (Bell and Nutt, 2002). Without doubt, the fieldwork in relation to the study was challenging on a number of fronts that included recruiting respondents and engaging with multiple gatekeepers both formal and informal. It was also testing in terms of the ethical dilemmas that arose, clearly highlighting the tensions that exist as a practitioner-researcher which is a role that is not neutral. There is a necessity with each of these roles to exercise them when required, so as to obtain access to respondents and ultimately their data.

Analytic Strategy

A review of triadic empirical studies between the period of 2002 and 2012 has revealed that the majority used thematic coding to analyse their interview data (Back et al., 2002; Baxter et al. 2006; Gysels et al., 2008; Kendell et al., 2009; Roberto et al., 2011; Miller-Karnieli, et al., 2012 and Brownhill et al., 2012). Given that this study was concerned with what is in essence is a new iteration of contact, in order to adequately describe the phenomenon it will be necessary to identify uniformities, patterns and differences amongst the respondents groups. With this in mind consideration was given to a number of research approaches and their associated analytical methods that fell within the sphere of qualitative research, but that also aligned with the ontological and epistemological positions outlined earlier.

Research approaches such as discourse analysis (inclusive of Critical Discourse Analysis, Foucauldian analysis and discursive psychology) are grounded in a structuralist and post structuralist philosophy, in which reality is accessed via language (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002 p.8). Through language individuals create representations of reality; but more importantly they also add to the construction of reality. Admittedly, whilst there is a fit with the epistemological position outlined earlier, the fact remains that, the study had not been devised using the research approach of Discourse Analysis. Jorgesen and Phillips (2002: 3-4) highlight that whilst discourse analysis is applicable to all areas of research, it cannot be used in a way that encompasses all kinds of theoretical frameworks. They state, *“Crucially it is not be used as a method of analysis detached from its theoretical and methodological foundations..... it is not just a method for data analysis, but a theoretical and methodological whole - a complete package”* (ibid).

Another analytical method that was considered and quickly dismissed, was grounded theory. It has already been identified that, existing theoretical and conceptual notions have informed both the research questions and the subsequent methodology. These are factors that are contrary to grounded theory which is predicated on the researcher generating new theory from the data as part of an iterative process. Whilst the majority of the data collected is in the form of semi-structured interviews the analytic method such as Conversation Analysis would not have been relevant as this adopts an approach where it is deemed that talk is action. In sum, the study was not concerned with the interaction between the author and the research participants. Rather, it attends to how young people in care made use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact with their familial and friendship networks, and how this is managed by foster carers and social work practitioners.

The final data set consisted of Ecomaps (*see Appendix B: Ecomap Template*), which had been used to capture the nature and types of relationships that young people had with their familial and friendship networks and which mobile communication devices are used. At this juncture it is important to state that whilst Ecomaps represent a different data set, they will not, for the purposes of this study, be analysed because they were used as a child-centred vehicle to prompt discussion and explore the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care (Harold et al, 1996; Ray and Street, 2005; Ray and Street, 2005b and Rempel et al., 2007).

Having considered a number of analytical approaches that were akin to the epistemological position, outlined, the one that had the greatest appeal and synergy with the study was thematic analysis. This can be used across those data sets that are comprised of words (semi-structured interviews). According to Braun and Clarke (2006:79) thematic analysis is, “*a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*”. From a review of the literature there appears to be little consensus as to what it is and how to undertake it (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This view is corroborated by Tuckett (2005:76), who comments that there have been suggestions that thematic analysis *is* grounded theory. As an analytical method it has also been associated with ‘thematic’ discourse analysis (this is thematic analysis from the epistemological position of social construction); thematic decomposition analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (this type of analysis relies on understanding the everyday experience of a respondent in very great detail, in order to understand the phenomenon being researched). Braun and Clarke (2006:81-82) postulate that although there is a variety of analytic methods, at their core is the search for different themes

across an *entire* data set. They add very importantly that, thematic analysis is, “*not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework and can be used to do different things*”. As suggested earlier, it can also embrace different epistemological positions that stem from realism through to constructionism, it can also be recognised as a contextualist method that sits between essentialism and constructionism (Willig, 1999 as cited by Braun and Clarke, 2006:81). Braun and Clarke (2006:81) stated that ultimately thematic analysis can “*be a method that works both to reflect reality and unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’*”.

The benefits and disadvantages of thematic analysis?

One of the key benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in that it can be used in circumstances where the researcher has an explicit theoretical or epistemological position, for example like that of IPA or discourse analysis. Moreover, the way in which thematic analysis is carried out is independent of a specific theoretical or epistemological position. Yet it is this level of flexibility and the lack of surety that has led to criticism of the technique not being methodologically robust (Antaki et al., 2002 as cited by Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke state that this criticism can be countered by researchers making clear their application of the methods used, their epistemological position, as well as the assumptions relied upon and the decisions made.

Another advantage identified by Braun and Clarke (2012:58) is that thematic analysis has “*the ability to straddle three main continua along which qualitative research approaches can be located: inductive verses deductive or theory driven data coding and analysis*”. This ability to straddle approaches that either begin with the data (i.e. bottom up) or is informed by theoretical frameworks (i.e. top down) makes it essential for the researcher to make clear his/her epistemological assumptions from the outset so that there is a well-defined link between how the data has been analysed and the interpretations reached. Braun and Clarke give the impression of it being a necessity of one or the other of the approaches outlined. Given the research strategy that had been developed it was necessary to use both approaches for coding so as to encompass the thematic concepts that emerged from the data and also to build associations between the various conclusions reached. Braun and Clarke (2006:80) make this point by stating: “*What is important is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that s/he acknowledges these decisions and recognises them as decisions*”. Therefore, in terms of this

study the analysis was informed by the conceptual frameworks that were outlined in Chapter Three, that is the Foucauldian interpretation of power, childhood studies and risk.

Important epistemological decisions that influenced the type of thematic analysis undertaken

The previous section of this chapter has begun to highlight the importance of the researcher's epistemological position when undertaking thematic analysis. In essence, there are two overarching approaches. The first is inductive where the approach to data coding and analysis is 'bottom up' and therefore driven by what is *in* the data (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Consequently, when carrying out this type of analysis, the researcher is identifying codes and themes that closely match the content of the data. The other overarching approach is deductive which Braun and Clarke (2012:58) have explained as a 'top down'. This is where the researcher applies a series of theories, concepts or topics to the data and then derives codes and themes from the data. Therefore, what is identified by the research does not necessarily have a close link to the semantic data content (Braun and Clarke, 2012). It is important to note that this approach, according to Braun and Clarke (2006 p.84), potentially provides a less rich description of the data and, instead, focuses on detailed analysis of some aspects of the data. In summary, bearing in mind that this entire research strategy is focused on answering questions about the 'how' (as explicated in Chapter Three) of the phenomenon being studied, it was necessary to use a combination of both approaches as this allowed theoretical concepts and practice insights to be derived from the data.

Another decision about which researchers need to be explicit when using thematic analysis, is at what level (semantic or latent) themes will be identified. It was decided that a semantic level would be used as it is concerned with the overt meanings of the data and therefore does not seek to look beyond what a respondent has said. It could be argued that this decision has been influenced by the ongoing wish to ensure that the voices of children in care are heard and to avoid multiple layers of interpretation. Therefore, the analytic process will involve the data being organised to show patterns in semantic content. This will be followed by the researcher's attempts to theorise the significance of the identified patterns, as well as their wider meanings and associated implications (Patton, 1990 as cited by Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84). On this occasion a latent level of themes was not used for analysis of the data because it requires the researcher to identify and examine underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations, as well as ideologies that inform the data. As such the researcher would be required to interpret and theorise what is being analysed, and this

level of thematic analysis follows after the tradition of the constructionist paradigm and even overlaps with discourse analysis research approach that has already been rejected.

The components of thematic analysis

When undertaking thematic analysis there are two key components: codes and themes. Codes have been described by Braun and Clarke (2012: 61) as the 'building blocks of analysis'. They add that codes can provide a succinct summary of a portion of data or depict the content of the data. For example, some codes mirror the participants' language whilst others reflect the researcher's epistemological position. This is clearly seen in Tuckett's (2005:67) application of thematic analysis to practice, where he owns the fact that his analysis is influenced by Charmaz's social constructionist/symbolic interactionist perspective (2005:76). As a component of thematic analysis codes can collect around a particular issue but this does not mean that they form a theme (see below). Moreover, certain codes are able to cut across or overlap with a number of themes. To this end, the judgement of the researcher, as well as his/her epistemological position will inform the next steps in relation to constructing relevant themes.

The other major component of thematic analysis is a theme, Braun and Clarke (2006:82) state that a *"theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set"*. This definition generates important questions in relation the size and prevalence of a theme and its importance. Braun and Clarke (2006) answer this question by highlighting that because there are no set rules in relation to the size and prevalence of a theme what has to be relied upon is the researcher's own judgement. What will be outlined from this point forward is the way in which codes and themes were created and then used as part of the Framework Method. It will be seen that the Framework Method departs from the broadly agreed conceptions of thematic analysis because there are specific steps that have been designed to ensure a deep and thorough familiarisation with the data. For example, as part of the analytic process there is a need to create a framework developed from recurrent themes in the data that consisted of semi-structured interviews and also field notes. This is a task that is not a requirement of Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis, as they did not use a comparative approach at the time of writing.

The Framework Method

Before providing details of how the thematic analysis was conducted, it is important to realise that this method is an active process where the researcher generates or constructs codes and in particular, themes. The method was developed in the 1980s by the National Centre for Social Research in order to manage and analyse qualitative data obtained as an applied policy research (Smith and Firth, 2011). The Framework Method allows the researcher to capture both the commonalities and the differences within the data through the use of matrices that summarise the data in rows (cases) and columns (codes) thereby producing 'cells' of summarised data (Gale et al., 2013). This analytical approach lends itself well to the research strategy employed for this study. It will enable analysis by an individual triad to be undertaken whilst ensuring the in-depth analysis of significant themes that cut across all the triads is carried out. Above all the Framework Method allows for the comparison and contrasting of data, not just across all triads, but also within each individual triad. Gale et al., (2013) also state that the approach can be applied to field notes (that is notes created during the period of qualitative fieldwork that records behaviours, types of activities and other events). Therefore, the data that was analysed included the interviews from each respondent group (young people in care, the foster carers and the allocated social work practitioners) and also field notes.

Gale et al. (2013:3) also make the point that the Framework Method is not wedded to any particular epistemological, theoretical or philosophical approach which means it has been used widely across a number of fields that include medicine (Smith and Firth, 2011 and Pope et al., 2000) through to applied policy research (Srivastava and Thomson, 2009). Furthermore, as an approach it provides the potential to understand the perspectives and behaviours that take place between the young person in care, foster carers and social work practitioners. It was also believed that this method might go some considerable way towards illustrating how a young person's contact with members their familial and friendship networks are negotiated and managed by foster carers and social work practitioners.

As a novice researcher the appeal of the Framework Method was that it had a number of inherent advantages. These included, facilitating a constant comparative technique (Gale et al., 2013); it ensures the researcher gives necessary attention to describing the data using the participant's own views and expressions before moving to interpretation (Gale et al., 2013). Furthermore, the use of interconnected stages means that choices and decisions made during the analytical process are far

more explicit, something for which qualitative research is often criticised (Smith and Firth, 2011, Srivastava and Thomson, 2009 and Gale et al., 2013). Another benefit of the method according to Gale et al., (2013) is that when the data is being summarised, it is contained within the wider context of the individual case thereby leading to 'thick description'. This highlights the intricate and layered meanings and understanding (Pope et al., 2000: 114).

As with any analytic approach, the Framework Method is not without its difficulties Gale et al., (2013) have commented that the approach does not lend itself easily to accommodating a diverse range of data or content that lacks homogeneity. Another criticism as explained by Parkinson et al., (2016) is that the application of the Framework Method can be unthinking and mechanistic. Parkinson et al., (2016) challenge this by referring to the fact that, the steps that are required allows the researcher to become immersed in the data. They also noted that, the Method worked less well for what they termed as '*ambiguous and subjective aspects of data*' (Parkinson, et al., 2016:126). Such an observation was not applicable to this study as from the outset there was an intent to focus on the 'how' of the phenomenon in terms of use and management of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact from the perspectives of three respondent groups. Whereas Parkinson et al., (2016) were looking at one respondent group, but this was within a wide age range (11-17 years) where it was recognised there would be little homogeneity. In terms of the study the Framework Method can be applied to the data set of semi-structured interviews and field work notes because of the uniformity of questions asked and the way in which the data had been recorded. Attention will now be given to how these separate strands of data were analysed using the Framework approach.

Analysis of qualitative data

Framework Method allows for the comparison and contrasting of data not just across all triads but also within each individual triad. Analysis undertaken as part of the Framework Method consists of 5 key stages, these involve:

1. familiarisation;
2. identifying thematic frameworks;
3. indexing;
4. charting; and

5. mapping and interpretation

(Srivastava and Thomson, 2009:75)

Ritchie et al., (2014:279) state that the Framework method goes beyond thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) in that there is an additional step which they label as “*data summary and display*” meaning that the researcher summarises the data and displays it through the use of matrices. The benefit of this approach is that it stops the researcher moving too quickly away from the raw data to analysis.

Familiarisation

In terms of the familiarisation process this entails the researcher familiarising him/herself with the transcripts in order to gain an overview of the data that has been collected. Srivastava and Thomson (2009) describe the process as listening to audio tapes, studying field notes and reading transcripts. For the purposes of this study the familiarisation stage mirrors the approach Srivastava and Thomson (2005). Each transcript was read according to triad group and also the field notes written for the triad. It was thought that this approach would enable a better understanding of the dynamic taking place within each triad, and that this would enable a comparative approach. A deliberate decision for each triad was to begin with the young person in care transcript, as part of acknowledging them as social actors who are able to exercise agency and make decisions in relation to contact. Moreover, this choice reflected a commitment to hearing the voice of a group of young people who are often marginalised because of the discourses of risk and vulnerability that is often associated with children in care. Having begun with the young person in care transcript the next transcript looked at was that of the foster carer, which enabled the contextualisation of the data provided by the young person in care. The final transcript looked at as part of a triad was the social work practitioner. This was done to ensure that the familiarisation process was not influenced by practice considerations commonly associated with contact. In terms of the field notes, these were analysed in conjunction with the transcripts from the respondents. This exercise provided further contextualisation of the statements made by the respondents, as well as the wider influences in the form of the fostering setting, and this gave added meaning. The same was true in terms of the reflexive diary that was kept during the fieldwork phase of the study. Referring to it as part of the familiarisation stage of the analytic process enabled contextualisation of interviews that had taken place months earlier. Moreover, it was possible to chart the change in mindset that was taking place, that is a growing realisation of the exercise of agency afforded to young people in care when they made use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact (Attia and Edge, 2017).

As part of this process notes were kept, and from these a set of preliminary codes were developed for each triad. As the familiarisation process continued it was noted that there were a series of codes that were common to more than one triad.

Identification of Framework

The purpose of this stage is to organise the data into manageable segments so as to aid the investigation and consideration of the data towards the latter stages of the entire process. Ritchie and Spencer (1994) advise that, this stage is informed by emergent themes arising from the data, as well as those informed by the literature review, conceptual frameworks and also the research questions. However, room also had to be left to identify those themes that are important to each respondent group and also triads. It should be noted that, this stage was characterised by moving between the actual data and the themes that were being devised. As part of ensuring that the approach taken was open to unanticipated themes, a transcript from each of the respondent groups (young person in care, foster carer and social work practitioner) was coded by hand in order to check whether there was a good fit with the themes that were emerging. For example, the theme that related to the intervention online by birth relatives was not expected and it was noted that, it was only specific to one triad, but it revealed not only reciprocity, but also monitoring that can be achieved by wider members of the birth family. Where there were inconsistencies noted in the themes identified, further amendments were made. Ritchie et al., (2014) state that, as part of the identification of a framework the themes should then be grouped together to form categories that have a broad overarching theme and a series of associated sub-themes that when placed together form part of an overall framework. To achieve the above it was necessary to identify links as well as discard others between the categories in order to group them thematically and refine the index further. An example of this is below:

2. Contact

2.1 Formal contact arrangements

2.2 Contact using mobile communication devices and the Internet

2.3 Contact with siblings

2.4 Contact with infants and other birth relatives

2.4.1 Intervention online by birth relatives

2.5 Topics of conversation when communicating with a birth relative

2.5.1 Physical health and wellbeing

2.5.2 Functional and Planning

2.5.3 Daily happenings

As can be seen, the broad theme that is 'Contact' that has a series of five sub-themes that were recurrent throughout all the transcripts and field notes. These sub-themes focus on different aspects of contact and also encapsulate the different perspectives held by the respondent groups, as well as individual triads. Decisions in relation to some associated sub-divisions of themes and how they were linked together under the broad overarching themes was influenced by the conceptual frameworks. For example, the theme of monitoring and management was sub-divided into 29 sub-themes that reveal the techniques and processes used by foster carers and endorsed by social work practitioners (*see Appendix L: Thematic Framework of analysed data*).

Indexing

The next step according to Ritchie et al., (2014) is concerned with applying the various broad overarching themes and associated sub-themes from the thematic framework to the data. This step entailed working through each transcript. Using Nvivo, a node was created for an overarching theme and its associated sub-themes. Following this, each segment of a transcript that related to broad theme and associated sub-themes was highlighted and then dragged and dropped into the labelled node. As identified by Parkinson et al., (2016: 126) this aspect of the process though time consuming was beneficial as each theme coded to a triad and participant group could then be manipulated as part of the analytic stage of the process. It was noted that more than one broad theme and sub-theme could be applied to an extract of data. This was of importance as it highlighted whether or not a theme was significant or that there were a series of important broad themes that were closely linked.

The decision was made to keep multiple codes where they were relevant for certain extracts of data as part of identifying themes that might be closely linked. Furthermore, as part of this phase there were certain extracts of data that did not fit into any of the identified categories that made up the Framework. Where this happened a further review of the Framework was required. For example, it

was found that, certain foster carers referred to the activity of young people in care making use of their mobile phone as ‘play’. This was not a theme that was repeated anywhere else in the data. However, it was indicative of how certain foster carers viewed the use of the mobile phones. This phase of the process was iterative and required a responsive approach in the sense of being willing to make changes to the labels for themes and associated sub-themes, as well as the moving of the various themes into different categories, and the deletion of some themes altogether.

Charting

This stage of the process involves creating a series of thematic matrices so as to aid analysis. Specifically, this part of the method required plotting on to an Excel spreadsheet the broad themes and associated sub-themes into columns with each respondent being allocated a row (*see Appendix M: Thematic Matrix: use of mobile devices and Internet by young people respondent group*). In order to do this, a labelling convention had to be developed that would include each triad and respondent group. Consequently, each triad was labelled with a capital letter from the alphabet, A-L and then each respondent group was given a number:

- Capital letter identifying which triad + No.1 is for young person in Care + initials of respondent = A1 (JS)
- Capital letter identifying which triad + No.2 for Foster Carer + initials of respondent = Foster Carer = A2 (BR)
- Capital letter identifying which triad + No.3 for Social Work practitioner for the young person in care + initials of respondent = Social Work practitioner for the young person in care = A3 (NW)

Triad	Young Person in care	Foster Carer	Social Work Practitioner
Triad A	A1 (JS)	A2 (BR)	A3 (NW)
Triad B	B1 (NH)	B2 (TS)	B3 (CP)
Triad C	C1 (KB)	C2 (PS)	C3 (KW)

In keeping with the process as outlined by Ritchie et al., (2014:231) a summary of each of the key points from the data including the context and the language used by each respondent, was placed within the relevant segment of the thematic matrix (*see Appendix L: Thematic matrix of analysed data*). In seeking to ensure that the content and context were properly noted, no actual quotes

were used, but use was made of different colour texts to highlight specific features. As each matrix was completed it was necessary to review it for the purposes of checking whether or not there were any gaps in the transference of data. Where this was apparent, notes were made on the chart that indicated whether the topic was relevant to respondent, or the respondent did not provide any comment. An example of this is F1, where many of the boxes have a single comment in the box which reads “Did not comment on her contact”. With regards to this particular young person in care she had willingly consented to an interview but then 15 minutes into it she withdrew her consent (Ritchie et al., 2014). However, it was possible to interview her foster carer and also her social work practitioner. At this stage in the analytical process there was also an empty column to record interpretive comments, note any relationships between various sub-themes or triads, as well as other questions that needed to be asked of the data (*see Appendix M: Thematic Matrix: use of mobile devices and Internet by young people respondent group*)

Mapping and Interpretation

This stage can be defined as moving from organising the data and moving towards analysing it. Parkinson et al., (2016: 122) state that, this phase is inclusive of “*the description and clarification of concepts*”, in other words, the extent and also characteristics of the phenomenon within the data. This phase also includes following lines of enquiry according to the research questions. This leads to the development of classifications (also known as typologies) and forming links that lead to explanations that stem from the data. As an activity the researcher is required to find patterns in the data and also to make sense of them. This stage represents a level of abstraction of the data that subsequently leads to the identification of diverse accounts of the phenomena being studied. The next level of abstraction of the data comes in the form creating key underlying dimensions. This aspect of the Method involves bringing together and sorting the elements. For example, in relation to contact, a number of elements were identified that included: multiple platforms of communication used for friendship network; use of pictures: shared record of life achievements and unwanted contact with birth parents. This activity was then followed by identifying key underlying dimensions, for example: patterns of communication; management of communication, maintenance of relationships and legitimacy of contact via mobile communication technology (*see Appendix N: Contact: Elements and Key dimensions*). Once this was done the process moved to another form of categorisation that resulted in further abstraction of the data (*see Appendix N: Contact: Elements and Key dimensions*).

In attempting to undertake this aspect of the process the data was reviewed for patterns in terms of behaviours, attitudes and perspectives. Examples of this include how the young people in care made use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact; the monitoring and surveillance activities undertaken by foster carers and also the management of mobile communication devices and the Internet in the fostering setting, as well as the attitudes of foster carers and social work practitioners to the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Importantly, this aspect of the process also enabled the contrasting of attitudes and perspectives across each of the triads and for each respondent group, this was important as it provided a holistic view of the phenomenon. The remainder of the process was concerned, as stated previously, with following lines of enquiry from each of the respondent groups influenced by the research questions and then comparing and contrasting them.

Reliability and Validity

An overarching and long running criticism of qualitative research when compared to quantitative is the supposed lack of validity, reliability and generalizability that has arisen as a result of the methods and approaches of a positivist paradigm that relies upon experimental design, double blind testing and random sampling (Gibbs, 2007:3). Blaikie (2010:216) highlights within a positivistic paradigm where the use of measurements and replication have often been used to secure and argue the reliability and validity of research it is important to remember that within this community of researchers there are, in actual fact, preferred measuring instruments as opposed to an ultimate standard which everyone has to abide by.

More fundamentally, as has been argued by Schofield (1993:202) when qualitative research is undertaken the point is not to generate a standardised set of results. Rather, what is produced is a description of the phenomenon which is undergirded by detailed study. Such a view is supported by Carmanti (2018:3) who says, *"In this sense, interpretivist research emphasizes the hermeneutics and perception of the social world, and the interactions between individuals and the surrounding context"* Consequently, to apply measures from a positivistic paradigm to a study that is qualitative misrepresents the academic worth of the study. The findings are neither repeatable nor reliable, but they are credible, particularly if relying on the definition provided by Longino (1990) that makes reference to clarity, transparency and being open to criticism. Meyrick (2006:803) makes a similar point regarding the difficulties that can be associated with recognising rigour in qualitative research that can include a range of epistemological positions and methodologies. However, she identifies

that consensus about rigour can be found across this paradigm when there is a focus on transparency and systemacity. Meyrick (2006:803) defines *systemacity* as “*the use of regular or set data collection and analytic process, and deviations in which are described and justified*”. Importantly, Meyrick argues that the transparency and systemacity should be present throughout all the stages of the research process.

With regards to transparency, the epistemological position and theoretical stance have been made plain (Meyrick, 2006). Furthermore, the ideal of the research design, the identification of respondents, and the realities of field work that saw the piloting phase curtailed because of an inability to access young people in care and the need to reduce the research burden on a local authority in order to increase the likelihood of the study being hosted. Again, in keeping with the notion of transparency, the research questions were provided and the justification for the methodology provided. In terms of the sampling technique used for this study, this has been made apparent, along with the rationale as to why different interview approaches had to be used.

Systemacity (Meyrick, 2006) has been achieved in in terms of explaining the analytical method that has been employed and examples from the stages of the Framework Method have been provided. This demonstrates not only the coherence of the analytic approach but also a commitment to rigour. By default, rigour has been achieved by sharing details of the data collection and then analytic framework that was employed. By default, rigour is a necessary characteristic of the Framework Method because of the systematic way in which it is employed, thereby confirming that a procedure was followed (Meryrick, 2006:805). In relation to the analysis, details were given regarding the lines of enquiry that were undertaken and the how these were linked to the research questions, as well as the themes that arose from the data. Both Longino (1990) and Meyrick (2006) highlight that sharing either the transcript or conclusions with research respondents is a way of establishing rigour and validity. Though Meyrick comments that there is a danger of the respondents’ views becoming the heart of the research, as opposed to the researcher’s interpretation. Similarly, Mays and Pope (1995) comment that to go back to respondent groups in isolation gives greater weight and validity to the common sense perspectives shared and detracts from more analytical interpretation. What was undertaken through a series of presentations to senior managers and practitioners within the host local authority was a level of member-checking from a practitioner perspective. It was not possible to do any member checking with the young people in care as a respondent group because this would have required seeking consent for a second time via allocated social work practitioners and foster

carers. Moreover, such an approach could potentially have had the added complexity of respondents changing the details, and therefore the meaning of their interviews because of having had the opportunity to reflect on what they had said.

Having stated that respondents were not approached to member-check, other means were employed to obtain feedback and these included regular meetings with my supervisors who challenged me on the findings and the evidence that was presented to them. Furthermore, I presented to academics at national and international conferences the emerging themes from the findings. These presentations provided the opportunity to check the extent to which the findings resonated with existing knowledge and practitioner experience.

Limitations

Having completed the study and reflecting on all of its aspects as part of completing the thesis, one of the first limitations that is likely to have affected the findings concerns the data captured from both foster carers and social work practitioners. It was noted on more than one occasion that both respondent groups made mention of other children as part of sharing details of their experiences. Whilst this provided a broader understanding of the phenomenon of children in care and their use of mobile communication devices and Internet for contact it was necessary to remind these respondents of the need to keep in mind the young people who were participants of the study.

Another key limitation is based on the sampling technique used. For the purposes of this study a specific type of theoretical sampling technique was used, yet the young people who were recommended for the study cannot necessarily be presumed to provide a sample that is inclusive of a representative range of young people in care that e.g. a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This is because social workers had a preference in relation to those young people where there were no difficulties in relation to contact. A similar limitation is mentioned by Mezey et al., (2015) who recognise that where social work practitioners act as informal gatekeepers there is a likelihood of selection bias. Therefore, whilst the study provides some insight as to how children in care make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact, what is not apparent in any great detail or depth, are the experiences of young people in care who are experiencing difficulties with this type of contact. This leaves the impression that the respondent group of young people who took part in the study were those that were seemingly settled and well-behaved. Given the difficulties of accessing children in care, it is highly doubtful whether an alternative approach could have been used or accepted by the local authority and social work practitioners.

A further limitation of the study is that one does not know to what extent the connections spoken by the young people in care was mutual. We have only heard one side or account of the connection. As stated previously in Chapter One this phenomenon could have potentially included more than the three respondent groups mentioned in the study, e.g. attempts could have been made to recruit birth family members however, the argument was made that the study was to be firmly located in the setting of fostering placements.

Conclusion

The challenges of the fieldwork and the limitations outlined in relation to the study overall could potentially cast doubt on the veracity of the findings. However, it is important to note that the field work challenges are not unique and reflect a wider debate in relation to the involvement of children and young people in research (see Fraser and Robinson, 2003). With regards to the limitations, particularly in relation to the sample of young people in care, this is related to, and a reflection of, undertaking research with children who are labelled as vulnerable, and therefore the influence on the sample size is not unique (see Gilbertson and Barber, 2002). Therefore, it can be suggested that the study provided a useful first from the perspective of children in care about the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact.

This chapter has set out aspects of the study in terms of the research strategy, the operative aspects of the fieldwork and finally the method of analysis employed. In doing so the reader has been provided with a reflexive account of the challenges associated with this stage of the study. It has been recognised that the period of fieldwork carries the greatest levels of uncertainty and risk as there were no guarantees that the respondent groups would be recruited. Additionally, information has been shared about the challenges encountered during the period of fieldwork and also the limitations of the study. A disturbing factor is that the researcher, depending on the type of study, is ever likely to be at the mercy of the host organisation and has to depend upon the benevolence and favour of the organisation (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2011 and Bell and Nutt, 2002), as well as the powers of persuasion, to gain access.

Chapter Five

Staying in touch

Introduction

This chapter constitutes the first of three findings chapters for the study, all of which are aimed at answering the research questions posed. A key feature of all three chapters will be the individual ages of the young people in care who took part in the study. This reflects what has been learnt in Chapter 2 that chronological age in terms of use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children and young people is an important variable that impacts not only on what devices are made available, but also what type of parenting practices are used.

This chapter is concerned with the first research question of the study, which is essentially, do young people in care make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact and the way in which this is done. As part of answering this question, there will be a brief overview of the contact the young people in care who took part in the study were experiencing, and also the type of mobile communication devices they made use of and how they used them. This information is useful in terms of providing a sense of context and avoiding impressions of homogeneity where they do not exist. Following this there will be a move to a description of how mobile communication devices and the Internet were used by the young people in care for contact. This description will encompass both familial and friendship networks. Additionally, what will be seen is how the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet are a means to stay connected with individuals and the wider network of family and friends. A further feature of the chapter is how the young people in care who took part in the study, actively engaged in managing their relationships with birth parent(s) and friends and the degree of success that they had. Appreciating that young people in care are not a homogenous group, it is important to note that the experiences of young people in care with learning disabilities was markedly different to their peers.

Existing arrangements for contact

All twelve of the young people in care who took part in the study were in a fostering placement of a duration of nine months or more. For six of the young people in care they had existing contact arrangements in place at the time they were being interviewed for the study (Nora, Kaitlin, Justine, Leo, Kayne and Darrell). The direct contact that took place was often with birth parents and siblings and was limited to a specific period of time. The foster carers for each of these young people in care

played a central role in transporting them to and from contact. Three other young people in care who took part in the study (Bradley, Leighton and Leo) had contact organised by their foster carers, particularly where it involved seeing other siblings. Examples of this included Justine who, in conjunction with her siblings had contact with her birth mother after school on a fortnightly basis. Leo had supervised contact with his birth mother once a month on a weekday, and unsupervised contact with his elder sibling as and when arrangements could be made with the foster carer. Darrell had supervised contact with his birth father once a month. There was only one young person who did not have contact either directly or indirectly with his birth parent(s) or siblings and that was Matt. His social work practitioner had tried on numerous occasions to organise contact but had not been successful:

“In the beginning the first social worker that he had when he came to us was brilliant and he kept contact going, he always saw dad, his oldest sister and youngest sister. As time’s elapsed, that social worker left, and then we don’t know why dad seemed to disappear. We couldn’t get in touch with him, and we still haven’t (Bev, Foster Carer)

For Nora, Kaitlin, Justin, Leo and Jaiden, they also had indirect contact that consisted of telephone calls and this was recognised as a permissible feature of their respective contact plans. For Justine and Leo their birth parents or relatives would telephone the foster carer in the first instance and the call would be passed to the young person in care³¹:

Sometimes Mum, you know will send me a text, can I talk to Justine and that, and sometimes I think well go on then. You know. Cos I’m sitting here. It’s not gonna hurt.” (Laura, Foster Carer)

It is evident that where telephone calls were a feature of the contact arrangements, foster carers saw their role as having the responsibility of supervising the call, an activity that was fully supported and seen as a norm by the social work practitioners:³²

“Justine does have phone contact on special occasions with mum. So things like birthdays, eve of Christmas and so on, she gets a phone contact.” (Verone, Social Work practitioner)

Foster carers were also asked about the contact that the young people in their care had. Their responses revealed that many of the young people had contact with their birth parent(s) on a monthly basis that was supervised (Nora, Kaitlin, Justine, Leo, Leighton and Darrell), and this also included non-direct contact. In the case of Kayne his contact was not as regular and as a result his foster carer, Piers preferred for contact to be organised by and through the Kayne’s social work practitioner. The foster carers also commented on the difficulties that were present in contact that

³¹ See additional examples in Appendix O

³² See additional examples in Appendix O

was direct and indirect particularly where the birth parent(s) had ongoing mental ill-health or substance misuse problems:

“Leo sees his Mum every month. At the moment it takes place in an office so it’s not good. In fact, we’re trying to get them to change it so they could meet in a cafe or in McDonalds or something just away, you know, from an office setting, so it can be a little bit more natural. It was agreed right at the start, that there wouldn’t be any phone contact because she would be kicking off, and then she would phone on the brother’s phone and then we would end up with hysteria at this end” (Nanci, Foster Carer)

From the perspective of the social work practitioners all the young people in care either had or were expected to have contact with their birth parent(s) or siblings. It was noted that, little or no mention was made by the social work practitioners about ‘contact’ being with other individuals from the young person in care’s familial or friendship networks.

Of the three young people in care aged between 17-18 years of age (Jane, Lamar and Jaiden) it was found that their contact arrangements were significantly different, in that they could choose whether or not to have contact with members of their familial network. In the case of Lamar he had intermittent contact with his siblings by choice, whilst Jaiden decided not to have any contact whatsoever with his birth mother. However, the same was not true for Jane, where it was found that her family had chosen not to have contact with her.

The details in relation to existing arrangements for contact show that a number of the young people in care had formal arrangements in place that was organised by social work practitioners and supported by foster carers, this was particularly the case for those young people who were aged between 13-16 years of age. For older adolescents aged between 17-18 years, there was a difference in the sense that they chose who they had contact with and when. Suggesting that these older adolescents were able to exercise a level of choice that was not readily available to the younger adolescents.

[Use of mobile communication devices by young people in care](#)

All the young people in care who took part in the study, apart from three (Justine, Leo and Bradley) made frequent use of their mobile communication devices to stay in touch with individuals from their friendship and familial networks. For the three young people in care who made either infrequent or no use of their mobile communication devices, this was for reasons associated with personal choice (Leo); lack of access (Justine) and use limited to key people such as the foster carer, the GP, the foster carer’s daughter and social work practitioner (Bradley).

In terms of the various platforms of mobile communication used by the young people in care, these included texting and phoning, as well as social networking sites and other applications. A total of 12 different social networking sites and apps were regularly used by the young people in care to make contact with members of their familial and friendship networks (see Appendix Q for a *Glossary of social media platforms and Internet applications*).

Name of young person in care	Age	Social media and apps made use of for contact with members of familial and friendship networks
Jane	17	Facebook, WhatsApp and Snapchat
Nora	14	Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Tango, Facetime, Twitter, Skype and Instagram
Kaitlin	14	Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Kik, Skype, Flickr, Instagram and FriendLife
Matt	15	Facebook, WhatsApp and Snapchat
Lamar	17	Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram and Gmail
Justine	14	None used
Leo	14	Facebook
Leighton	15	WhatsApp and Facebook
Jaiden	18	Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram
Bradley	17	Facebook and Gmail
Kayne	16	Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, FriendsLife
Darrell	13	WhatsApp

Table 3 Social Media platforms used by young people in care

As can be seen the most popular platforms used by the young people in care were Facebook (inclusive of Facebook Messenger), WhatsApp and Snapchat, followed by Instagram and Twitter:

“So yeah, with this cousin it’s, it’s a Facebook and a Whatsapp thing. I deleted my Instagram. I don’t really contact anyone apart from my two best friends, unless I need something.” (Jane, aged 17)

Less frequently used were social networking sites such as FriendLife and Tumblr, this was because these platforms were not used by members of the young people in care’s friendship and familial networks. Instead, use was made of Gmail to communicate with others. It was noted that those

young people in care who possessed a smartphone made use of multiple platforms, for example, Nora made use of 8 different platforms, whilst Lamar made use of 7 in order to have contact and communicate with members of his friendship and familial networks (see Table 2). Furthermore, the use of mobile communication devices for staying in touch was not just confined to smartphones, it also included computers and tablets.

Of the mobile communication devices that was available to the young people in care, for example tablets and laptops (see Appendix K: *Table of key characteristics of triad respondents*), the device used most frequently was the smartphone. The young people in care also made use of their mobile communication devices, more frequently their smartphone, to communicate with their foster carers and, on occasions their social work practitioners³³:

“Like when I’m letting her know what my plan is for a day or if I’m late for the bus, like I say that I’m on my way home you know, to let her know” (Nora, aged 14)

“So, for instance Lamar had problems with his employment so he texted me a few times that week just to say ‘I’m having problems with this and I’m not sure what to do’. So I phoned him so we could discuss about what he wants to do with work and give him a bit of advice with that. And then he’d text me later on in the week just to say that this has happened and he’s no longer working there anymore. So, it’d be giving me updates in that sense.” (Zayla, Social Work Practitioner)

A further characteristic of use was that for those young people in care who owned a smartphone, they used it for a variety of other activities that included gaming, making videos; watching YouTube and watching soap dramas in their native language. Where they made use of other mobile communication devices such as laptops and computers, these were used for watching films, listening to music, gaming and also homework³⁴:

“So I’ll be watching movies and stuff, but yeah, that’s what my tablet’s for, movies... and music” (Jane, aged 17)

Whilst it was evident that young people in care primarily used their mobile phones as a device of choice for a variety of activities, this was not necessarily welcomed by foster carers. The use of mobile communication devices was associated with a reduction in face-to-face communication and a drain on time:

“My view of it is, and I’m obviously called an old fuddy duddy, is that there’s far too much time spent on mobile phones. And I can only see it getting worse really. Because of technology improving, which is great in some respects, but on the negative side, they lose that face to face contact, that social element of communicating” (Toni, Foster Carer)

It was noted that a similar view was held by one social work practitioner:

³³ See Appendix O – Use of mobile communication devices by young people in care

³⁴ See Appendix O – Use of mobile communication devices by young people in care

“It’s negative. If you want to get hold of a young person and find out where they are and what they’re up to. Or if there’s any criminal activity involved, but the negative is, obviously they’ve got online access which isn’t always in the child’s best interests, and you know if they don’t want you to get hold of them they switch their phones off!” (Camlyn, allocated Social Work Practitioner)

Other foster carers and social work practitioners, associated mobile phone use, as well as the use of other mobile communication devices, with risky behaviours:

“And I think some of the discussions we’ve had, you know, we all recognise I think with IT how vulnerable – not just children in care are, but children in general. But you get to a point when particularly when he’s getting to a teenager...you think of pornography and things like that” (Madaline and Rex, Foster carers)

“It’s negative. If you want to get hold of a young person and find out where they are and what they’re up to. Or if there’s any criminal activity involved, but the negative is, obviously they’ve got online access which isn’t always in the child’s best interests, and you know if they don’t want you to get hold of them they switch their phones off!” (Camlyn, Social Work Practitioner)

In contrast, there was as a minority of social work practitioners, such as Nadia and Zayla who recognised that the use of mobile communication devices and social media was an integral part of a young person in care’s life and they also associated it with privacy³⁵:

“With social media, with texting and things like that – it is privacy for them, it is their private use” (Zayla, Social Work practitioner)

It was noted that both these social work practitioners had been in post for a period of one to twelve months, leaving the impression that, the acceptance of mobile communication devices is recognised as a norm for all young people, and not just young people in care.

It can be seen that for the young people in care, the use of mobile communication devices like the smartphone is an inherent feature of their daily lives. Moreover, for those young people in care with a smartphone it enabled them to use a variety of apps and platforms, and it was also used as a means to access entertainment in the form of watching films and listening to music. Other devices such as laptops and the computers were primarily used for homework and entertainment. The response by foster carers and some social work practitioners to the use of mobile communication devices was less than positive, associating them with inferior communication methods when compared to speaking face-to-face and time wasting. Furthermore, both foster carers and social work practitioners linked the use of mobile communication devices to a range of risks that included criminality, negative online content, as well as vulnerability as a young person in care. It could be argued that this preoccupation with risk about mobile communication and the Internet reflects adult

³⁵ See Appendix O – Use of mobile communication devices by young people in care

concerns in general about the use of mobile communication by children and young people (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Livingstone and Brake, 2010; and Ofcom, 2017).

The use of mobile communication devices with familial networks – staying in touch

With regards to the use of mobile communication technologies with birth family members there was a tendency by the young people in care to rely on Facebook because it was the most popular social media site that many of their family members had access to, even those family members who lived abroad³⁶:

“I follow my stepfather and mother, they use Facebook sometimes” (Nora, aged 14)

“I stay in touch with my Nana and Grandad by text and phone calls. I don’t text him a lot to be fair, sometimes I’ll get an odd call from my Nana and stuff but not a lot. Yeah. I’m quite - I’m close to them both” (Leighton, aged 16)

The popularity of Facebook is summed up by one of the young people who took part in the study, he stated:

“Facebook messaging cos it’s easy and it’s free and everyone has access to it if they have a smartphone etc” (Kayne, aged 16)

For Matt, the use of Facebook was essential for him to stay in touch with various members of his family, as his circumstances involved not having contact with any individuals within his birth family. Contact via Facebook was deemed as permissible in the absence of direct and indirect telephone contact:

“We couldn’t get in touch with his Dad, and we still haven’t. Now I know that – cos I’m on Facebook – to monitor them, and all his family is on Facebook. We did authorise that through the social worker that it was OK for him to go on Facebook in the first place and would it be OK for him to contact any of his family and they sanctioned that” (Bev, Foster Carer)

Facebook was not the only platform that the young people in care used to contact their birth family members. There was widespread use of WhatsApp to share messages and pictures. Nora was the only respondent who made use of video-calling through Tango (see Appendix Q: *Glossary of social media and Internet applications*) that allowed her to not only speak to her family abroad but also see them:

³⁶ See Appendix O - The use of mobile communication devices with familial networks – staying in touch

“We do more Tango video calls. I see them all the time” (Nora, aged 14)

At no point during the study did the young people in care describe their interaction with members of their familial network via various mobile devices and social networking sites as contact. Their activities were simply a matter of staying in touch with those individuals from their familial network. This is illustrated in Nora and Lamar’s use of WhatsApp and Snapchat to communicate aspects of their daily lives through pictures which allowed them to share moments that were of importance to them³⁷:

“You just wanna show things off, like, what are you in, or what are you doing, or who are you meeting. Just like when we went to Heavenly Desserts we eat something I just take a picture, put it on Snapchat. Or when I’m meeting my friends, I’m just like ‘oh we are all here, together. Or when I look nice and I do my make-up and everything. They comment on it like ‘y’alright’ and everything, or they send me a text on Facebook” (Nora, aged 14)

In the case of Matt he would always instigate communication by sending a quick message to check that certain family members were OK.

For Kaitlin, Lamar, Leighton and Kayne, they were able to plan their contact using various platforms such as texting, WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. A further consistent finding was the way in which contact was instigated by the young person in care with particular members of their familial network. In the case of Matt he would always instigate communication by sending a quick message to check that certain family members were OK. For Kaitlin, she would contact her elder brother and sister as the time for face-to-face contact was drawing near. They would then go on to arrange the details of contact, where to go and what to do. As we have already seen with Lamar, he explained that his brothers were busy with their own families, so could not always send a message to him, but they would respond to messages he sent. What is important to note is the ease with which these young people could plan contact and their experience of disappointment was limited³⁸:

“Yeah, it’s in my hands basically, all that contact. But when I was younger of course things would be put in place, people would be called and say ‘look, Lamar wants to see you then everything would be put in place at a contact centre or a McDonalds or whatever. With social media like Whatsapp I can say ‘mum are you still in, is it OK to come down’ then it’s fine. Cos then you’re not getting your hopes

³⁷ Appendix O - The use of mobile communication devices with familial networks – staying in touch

³⁸ Appendix O - The use of mobile communication devices with familial networks – staying in touch

up about 'oh I'm seeing my mum today' and then what's it called? She don't turn up because something else popped up and she could text me if anything pops up, and I could say 'OK, that's cool' or with anyone really so, like with contact really I think it's like you can rely on it more" (Lamar, aged, 17)

"It's easy, you don't have to travel, like, for ages to go and see her [Mum]. Even if she is busy, you know at some point you will get to talk. Sometimes I initiate the conversation. Sometimes she initiates it and just – it's just about everyday life and stuff like that" (Kayne, aged 16)

The young people in care were able to communicate with members of their familial network with ease and without the attending facets of contact that relate to travel and availability.

Often the instigation of communication by the young people in care was due to the fact that birth relatives, particularly older siblings were occupied with matters in their own lives and this influenced the nature and amount of communication using mobile communication devices. What was also apparent from the interaction the young people in care had with birth family members was that they appreciated the positive comments made to them and valued the relationships.

That said, there were also instances when birth parents would get in touch. In the case of Leighton, this was in relation to a change in his father's circumstances that involved him being temporarily admitted to a rehabilitation centre:

"But I know when he went into rehab, there was a time when Dad was texting or calling Leighton in the morning, and they [foster carers] were concerned that it was delaying him from getting ready for school. The foster carers who have a good relationship with Dad were up front with him to say look, you phoning him in the morning is having an impact on him, you know, he's now getting late and getting ready for school and he becomes a little bit confused in the morning when you've called him. And Dad was OK with it, he adhered to it and he said it was fine". (Candice, Social Work Practitioner).

What is of import is the fact that, the contact Leighton had with his birth parent was ongoing and that it only reduced when the foster carers became involved.

The immediate benefits of young people staying in touch with members of their birth family via mobile communication devices was not always necessarily welcomed by foster carers or social work practitioners. Speaking from experience, foster carers provided accounts of placements almost breaking down due to the negative and disruptive influence of birth parents:

“I don’t think they should be allowed on Facebook until they’re an adult cos I just think it’s misused as children a lot of the time it’s just misused and it causes – well, it has caused breakdown in our placements here” (Perry)

Perry’s negativity regarding the use of mobile communication devices was not just confined to placements; his views were also informed by the recent experience of the uninvited and unwelcome contact from Kaitlin’s birth mother³⁹:

“Kaitlin was a little bit uncomfortable with the amount of contact that mum was making. It was getting too much. It was her Mum saying on Facebook, “I’m doing this today”; “Hi babe, we’re going such-and-such today” and “I’m doing that today”. And Kaitlin was uncomfortable. I mean it even came to a point where mum was sending messages at 12 o’clock at night while the phone was in our bedroom. Obviously she didn’t know it was in our bedroom but we spoke to the social worker about that and I believe that she spoke to mum and said it was unacceptable and the amount of contact that mum was trying to force on Kaitlin and how uncomfortable Kaitlin was with it” (Perry, Foster Carer)

A further perspective on the situation is provided by Kaitlin’s social work practitioner:

“Kaitlin was getting quite frustrated you know - every time she put something on Facebook her mum liked it or put comments on it – she found it a bit annoying. Like you know, normally they expect that they [birth parents] would kind of make contact with Children’s Services. We’d kind of assess it, look into it, whether it’d be appropriate, which we’re kind of having to do – we’re kind of having to take a back step to do that after the event” (Camlyn, Social Work practitioner)

What is seen here is a difference in how the communication taking place between the young person in care and their familial network, it is described by both Perry and Camlyn as ‘contact’. It can be seen that Perry describes the nature of ‘contact’ as being forced upon Kaitlin, in doing so he highlights the level of intensity that can be experienced by users of mobile devices who are recipients of unwanted attention. The response provided by Camlyn sees her focus on Kaitlin’s emotional reaction to the situation. It also highlights the way in which use of social networking platforms by birth parents to reach out to their children can circumvent normal procedures in relation to seeking permission from Children’s Social Care to have contact. Consequently, the normal process of carrying out an assessment and the subsequent decision by the social work practitioner as to whether or not contact between a young person in care and a member of their

³⁹ Appendix O - The use of mobile communication devices with familial networks – staying in touch

familial network is appropriate, was in effect made redundant, as the act of 'contact' has already happened and the practitioner was essentially catching up. Kaitlin's case once again highlights the immediacy, duration and intensity of staying in touch when mobile communication devices are used.

The circumvention of social work practitioners either by birth parents or young people in care when they used mobile communication devices to stay in touch, was something social work practitioners were acutely aware of:

"Leo's mum bought him a mobile phone for his Christmas present and it was one of the brand new Samsung ones with all of the up to date stuff and I know that she'd put her phone number in it."
(Carissa, Social Work practitioner)

"Because the smartphone can have the internet access and they're more likely to be able to go on sort of inappropriate things online, or they might be able to go on Facebook and contact their mum – and that's the biggest concern I've got for that young person, is that they will contact their mum through Facebook" (Nadia, Social Work practitioner)

What is important to note is that the evasion of social work practitioner approval for 'contact' comes from both birth parents and the young people themselves. Meaning that this form of contact, at first sight, seems beyond the immediate control and management of social work practitioners and also foster carers, as what is taking place is in real time and needs to be responded to in that moment, as opposed to any other timescale. The response by foster carers is that unmediated contact represents on the one hand an unwanted intrusiveness into the life of the young person in care, and on the other, disruption to placements, not only in terms of the breakdown, but also the effects of destabilisation. In contrast, social work practitioners deemed unmediated contact via mobile communication devices and the Internets as illicit and full of risk, as well as a failure by birth parent(s) to comply with usual mechanism that involves asking their permission in the first instance.

For the young people in care who took part in the study, staying in touch is about sharing daily aspects of their lives with various members of their familial network. It is also evident that the information shared is across more than one platform which provided different means and choice for communicating in either pictures or words. Importantly, what is also seen is the immediate feedback from members of the familial network in relation to the information shared with them. Ironically, in the case of Kaitlin it can be observed that, official contact is being organised through a series of texts with her elder brother and sister, with no concerns expressed by her social work practitioner. Overall, the findings indicate that, the young people in care who took part in the study

are engaged in 'doing family', that is staying in touch and maintaining a range of connections with members of their familial network. This in turn leads to a further questions about risk, vulnerability and safeguarding, and whether or not it is applicable to *all* children and young people in care. Moreover, in relation to the wellbeing of these young people in care, from whom do they need to be protected?

Sibling relationships

A key component within the literature for contact is sibling contact and how it can best be maintained (see Chapter Two). There is evidence that suggests that the young people who took part in the study made use of their mobile communication devices, especially their smartphone to stay in touch with their siblings and step-siblings. For those young people in care who had younger siblings their ability to stay in touch was often barred by an adult. Examples include face-to-face contact with younger siblings stopped by a step-parent (Kayne); a social work practitioner denying contact because of the negative family reputation (Matt) and a social work practitioner who was struggling to find and make contact with adopters (Kaitlin)⁴⁰:

"There are children on his father's side, there's 3 children but he doesn't have any contact with them either. But in any case, we did ask for - for contact between the other 3 siblings and the stepmum – refused" (Candice, Social Work practitioner)

However, the situation is completely different for teenage siblings who had access to mobile communication devices. An example of this is Kayne, whose younger brother and sister, both of whom were in early adolescence and able to communicate independently of their birth parents or foster carers on Facebook⁴¹:

"Dylan Facebook messages me and he normally asks about six packs and then he asks if I have a girlfriend and that's normally about it. He also texts me, but I don't reply cos normally he's just asking where are you, and stuff like that" (Kayne, aged 16)

Here it can be noted that, the use mobile communication devices by siblings in their early teens of the young people in care is a matter of staying in touch and is not influenced by existing contact arrangements that might already be in place. It would seem, that it was simply a matter of getting in

⁴⁰ Appendix O – Siblings relationships

⁴¹ Appendix O – Siblings relationships

touch and connecting with his brother. However, it is acknowledged that without having interviewed Kayne's young sibling what has been presented is one perspective.

A further noticeable theme relevant to a number of the young people in care who took part in the study was how mobile communication devices were used even when the relationship with a sibling was in the midst of breaking down or had already broken down. Matt expressed the fact that, his sister's threat to have him beaten up, had a devastating impact on him, possibly meaning that although the communication that took place was synchronous, the emotional intensity and the sense of pain experienced was in no way impaired. Yet despite the breakdown in relationship, they still stayed in touch:

"She popped up to me once saying – oh, do you know about mum? Which I already knew about my mum. And I said yeah, I do. And she went OK and I went OK. And then we left it at that" (Matt, aged 15)

Conversely, the experience of Lamar in terms of his broken relationship with his elder sisters would seem to indicate that the use of mobile communication devices, and in particular certain platforms, do allow the opportunity to make a series of tentative steps towards reconciliation:

"I have two sisters they're my half-sisters. Like the relationship's broke down in a way? But then like I do talk to 'em sometimes, see how they are – I always check if they're OK and stuff. But I don't really talk to them much, like - not every day and stuff like some kids would talk to their brothers and sisters every day" (Lamar, aged 17)

These responses seem to indicate that the use of mobile communication devices in particular, allowed the young people in care who took part in the study to maintain connections with step siblings that were not included as part of the Care Plan:

"I have... 3 older sisters on my Mum's side. I stay in touch with only one of 'em by Facebook. We used to see them all the time. I get in touch with her about once a week" (Kayne, aged 16)

These experiences would seem to indicate that staying in touch with members of the familial network like birth siblings means that the facility to communicate and restore relationships is never really lost – unless the birth relatives remove themselves from being contacted altogether. It can also be noted that, there are difficulties that may exist in ongoing sibling relationships because of the behaviours displayed. For example, Kayne whose younger brother would ask annoying questions and his sister, who regularly called him to talk about matters that were, for him, inconsequential. Admittedly, whilst acknowledging Kayne's perspective on the nature of the communication he had with his siblings; what is not ascertainable are his siblings' thoughts as to the interactions they had.

As to whether the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care either enhanced or hindered the sibling relationships, the answer would seem to be that this is dependent upon the existing relational tie and how it is manifested. The findings to this point would seem to indicate that mobile communication devices and the Internet are a conduit for existing relationships rather than the replacement of them.

Relationship Preservation

The findings from this study indicate that young people in care through the use of mobile communication devices are able to stay in touch with birth family members and other individuals from the familial and friendship networks as a matter of choice. Examples of this include Matt who is able to maintain a minimum level of contact with his father and elder sister, compared to the efforts by his social work practitioner to officially organise contact which to that point had yielded nothing at all. Matt was also able to maintain an important relationship with his cousin and her mother. Another example is Nora and her sister, both of whom were able to maintain contact with a former carer, much to the annoyance of her social work practitioner:

“The previous foster carer that they were in placement with a few years ago was still in communication with them. And I think the local authority had difficulties trying to stop that communication. And I think the girls have only just recently realised that the local authority aren’t going to support them going back to that placement which is why they’ve now accepted the care that they’ve been given. In all fairness to Nora and her sister, when challenged - they confirmed that was what was happening, and I think it was more about the foster carer not being able to let them go, and she didn’t want them to go. Yeah it was by mobile phone” (Cath, Social Work practitioner)

The point to note is that the connection, in this case an emotional one continued beyond the placement and was acted upon and reinforced through ongoing communication through mobile communication devices. In contrast, Jane, whose family members had refused to have contact with her, maintained a connection with them through a method of monitoring what was going on within the family via mutual friends of her family members:

Like, my dad he finks he’s the Godfather of the family like, he’s man, but he’s not. Cos I know everyfink. I’ve always got that one person that’s in contact with – there’s always a mutual friend that knows everything because they’re close to my sisters. So it’s like, I always know what’s going on, so what’s said about me, what feelings are towards me. I know them. So yeah, I’m not bothered about being in foster care because obviously I still got tabs on everybody” (Jane, aged 17)

Lamar, Nora and Jaiden also followed their birth relatives on Facebook:

"I follow my stepfather and mother, they use Facebook sometimes" (Nora, aged 14)

"Like if my sisters have been somewhere and that like it's a big part then I can just write a comment underneath like 'well done' if it is like summat positive, or - if it's a hospital appointment 'oh, I hope you get better soon'" (Lamar, aged 17)

In the case of Jaiden, the act of connection would seem to be altogether different. The act of looking at his birth mother's Facebook profile appears to suggest that his interest in her was ongoing and that this could be satisfied, though he had no intention of communicating with her:

"Jaiden's looked at his Mum's Facebook profile and occasionally he tells me how awful she looks" (Bernice, Social Work Practitioner).

Other young people such as Matt and Kaitlin monitored the Facebook profiles of birth family members. The ability to monitor indicates a level of cognizance about family members that would not necessarily have been present before the advent of the Internet and social networking sites. This level of cognizance about the familial network, coupled with ongoing contact via one or more social media platforms, highlights the extent to which a sense of connection can be maintained, even if communication is infrequent or does not take place at all. It was also noted that the young people in care valued the relationships that they with members of their familial network.

Importantly, the act of monitoring is not just exercised by the young people in care. It was found to be prevalent amongst birth family members. This was particularly the case for Kaitlin, who, when she was being bullied online, obtained support from her elder sister and another relative:

"Yeah cos I'm in care, they was like saying things about my mum and things about my dad and all that. And cos like lots of people know that I don't see my mum any more cos I've decided not to see my mum. They're saying 'oh, when are you seeing your mum?' and all that and I was like, you know I don't see my mum any more, you're just trying to wind me up. My elder sister always gets involved and also someone call Claire. She's part of my family – I don't know who she is but she's part of my family. They write things like 'Just ignore them Kaitlin, you're the bigger person' and all that" (Kaitlin, aged 14)

Whilst this type of monitoring is immediately helpful for Kaitlin, it was not welcomed by her foster carer:

"A coupla times Kaitlin's family's seen this and tried to get involved saying 'we'll come down to where you live Kaitlin and we'll get 'em for yer' and you just think – you just don't need it – just stop talking on Facebook! Just leave it alone! So we've had brother phoning social services, Kaitlin's been threatened... yeah you're alright, we're dealing with it, it's all sorted! What you're doing isn't helpful, threatening everything else, it's just fuelling the fire, you just need to leave it. We'll sort it and let's move on" (Perry, Foster Carer)

As can be seen the ability to monitor family members has offered the young people in care a greater sense of what was taking place in their families and a sense of continuing connection. In particular,

for Jane, the ability to view what was happening within her family enabled her to cope with being in care, and the separation from her immediate family. A similar finding was replicated for Nora, Matt and Lamar, all of whom were able to monitor their familial networks highlighting what is a significant development in the arena of contact for children and young people in care.

The management of difficult relationships

The existing literature in relation to contact highlights that a further feature is that during the contact encounter that could constitute a telephone call, a visit or a letter that children and young people in care may be subject to the same repeated negative and rejecting behaviours that led to them being originally placed in care (Macaskill, 2002 and Moyers, Farmer and Lipscombe, 2006). Conversely, the very opposite may happen and the child in care has the experience of a birth parent(s) providing them with lots of gifts or promises of returning home (James et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2010 and the Department for Education, 2012). What is apparent from this study is that, mobile communication whether it be in the form texts, telephone calls or Facebook messages can and are a conduit for such behaviours and experiences other than those outlined in the literature. The young people in care attempted to avoid communication and this took the form of ignoring calls, arranging for either an elder sister or foster carer to take the call on their behalf, as well as making excuses. Alternatively, the young person's social work practitioner got involved and stopped communication altogether⁴²:

“Well she [birth mother] rings me, cos I can't ring her, she only can ring me. So she want to ring me like nearly every day and see what I'm doing. Well – sometime you find it quite annoying cos, you know. So sometime I just like don't pick the phone up or I just ignore it” (Nora, aged 14)

Jaiden completely stopped contact altogether with his birth mother by blocking her from his mobile phone and Facebook account. This activity was then followed up by his social work practitioner:

“I eventually pushed her away. So quite a few years ago now, I cut her off. Like, I didn't explain to her why. I just blocked her number. Cos I didn't wanna –have anything to do with her so... I was cutting out the middle man, save the explaining and just be gone with her” (Jaiden, 18 years)

In Kaitlin's case her birth mother contacted her unexpectedly after a significant number of years:

“Well, she got Facebook. And um – she tried to add me so I added her. And I was like I don't know who she is. And then she told me, like, she was my mum. Yeah. So I started talking to her and she was like, when do you wanna meet up an' all that. And I was like I don't want to meet up with you. Cos like - I'm not ready. And so – like – she started texting me all the time. Through lessons and that, so I blocked her” (Kaitlin, aged 14)

⁴² See Appendix O – Management of difficult relationships

For Kaitlin it can be seen that with her birth mother unexpectedly getting in touch with her via Facebook this was an experience she found difficult and her response was to block her birth mother from her Facebook account and mobile phone. The case of Leighton offers another perspective on how young people in care manage difficult relationships. The problems underpinning the existing relationship stemmed from his birth father's substance misuse and Leighton's role as pseudo carer:

"Unlike before he used to worry about his health because he knew he was drinking. So he was sort of like took on that caring role even though he wasn't living with him. Dad would ring him regularly, I think a lot of times during the day they would have to be texting or communicating with each other because Leighton worried about dad". (Candice, Social Work Practitioner)

Leighton stayed in touch with his birth father regularly which enabled him to reassure himself about his father's welfare. A sense of anxiety is a common characteristic for young people in care, who remain concerned for family members despite having been removed from the family home (The Office of the Children's Rights Director, 2009). An example of this is Justine:

"When they first come her mam used to ring up and upset her. You know saying I'm really poorly and things like that. Course, she's not been here that long and she was worried! You know, or I've got no money, I don't know how I'm gonna find meself some food, you know. Which is worrying for children in't it?" (Laura, Foster Carer)

Returning to Justine's, her foster carer, Laura goes on to describe the communication that takes place now after a number of years in placement:

"Well - Justine will be talking to her mam and then she'll just say, 'Well, you're a bitch ain't ya. You know, you put me in care' and all this lot – things like that. And then cos her mam has her own difficulties as well... some mental health issues. And of course it just clashes. Justine will put the phone down. She'll say 'Yeah, I'm going, bye'. Oh there's no bother with her, with it whatsoever! She's laughing her head off! (Laura, Foster Carer)

The scenarios involving Justine and Jaiden points to a level of spontaneity and volatility that can be quickly ignited dependent on the mood of the young person in care and the situation at the time. But, what is also apparent is a choice to either stop communication altogether, or where communication does take place, the young person in care is able to say what s/he thinks and feels freely without it being controlled or managed, as is likely to be the case in supervised contact. The findings point to the fact that the young people in care who took part in the study found ways of avoiding contact with birth parent(s) through making themselves unavailable particularly or through challenging birth parent(s) about what they had done. Consequently, it can be concluded that the management of relationships between young people in care and their birth parent(s) is not just within the ability and realm of social work practitioners and foster carers.

Young people with Learning Disabilities

As stated previously this study has involved three young people with learning disabilities (Justine, Bradley and Darrell). Their experiences of using mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact was starkly different when compared to their non-disabled peers. For example, Justine was not given any opportunity to make use of mobile communication devices because her foster carer, Laura ensured that all the communication went through her. Laura did provide Justine with a mobile phone but this did not have a SIM, meaning she could only make emergency phone calls. The motivation behind such a decision was not necessarily linked to safeguarding:

“Because, she don’t have to waste her money on credit. Cos soon as she buys credit, like she did wi’ her old phone she has her £12, she has to buy £10 worth of credit – well it’s gone in seconds. So it’s just a complete waste of money. I said in the end, I’m not giving you the money to waste on credit. I want you to get something for you. Because it’s only her friends saying ring me, ring me, they don’t ring her! You know, so- yeah”. (Laura)

Laura also stopped Justine from having a Facebook account because of previous issues of bullying at school and therefore she did not want her exposed again to behaviours that would cause upset⁴³. Laura also dissuaded members of her family from having any contact with Justine online because she believed that they would be continually bothered⁴⁴:

In the case of Bradley, he made limited use of his mobile phone, but did engage with social networking. However, his foster carer, Rose simply assumed that because of his learning disability that he was unlikely to make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet.

“Because of Bradley’s autism, he’s got no friends. He’s very isolated. He spends all his time in his bedroom. I mean if he had friends at school like children do use it for friends, it’s a good way of keeping in contact with friends – well he’s got no friends. He was a loner at school and the teachers say the children all thought he was odd. So it’s not like he’d want the phone to keep in touch with friends” (Rose, Foster Carer)

It was only Darrell who made use of mobile communication devices however, this only happened as a result of his foster carer frequently checking what he was doing.

“So I’m saying that if he’s got his mobile phone and he’s in his bedroom, he just keeps his door open and every so often I’ll just go and like little spot checks with him. I’ll say ‘Darrell what you doin’ on your phone matey?’” (Rayanna, Foster Carer)

However, Darrell was at liberty to speak to others within the foster family:

Interviewer: *So how do you speak to your foster brothers?. Do they ring? Or do they text you?*

Darrell: *Whatsapp! I text them, if they’re busy, if they don’t text back, that means they’re busy*

⁴³ See Appendix O – Young people with Learning Disabilities

⁴⁴ See Appendix O – Young people with Learning Disabilities

The set of findings point to the fact that, whilst the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet have enabled almost instantaneous communication, this is not always an opportunity afforded to young people in care with disabilities by their foster carers because of assumptions about their vulnerability and the need to safeguard their welfare. However, this was not a view held by the social work practitioners for these young people. Verone, Justine's social work practitioner understood that Justine had access to a number of mobile communication devices and the Internet, but that use was supervised:

"She got her mobile phone, she sometimes has a tablet, I think it depends on whether it's broke or not! Um – and she can use a laptop, she can use a computer but that's a family computer. Justine can get internet access, if it is supervised. She does speak to mum on Facebook but it's supervised and supported, that is what it is about, supported by the foster carer." (Verone, Social Work Practitioner)

With regards to Bradley, his social work practitioner Casey recalled the fact that there was an earlier incident when he went missing for a period of 48 hours. Further investigation into the incident revealed that Bradley had been making use of social media, potentially to communicate with his birth mother⁴⁵.

"Well prior to me coming on board, Bradley had gone missing so to speak for a weekend and we kind of never got - his carer and his previous social worker kind of never got to the bottom of where Bradley was during that time, and there has been a couple of incidents where at college he hasn't gone to lessons. There were some concerns that he was having contact with mum via Facebook" (Casey, Social Work Practitioner)

Both Verone and Casey recognised issues of vulnerability in relation to Justine and Bradley, and to this end acknowledged the need for safety and how this can be achieved through monitoring. Yet they also spoke about age appropriate activity and the ability to take risks in relation to the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet⁴⁶:

"For Justine we feel she needs to be given the time to do age appropriate activities that would be age appropriate for any other young person out there. And also not to alienate her because all the other young kids have that, do that etcetera. So she does want it as well, she came into care having had a Facebook account already but it was clear that there needs to be support in terms of monitoring that, making sure all the privacy settings and security settings are on there" (Verone, Social Work practitioner)

⁴⁵ See Appendix O – Young people with Learning Disabilities

⁴⁶ See Appendix O – Young people with Learning Disabilities

What is seen here is a contrast between the attitudes and perspectives expressed by the foster carers and the social work practitioners. That is to say, the foster carers are potentially overly concerned about potential risks because of the known vulnerabilities of the disabled young people in their care. In contrast, the level of concern expressed by Verone and Casey is not as high as it is balanced by perspectives that appreciate the need for normalcy in terms of young people in care, in this sense their peers making use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Additionally, there is also the other balancing factor in terms of risk taking as part of developing necessary life skills.

Legitimacy of contact via mobile communication devices and the Internet

For those young people in care who made use of mobile communication technology for contact, communicating with their friendship and familial networks was considered a norm. Their ability to exchange information, plan activities, share pictures and check postings constituted everyday living. Yet this was not something expressed by foster carers and social work practitioners instead, there was a widespread theme in relation to doubting the usefulness and legitimacy of mobile communication technologies for making contact with friends and family:

“Kayne and his mum text each other, and send each other messages via social media. But in terms of actually talking on the phone, and Kayne says we don’t do that really because that’s not the kind of relationship we’ve got. He finds it better to talk to her direct, or to send a text message rather than to talk to her on the phone” (Candice, Social Work Practitioner)

The comments above call into question not only the usefulness, but also the worthwhile nature of contact via mobile communication technologies. The inference being that meaningful relationships might best be supported by face-to-face communication, and there was no recognition that such relationships could be maintained through a range of mobile communication technologies. It could be argued that these attitudes are linked to the both the childhood and life experiences of the adult respondents, where interaction of a face-to-face nature is deemed to be of more significance.

The use of mobile communication devices with friendship networks

The findings in relation to young people in care and their use of mobile communication devices with members of their friendship networks mirrors the general trends that have already been highlighted

in Chapter Two. This is, young people use mobile communication technology to plan social events, share information and check availability with their peers⁴⁷.

“Just occasionally, like, I do skating every weekend, so it’s like – are you going...either on Facebook or Snapchat... are you going skating or not? That’s about it.”(Matt, aged 15)

The ecomaps that were completed by each young person in care revealed the dominant finding that many of them made frequent use of different platforms to make and maintain contact with various members from their friendship networks (see Table 2):

“I have a Samsung S3 Lite. I’ve had that for about a month and have everything on there. Snapchat, Instagram, Gmail, Facebook, Facebook Messenger. And I use that a lot because – that’s your phone, that’s what you use it for to communicate with people in various ways cos of the way technology’s changing” (Lamar, aged 17)

For those young people in care who did make use of a number of different platforms to stay in touch with members of their friendship networks, they identified preferences in terms of certain types of platforms they liked to use. A recurrent finding particularly for the young male adolescents who took part in the study was their reticence to make use of Snapchat, viewing it as tool they would only use with their female friends:

“I dunno – I Snapchat wiv a couple of my friends – it may seem weird but it’s mostly girls that I Snapchat to. It’s just – not a lot of my friends have Snapchat – as in guys. But the girls do” (Matt, aged 15)

The young people in care who took part in the study also referred to the complexities and difficulties of using social networking. In particular, Kaitlin spoke of being bullied and needing to shut down her original Facebook account and starting a new one with people she knew would not bully her:

“I’ve been bullied loads, that’s why I deactivated it. But I’ve started a new one and got friends that I know won’t bully me. Yeah cos I’m in care, they was like saying things about my mum and things about my dad and all that” (Kaitlin, aged 14)

Mention was also made of the type of communication that took place online which was often negative and resulted in arguments that spilled out into the offline world of school and beyond:

“There was like this girl and this boy told ‘er to drop dead. And I popped up to ‘im sayin’, why would you say that for? And he got all his mates on me. So I ‘ave arguments with guys and girls” (Matt, 15)

Yet the difficulties experienced were not all based on the behaviours of other young people, there were occasions when the young people in care could also instigate difficulties:

“I’m friends with Tanya at school, and we have lots of lessons together. I sometimes block her on Facebook cos she gets really annoying at times and she sends pictures that are really annoying. Well

⁴⁷ See Appendix O – The use of mobile communication devices with friendship networks

–she sends like pictures on Facebook. And it's like - Power Rangers and all that and Teletubbies! I'm like- can you stop sending me them please and she keeps sending 'em! And so I blocked her, but then I unblocked her and she hasn't talked to me yet" (Kaitlin, aged 14)

Here we see with Kaitlin's account that her friend's attempt at playfulness resulted in a reaction from her that was having an adverse impact on her friendship with Tanya. The experiences shared by the young people in care who took part in the study highlight not only the expediency and ease of communication that is offered through the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Their individual accounts also show the complexities that they face as they seek to navigate the online world, as part of communicating with various members of their friendship network.

The perspective of the foster carers and social work practitioners to the friendships the young people in care, was on the one hand, tinged by narratives associated with inappropriate use leading to bullying or even physical violence:

"I mean we've had gangs turning up ready to kill a kid. Because it was posted on Facebook, or it was Twittered [sic], or somebody texted somebody and then suddenly you've got 15 to 20, you know, huge lads with knives and batons and goodness know what, tryna kill this 14 year old kid, but- it's unnecessary, and it's the time involved, you know, and everything."(Nanci, Foster Carer)

On the other hand, there was annoyance regarding the way in which young people could treat each other, this is particularly so in the case of Kaitlin:

"She's in her own bedroom, she's made a comment on somebody's status, then everybody jumps on something and arguments happen. And to me, that seems wrong, you're in your own room, minding your own business, just commenting on something that somebody's shared with everybody, and you say something and it leads to arguments and threats" (Perry, Foster Carer)

What is reflected in the friendship networks for the majority of the young people who took part in the study, is the importance of their friendship network and how this was effectively facilitated by mobile communication devices and the Internet. There were two notable exceptions to this finding. Bradley had been recently diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum. His social work practitioner, Kacey explained:

"He's very isolated. I think it ties into his disability that he doesn't have or has not always had the ability to form friendships. But actually now I think it is his preference to be alone. He prefers to be in his room doing what he likes to do i.e. puzzles, or reading or watching DVDs or playing on the X-Box or whatever" (Kacey, Social Work practitioner)

The other young person who did not use mobile communication technology to get in touch with friends, was Leo. He explained that:

"It's harder when you're in foster care because sometimes – you might have to share things? So like what you're texting or what they've text you. So you may as well just keep it normal. Cos if say a

rumour goes round and then you tell me social worker then she's gonna wanna look at all my messages? It's better off if you don't put yourself in that position where rumours are going to be spread" (Leo, aged 14)

Neither did Leo use mobile communication devices to stay in touch with former friends⁴⁸: Another reason why Leo did not use mobile communication devices was because he did not want to be seen as flouting the rules that had been put in place by his foster carer, Nanci⁴⁹:

In the case of Leo, his limited use of mobile technologies was also because of a lack of time⁵⁰: Where mobile communication devices are not used extensively it is a matter of choice. This choice, as in the case of Leo would seem to be motivated by the need to maintain a sense of privacy. Other motivations for choosing not to make use mobile communication devices can also include a determination to cut ties with a previous life before coming into the care system because of the associated emotional pain, or for fear of flouting 'the rules' of the fostering household.

As stated previously, the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet amongst young people in care is a norm (Lenhart and Madden, 2007; boyd and Marwick, 2007; EU Kids Online, 2012 and Ofcom, 2017) and this is reflected in the friendship networks for the majority of the young people in care that took part in the study represents adolescent development. That is, a growing level of independence for the younger adolescents, and greater independence for older adolescents like Lamar and Jane. The search for independence away from carers means that the young people prioritised the relationships with their friends, and that this was facilitated through the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet (Luricella et al., 2014). The findings also reveal that there are a small number of the young people in care did not make use of mobile communication devices or the Internet to stay in touch with their friends and this seemed to be motivated by personal choice.

Summary of findings

An immediate and overarching finding was that the use of mobile communication technologies were an intrinsic part of the lives of the young people in care. They made use of their mobile communication devices, in particular the smartphone as the primary means of communication for

⁴⁸ See Appendix O – The use of mobile communication devices with friendship networks

⁴⁹ See Appendix O – The use of mobile communication devices with friendship networks

⁵⁰ See Appendix O – The use of mobile communication devices with friendship networks

staying in touch with their friendship and familial networks. This seemed to be due to the ease of access to the device and the immediate way in which a response could be made to any messages sent. It is important to point out that, during all the interviews undertaken with the young people in care, none of them made mention of the word 'contact' to describe their communication with individual members of their friendship and familial networks. Instead, the young people in care spoke about the activities involved in their communication, for example texting, calling, using WhatsApp. This finding is reinforced by the way in which certain social networking platforms offered an additional dimension in terms of communication, for example, video-calling and the sending of pictures. A further consistent finding that points towards young people staying in touch was the way in which they, more often than not, instigated communication with particular members of their familial network.

Importantly, the findings highlight that the young people in care were not only able to stay in touch with chosen members of their familial network, they could also monitor what was going on in the wider family via the social media posts that were made. They were able to see what was happening in the lives of other family members at any given time. This brought with it an added dimension that was evident even when a young person in care's feelings were not being reciprocated, there was still the ability to maintain a connection.

In terms of managing familial relationships with certain members the study revealed that the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet to communicate, whether it be in the form of texts, telephone calls or Facebook messages, was a conduit for existing behaviours and experiences. The findings highlight that for at least two of the young people in care who took part in the study had difficult and tense relationships with their birth parents, one to the extent that he stopped contact with his birth mother altogether. This impacted on the nature and type of communication that took place, as well as the behaviours that were demonstrated. Yet each found methods and means in order to manage the communication from their individual birth parent. Additionally, the use of mobile communication devices with members of the familial network by young people in care enabled the opportunity to stay in touch with individuals from the wider familial network. There was also room for young people in care to be able to negotiate the complex relationships that they had with other members of their familial network, without the complete loss of the relationships altogether.

As to whether or not the use of mobile communication devices helped or hindered contact by the young people in care, this is a matter of interpretation. The findings suggest that the use of mobile communication devices offered immediacy and ease by which communication with members of the familial network could be achieved. However, it was also evident that the devices were not so helpful in the sense of the same characteristic being present in cases of unwanted contact.

The findings revealed that the smartphone in particular represents the means whereby a young person in care can engage in friendships outside of the immediate control of their carers. Importantly, this device allowed the young people in care to create separate boundaries between their friends and their carers. It was also found that young people in care experienced the same complexities and difficulties as other young people in general with maintaining peer relationships. In essence they were involved in arguments online; and one young person in particular, was a victim of bullying. What is reflected in the friendship networks for many of the young people in care who took part in the study, is adolescent development. That is, a growing level of independence for the younger adolescents, and greater independence for older adolescents. This was facilitated through the use of mobile communication technologies. Therefore, it is little wonder that the nature and type of communication methods used are individual to each young person, as they tended to reflect the way that they communicated with peers in their friendship networks.

There were three young people in care who took part in the study that either made limited or no use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. As alluded to earlier, for two young people this was a matter of choice, whilst for the third young person in care, her lack of use was linked to the way in which her foster carer managed her use of mobile communication devices and the Internet.

Such findings reinforce the fact that current understandings of the practice of contact is dominated by an adult perspective. The adult interpretation of the term 'contact' leaves little room for the ebb and flow that often characterise human relationships that are at best complex and are in effect made more so with the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet.

With regard to the response of foster carers and social work practitioners to young people in care making use of mobile communication devices and the Internet, their reaction was similar in that

they often associated the use of mobile devices with risk. There was little acceptance or realisation amongst either foster carers or social work practitioners that the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care was not only ubiquitous, but also a norm, and that communication via a range of devices and platforms was an essential part of staying in touch with individuals from their friendship and familial networks.

Chapter Six

Monitoring and Surveillance

Introduction

The previous chapter offered an insight into the way in which young people in care who took part in the study made use of mobile communication devices and the Internet to stay in touch with members of their familial and friendship networks. Importantly, it was noted that these young people did not describe their actions as 'contact' but simply as staying in touch. We also saw that through the use of a range of mobile communication devices and social networking platforms they were able to engage in a variety of communication when and with whom, they wanted. As part of this new way of communicating they were able to monitor the wellbeing of other family members and friends for good or ill. Additionally, it was noted that the young people in care experienced complexities and difficulties with their existing relationships and that the technology they used was merely a conduit. Whilst the last chapter indicates the ease and relative freedom with which young people in care can stay in touch with members of their friendship and familial networks, what this chapter will reveal is that this new found freedom is linked to a darker characteristic of ongoing monitoring and surveillance.

The statutory gaze

Having set out the wider findings in relation to monitoring by parents of their teenage children's internet and social media activity as part of Chapter Two, how does this compare to young people who are in care? Before looking at the findings from this study in detail it is important to remember that the lives of both children and young people in care are constantly monitored. The duties and powers held by local authorities include the Children (Leaving Care) Act, 2000; the Adoption and Children Act, 2002, as well as the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. Additionally, there is also Section 22 (3) of the Children Act, 1989. These various duties and powers have at their core the need to safeguard and promote the child's or young person's welfare. An integral aspect of carrying out these duties involves care planning which means the bringing together of relevant professionals, parents and the child in care to regularly review the plan as part of ensuring the desired outcomes are met. The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review (2015 paragraph 2.33) states:

"The process of review is ongoing and starts from the monitoring of an existing care plan. It is important to distinguish between reviewing as a process of continuous monitoring and reassessment,

and the case review, which is the event when a child’s plan may be considered, reconfirmed or changed, and such decisions agreed and recorded.”

The activity of planning and reviewing by default brings with it an ongoing and inescapable amount of monitoring, a characteristic that the reader will see is echoed in the stated findings.

Monitoring and Surveillance

When foster carers were asked about how they monitored the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in their care, it was found that they made use of a variety of different methods. These methods can be described as taking three distinctive types. The first type of monitoring was manifested in a range of physical tasks and activities undertaken by foster carers as they sought to check what the young people in care were doing with their mobile communication devices, and with whom they were communicating (see Table 3: Physical tasks and activities used to monitor young people in care). The second type of monitoring consisted of foster carers making use of computer software as the means by which the young person in care and their activities online and otherwise could be closely monitored (see Table 4: Computer software used to monitor young people in care). The third and final type of monitoring took place via agencies such as schools, other members of the fostering household or through birth family members (see Table 5: Monitoring via other agencies or individuals)

<i>Physical tasks and activities used to monitor young people in care</i>	<i>Young Person in care</i>	<i>Foster Carer</i>	<i>Social Work Practitioner</i>
Overseeing use and sharing information	Kaitlin	Perry	Camlyn
Random checking of mobile phone	Kaitlin Matt	Perry Bev	Camlyn Margaret
Regular checking of mobile phone of mobile phone content	Darrell	Rayanna	Elaine
Checking Internet history	Darrell Leighton	Rayanna Todd	Elaine Candice

Remaining in the same room whilst a mobile communication technology device is used	Justine Bradley	Laura Rose	Verone Kacey
Details of passwords for social media accounts	Kaitlin Kayne	Perry Piers	Camlyn Candice
Written Agreement	Kayne	Piers	Candice
Young person in care to leave the bedroom door either open or ajar	Jane Darrell	Betty Rayanna	Nadia Elaine

Table 4: Physical tasks and activities used to monitor young people in care

<i>Computer software used monitor young people in care</i>	<i>Young Person in care</i>	<i>Foster Carer</i>	<i>Social Work Practitioner</i>
GPS Tracker	Leighton	Todd	Candice
Parental permissions e.g. purchasing of games, blocks on website pages	Darrell Jaiden	Rayanna Madaline and Rex	Elaine Bernice
Monitoring software	Kayne	Piers	Candice
Facebook Friend	Kaitlin Matt	Perry Bev	Camlyn Margaret

Table 5: Computer software used to monitor young people in care

Monitoring via other agencies or individuals	Young Person in care	Foster Carer	Social Work Practitioner
Monitoring of posts by fostering family members	Jaiden	Madaline and Rex	Bernice
Monitoring by members of the birth family	Bradley	Rose	Kacey
Monitoring by agencies e.g. schools	Nora Bradley Kaitlin	Toni Rose Perry	Cath Kacey Candice

Table 6: Monitoring via other agencies or individuals

The findings show that firstly, foster carers made no distinction between the various methods of monitoring, it was simply a matter of monitoring young people in care on multiple platforms including the mobile smartphones, tablets and the family computer:

“20 years ago your foster carer could’ve just stood on the other side of the door and keep an ear on. And I see my electronic eavesdropping as not being significantly different from that. Just wanting to keep the young person safe. Because the young person isn’t always the best person at judging whether they are safe or not” (Piers, Foster Carer)

Foster carers were also concerned with monitoring the Internet, as well as the use of social media and mobile phone content in terms of texts. In the case of Matt his foster carer Bev was his Facebook friend. When asked how much monitoring she undertook on a weekly basis she replied:

“I don’t do much at all to be fair but, will do it at the end of the day when they’re in bed. Then I’ll sit and I’ll just scroll through me newsfeed. That type o’ thing, so I’m not on it like they are. But I just do it for monitoring reasons” (Bev, Foster Carer)

Bev clearly made the monitoring of Matt’s Facebook a part of her caring routine and her response at the time did not indicate that she had any qualms in relation to impinging on his privacy.

Rayanna who when asked about how she monitored Darrell’s mobile phone said:

“So I’m just saying that if he’s got his mobile phone and he’s in his bedroom, he just keeps his door open and every so often I’ll just go and do like little spot checks with Darrell, “What you doin’ on your phone matey?” (Rayanna, Foster Carer)

Rayanna also believed that there was a need to check Darrell's Internet history on a regular basis as part of ensuring that he was not exposed to any inappropriate content that he had not made her aware of:

"He's just technology brilliant. That's one of the reasons that – we do the spot checks and things because we have to. But because he's so savvy I'm more aware that he knows what he's doing. On his laptop – sorry – on his devices, I have to go through the history as well" (Rayanna, Foster Carer)

It is evident that whilst Rayanna would want Darrell to access a range of mobile communication devices there were concerns about his wellbeing not only because of the level of vulnerability that she believed Darrell had, but because of the view she held in terms of his proficiency when making use of mobile communication technology.

Other foster carers such as Perry and Bev made mention of randomly checking the young person in care's smartphone. This type of checking was often linked to a threat in order to manage behaviour or took place as a consequence of a major concern. In the case of Bev, she spoke about checking Matt's smartphone as a form of threat:

"And we said that at any point in time I could take his phone and go through it, check his contacts, check – like I say I'm friends on Facebook with him anyway so if anything gets posted, I'm aware of it anyway. So that's how we sort of monitor it, but to be fair I think he is quite responsible. We've not had any issues."

In contrast, Madaline and Rex checked Jaiden's Internet history because of concerns in relation to him accessing a number of inappropriate horror and pornographic websites. Their need to check his use of the Internet also related to wider apprehensions about his overall wellbeing during a period of mental ill health, both of these issues were alluded to when they explained how they tried to manage Jaiden's use of the Internet:

"We had an element of when we were checking his history on his computer. He'd wipe most of it but not all of the time and then you could have a discussion with him to say, "Look mate, come on now, you've gotta be thinking about this." I think the other downside is that of course when he was going through his mental health issues he would go to several sites that were supposed to be self-help sites but were perhaps not so helpful." (Madaline and Rex)

The use of monitoring by Madaline and Rex highlights that the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet is simply not concerned with those dangers and risks that are external, there is also the added complexity of the task of monitoring being necessary to support a young person especially when there are issues related to poor mental health.

A minority of foster carers made use of parental permissions as a way of effectively managing the young person in care's access to website content and to avoid making financial purchases:

“On his [Darrell] laptop, and his mobile phone, I haven’t done it because I don’t know how to but it has been set up that he can’t access anything older than his age. So we’ve got it set up for – every time he has a birthday obviously we change the setting. But at the moment, we’ve got it set so he can’t access anything past the age of 14. So at the minute he can only watch – like on YouTube he can only watch videos that are 12 and under.” (Rayanna, Foster Carer)

Piers’ use of monitoring software was influenced by Kayne’s proficiency with mobile communication devices. In this particular case, the software had been added to all of Kayne’s mobile communication devices without his knowledge:

“Well, while he’s at home on the network, there’s the usual service provider based filters which we use but also by having access to the router you can actually watch the data traffic that’s going on. Kayne tended to use his phone more than anything else for contact between whoever. So installed on his phone is a piece of software to keep an eye on traffic. Initially I didn’t let Kayne know the software had been installed. Kayne’s computer savvy and would do his best to remove it but as luck would have it its thrown up one or two warnings on the phone and so he’s identified the fact that it was there” (Piers, Foster Carer)

It can be noted here that the type and nature of the monitoring employed by the foster carers was influenced by individual characteristics related to the proficiency of the young person in care; that the level of skill had to be carefully controlled and monitored.

The monitoring carried out by Bev, Rayanna and Piers was done in real time and involved looking at actual content online. In Todd’s case he demonstrated another version of monitoring that was retrospective. Todd monitored the mobile telephone bill of each of the fostered young people in his care, including Leighton. This allowed him to look at the numbers called, texts, downloads, as well as the duration of the calls, as he explained:

“We don’t have a problem. The way we manage it is that we just sign onto the account on the Internet and check. We just link them to our account, we go onto the Internet and we can see – what time they have phone calls, what time they’ve sent texts and things like that” (Todd, Foster Carer)

A characteristic of this type of monitoring is that it seems all encompassing in terms of capturing the use of mobile communication devices and activity on the Internet in terms of content that is generated. It is also evident that this mode of monitoring potentially allows for a retrospective approach, meaning that the activities of young people in care are captured in time and could be referred back to as and when required.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of monitoring and surveillance foster carers like Mary, Laura and Rose engaged in a series of physical tasks and activities (see Table 3: *Physical tasks and activities used to monitor young people in care*) that relied upon them watching how the young person in care, when in the foster home setting. An explicit example of this is:

“I’m always ‘overing about! Oh yeah! I’m a bit of an ‘overer! Ooh yeah! Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I know at night she’s not on it because I turn that off, you know, and then the tablet I used to have it in my bedroom, take it out of her room” (Laura, Foster Carer)

Other examples of physical tasks and activities performed on the part of the young person in care was not taking the mobile phone upstairs:

“But obviously when he [Lamar] was little and he had his phone he wasn’t allowed any electrical things upstairs. They was - at night when he was going to bed they had to be down here in a basket and that’s what I did with all me children. You know” (Mary, Foster Carer)

Other activities involved the task of random or regular checking of mobile phones and ensuring that the young person in care left their door ajar when using mobile devices like tablets:

“I mean, they all like to sit in their bedrooms and play on the games with their phones and do the things but, I don’t have fear because they’ve always got the door open” (Betty, Foster Carer)

For Bradley and Justine the characteristics of monitoring was influenced by their lack of access to mobile communication devices. For example, in the case of Justine she was not allowed to use her tablet even when at home in the presence of the foster carer:

“She used to, with her tablet, talk to her friends. I used to take it off her. Cos I didn’t realise – cos I’m not brilliant with these things, never have been. I don’t even – to be honest with yer, I don’t even like ‘em. I don’t bother with ‘em anyway really. But the tablet – I always took her tablet off her.” (Laura, Foster Carer)

The opposite was true for Bradley:

“He hasn’t got a tablet, he uses mine. But, he doesn’t go on it – if he was to go on it, he goes onto the games. He doesn’t use it without me being here – I’m pottering around in the kitchen, I can see what he’s doing. Keeping him safe” (Rose, Foster Carer)

These findings highlight that monitoring of young people was simply not based on their level of proficiency, but that of their foster carer, a finding that will be returned to at a later point in this chapter.

It was noted that a number of foster carers linked their duty to safeguarding with monitoring and surveillance, for example Darrell⁵¹. However, despite efforts to limit the potential harm young people in care could encounter when using the Internet, there were foster carers such as Perry and Todd who stated that it was not possible to monitor the young people in their care at all times:

“It can be very beneficial but you can’t control how much they use their mobile phone for texting, phone calls or social media. It could be quite scary” (Perry, Foster Carer)

⁵¹ See Appendix P: Monitoring and Surveillance

“Well again, you have to um – [sighs] it’s very easy to say that you monitor everything: you don’t.”
(Todd, Foster Carer)

This view was not just confined to foster carers, it was also shared by a number of social work practitioners, we note the difficulties of monitoring on a 24/7 basis:

“It just gets difficult to, like, monitor it, because – you can’t, you know, supervise the phone 24-7, ‘specially if they are out and about, so yeah, it’s just hard” (Nadia, Social Work Practitioner)

These particular findings point to an expectation of ongoing monitoring by both foster carers and social work practitioners, but the skill, ability and approach required to achieve this seemed to involve a level of knowledge and understanding of mobile communication devices and the Internet that was not readily available amongst foster carers. Moreover, even if the necessary level of knowledge and skill were obtained and used, it was noted that there was seemingly no guarantee of monitoring at a level that would sufficiently safeguard the young person in care at all times.

The findings point to a range of monitoring and surveillance activities that foster carers were engaged in, that indicated this was daily practice within placements. It was also noted that these activities entailed the use of both physical and electronic means to observe young people who were being looked after, and that the primary motivation for such actions was to safeguard. It can also be observed that the physical monitoring was characterised as having immediacy and was situated in that moment and entirely dependent upon the foster carer. Similarly, the monitoring by electronic means captured the moment in time, but then went beyond, in the sense of being able to take a retrospective approach, with key information being returned to as and when the foster carer required.

Proficiency of use and understanding of mobile communication devices and the Internet by Foster Carers

The analysis of the data revealed that there was seemingly a link between the types of approaches used by foster carers that, as has been noted, entailed physical tasks and activities or the use of computer software and the level of proficiency foster carers had in relation to understanding and making use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for themselves. For those foster carers who described themselves as not being proficient, for example Mary, Laura, Nanci and Rose, they seem to rely on what could be described as a prohibitive style that was rooted in physical tasks and activities and they also made use of a range of restrictions. They relied upon their physical presence and visibly watching the young person in care making use the mobile communication device. However, their monitoring did not extend to looking at the actual content. Whereas other carers such as Todd, Piers, and Bev made less use of a prohibitive approach that was physical, and

instead depended on software that had a panopticon effect, meaning that the online behaviours of young people in care were subject to a perpetual gaze. It can be seen from Kayne that this level of observation was not welcomed:

“It’s an invasion of personal privacy. I didn’t agree to it so therefore it could be classed as illegal. I could say what I wanted, I could talk to who I wanted. Say if Piers did something to annoy me and I wanted to rant about it to my mum. I can’t do that now cos Piers monitors it and starts confronting me about it” (Kayne, aged 16)

Whilst the foster carers in this study felt the need to monitor using software, the level of intrusiveness for one young person in care was too much and it can be seen that it affected his behaviour in terms of not being able to speak to his birth mother about aspects of the placement that he was not content with.

As stated previously, the monitoring of mobile communication devices by foster carers is primarily concerned with issues of inappropriate content and who young people in care could possibly be communicating with, findings that echo previous studies in relation to monitoring by parents (Alvarez et al., 2012 and Padilla-Walker and Coyne, 2011). It is apparent from empirical evidence provided by Pew Internet (2015) and Livingstone et al.’s study (2011) that a trend amongst parents not to make use of geo-tracking devices for their children. However, two male carers made use of geo-tracking software for the young people in their care. Todd explained his use of such technology was as a means to keep the young people in the fostering household safe, particularly those that had a recognised learning disability:

“To be honest, all 4 of them – they don’t go out at night, you know, if they do, we want to know where you’re going. It’s like the oldest girl, her phone, you know, we’ve got a tracker on it, so we know exactly where she is. It’s just that once a week she goes to a local sports place where she works in the cafeteria doing tea and coffee and things like that. Whilst it’s only a quarter of a mile away, we can track her walking there and we know when she’s got there. And she’s happy enough” (Todd, Foster Carer)

“We installed some software which – it monitors text messages, the various social media to some extent. It’s not always reliable but, with Facebook it’s fairly good. Keeps an eye on photos and it tracks location” (Piers, Foster Carer)

It can be contended that the use of such technology with young people in care that are considered highly vulnerable is appropriate and a means of ensuring their welfare whilst allowing them to be away from the placement setting. Yet, this can be questioned, particularly in relation to Leighton, who as part of the same fostering household was also subject to GPS tracking when he came home

late and did not alert his carers that this would be the case. Leighton's social work practitioner described what happened:

"I think there was the time when he went out, he met with some friends, including his girlfriend, and then he didn't answer his phone. And told Katie [Foster Carer] that he was somewhere else where he wasn't. Katie wasn't too happy about it, so when he came back she confronted him about it. Well, he apologised and then what happened was, Katie put - you know, what do you call it - you know they call the geo tracker? Yeah on the phone." (Candice, Social Work Practitioner)

As was highlighted in Chapter Two parental monitoring of this nature is not a norm, and therefore a potential explanation as to why it was used, particularly in Leighton's case was not necessarily an issue of vulnerability, but instead a situation where the young person in care had failed to follow the expectations in relation to returning home on time, and as a way of stopping this he was made subject to GPS monitoring. Here we see an attempt to monitor Leighton's whereabouts as part of a behaviour management regime. This exemplar can be deemed as an attempt to maintain and uphold the existing expectation in relation to returning home on time.

The other carer, Piers, sought to covertly monitor Kayne's use of all of his mobile communication devices:

"Kayne's tended to use his phone more than anything else for contact between whoever. So [I] installed on his phone is a piece of software to keep an eye on traffic. This has been kind of routed in, we've had some behaviours that have at an early stage, have made us just be a little bit more stringent than we might otherwise have been. He was running up a massive phone bill. Buying stuff in my name. You know because it's a contract phone." (Piers, Foster Carer)

Piers' motivation for monitoring Kayne in this fashion was informed by concerns about his behaviours, in particular online monetary transactions and mistakes made by Kayne in the past:

"It's completely trust related and what we've said to Kayne about it is, you know, the only way we can loosen the bonds is by you demonstrating that you can be trustworthy and that your behaviour is appropriate and not destructive. We open a bank account, put a lump of money in, we start paying pocket money in, it all vanishes and then the pattern is repeated" (Piers, Foster Carer)

Piers' reference to "loosening the bonds" raises questions as to what is the greater motivating factor in terms of Kayne's use of mobile communication devices, is it protecting him from harm, or controlling his monetary behaviours online. Of greater concern was the fact that Kayne's social work practitioner had no knowledge that monitoring software was being used:

"No, what software is that?! [laughs] What we normally recommend is to put a blocker on certain sites. That's what we normally recommend. But in terms of getting the software, that's ...you know, that's going a bit over the top" (Candice, Social Work Practitioner)

This again highlights the divergence between foster carers and social work practitioners in the sense of what is thought to be taking place as part of monitoring and surveillance regime of mobile communication devices and what is actually happening within the fostering setting.

In terms of proficiency of use and understanding of mobile communication devices and the Internet, these can be viewed from the perspective of individual triads. Examples include the expectations of social work practitioners such as Verone and Kacey, who described themselves, when asked about their use of mobile communication devices, as proficient. Their expectations was that foster carers would also be able to show the same level of proficiency:

“I would want Rose to kind of check in frequently on his Internet use, kind of thing is he accessing, or those appropriate things, do we need to have discussions about what is and isn’t appropriate. I think it’s quite difficult because Rose isn’t – I mean I don’t think she’ll mind me saying but she’s not kind of up in terms of understanding technology. So for me, I feel, she’s got a responsibility to learn about those things if she’s got young people living in her house. (Kacey, Social Work Practitioner)

Whilst the above example highlights what can happen where a foster carer has a low level of proficiency in terms of using mobile communication technologies, the example of Todd and Piers is at the other end of a scale in terms of proficiency. Both Todd and Piers identified themselves as proficient, but the same was not true for Candice, the social work practitioner for the young people they cared for. Her expectation of monitoring was limited physical activities and tasks associated with online activities:

“I think they do check the Internet usage. You know, they do check it in terms of the websites that Kayne visits, if he visits any. And when he hands in his mobile phone in the evening, he leaves it to charge. And they check mobile phones here and there. Not every day, but you know, maybe once every two weeks” (Candice, Social Work Practitioner).

The above, combined with Candice’s observations about the use of geo-location tracking by Katie for Leighton, points to the usage of such software not being challenged or contemplated as overly intrusive or inappropriate. This imbalance in the levels of proficiency between the foster carers and the social work practitioners poses a problem in the sense of knowing what is in the best interests of the young person and how to manage risk appropriately, and who has overall responsibility for this.

The influence of age and maturity

It was found that the level of monitoring for older adolescents in care was reduced, when compared to those that were younger. Moreover, the older adolescents had a far greater level of independence and autonomy when compared to the younger adolescents. This seem to coincide

with their increasing level of maturity. Madaline and Rex, as well as Mary commented on their inability to monitor the young people in their care because of their age and independence:

“Looking back, would we to stand on his shoulder every time he was on YouTube. But - you know – you don’t have much time. Should we have done it – probably more than we did, looking back. Perhaps when he was a bit younger we should have done more of that – but again by the time he gets 14, you can’t stand on his shoulder!” (Madaline and Rex, Foster Carers)

Mary during the course of her interview willingly admitted that it became harder to monitor Lamar’s use of his mobile devices, as he grew older and more autonomous. The situation was seemingly compounded by Lamar’s growing sense of independence:

“I can monitor him and monitor any children but obviously when he got to 16 or so then I says well – you know – you can have your phone with you. So that was it” (Mary, Foster Carer)

The comments made by Mary show a sense of finality in terms of not being able to actively manage Lamar’s use of mobile communication devices, unlike the other foster carers who were caring for younger adolescents.

It was also noted that whilst foster carers were concerned about the inability to monitor, at the same level, the social work practitioners welcomed and encouraged the exercise of autonomy and independence of older adolescents in care. As such they did not expect the same level of monitoring to be applied:

“So in terms of Lamar’s case there are, say, positive factors which are things like, he’s been in placement for a very long time, he has an extremely good relationship with his foster carers, he is much older, you know, those would be the kind of positive elements that kind of safeguard in terms of his behaviours when using mobile technologies.” (Zayla, Social Work Practitioner)

The inability of foster carers to monitor older adolescents mirrors the developmental stage of the life-course, that is, adolescence being associated with moving away from the family in terms of emotional dependence and seeking and securing friendships outside of the immediate family circle. For the social work practitioners there was a growing expectation of maturity and with that a change in the level of monitoring. The extent to which this was explicitly understood by foster carers is open to question and may explain the spectrum of monitoring and surveillance that was taking place. This was particularly the case for the young people aged 13-16 who took part in the study:

“Matt’s really good and the carers - you know, there’s a lot of respect and Matt’s very open he can talk to them about anything. They do trust him to do things. But they do it like a step at a time, do you know what I mean? Age appropriate if you like.” (Margaret, Social Work Practitioner)

The quote above shows that there was at least one carer who adopted an incremental approach as part of enabling access to mobile communication devices, but this is clearly linked to age. For the

remainder of the carers, they did not adopt an incremental approach instead; there was a tendency to focus on the behaviour of the young person in care at that time or believe that no changes should be made⁵²:

“But because we monitor, you know, I keep an eye on the internet traffic on the router. And just recently because we’ve had one or two hiccups, I just set a timed access on the internet so that it just switches off” (Piers, Foster Carer)

Other foster carers such as Madaline and Rex, Rose and Rayanna engaged in conversations about the use of the Internet and social media with the young people in their care. But the prevailing narrative of the discussions with young people in care were concerned with risk and threat. There was no mention by any of the foster carers about sitting alongside and enabling young people in their care to make safe and effective use of the Internet or any other mobile device; or discussing the content. Evidence of this can be seen in the comments made⁵³:

“But I suppose if you think of the risk situation, yes he was inappropriate with some of the things that he did. But it was in a controlled environment. Cos we knew he was upstairs. Although there was some stuff, that he has or says he has made contact with men on occasion, and we think it’s probably a small number of occasion that he has then met in the park for sexual activity” (Madaline and Rex, Foster Carers).

The notion of sitting alongside young people in care and enabling them to make safe and effective use of mobile technologies, was expressed by two social work practitioners.

“I would want Rose to kind of check frequently on his Internet use– what kind of thing is he accessing, or those appropriate things, do we need to have discussions about what is and isn’t appropriate” (Kacey, Social Work practitioner)

The second was Verone, whose comments indicate a genuine belief that Laura was working in a fashion that was supportive of Justine to have contact with her birth mother via social media:

“She does speak to mum on Facebook but it’s supervised and supported, that is what is about supported by the foster carer. Because sometimes things are being said – cos the dynamics between Justine and her mum is less of a parent-child dynamic, than a ...a sibling friendship dynamic. And mum at times actually says things to push Justine and then Justine says something back and her mum goes off completely if you want. So it needs to be supported really” (Verone, Social Work Practitioner).

Yet the reality was, that the foster carer, Laura was taking an entirely different approach that was built upon prohibition. Particularly in the case of Bradley and Justine, both of whom had learning disabilities, the expectations of their social work practitioner was markedly different from what was

⁵² See Appendix P – The influence of age and maturity

⁵³ See Appendix P – The influence of age and maturity

taking place within the fostering setting. This echoes what has already been seen, which is that, there are different expectations of surveillance and monitoring by both foster carers and social work practitioners. A potential explanation for this could be the turnover of social work practitioners, thereby making it difficult for foster carers to maintain a single and ongoing relationship with a social work practitioner, which can be a foundation for building common understandings. Another possible explanation is that there may be assumptions being made about the proficiency of some foster carers to make use of, and understand, mobile communication devices and the Internet. Alternatively, there did not exist a policy setting out expectations of foster carers, other than under the umbrella term of safeguarding.

Social Work Practitioner expectations of monitoring

Unsurprisingly, all the social work practitioners who took part in the study were in agreement that young people's use of mobile communication devices should be monitored. They expressed concerns in relation to the Internet being unsafe due to content and the dangers of unsolicited contact by either birth family members or strangers. Specifically, the social work practitioners stated that the purpose of monitoring was to watch what the young person in care was doing on social media; monitor who the young person in care was communicating with, and to keep them safe. Monitoring the activities of the young people in care for the social work practitioners was a taken for granted assumption, and as has been seen, an explicit expectation and blanket approach to risk. It was expected that foster carers would, as they have always done, share information with the social work practitioner about the young person in care and that this would extend to reporting information in relation to use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. In particular, it was found that where there was more than one child in the fostering household the social work practitioners were keen to ensure that these children and young people were carefully and closely monitored. An example of this is below:

"I mean they closely monitor it because they've got 3 children in care – in their care, and they have to be really mindful and they take all the safety precautions as well, cos their fostering agency and they're very strict on things like that as well" (Margaret, Social Work Practitioner)

Another exemplar is provided by Bernice who, quoting a real case, stated that from the first day of a placement foster carers are to monitor the young person in care:

"I mean some of our foster carers do check phones, you know, and they've done that from when the young person was young, and they've started from sort of day 1 where they'd hand the phones in at night time and they'd check them". (Bernice, Social Work Practitioner)

Certainly, a contrast between the monitoring expectations of foster carers and social work practitioners was that, the practitioners spoke about monitoring in more globalised terms, as something that should be done. There were no specific references to risk borne out of concerns for the young person they had responsibility for. This is likely to be linked to what is seen as prime responsibility of social work practitioners, that is the management of risk. However, what is notable about the management of risk is that it is done on a long arm basis that might explain the expectation that social work practitioners had in terms of having all information shared with them about the young person in care. Only in one case which was Matt's, was there any specific requirement that monitoring took place as his contact arrangements were inclusive of social media. Whereas, the other young people in care who took part in the study had contact arrangements that entailed having direct and indirect contact as specified and agreed by the social work practitioner.

It has already been noted that there was also an expectation by two of the social work practitioners that foster carers would actively engage with young people when they were looking at content online, and where necessary, have a discussion with the young persons' about what s/he was looking at, as Kacey explains:

"I don't expect a foster carer to sit at the back of a young person and watch what they're doing. But you know, if they're passing 'ooh, who's that' you know like casual chit-chat about who it is. I would expect them to look at their Internet history frequently, to see what they were accessing you know, it may be that the foster carer has the young person's password to Facebook or whatever else, and can check who they're talking to. I think that's healthier than a young person being told that they can't have any social media and then they do – they do it anyway, and the carer has absolutely no knowledge of what's going on" (Kacey, Social Work Practitioner)

Whilst the monitoring of young people in care was taken for granted by social work practitioners involved in the study, what was also evident was that a number of practitioners linked the level of monitoring undertaken by foster carers to the behaviours on the part of the young person in care. For Verone there were clear links to increasing or decreasing the level of monitoring based on behaviour of Justine:

"And the placement have simply said if she plays up she can't have WI-Fi, as simple as that. And then she hasn't had it for the weekend or whatever it is – and then it goes back to being supervised so she has the choice of either play a game with what she has and then over a period of time she works on the trust and showing that she can be responsible and sensible" (Verone, Social Work Practitioner)

For Verone, her rationale was based on how much the young person in care, in this case, Justine, shared openly and willingly making known her communication with others to her foster carer.

Consequently, if Justine shared a great deal of information about her communication with others, then the level of monitoring should be reduced.

A similar view regarding the need for young people in care to willingly share information about their communication with others with their foster carers, was held by Margaret, Cathy and Camlyn. It was seen as part of an important and integral aspect of monitoring:

“Obviously because she’s 14 [Kaitlin] you know, she should maybe have some privacy but I guess - I think you know while there continues to be issues within the peer group as well. Kaitlin does talk - you know, she has been open with the foster carers as well about, you know when, communicating with mum. It’s not just a case of it being monitored, she has kind of volunteered the kind of the information as well.” (Camlyn, Social Work practitioner)

The responses of the social work practitioners all point to the necessity of monitoring. There is also an expectation that young people in care will share information regarding who they are communicating with. What is worthy of note is that only one social work practitioner out of those interviewed made any mention of privacy. The impression left is that the greater the level of transparency by young people in care, the more confident social work practitioners could potentially be about the wellbeing and safety of the young person in care. But this seemingly comes at the cost of privacy and the right to keep that which is dear and precious out of the immediate line of sight of social work practitioners.

Privacy

A contrasting finding compared to the cognizance that the young people in care had in relation to their birth family members was the lack of knowledge some foster carers and social work practitioners had to the nature and type of contact that was taking place with birth family members through the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. When interviewed there was a recurring response from foster carers and social work practitioners that they were not sure what communication the young person in care had with individual members of their friendship and familial networks⁵⁴:

“I don’t really know how much contact she’s having with them. I think because of obviously Jane’s age as well, it’s more difficult to impose contact - you know, arrangements as such because you know, she will kind of just do what she wants, and also she’s only on section 20 as well so that sort of limits what we can really impose in terms of contact”. (Nadia, Social Work Practitioner)

⁵⁴ See Appendix P - Privacy

Of the 24 adult respondents that were involved in the study only four made mention of privacy, Betty, Toni, Perry and Camlyn⁵⁵:

“Well, I’m a big believer of not interfering on the phones. I don’t think you should go through the phones unless you have a genuine concern and then I think it needs to be done by the social worker, not by you. I ‘ave never intervened on the girl’s phones” (Betty, Foster Carer)

The comments made by the three foster carers indicate that they appreciated the privacy that young people in care should have, it is was acknowledged by one foster carer as the only area where there is some level of control, in a life that is characterised as being controlled by others in the sense of social work practitioners making decisions and care arrangements being subject to a court decisions.

From another perspective, young people in care do attempt to obtain privacy through not only the hand held device they may be using, but also on social networking platforms. An example of this is Matt, whose argument with his sister took place on Facebook Messenger away from the gaze of his foster carer:

Interviewer: *“How did how did you keep private the fight with your elder sister? Because sometimes, you know when people have fights on Facebook, everybody’s got permissions, they can see absolutely everything that’s going on”*

Matt: *“It’s an app, Facebook messenger, only you two can talk to each other but like – I just- there’s no point, like keeping messages, I just deleted it”*

It is evident that the young people in care who took part in the study employed a multi-modal approach to their contact with members of their friendship and familial networks and that this was also linked to certain levels of privacy. They appreciated the fact that their communication could be seen by others including their foster carers, and then chose to make public their communication or not. Marwick and boyd (2011b:1) make the argument for that although adolescents engage in communication online which is part of a network and visible to a number of onlookers, the fact remains that they are keenly interested in maintaining privacy.

This finding would seem to indicate that where the use of mobile communication devices was used for staying in touch, particularly the smartphone, there was a level of privacy that was in direct contrast to contact that is often supervised and scrutinised. One potential explanation for this is that when making use of a hand held device, unless the contents of the mobile phone are shared, there is limited opportunity to know who is being communicated with, how often, and what is being said. In other words, the use of mobile communication devices offers young people in care intimacy

⁵⁵ See Appendix P - Privacy

and seclusion, characteristics that are in direct contrast to contact, as it is currently understood and practised.

Others involved in monitoring

Throughout the study both foster carers and social work practitioners made mention of other agencies and organisations that were also involved in the activity of monitoring use of mobile communication devices. In particular, it was noted that social work practitioners, again had a taken for granted assumption regarding the global monitoring that could be done by other organisations such as schools and colleges. An example of this is below:

“She [Nora] goes to an excellent school who are aware of her history. I think if school has any concerns they will relate it to me as well, I think it’s about all the professionals involved working together. And with these girls, that’s happening” (Cath, Social Work practitioner)

The taken for granted assumption by social work practitioners of monitoring by other agencies and organisations is a wider reflection of the multi-agency narrative in relation to safeguarding children and young people in general, as well as the range of partners involved in the monitoring of children and young people in care, as indicated at the start of this chapter. On another level altogether, one is reminded that the spread and amount of monitoring for young people in care is far reaching and has always been beyond the immediate fostering setting. In the case of Bradley, there was an expectation that information would be shared by the college that he attended:

“And then I’d asked college to kind of look to see if he [Bradley] was in the library you know, via his username or whatever he logs into. But I’ve never asked college to monitor his Facebook use. I’d certainly never asked them to monitor that. Because I didn’t feel it as at a level whereby college would need to do that. I was quite happy the fact that Rose would be able to do that” (Kacey, Social Worker)

Another example is Jaiden, whose foster sister monitors his social media posts:

“We’ve had that in place and still got it now, cos our youngest daughter, sort of was monitoring and coming back to us and saying Jaiden’s being a bit of an idiot again, so can you have a word with him. I think that’s working quite positively in trying to gatekeep him” (Madaline and Rex, Foster Carers).

It has been seen that the monitoring of young people in care is not just limited to the fostering household but, can on some occasions go well beyond it because of expectations placed upon individuals and agencies, all of whom have either a latent or explicit responsibility for safeguarding.

Small acts of resistance

When analysing the responses of the young people in care to the monitoring of their use of mobile communication devices and the Internet, the dominant finding was that there was no comment at all. A probable explanation for this finding was that 5 of the young people were aged between 13-16 years. They took for granted the monitoring they were subject to. As young persons in care, they would have been very familiar with having various aspects of their lives monitored, for example their health, their education and the placement itself. Added to this, the young people in care were also experiencing the control of their mobile devices in other environments such as school:

“Yeah sometimes I mean obviously, she’ll text if she needs something or something’s happened but there is a new policy at school which they’re not very happy about, the children. So from quarter past eight until the end of the day, apart from half an hour at lunchtime in certain places, they can’t have the mobile phones out at all, they’re confiscated” (Perry, Foster Carer)

Where comment was made, it was by those adolescents who were older. A perspective is provided by Lamar as to why foster carers needed to monitor children and young people in care:

“Because as a young person I absolutely love Wi-Fi and you can’t like – what’s it called – live without it!. If I leave my phone downstairs the Wi-Fi will stay on but then if I take it upstairs the Wi-Fi is turned off due to I could be searching up anything at night or anything. Or I could be like being bullied or anything and my parents don’t know about it – that could lead to anything. That were kind of for my safety” (Lamar, 17 years)

A similar acceptance was shown by Leighton, who commented that he did not mind the curfew that was in place for turning off the Wi-Fi at night because he welcomed going to bed. That said, Leighton also expressed the fact that the level of monitoring he was currently subject to should reduce as he matured:

“They obviously know that I’m not gonna stay up all night on the Xbox. But they’ll just leave me to it cos they’ll know” (Leighton, 16 years)

The young person who expressed the most discontent with the monitoring he was experiencing was Kayne, who commented that the use of software was an invasion of his privacy as he did not agree to it, and also that he had nothing to hide:

“Like – Pier’s rules are there for a reason so that’s to protect ‘im and me so in a way that is kind of equal say. But, they don’t stop me from perceiving it as me being like, prevented from doing something. ‘Cos that’s basically what it’s like in prison and stuff like that, they monitor everything what you’re saying and then they can do what they like with it” (Kayne, aged 16)

It is evident from Kayne's comments that the level of monitoring he was experiencing was not only undermining his sense of privacy as all the devices he was using were being monitored. It was also impeding the communication he was having with his birth mother to the extent that he did not feel able to communicate what was going on within the placement:

"Because say if, like, there was something I wanted to tell my mum that I didn't want to tell Piers, then I could do that. But now I can't cos Pier's gonna find out anyway, and then start trying to talk to me about it whereas if I wanted to talk to him about it I would've went to him" (Kayne, aged 16)

Additionally, Kayne makes reference to the dynamic of the relationship between himself and his foster carer. Piers would approach Kayne in an unsolicited and supposedly helpful fashion about the communication had:

"Cos he's doing it to improve the bond and trying to open up a connection so that I feel happier talking to him which isn't a bad thing but by going behind my back and reading the messages it's like he's taken one step forward and two steps back" (Kayne, aged 16)

Such solicitations were clearly not appreciated by Kayne and did not allow him to take the initiative in seeking help, an important element to receiving and accepting help and support. Furthermore, there was no opportunity for Kayne to speak privately to his mother about his placement.

The initial result of young people not commenting on the monitoring they experienced as part of their daily lives in care, would on first impression seems to indicate that they are passive recipients of the monitoring that they are subject to. However, the opposite was found to be true. Both foster carers and social work practitioners spoke of individual incidents where the young people in care would exercise, what could be called small acts of resistance (Kinnunen et al., 2011). These acts manifested themselves in various forms. For example, deleting content from the mobile phone, as explained by Nora's social work practitioner, Cath:

"The difficulty is that I don't know of any other way of finding out things without, you know I could easily say Nora can I have a look at your phone? I think she would let me have a look a look at her phone. The difficulty is that if she knew it was a regular thing, she would delete the contents of the phone" (Cath, Social Work Practitioner)

In the case of Justine where Wi-Fi was not made available in the fostering setting, she ran to the local supermarket to make use of the Wi-Fi available there:

“Well we have to say that, you know, you can’t use the mobile phone, if she does things like run off or so, she point-blank can’t use it. And that is when the more supervision came in because she use to go Tesco to get on the mobile phone and speak to that girl” (Laura, Foster Carer)

Other examples included reversing how GPS tracking was being used:

“When Leighton was going out he would put on the GPS tracker and make a request for it to track Katie, the foster carer. So he was sending it to Katie so that he could view where she was!” (Candice, Social Work Practitioner)

Jaiden in particular was able to regularly engage in small acts of resistance by disabling the parental permissions and blocks put in place.⁵⁶: Jaiden’s foster carers recounted with exasperation the attempts made by them to monitor the content he was accessing on the Internet:

“He managed to download for example a horror film, and we definitely had got horror films at that level blocked. Well he managed to download a film and we asked him ‘How d’you do that then Jaiden? It was a particularly horrible film. And he said you can go on YouTube, which wasn’t blocked, and you can download it in segments. And he’d done that hadn’t he?! He’d spent time and energy and he was around 13 years of age.” (Madaline and Rex, Foster Carers)

These small acts of resistance could seemingly be said to point to the exercise of agency by the young people in care, as well as the ongoing tussle for power that exists between adolescents and adults, as one group seeks to exert control, whilst the other makes attempts to evade it.

Summary of findings

A notable finding was the frequency and nature of monitoring by some foster carers was such that it constituted a routinized aspect of foster care that began first thing in the morning and stopped last thing at night. This type of monitoring was taken for granted and was seemingly accepted as an extension of their role, as they were expected to report back to the young person in care’s social work practitioner any concerns that they had.

The majority of foster carers did make use of a range of monitoring methods that was inclusive of both physical activities and tasks. For example, hovering and watching, and also a technological

⁵⁶ See Appendix P – Small acts of resistance

approach, that is making use of software. These were often motivated by a desire to safeguard the young people in their care from what they considered to be a range of risks such as inappropriate content; financial irresponsibility and inappropriate contact by strangers. However, this focus linked to risks associated with use of a range of mobile communication devices by young people in care, and not necessarily any threats posed by birth parents. Importantly, only two of the foster carers explicitly stated they wanted to protect the children in their care from their birth parents. It was also noticeable that there were certain young people who were monitored by other members of their family, particularly their birth or foster siblings.

A further key finding was the way in which monitoring and surveillance differed according to the age of the young person in care. The ability of foster carers to monitor older adolescents was clearly limited for a number of reasons that included independence and autonomy. It was also limited by the growing length of time the young person was away from the immediate fostering environment because of his/her varying social commitments and other interests that were not within the immediate vicinity of the placement.

The findings revealed that there was an expectation by a number of social work practitioners of a certain supervisory approach that would see foster carers take an active involvement and interest in the use of Internet by certain young people care. Instead, what took place within the fostering setting was predominantly monitoring and surveillance that took the form of physical activities and tasks coupled with prohibition. Consequently, the impression left was that the identified skills of appropriate risk-taking were possibly never engaged with or acquired by these young people in care.

The findings also highlighted that for those triads where the foster carers did not have a great deal of I.T. literacy or confidence in the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet, and the social work practitioner use and experience of devices was the opposite, this led to a greater level of expectation of what foster carers needed to do in order to support young people in care's use of mobile communication devices and their use of the Internet. In contrast, when those foster carers who had a high level of skill and confidence with mobile communication devices and the Internet based on their own personal use, and this was paired with social work practitioners who admitted to having little or no knowledge of mobile communication devices or the Internet, the foster carers assumed a position of 'knowing better'. The findings suggest that there is a lack of skill and

confidence in the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet on the part of certain foster carers might explain why use and access was at times greatly limited or prohibited altogether.

The findings reveal that for social work practitioners it was not enough for foster carers to simply monitor use, this also had to be accompanied by young people in care sharing details of content with little attention or thought being given to privacy. This emphasis on 'knowing' possibly mirrors the position that was evident amongst foster carers, that is by knowing what is going on at all times the level of risk was supposedly reduced, even though it was acknowledged that monitoring and surveillance could not be undertaken on a 24/7 basis.

Against a backdrop of continued and ongoing monitoring and surveillance, the findings reveal that the young people in care who took part in the study engaged in small acts of resistance. These illustrate the way in which they successfully avoided efforts by their foster carers to monitor their use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. These small acts of resistance speak of the exercise of agency and also a need for maturity to be recognised. Furthermore, one can note the ongoing struggle between those who have responsibility for young people in care and how these same young people seek to evade such surveillance and monitoring.

Chapter Seven

Day to day management of, and access to, mobile communication and the Internet

Introduction

The previous two Chapters attempted to answer the research questions as to how young people in care make use of mobile communication devices for contact; and whether communication using this approach is either helped or hindered. Chapter Six sought to address the research question in relation to surveillance and monitoring of young people in care by foster carers and social work practitioners. Specifically, the findings in relation to surveillance and monitoring by foster carers highlight that these activities were a daily routinized aspect of fostering that began first thing in the morning and stopped last thing at night, and that this was perceived as an extension of the fostering role. It was evident that the social work practitioners had an expectation that foster carers would monitor the young people whom they were caring for, and where necessary would report to them any concerns. In terms of the monitoring and surveillance approaches there were three types, but importantly, the motivation for the monitoring and surveillance techniques adopted by foster carers were for risks associated with the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet in *general*, as opposed to any specific concerns in relation to unmediated contact the young people in their care had with members of the familial and friendship networks. Potentially, these findings call into question the extent to which the young people in care are likely to experience potential harm from members of their familial network when making use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. They also seem to indicate a sense of moral panic on the part of foster carers (Clapton, Cree and Smith, 2013).

This final findings chapter of the study will focus on management of, and access to, mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care. Consequently, a description will be provided as to how these day-to-day access and management practices were carried out in the fostering setting. Such an approach will provide an opportunity to gain another perspective in relation to the final research question for this study.

An issue of access

The foster carers shared their experiences of how they managed and allowed access to mobile communication devices and Internet through a spectrum of activities. Two spoke of managing access to the Internet by administering and controlling the availability of Wi-Fi (Todd and Piers). One threatened to remove fuses from plugs in order to ensure that the young person in care did not make use of a mobile device beyond stated curfew hours (Nanci). Another provided a mobile phone with no SIM, meaning that the young person in care could only make emergency phone calls (Laura). Another purchased a mobile phone with limited functionality (Bradley). Other methods aimed at management and control included turning the Wi-Fi off if the young person in care was located in the upper part of the foster home (Mary and Rayanna). Finally, confiscation of a mobile device appeared to be the most draconian measure. This was used as a form of threat and also on occasions by foster carers when they either had grave concerns or confiscation was used as a form of punishment (Rayanna, Todd and Bev). We see an example of this below:

“She is only on Facebook to her friends. I’ve told her, she knows, straight down the line, if she starts going off doing other things, then the phone’ll be gone” (Laura, Foster Carer)

The findings also highlighted that as part of the day-to-day management of, and access to, mobile communication devices and the Internet there were certain foster carers such as Todd, Piers and Bev whose approach tended towards behaviour management. Examples of this included Leighton’s access to Wi-Fi being stopped for a period of five weeks because of an incident at school where he failed to disclose important information about a piece of coursework. Kayne’s access to Wi-Fi in the fostering household was dependent on signing an agreement created by Piers:

“Basically if Kayne wants to have access to the Internet then he has to say that we can look at his devices, that he can’t put passwords on to stop us looking at his devices. I really stressed at the time that it wasn’t compulsory. But that he needed to sign the agreement in order to get the privileges and the access that came with it, then that’s what he had to consider” (Piers, Foster Carer)

The day-to-day management of Wi-Fi seemed to be a privilege, it was not a readily available resource that was useable throughout the fostering home to the young people in care. Rather, it was time-limited, linked to behaviour and governed by foster carers. We see this most readily through Kayne, whose use of Wi-Fi was an integral part of a written agreement that was in use in his foster placement. As part of the written agreement the Wi-Fi could be turned off automatically, as it was on a timer, or at will by his foster carer. It was also noted that Wi-Fi seemed to be used as part of a transactional process to access, meaning that foster carers and young people would make use of it as a type of bartering system. This is clearly exemplified in the additional time Leighton would bargain for with Todd particularly when he wanted to finish an online game:

“On the odd occasion he’ll say, can I just finish this game? Fine, you know, ask us, the answers nearly always yes. But as long as it’s not going on till 11 o’clock, 12 o’clock or whatever. Cos – as I say he’s 16 but we insist he and the other children are in bed for 10. Which for a lot of 16 year olds is quite early” (Todd, foster carer)

The findings also revealed that foster carers regularly changed Wi-Fi codes in response to concerns raised about inappropriate web content. This was the case for Betty when it was discovered that a young person in her fostering household was accessing inappropriate sexualised content. The response at the time by both Betty and the social work practitioner involved was to switch off the Wi-Fi until the matter had been investigated. Yet for other young people in the fostering household, in this case Jane, it proved necessary for her to negotiate her own Wi-Fi access whilst the investigation was being completed. Another example can be found within the fostering household of Todd, where it was normal practice to regularly change the Wi-Fi code as part of ensuring that none of the young people in care could inadvertently control the Wi-Fi, and thereby supposedly access to the Internet.

For those young people in care who were aged between 13-15 years of age, and in particular for those who had a recognised learning disability, their experience was the complete opposite, in that they were *not* given the opportunity to negotiate their use of Wi-Fi. This finding echoes with what has already been highlighted in previous chapters, that is, where a young person in care is chronologically older and more mature, this brings with it greater levels of independence and autonomy, which may explain the increased scope they compared to their younger counterparts to negotiate the use of, and access to, mobile communication devices and the Internet.

Rules and regulations

Within the host local authority there existed an E-Safety strategy that was the responsibility of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board. The policy emphasised the development of a framework that was both responsive and flexible enough to deal with the *“changing nature of the potential risk”* (2016:1). Importantly, the strategy was built on a series of key principles, as opposed to providing specific detailed practice guidance. These key principles were supposedly informed and aimed at young people. They were also meant to be accessible to parents and carers and would provide targeted communication to staff and volunteers. A further principle within the strategy was the expectation that the policy would encourage the use of existing resources. It was evident that the

strategy related to all children and young people in the vicinity covered by the local safeguarding board, and that there was nothing specific to children and young people in care.

Against such a backdrop, the spectrum of management and access approaches across all the triads was seemingly influenced by a series of rules and regulations that were unique to each fostering household. The rules and regulations used were primarily associated with access to the Internet, but there were also other rules and regulations that included:

- Mobile phone being checked on a regular basis to see what messages had been sent
- Mobile phone device not being used when preparing to go to school
- Mobile device could not be used when the young person was in his/her bedroom
- Details of all passwords to be provided.

It is important to note that, the above approaches are not necessarily out of step with parental approaches in general, as was seen in Chapter Two. However, little or no mention was made of either a local authority or independent fostering agency's E-safety Strategy by foster carers. A similar finding existed amongst the social work practitioners all of whom had very clear expectations about how management and access to mobile devices and the Internet should be undertaken, even in the absence of any specific guidance by the local authority or the local Safeguarding Children's Board. This is particularly evident in the response of Candice, who when asked about her expectation of foster carers and their management of mobile communication devices and the Internet, said:

"in terms of handing in the phone near the end of the day like round about half 8 or 9 o'clock, across the placements all the children give their phones to foster carers to put them on chargers and that's it, and then they get them in the morning" (Candice, Social Work Practitioner)

It would seem that in the absence of a specific practice guidance Candice, and also the other social work practitioners, as well as the foster carers made mention of common methods for the management of, and access to, mobile communication devices and the Internet. For example, bringing the mobile phone downstairs at night and the use of curfews. That said, social work practitioners did recognise that there were difficulties in relation to the management of mobile communication devices. Both Carissa and Kacey held the view that these difficulties stemmed from foster carers failing to state explicitly what the rules were from the outset of a placement:

“I’ve just had a young person move into a new placement but prior to them moving in, we did like house rules? What was expected and for me – because basically what had happened is, the previous carer had given him a mobile phone without any discussion with myself and what that young person did was within 24 hours of having a mobile phone, he rang his mum” (Kacey, Social Work practitioner)

It was noted that many of the foster carers and social work practitioners relied upon their own discretion. For example, Laura did not share with the social work practitioner the fact that she had removed the SIM card from Justine’s phone. It was a decision she made on the grounds that Justine had a tendency to waste credit. Laura also spoke openly about the use of her discretion:

“As she gets older, if she’s with me, and I think, yeah, it’ll be fine, I shall use my discretion. And if I don’t think it’ll be fine, then I’m not – I’m only doing it for Justine’s best interest, nothing else. But if I think it’s not safe for Justine then it’d be a no” (Laura, Foster Carer)

Laura’s perspective on the use of discretion mirrored that of the other foster carers who took part in the study. They believed the use of their discretion was based on keeping the young person in their care safe and not exposed to anything that could cause them harm.

Similarly, the social work practitioners Candice and Bernice were informed by their own experiences as parents, and this seemed to have influenced their use of discretion and what they expected of foster carers:

“I mean, you know, we have had some young people that have to hand their phone in and it’s monitored, but the thing is – and I’ve got my own teenagers and I was doing that with mine for a while” (Bernice, Social Work Practitioner)

Notably, what was not present was an explicitly agreed and common understanding between the two respondent groups of foster carers and social work practitioners regarding the management of, and access to, mobile devices and the Internet. This might explain why there was such a spectrum of rules and regulations that ranged from the light touch (not making use of the mobile phone during mealtimes) to those that were much more intrusive (checking mobile phone on a regular basis). The findings seemingly highlight that, foster carers were more often than not seeking to meet the challenges of parenting in the digital age through common sense means, and without automatic reference to the young person’s social work practitioner. This lack of reliance on social work practitioners for guidance and support may reflect the significant turnover in staffing:

“But it’s quite difficult sort of explaining everything to social workers over and over again who don’t know Kaitlin. If you give one example it may sound different to somebody who you’ve had conversations with before and building on something. It will sound quite - strange, just having one little snippet, trying to explain to a new social worker, then them thinking” (Perry, Foster Carer)

The immediate data seems to point to foster carers feeling the need to rely on their own judgement and resources.

As for the young people in care, there was a sense of inevitability about the rules and regulations that they were an integral part of being in the care system:

I'd stick to the rules and regulations that she's going to put out there. Cos she's a foster carer and she has to do that – cos she wants to keep us as safe as possible. I wouldn't put myself in harm's way" (Leo, aged 14 years)

In the case of Kayne he felt that the written agreement in place was used as a measurement as to whether or not he was obeying the said rules of his fostering placement:

"It's like up to Piers, if he feels like there's something that he needs to...do, in order to make him feel that I'm obeying his rules. Then he can like, keep the software there, but ...it won't change the fact that it makes me feel uncomfortable and kind of imprisoned in a way. But – there's nothing that could be helped about it cos I can't really force Piers to remove the software" (Kayne, aged 16)

The impression given by Kayne is in keeping with that of Leo, that is, the rules and regulations are an inherent characteristic of being in care; but what can also be seen is the emphasis that these rules and regulations are specifically owned by the foster carers and that a number of the young people in care feel they do not have either sufficient influence or power to change them.

Trust

Trust was a term that was mentioned frequently by all respondents. However, it was identified that the idea of trust and how it was evidenced differed according to each of the respondent groups. For the young people in care who took part in the study they primarily linked trust to members of their familial and friendship networks:

"On Facebook; she's like the only cousin I talk to. Like – cos we share the same birthday and stuff, we grew up together, we're kind of like brother and sister instead of cousins, that's why I talk to her a lot. They're my family. I trust my family" (Matt, aged 15)

For Leighton, as it has already been seen previously in the earlier chapter on surveillance and monitoring, his notion of trust was linked to age and maturity, believing that his foster carers' level of trust in him should increase as he matured. For those young people that made mention of trust, their interpretation of it was based on the relationships they had, and also what they believed they ought to be doing at a certain age. Examples of this included the relationship between Matt and Bev:

"Matt's really good with the carers. There's a lot of respect and Matt's very open, he can talk to them about anything. And you know cos he's a growing young man, now they can come to compromises

which I think's a lot better and there's trust as well. They put a lot of trust in him to do things. But they do it like a step at a time, do you know what I mean?" (Margaret, Social Work Practitioner)

Where the idea of trust was mentioned by foster carers they spoke of their level of personal trust being based on their relationship with the young person in care, and also about trusting the young person to make appropriate use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Additionally, the foster carers' perspective on trust was linked to behaviours and levels of maturity exhibited by the young people that were in their care. For example, Todd commented:

"I think you have to know who you can trust and who you can't trust. Up until this last incident, we would have said, yes we can trust Leighton. It does bring it into doubt a little bit because of what he did at school" (Todd, Foster Carer)

It can be noted that trust is undermined through the outward display of behaviours that are not in keeping with the expectation of the foster carer. However, a broader level of suspicion was held by Bev who remarked more broadly that young people in care could not be trusted:

"But these kids are crafty, they could delete whatever they've said anyway. Whatever they don't want you to see they'll delete it" (Bev, Foster Carer)

It would seem that the day-to-day management of, and access to, mobile devices and the Internet was influenced by the level of trust foster carers had. However, it should be noted that trust was something that needed to be earned through acceptable behaviours exhibited by the young person in care, and which could be lost very quickly when the young person failed to comply or behaved in a manner that was not acceptable. Nanci's experience is entirely different in that she spoke of an implicit sense of trust in Leo, meaning that she had confidence in the behaviour of Leo, but not that of anyone else:

"It's not that I don't trust him. It's just – I think he's a bit gullible. But I think there would be people out there and – you know, and I've worked with teenagers for 20 years and I know how many fights and I know 2 stabbings that social media has instigated or has been a direct result of" (Nanci, Foster Carer)

Nanci's perspective appears to indicate the way in which foster carers may view a sense of threat that is immediately beyond the young person in care, yet still responds in a way that limits access to how mobile communication devices and the Internet are used by the young people in their care.

The views of the social work practitioners mirrored those expressed by the foster carers, that is, trust being influenced by the behaviour of the young person in care, but also the individual care history. Moreover, where trust had been lost, the practitioners thought that this should be met with sanctions and a reduction in the use of mobile communication devices and access to the Internet:

“Contact with other young people needs to be very much monitored and she’s [Justine] just too vulnerable so there needs to be a lot of supervision and guidance, and quite strict boundaries around that, you know, if she kind of misbehaves then she can’t go on it. That’s very point-blank” (Verone, Social Work Practitioner)

Other social work practitioners identified that trust can be conferred on a young person in care when s/he shares regular information about who they are communicating with and what the content is. Where young people in care did not share information, there was a sense of suspicion and lack of trust. What is noticeable is that neither foster carers nor social work practitioners make any mention of privacy in the sense that it should feature as an aspect of both maturity and trust.

Whilst there were similarities in the perspectives of foster carers and social work practitioners on the notion of trust and how it was exhibited in the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care, there were also differences. A key difference was the lack of trust that social work practitioners exhibited toward the birth family:

“The key one is parents being underhanded and using it as a way to contact the child and to undermine the care plan which naturally they would do by that point. I’ve had parents think they’ve already lost the child so they will use any way they possibly can to be a bigger part of their lives than they get through the contact sessions” (Carissa, Social Work Practitioner)

What can be seen between the foster carers and social work practitioners there was a contrast in interpretation of trust. For the foster carers their notion of trust was influenced by their relationship with the young person in care. Whereas for social work practitioners their notion of trust was linked to both their relationship with the young person in care, as well as behaviour and the actions of birth parent(s) and how these might influence a placement. It could be argued that these interpretations of trust are linked to the proximity of the child in care and the birth parent(s). In other words, foster carers are in close proximity and have a relationship with the young people that they care for, this is not necessarily the case in terms of birth parents. It could be deemed that the opposite is true for social work practitioners, who are more likely to be in touch with birth parent(s) in relation to any changes in their child’s care, meaning that there is a much closer proximity.

The findings suggest that for foster carers concerns about the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet were not always influenced by anxieties in relation to the young person in care’s birth family. Instead, the influential factors were the behaviour and vulnerability of the young person in care that seem to dominate when responding to the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Furthermore, from the findings there was an indication that social work

practitioners were concerned about the behaviours of the young people in care, but they were also disquieted by the behaviours of birth parents.

Safeguarding

The complexity experienced by foster carers in managing the use of, and access to, mobile communication devices and the Internet seemed to be made much more achievable when they reflected on how their actions could be linked to safeguarding. As a respondent group they all believed that they had an integral part in safeguarding the wellbeing of the young person in their care, which might explain the rationale for the actions undertaken by foster carers:

“Cos I have to keep him safe and the rules of fostering are, that you’re always in control of what the child’s doing with their mobile phone. So I just said to him, I just said I need to check your messages. And he just gave me his phone ‘cos he knows I have to, and – it was just doing spot checks” (Rayanna, Foster Carer)

It can be seen that for Rayanna the notion of safeguarding was linked to being in control of what Darrell was doing with his phone and needing to spot check it on a regular basis. For the majority of foster carers they had generalised views about safeguarding the young people in their care, but there was no reference to the safeguarding against the birth family. When foster carers did make mention of safeguarding and the birth family they tended towards a general disinclination that was not necessarily grounded in specific concerns:

“He stopped seeing dad and everything was fine. Dad’s an alcoholic, and he tried to come off it. And I think the last time Matt saw him, he’d come off it but he was getting bullied in the community” (Bev, Foster Carer)

The comments made by Bev highlight the experiences of Matt’s father, but these do not link to him being an immediate threat to Matt and putting at risk his welfare. That said, there was only one foster carer who shared details of concrete concerns in relation to the young person they cared for (Perry concerning Kaitlin). These concerns related to previous behaviours of a birth parent and the vulnerability of the young person in care to seek support and help to manage the communication from the birth parent.

The perspective of social work practitioners in relation to safeguarding extended to preventing use altogether. This respondent group spoke about the complexity and difficulty of managing use and how the use of mobile devices are always associated with negative circumstances. This prevailing attitude is best demonstrated in the following comment:

“To be honest, I never really view it as a positive thing. And when young people ask me about phones, it’s just so complicated, especially when there are restrictions in place in terms of contact, whether that’s directed by court or the family’s sort of well-known to be honest it’s something that I would try and put off for as long as possible” (Nadia, Social Work Practitioner)

It is important to note that whilst all the social work practitioners were able to provide detail of the instances where unmediated contact had taken place between a young person in care and members of the familial network this was *not* in relation to the young people who took part in the study. Potentially, this preoccupation with previous experiences involving other young people in care may have led to a blanket approach in relation to prohibition, as opposed to a differentiation of response according to the individual young person in care’s circumstances.

Risk: external and internal threats

The sense of external and internal risks deemed by foster carers and social work practitioners was seemingly another influential factor from the findings of the study that may go some way towards explaining the extent to which foster carers closely managed access to mobile devices and the Internet. It can be seen from the previous chapter on monitoring and surveillance that both foster carers and social work practitioners expressed concerns regarding the external threats posed by use of the Internet through mobile communication devices. These threats consisted of inappropriate content; financial irresponsibility and sexual predators. Looking more closely at the external threats described above, it is apparent from the findings that, foster carer concerns were linked to those individuals whom young people in care were communicating with. On the one hand the risks foster carers made mention of was unsolicited contact that could potentially lead to sexual exploitation, particularly in circumstances when there is deception in relation to the identity of the individual:

“I tried to talk to her about, you know, people pretending to be who they’re not and - the serious side of someone offending someone, and pretending for instance they’re a 15 year old boy for instance they could be a 60 year old male who’s pretty dangerous.” (Betty, Foster Carer)

On a similar note, social work practitioners were concerned with the behaviours of the young person in care and how this could lead to them being placed in a position where they were unsafe:

“I went round I’d do sort of sessions with him [Jaiden] about internet safety and - you know. Try to explain that sometimes these people aren’t actually other 17 year old boys, you know, they could be 50 year old men and all that sort of thing. But he was very clever, he knew all these things anyway” (Bernice, Social Work Practitioner)

Perry and Laura spoke about the risks associated with the young people in their care being bullied online by other young people. Laura's fear for Justine went as far as her believing that Justine would not share with her that she was being bullied, potentially meaning that the situation could escalate and have an adverse effect on her. It is important to acknowledge that those concerns raised stemmed from previous problems these young people had experienced with being bullied online.

With regard to Leo, it is apparent that his foster carer Nanci had witnessed violent attacks, and that these were instigated by an exchange in communication on social networking sites. Nanci was of the view that if Leo was not online then it would be possible for him to avoid being caught up in such violence:

"Having free access to technology without any boundaries in place, and having seen first-hand– you know, what happens with that and what appears at your doorstep at 8 o'clock in the morning that is a result of – I mean we've had gangs turning up ready to kill a kid. I guess my worry would be, those people are still out there. So while he's not active, they can't get to him" (Nanci, Foster Carer)

There were members of the social work respondent group that spoke repeatedly of child sexual exploitation but this did not relate to the young people who had taken part in the study.

There appeared to be a difference between the concerns held by foster carers and social work practitioners. This seemed to be a sense in which members of the familial network, including birth parents were an actual threat. For social work practitioners the risks posed by members of the familial network seemed to be much more palpable. This was not the case for foster carers, which may reflect the fact that social work practitioners tend to have far more dialogue and interaction with birth parents than foster carers do. That said, both foster carers and social work practitioners were equally concerned about the threat of child sexual exploitation. This may be due in part to this topic being centre stage in terms of policy development and implementation by local authorities at the time the study was being undertaken.

As foster carers and social work practitioners commented on risk, it became apparent that they were also concerned with another type of risk altogether that was inherent *within* the young person in care. This sense of 'internal' risk was linked to the vulnerability of the young person in care, their fostering history and the arrangements that were in place for contact. This was most clearly evident

amongst the foster carers who were caring for young people with learning disabilities. An example of this is provided by Laura, who spoke of Justine being easily led:

“Cos I do know that she is easily led and she’s vulnerable and you know, I wouldn’t like to see nobody take advantage of her.... you know” (Laura, Foster Carer)

It is evident that Laura had not just applied Justine’s level of vulnerability to risk, she had possibly gone a step further by equating it to the use of all mobile communication devices and also the Internet, and therefore had sought to carefully manage and control access accordingly.

Rayanna, constituted another example where her reaction to management and access was fuelled by a perspective of the young person in her care being risky because of a number of reasons that included: his perceived level of vulnerability, his adeptness with mobile devices and her own lack of knowledge in relation to their use. Her response to a situation when Darrell was put in touch with a young adolescent girl of his own age and he began asking questions about whether or not she had kissed anyone, resulted in the confiscation of Darrell’s mobile phone on the grounds that he was not able to appreciate the risk his behaviour posed:

“He was sending text messages to a girl that he didn’t know. And it’s just that his friend gave him this telephone number for this girl. So Darrell was sending her text messages that weren’t appropriate. But Darrell just could not process what I was saying to him, he just couldn’t process it. So we just had to take his phone off him” (Rayanna, Foster Carer)

Another example of a young person involved in the study being viewed as risky was Matt. Attempts had been made by his social work practitioner, Margaret to try and arrange for him to have contact with his young nieces and nephew. Contact was refused for these children by the social work practitioner for Matt’s nieces and nephew on the grounds that Matt posed a risk in terms of his family background.

It can be seen from the examples provided that the perception of individual young people in care is that they are supposedly all *at risk* and *are a risk*. Such views are held not only by those who have caring responsibilities for them, but also by others who do not. It was not just young people with disabilities who were thought to be a risk. It was also able-bodied young people. For example, Kayne because of his communication online with young adolescent girls, was thought to be risky:

“So there’s been communication with girls. Kayne, almost, it becomes – needy. I think he’s trying to create a loving attachment with somebody which is probably something that’s been missing. He doesn’t build a friendship first because he finds it very difficult. And very often – or, several times in the past what’s happened is Kayne has sort of shifted to fairly significant sexualised talk, fairly quickly. And at which point the girls just go” (Piers, Foster Carer)

From Piers' comments it is apparent that his explanation for the risk posed by Kayne was due the fact that Kayne had a need to build a close relationship with one other person and as a result was unable to engage emotionally in a safe and measured fashion.

This notion of young people in care being risky was also shared by the social work practitioners who, as has already been seen, spoke generally about some young people in care not being able to manage the use of their mobile phones. It was assumed that they would put themselves in serious danger because of the need to emotionally connect to another person, even if this meant being subject to sexual exploitation:

"I think some of our children cannot handle it and it's a gateway to so many other things. And because of the vulnerability, it puts them at risk of so many other things. So – no, I would say, I'm a little bit anti- use of certainly social media, I haven't seen many who handle it well" (Carissa, Social Work Practitioner)

The findings present a picture that both foster carers and social work practitioners are dealing with a continuing sense of risk, the origin of which is not only external to the fostering household but, can also stem from within it because of the generalised notion that young people in care are inherently vulnerable and this is associated with risk.

Prohibition

A feature as seen in the previous section is the way in which foster carers who have caring responsibilities for young people in care with learning disabilities either limited and/or prohibited use of mobile communication devices. For example, Laura restricted Justine's use of various types of mobile communication technology through providing her limited access to her mobile phone, tablet or the broadband connection available in the fostering setting. In the case of Bradley, Rose only allowed him to use her tablet when she was present in the room, and she did not allow him to have any mobile communication devices in his bedroom:

"Go upstairs with a tablet! Never! You know they'd sit in the caravan, when we're all there, sit in here where we're all pottering about, or sit in the lounge. I would never let him go up to his bedroom with it" (Rose, Foster Carer)

With regard to Laura, she too adopted a similar prohibitive approach towards Justine that restricted her use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Yet, this method of prohibition was not just confined to those foster carers who were caring for young people with learning disabilities, all the foster carers engaged in some form of embargo in relation to the use of mobile communication devices, for example meal times, before going to school, not being used in certain parts of the house, in particular the bedroom. That said, there was one social work practitioner who expressed that management of mobile communication devices and the Internet, despite the difficulties and complexities involved could not be simply a matter of prohibition:

“You can’t do a generic blanket wall over that and can’t say right, phone in at this time, you’re not allowed to do this, and it’s like this. Because – the realism to this is that young people access social media wherever they can. They can access it on computers, they can access it on their mobiles” (Zayla, Social Work Practitioner)

The same social work practitioner acknowledged that the age of the young person in care was a critical factor to take into account:

“I think it varies on the young person’s age and I think it varies on sort of the risks that are involved with it. And what they’re using it for and what social media sites they go. So I think it does vary on a child’s age. I think because Lamar’s 17 and he’s approaching 18, it’s about looking at equipping him because when he is 18, he will no longer be in care” (Zayla, Social Work Practitioner)

Furthermore, she also recognised that the approach taken was potentially reinforcing the stigma for young people of being in care:

“Well, the other thing is, all their friends are doing it, you know, they’re not meant to be labelled or stand out as being different, the idea is that they can get on with their lives, and have as normal a life as possible, and I think that by denying them that sets them apart and makes them feel different, a lot of our children don’t want that, they want to feel the same as everybody else”

Zayla’s comments reveal that an approach of prohibition does come at a cost in that it fails to take account of the way in which mobile communication devices are a norm for all young people, including young people in care. Additionally, prohibition would seem to be a blunt tool that does not appreciate age differentials and maturity in young people in care. Notably, Zayla makes a point that has been missed altogether by all the adult respondents which is that, a prohibitive approach is likely to add to the sense stigma that children and young people feel as part of being in the care system.

Whilst foster carers and the majority of social work practitioners agreed on prohibition, their motivations were seemingly fuelled by different factors. In the case of the foster carers it was the

potential risk and vulnerability of the young person in care. The findings in relation to social work practitioners pointed to them being influenced by their experiences of individual family members making use of mobile communication devices to disturb and disrupt placements. The social work practitioners tended to focus on general risks, but rarely named them in respect of an individual young person in care who took part in the study.

Summary of findings

The findings indicate that Wi-Fi as part of day-to-day management of and access to mobile communication devices and technology within the fostering households was exercised on a transactional basis, available in certain parts of the fostering home and not others. It could be turned off and on at the will of the foster carer dependent upon the circumstances at the time, which included whether the young person was behaving appropriately or not. It was noted that this transactional approach to Wi-Fi was also coupled with a lack of appreciation on the part of foster carers about the extent to which the use of mobile devices were an integral part of young people's lives and was key to staying in touch with individual members of their familial and friendship networks.

A conclusion can be drawn that the management of mobile communication devices is not exclusively based on young people in care having unmediated contact with members of their friendship and familial networks. Rather, management and access appeared to be linked to controlling and managing the behaviours of the young people in care, both within and outside of the fostering household.

A prevalent feature of the findings was the use of discretion by both foster carers and social work practitioners and how this influenced the rules and regulations that were used. Foster carers as a respondent group expressed a range of concerns in relation to the use of mobile communication devices and clearly attempted to manage use through a series of boundaries. The rules and regulations that the young people in care were subject to leaves an initial impression that the fundamental motivation was to safeguard and protect. However, the way in which these rules and regulations were applied, tended to lean much more towards behaviour management.

The findings regarding the response by young people in care to the issue of management and access to mobile communication devices and the Internet seemed to indicate that there was not any sense of resentment or frustration. However, two young people expressed a sense of inevitability in terms of not feeling they were not able to challenge the rules and regulations of their placement. This feeling of powerlessness by these young people possibly reflected a sense of inevitable compliance to the rules and regulations, many of which were imposed, rather than negotiated.

The findings would seem to imply that the transactional approach between foster carers and the young people in care was related to the notion of trust but more generally operated like a bartering system. Where the foster carer had a high level of trust in the young person in care, this was accompanied by a greater level of access to mobile devices and a reduction in monitoring and surveillance. Nonetheless, when the trust held by foster carers in relation to a young person in care was either breached or no longer existed, then the use of mobile devices was either reduced, restricted or prohibited altogether. There was also a contrast in terms of the perspective held by social work practitioners about trust, their focus was birth parents and the potential that existed to disrupt a placement through the use of mobile communication devices. It was suggested that this variation in perspective between foster carers and social work practitioners was dependent upon proximity in terms of a working relationship. The findings also draw attention to the concept of safeguarding and the way in which it is being carried out by the majority of foster carers whose understanding and application of it does *not* seem to have evolved in line with the technology that young people in care were making use of. As such, this may go some way to explaining why many of the methods employed by foster carers were often grounded in management and control with little room for negotiation by the young people in care, and thereby constituted another form of behaviour management.

A further finding that was apparent, was the notion of young people in care being 'risky'. This notion was not just prevalent amongst those young people with learning disabilities, it also applied to young people with no known disability. Of significance is the fact that, at the time the study was taking place, none of the young people in care were subject to any additional interventions by their social work practitioner, and there were no stated reports that the placements were unstable due to risky behaviours exhibited by these same young people. However, all the young people who took part in the study experienced some form of prohibition in relation to their use of mobile communication devices and Internet. This raises questions as to the extent to which the notion of

inherent riskiness of young people in care is homogenous, and how far it informs the thinking of both foster carers and social work practitioners. In sum, the notion of risk and its automatic association with young people in care strongly suggests that a blanket method of dealing with the use of mobile communication devices and use of the Internet is being adopted, thereby inadvertently ignoring the need for an individualised approach to effectively and sensitively manage use.

Chapter Eight

Discussion

Introduction

A striking feature of this chapter will be the presentation of a series of new constructs about contact that have not appeared in the literature before. The uniqueness of the constructs that will be shared are due to the advent of mobile communication devices and the Internet as a primary method of communication, and the adoption of this new technology by children and young people, and more specifically by those that are in care. As already indicated in all the findings chapters, the majority of the young people who took part in the study not only embraced and used the technology, they also exercised choice. This was represented by the fact that they no longer had contact done to them, but rather chose who to contact, when and by what means. Such fundamental changes indicate that, how contact is currently understood and managed by foster carers, assessed and planned by social work practitioners, and conceptualised by policy makers will need to change.

Staying in touch

The young people in care who took part in the study made use of mobile communication devices, particularly smartphones to engage in unmediated contact with individuals from their familial and friendship networks. In Chapter Five it was noted the nature and extent of the communication between the young people in care and individual members of their familial and friendship networks, and as such it can be concluded that the mobile communication devices and the Internet are conduits for established relationships. Furthermore, the young people in care when speaking of their efforts to communicate with friends and family spoke about staying in touch, and this was done in a fashion that was informal and impromptu. What was prevalent amongst the young people in care was that they had a connection with certain members of their familial network and sought to maintain them, but not necessarily with the knowledge of their foster carers or social work practitioners. Specifically, in Chapter Five staying in touch was unlike contact in that, it was not bound by people, places and time, and did not need to rely on an adult to organise it or secure engagement. Moreover, there were also characteristics of immediacy and day-to-day engagement. When considering the experiences of the young people in care one is drawn to Turkle's notion of the

'always-on' that is a characteristic of mobile communication devices, that they are "*ready to mind and hand*" (2008:122).

The Internet and a range of social media platforms allowed the young people who took part in the study to keep a 'watching brief' of family members through direct and indirect communication that can come through a variety of means that ranged from texts to Facebook posts and Instagram pictures. The findings from Chapter Five also revealed that the young people had a variety of relationships that consisted of traditional kinship ties such as brother and sisters. Details of other relationships were shared that demonstrated the importance of extended and step family members. Above all, what can be noted is that the young people's engagement with family is not just confined to those individuals who were formerly members of their household. The ability to stay in touch chimes with what has already been highlighted in Chapter Two, which is that the familial network is not necessarily nuclear. Additionally, in the same chapter it was noted that, there was little recognition that children and young people in care may have more than one family that they relate to, this was seen in the case for Kayne. Importantly, it was also identified that, although children and young people in care are removed from birth family members these relationships still remain psychologically present, in other words there is no such thing as out of sight and out of mind.

In Chapter Five what was made apparent was the value that young people in care placed on the ability to stay in touch even in circumstances where family members were no longer engaging with them or because relational ties had been fractured. The early work of Walsh et al., (2008) whose Australian study focused on mobile phone use and how it related to belongingness and social identification provides an indication of what may be taking place for the young people who took part in the study. Walsh et al., (2008) come from the premise that a sense of belonging is one of five emotions that motivate certain social behaviours; meaning that individuals will actively seek out frequent contacts and enhance relationships so as to maintain social bonds. They add that through the maintenance of social bonds there are feelings of connectedness, as evidenced by the young people in care who took part in the study. They identified that use of their mobile phone promoted feelings of belonging which meant they had a sense of being highly valued, examples of this are Nora and Lamar (2008:226). Nevertheless, there were a young people who had some breakdown in relationship with their family members (Jane, Lamar and Matt) yet, each one of them were able to maintain a sense of connection either through the sending of a Facebook message, or through viewing the notifications on Facebook of family members. This potentially means that the

psychological presence of kin is never lost and remains, though young people may not be able to act on it.

The case for continuing relational ties has been made but, will be reiterated because of its importance. In more than one triad there was evidence that young people in care valued a range of relationships with individuals from their familial and social networks. A further explanation is offered through LaMendola as to why the relationship between young people and members of their familial network did not seem to diminish. LaMendola in 2010 explored the notion of social presence focussing specifically on the way in which individuals have an awareness of another person in the context of computer mediated communications. For example, the degree to which a person feels connected to another or the extent to which an individual senses someone is involved and known will have an impact on the sense of 'presence'. La Mendola made reference to Ruth Rettie's research (2003a, 2005b and 2009c) which provided three definitions of presence. The first is concerned with the *projected presence* of a person, much like that of a Facebook profile. The second focuses on the *sense of the other*, akin to the experience of a telephone conversation where there is social interaction, the third definition is *co-presence*, which means that a psychological connection is established and an individual feels that that s/he has access to another person's intent and affect. Whilst Rettie's (2005b, 2009c) work took place at a time when most mobile phones did not have Internet accessibility, what was apparent were the whole communication repertoires involving calls and texts that were established by respondents with their partners, friends and family leading to a form of co-presence akin to face-to-face interaction. Text messages also allowed respondents the opportunity to let others know that they were thinking of them without the level of intrusion that is associated with a mobile telephone call.

Rettie's research (2003a, 2005b and 2009c) highlights the way in which current models of smartphones with Internet accessibility and other functions such as calling, texting, and communicating via social media platforms, can enable their users to experience different types of presence. Rettie's research would seem to reinforce the fact that the sense of another person is real and therefore relationships that take place either online or using other mobile communication technology platforms are meaningful. Consequently, it can possibly be deemed that there is a lack of realisation on the part of social work practitioners and foster carers that a young person in care's familial network can be present in both the online and offline worlds. This may go some way to explaining the growing use and popularity of mobile communication devices for staying in touch

amongst the young people involved in this study, as there is a seamlessness that is created across the two worlds, unlike how contact is currently conceptualised with its emphasis on material aspects such as time and place of meeting.

Taking into account the statistical information shared in Chapter Two regarding the age of children and young people entering the care system (see Table 1: *Age range of young people in care as at March 2018*) it is unsurprising that strong relational ties remain with family members, and that children in care where they are able to, will continue to engage in such relationships. It has already been noted through the literature that, there is too little attention paid to the wider family network of children in care. However, the situation may be further compounded by the fact that social work practitioners may be blinkered in terms of theoretical preoccupation with attachment, which has often been interpreted as being concerned with the child or young person's ongoing connection to the main caregiver. The Ecomaps completed by the young people in care who took part in the study highlighted that they made contact with a range of people who were important to them (see Appendix B: Sample of Ecomaps). This finding supports what is known already, that children and young people in care prize highly the ability to remain in contact not only with their birth parents, but also other relatives and close family friends (The Office of the Director of Children's Rights, 2009a and 2012b and Children's Commissioner, 2018). It could be argued that the ability of children to identify their kinship networks, and in particular the desire of children in care to maintain contact with birth parent(s), relatives and significant others denotes for them not only a sense of relatedness and belonging, but also identity. The commentary by Wilson et al., (2012:114) would support the above in that they state kinship relationships for children and young people are very important, representing a form of 'shared biography' which signifies permanence and stability.

The research by Mason and Tipper (2008) gives us an insight into how children and young people define and create kinship. The key finding from their research is that, children are not passive recipients of family relationships. An exemplar of this is found in Chapter 5, in the description given in relation to the act of verbal aggression by Justine, and there were also other occurrences in the form of young people in care actively ignoring calls from birth parents. Such actions seemingly emphasise that the young people in care who took part in the study made a choice as to whom they wanted to communicate with and made use of a series of strategies to either avoid or confront birth parent(s).

Further evidence of remaining connected can be built on the claim made by Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (1997) concerning socio-genealogical connectedness. Socio-genealogical connectedness posits the importance of taking account of the broader social network of the child in the form of information about the wider family and community that the child comes from. Practically speaking, if a child does not have contact with a birth parent, but instead with grandparents and other members of the birth family, a sense of positive connectedness is retained and this is of benefit to the child's emotional wellbeing. Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (1997) state that socio-genealogical connectedness is not a replacement for attachment theory, but rather seeks to build upon it in such a fashion that the wider ecological networks of a child are taken into account. The implications for social work practitioners are that consideration can be given to the wider familial network in terms of effective interventions that will promote the emotional wellbeing of a child in care. Moreover, in terms of challenging the internal working models of the individual child in care, this could happen through the acquisition of expanded and new information about the familial network and not just the birth parent(s). A further advantage of the theory is that it there is room made to bridge vital chronological gaps and develop a sense of continuity. This may be particularly relevant in circumstances where contact is resumed between a parent and child after a considerable length of time.

The characteristic of choice about whom to communicate with extended to siblings and half-siblings who were significantly older, for example in the case of Kayne who was in touch with his older half-sister. It was also noted that where siblings had their own mobile communication device, they made contact with the young person in care. Indicating that choice is not solely about whom the young person in care makes contact with, but also with whom she or he chooses to respond to. However, there were still aspects of contact where the young person in care was subject to adult decision-making. This was in relation to younger siblings or nieces and nephews who could not independently make use of mobile communication devices. In such circumstances the young person was dependent upon the adult for access to these family members.

What has been outlined is unique in the sense that the choices made are by the young people in care and there is little social work practitioner involvement. That said, one could go as far as to say that the concept of contact as it is currently understood is being rendered redundant by the rapid advance of young people's usage of social media.

The exercise of agency

The review of the literature on contact revealed that children in care experienced a continuing frustration in relation to the amount and type of contact they wanted and what they actually experienced. One of conceptual frameworks that was considered in Chapter Three was childhood studies, this allowed us to appreciate that childhood is socially constructed. James and Prout (1990:7b) have described childhood as ‘*an actively negotiated set of relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted*’. Where such a perspective on childhood is taken we can begin to appreciate, as well as engage with children’s needs, and in this case the needs of children in care. When this is done, we can embrace the idea posited by James and Prout (1990) that, children and young people are able to move in and out of different social environments e.g. from home to school to the local football club on a Saturday morning. James and Prout (1990) also cogently argue that within each of these social environments children are exercising different levels of agency.

The findings reveal that young people in care who took part in the study not only stayed in touch with individual members of the friendship and familial networks, they also made a series of choices in relation to the when and how. The findings suggest that the young people in care who took part in the study were making use of different platforms, as part of staying in touch. For example, use was made of WhatsApp (Nora and Jane), Facebook Messenger (Lamar and Matt), Facetime (Jane) and also video calling via Tango (Nora), thereby potentially mirroring what James and Prout (1996) have described as different social environments. In relation to this study, it is the different virtual environments (see Table 2: *Social Media platforms used by young people in care*). The argument of different environments is significant as it provides us with room to reflect that young people in the offline world will negotiate and act differently in various environments and if this is the case, they are able to do so online. Examples of the above included siblings and relatives being followed on social media and the sending of pictures that record daily achievements, as well as getting into arguments with their peers. The ability for young people in care to act differently, as has already been seen, also extended to unwanted and unexpected contact, where the behaviour was often to divert or avoid altogether, the birth parent. Therefore, it can be asserted that, the use of mobile communication devices has simply made more visible the way in which young people in care exercise both choice and control about staying in touch. It can be argued that this choice and control has often been restrained by notions of vulnerability that have been held by foster carers and social work practitioners, as has been the exercise of power by carers and professionals that has been hiding in plain sight as a feature of contact.

The characteristics of staying in touch

In Chapter Two a description was provided as to how contact was organised. The description inferred a tendency towards a static approach that is confined by time, location and duration. This was mirrored in the experience of contact for the young people in care who took part in the study. It was evident that they had direct contact with birth parent(s) that took place on a monthly or quarterly basis, as well as contact with siblings. The use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care reveals that staying in touch can happen at all times, depending on the availability of the young person in care and their other commitments, as well as those of the people they are in touch with. Where there are time barriers these are associated with time zones, but there is also the characteristic of young people fitting staying in touch around certain familial members for example, Lamar who appreciated that his elder brothers had work commitments. In this sense, there is a departure from the usual contact arrangements, in that young people in care are making choices that are influenced by their own availability, and that of members of their familial network. In the case of Nora, her ability to stay in touch with members of her familial network took place at the weekend, which was an allowance for the time difference in her country of origin.

It would appear from the perspective of the young people in care who took part in the study that mobile communication devices to all intent and purposes, were used as the means to narrow the gap between themselves and their family and friends. The smartphone was a central device of communication with friends and family members for the young people in care. The communication that can be achieved through this device was such that it could be viewed potentially as a form of social adhesive and connection between young people in care and members of their familial and friendship networks (Walsh et al., (2008). That said, what is not known is if this was idea of narrowing the gap was the same for the familial members and friends that the young people in care were in touch with.

Notwithstanding what has already been said, the findings from Chapter Five also reveals that the potential of mobile communication devices to bring cohesion did not seem to be harnessed by either foster carers or social work practitioners. Instead, they saw the use of the mobile communication devices as a risk or a nuisance. For example, foster carers and social work practitioners spoke of the young people in care being 'addicted' to their mobile phones, and that interaction via mobile communication devices was an inferior form of communication when compared to speaking in

person. Reference was made to the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet being associated with a range of risks that included cyber-bullying and inappropriate content. What is particularly important to note is that for the young people in care their communication with members of the familial and friendship networks was a natural part of daily living. This was not a view shared by either foster carers or social work practitioners because they did not recognise staying in touch as a legitimate form of communication, they preferred communication methods that reflected the current understanding of contact. These perspectives potentially reflect that there is a generation of foster carers and social work practitioners who may not be able to appreciate the connectedness that is available to young people when they make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Rather, both foster carers and social work practitioner tended to have a greater familiarity with the risks and potential harm that could be caused through misuse of mobile communication devices and the Internet. The themes of risk and vulnerability will be returned to later in the discussion, but for now there will be a continued focus on the characteristics of staying in touch.

An obvious characteristic of staying in touch, as seen through the findings is the immediacy and reach made available through the use of various platforms such video-calling apps like Tango; texting, as well as Facebook Messenger all of which were used to communicate with birth parents and also members of the extended family that were seen infrequently or were abroad or not seen at all because family estrangement. The use of these types of mobile communication platforms brings with it choice and control of when and how the young person in care stayed in touch. This was because characteristics of use included ease of use, the type of content that can be shared and the minimal interference from foster carers and social work practitioners. There was also the added advantage of being able to share joyful moments and achievements that Ellison et al. (2009) explains as being emotionally rewarding.

Another characteristic of staying in touch was the ability of the young people in care being able to communicate in real time. Therefore, opportunities were created to communicate immediate moments of achievement or fun and receive feedback in the forms of likes (thumbs up) or brief written feedback. Madell and Muncer (2007 p.139) a decade ago realised the potential for mobile communication devices, particularly the mobile phone to promote either synchronous or asynchronous communication. Consequently, the level of control for young people in care can have when communicating does not only extend to how and with whom they wish to stay in touch with,

but also the pace of communication; features that are not necessarily part of usual contact arrangements because organisationally they are often controlled by a range of individuals who are influenced by assessments and governed by a court judgement.

The features that have been described also work in a similar fashion for those individuals who were part of the young person in care's familial network. In Chapter Five there was the example of Kaitlin's sister and another relative providing emotional support online when required and also warding off potentially harmful individuals, if they thought she was being bullied. These features encapsulate what could never be truly achieved before, that is, other members of the familial network having an insight into the young person's world on a daily basis through the monitoring of Facebook profiles, and the sending of pictures. In sum, there is a potentially greater means for ongoing communication and the reinforcement of connection.

Linked to the characteristic of immediacy offered by mobile communication devices, there is also the trait of duration, that is the time involved in contact via mobile communication devices can range from a matter of minutes in terms of writing a couple of sentences via Facebook Message through to ongoing interaction during the course of a single day in the form of pictures and texts. Licoppe's (2004:144) concept of connected presence is typified by continuous connection resulting from communicative behaviours that include the conversational mode where an exchange over a longer period takes place about what is happening in each other lives. The other behaviour is '*short and frequent communicative gestures*' in the form of text messages. It would seem that the young people in care made use of both methods therefore, regardless of the duration of the interaction the young person in care had with individual members of his/her birth family, there seemed to be an ongoing sense of connected presence, which was affirmed through communicating via mobile communication devices. This is exactly the opposite of contact that has a specified time, location and duration; and is, by virtue, formulaic. Furthermore, it can be argued that even if there are contact arrangements that are inclusive of telephone calls these tend to take place at specific times, and are more often than not, supervised by the foster carer. In contrast, the use of mobile communication devices provides a level of spontaneity that might not be truly achieved by the nature of current contact arrangements. More obviously, with staying in touch there was no intermediary in the form of a contact worker or foster carer to interrupt the pattern of communication that is formed. The notion of duration and the common understanding of it cannot be simply confined to time. There is also a need to engage with the thought that for young people in care staying in touch is symptomatic

of the 'always-on' culture, meaning that there is no artificial cut off point for communicating with individuals from friendship and familial networks, unless imposed because of reasons associated with personal choice, safeguarding or as a form of reprimand either by foster carers or social work practitioners (Turkle, 2008 and Mihailidis 2014).

The findings thus far indicate that the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet provide young people in care with a degree of independence, control and non-reliance upon foster carers which are not features of a life in the care system. In more than one instance, the young people in care had stopped or started staying in touch with members of their familial network *at will*. In other words, the interaction that took place was part of an ongoing informal communication pattern, unlike the formulaic nature of contact that can be said to be static and out of time with the natural rhythm and routine of the life of a young person in care. There is also the need to consider what Licoppe (2004:139) has described as a shared history of expectation, routines and understanding of the world, that takes place through a continuous conversation within an interpersonal relationship. Therefore, when applied to a young person in care it would seem to indicate that, she/he is having an ongoing conversation with specific family members by choice and are unhindered in doing so, thereby leading to the reaffirmation of the existing relationship. Consequently, even when a child or young person has been removed from the family home it does not mean that they have left psychologically, there is a continued sense of connectedness that cannot necessarily be erased or removed by entering the care system (Boddy et al., 2013). However, the findings from the study also clearly indicate that whilst there is freedom of choice this is not necessarily accompanied by behaviours from birth parent(s) or members of the familial network that are acceptable or make for easy management by the young person in care. Behaviours that led to the young person to enter the care may still manifest themselves.

A third characteristic of staying in touch is that of intensity, which was most vividly demonstrated in the case of the young person whose birth mother unexpectedly got in touch with her. The birth mother frequently posted on Facebook, left status messages and regularly posted details about her daily life. The reaction of young person to the intensity of the contact was one of discomfort and frustration that ultimately resulted in her deciding with the support of her foster carers and her social work practitioner, to block her birth mother from her mobile phone and Facebook account. This case represents a negative example of intensity. There were also other examples of intensity, these concerned birth parents with a history of mental ill-health or substance misuse, when they

contacted their children, this generated feelings of emotional discomfort. In these instances it was seen that, a number of young people could not effectively manage the communication and sought help from their foster carers. In contrast, there were other experiences of young people in care that were entirely the opposite, the use of WhatsApp and Facebook messenger are used to share pictures and words on a daily basis.

This spectrum of activity, of *'always being on'*, (Turkle, 2008) text, phone and social networking can be both beneficial or detrimental, particularly if the nature and type of staying in touch cannot be effectively managed or controlled by the young person. Therefore, in the case of Kaitlin what we observed was a combination of immediacy, duration and intensity that, on occasions can leave the young person in care overwhelmed, bewildered and in need of adult assistance to effectively manage the situation.

A final feature of staying in touch was in relation to the use of more than one platform. Those young people in care who chose to use a range of social networking sites and apps with both their friendship and familial networks, meant that those in receipt of the communication could see, hear and read. For those young people who only made use of Facebook and text, it could be argued that they were able to communicate in a way that was two dimensional as they had the potential to share not only words but also pictures with their friendship and familial networks. When taking into account the opportunity for 3D and 2D communication that staying in touch using mobile communication devices offers, it can also be contended that there is a tendency for contact, as it is currently understood to be one dimensional where only one or two mediums of communication are used to communicate a range of thoughts and emotions in what are often complex relationships, particularly with birth parent(s). Triseliotis (2010) states that in situations of supervised contact, it is in actual fact an *"artificially constructed situation"* (2010:64) that places immense pressure and stress on birth parent(s) as there are no clear guidelines as to the kind of behaviour that needs to be demonstrated. Even if contact is not supervised, it is still artificially constructed because of the formulaic way in which it is organised and arranged by practitioners, failing to take account of the ebb and flow of relationships. As highlighted by the work of Boddy et al., (2013) it is evident that there continues to be a lack of conceptualisation on the part of practitioners and policy makers about contact. Consequently, whilst the technology of mobile telecommunications have revolutionised daily communication this has yet to be realised by those who have traditionally held the power over contact.

The disciplinary gaze

In Chapter Three mention was made of the theoretical construct of power, specifically Foucault's articulation of disciplinary power and its characteristics. Foucault (1977 and 2002) explains that this power is ever present and does not reside in any one person or institution, rather it is embedded in relationships. As such, power is not hierarchical and is exhibited through discourses that are activities and ideas and statements that reinforce what is understood as the norm and common sense, thereby perpetuating the continued influence of power. Disciplinary power, Foucault (1977) stated it is not triumphant, neither is it omnipotent, instead it is modest, functions constantly through a series of simple instruments such as: hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and procedures.

Chapter Six revealed that the young people in care were subject to surveillance and monitoring because the entire care system is predicated on foster carers being part of a wider system where there is a need to monitor, record and account for their actions and that of young person who is in their care. This means that the associated level of accountability of foster carers is significantly different when compared to other carers e.g. birth parents. Broadly speaking, it is also important to note that the monitoring of children in care extends to their health, education and emotional and mental wellbeing. Other professionals across the health and education sectors are also monitoring as part of a multi-agency approach (Department for Education, 2015). This need for monitoring is linked to a narrative that is encapsulated in a series of plans (Care Plan, Permanency plan, Health and Education Plans), all of which are geared towards meeting the assessed needs of the young person in care as part of ensuring better outcomes. These plans, as part of the care planning approach are subject to a cycle of assessment, planning, intervention and review (Department of Education, 2015). Therefore, there is no aspect of the life of the young person in care that is not subject to scrutiny. Given this backdrop it comes as no surprise that the young people in care's use of mobile communication devices and the Internet was subject to monitoring and that this is a taken for granted assumption on the part of foster carers and social work practitioners.

The findings from Chapters Six and Seven confirm that foster carers in particular, are monitoring young people in care, but the impression left is that it is almost all pervasive, but despite this, young people in care are still able to stay in touch with members of their familial and friendship networks without the knowledge of their foster carers. The findings revealed that some foster carers and social work practitioners see as a norm the necessity to read the content of texts, emails, social

media posts and any other communication that may be generated as a result of using a mobile communication technology device. Specifically, it was seen that foster carers engaged in a variety of activities to monitor and manage the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by the young people who were in their care. Foster carers explained that they undertook the monitoring for a variety of reasons that ranged from concerns about risk that the young people in care might be exposed to through to the level of skill demonstrated by certain young people when making use of the technology which was beyond the skill and capability of their carers. Other motivations for surveillance and monitoring were linked to the foster carers' strong sense of duty to safeguard the wellbeing of the young people.

Penna (2005) in a discussion paper regarding The Children Act 2004 and the notions of child protection and social surveillance, raised a warning that the national information, retrieval and tracking system, at the time, represented the government's attempt to ensure that information was effectively shared by practitioners. In arguing the legitimacy of such a tool, Penna (2005:148) highlights that its implementation raised serious questions in relation to civil liberties and human rights. Borrowing from Penna (2005) and applying the argument to the findings from this study what can be traced is a transition within fostering from a global monitoring linked to the wellbeing of a young person in care that feeds into a range of plans to a form of surveillance that is routinised and standardised and extends from the physical to the virtual. Yar (2003, as cited in Penna, 2005 p.147) comments that those children and young people identified as being vulnerable are the 'focus of a protection-orientated regime'. Applying this to children in care one is left wondering within fostering, whether or not foster carers and social work practitioners, are in the words of the Information Commissioner for 2005, "*sleep walking into surveillance where the aim is social control*" (para 13).

The notion of surveillance, according to Ball et al., (2006) brings with it not just suspicion and a lack of trust, but also a social sorting and categorisation that marks the individual out as different. Before expanding on the above further, it is wise to ground what is being said in terms of a definition, Bell et al., (2013:8) define surveillance as being:

- purposeful: watching can be justified
- routine: it happens whilst the person carries on with their daily lives
- systematic: planned and carried out according to a particular rationale

- focused: the data collected is stored, transmitted, retrieved, compared, mined and traded

The activity of monitoring and surveillance as described by foster carers involved in the study indicated that it was purposeful, routine, systematic and focussed and was seemingly akin to 'function creep' (Bell et al., 2009). That is, the surveillance being undertaken and the data being collected is used for other purposes other than those originally devised. An example was a fostering carer using electronic monitoring to manage financial spending online, not for the purposes of avoiding fraud, but rather to control what money was spent on what and with whom.

Therefore, the foster carer techniques of regularly checking the content of mobile phones, social media posts, information on phone bills, as well as checking internet history potentially has "*profound and far reaching consequences for the ways in which young people in care are subjected to social supervision*" (Penn, 2005: 148-150). The three types of monitoring as identified in Chapter Six have been absorbed into everyday routines meaning that for the fostering households involved in the study a process of normalisation had taken place. This had affected not only foster carers and social work practitioners, but also young people in care to the extent that the nature and type of monitoring was seemingly unquestioned (Penna, 2005:150). The findings also revealed that, the greater proportion of foster carers used a range monitoring techniques because of overarching adult concerns about the Internet and social media, as opposed to tangible concerns about unmediated contact from birth family members.

Techniques

The findings from Chapters Six and Seven reveal foster carers engage in a variety of activities to monitor and manage the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by the young people who were in their care. Moffatt's essay (1999:219) on how individuals apply for welfare and the way in which this is managed by government workers. Using Foucault's perspectives on disciplinary power and governmentality Moffat (1999) illuminates a range of techniques that reinforce the power dynamic that exists as part of the welfare process. He also identifies the techniques of knowledge through the information that those applying for welfare have to provide. As part of his essay Moffatt (1999) also reveals the technique of examination which is apparent in the interview that those applying for welfare have to have with the government officer. It has been suggested that, the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet has made much more

explicit the manifestations of power and this will now be considered as a range of techniques that include: examination, interrogation, visibility and resistance.

In terms of the technique of examination, this was seen in the way in which certain young people in care were subjected to having their mobile communication devices examined. It was apparent that some foster carers threatened examination of mobile communication devices as a way of ensuring that the young people in their care did not engage in any risky behaviours. It was also evident that the act of examination was wholly expected and supported by social work practitioners. The technique of examination harbours both power and knowledge in the sense that, details about whom the young person in care is communicating with and the content of that communication can be used as means to further subjugate or not. This technique led one young person in care (Leo) to avoid the use of social media altogether because he did not want to break the rules as specified by his foster carer. Moreover, he was aware that concerns raised in relation to him would include the examination of his mobile phone and that of his friends. What is seen is self-imposed control and management, a characteristic of disciplinary power.

The technique of interrogation was also apparent in accounts of surveillance and day-to-day management undertaken by foster carers. It was most visible in the activity of checking the mobile phone bills of the young people that were part of the fostering household. It was also illustrated in the actions of spot checking and overseeing the posts as a Facebook friend. Whilst the checking of mobile phone bills, the smartphone and the Facebook posts are a retrospective act on the part of certain foster carers what it does reveal is that, this technique brings with it ongoing visibility, making the young person in care's communication with members of their familial and friendship networks ever visible to foster carers and social work practitioners.

Revealed in the acts of monitoring and surveillance as seen in Chapters Six and Seven is the technique of visibility, which most resembles the Panopticon (Foucault, 1977). This technique seemed most apparent in the physical tasks and activities of foster carers such as checking Internet history (Rayanna and Todd); remaining in the room whilst a mobile communication device is used (Laura and Rose) electronic monitoring (Piers) and also being a Facebook Friend (Bev and Perry). This technique displays how power is able to be exerted over the young people in care who took part in the study, but what can also be recognised is the way in which their subjugation had become

a norm, in the sense that only one young person (Kayne) questioned the monitoring and surveillance he was experiencing. It could be deemed that some of the young people willingly took part in their own subjection by handing over their mobile phones to be checked (Darrell) and providing their foster carers with details about content on their mobile phone (Kaitlin). Such acts on the part of these young people point towards the prevailing power differential that exists between children and adults. Importantly, the techniques of examination, interrogation and visibility produce the byproduct of knowledge about the young person in care which is being maintained and shared with others, and as a consequence may reinforce the existing discourses of vulnerability and risk.

With a perspective that power is not a thing, but rather is everywhere and functions in a continuous way (Foucault, 1979:80) it is not just the young people in care who are subject to the technique of visibility. So too are foster carers and social work practitioners. The processes of review and evaluation e.g. LAC Review and the writing of case records by social work practitioners, and daily notes by foster carers which are overseen by the Supervising social work practitioner means that there is not only visibility but also subjection in relation to the wider processes related to corporate parenting. It can be concluded that the technique of visibility is one that affects all respondent groups, and that power functions automatically regardless of who is exercising it (Moffatt, 1999: 227). Whilst the argument has been made that everyone is affected by the influence of power, it should be noted that it is only children who are subject to monitoring and restrictions that results in what Ballantyne, Duncalf and Daly (2010:104) describe as *“crude technical filtering and monitoring solutions....with little understanding of the needs of children and young people”*.

The final technique that is present within this new form of contact was resistance. This technique is used by the young people in care, foster carers and also birth parents. For the young people in care, the act of switching off mobile phones and having siblings or foster carers respond to unwanted contact from birth parents are exemplars of the power that is most relevant to them. It was noted in the example of the birth mother who avoided the usual protocol of getting in touch with Children’s Services in order to have contact with her daughter. Thereby circumventing normal practices expected by children’s social care. For foster carers, their resistance comes in the form of the personal judgements they make in relation to monitoring and management of mobile devices and the Internet, which was seen to be at odds with the views and expectations held by social work practitioners. This is most starkly portrayed in terms of foster carers for young people in care with learning disabilities. Two foster carers relied on a prohibitive approach, as opposed to one that

involved age-related risks, which was encouraged by the social work practitioners. One is reminded of Lipsky's (1980) street level bureaucrats, where the work carried out is situational and by virtue of this fact, there is the exercise of discretion, which cannot be easily managed by those with responsibility to supervise these individuals. Moreover, discretion is used to manage the emotional and physical demands of the work that is carried out, as are shortcuts to deal with the complexities (Maynard-Mooney and Portillo, 2010). There would seem to be synergy between what has been described and the role of foster carers, who are autonomous and exercise significant discretion possibly in the form of prohibition as a form of shortcut within the fostering setting. As for social work practitioners, the impression left is that their role is to endorse and condone. This may explain the finding from Chapter Seven where there was a significant difference in what some social work practitioners thought was taking place in the placement and what actually did take place.

The literature review in relation to children in care and contact takes for granted the power exercised by social work practitioners and foster carers, and this is likely to be because of notions in relation to the sanctity of childhood and the unchanging vulnerability of children in care. The findings from the study represent for the first time a line of sight in relation to the monitoring that is an inherent feature of the lives of children in care, and how this is now much more explicit and pervasive as a consequence of the response that both social work practitioners and foster carers are making to the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children in care.

Discourses of risk and vulnerability

One can argue that the process of monitoring practices by foster carers have gone unnoticed because children in care are closely associated with a rhetoric in relation to vulnerability and risk. Reasons for this are provided by Livingstone (2005) who makes mention of the sanctity of childhood and how this is being challenged as a result of the blurring of boundaries in the parent-child relationship. She identifies that parents (and caregivers) can no longer rely upon their own experiences of childhood to make sense of children's lives. Instead, they are preoccupied with the potential risk that children could be subject to, and also what may be created through a child's own behaviours. Livingstone (2005) goes on to argue that there is a confused discourse on child online safety. Within this discourse there is a failure to appreciate that, whilst there is a recognised risk, this does not mean that it will necessarily materialise and that the child or young person will be subjected to harm. This is what was most readily seen in the comments made by certain foster

carers in relation to the lack of privacy and also a single social work practitioner. She questioned the efficacy of a blanket approach to manage the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by young people in care. However, such views were in contrast to the majority of foster carers and social work practitioners. For them risk was an ever present entity that could come via any number of mobile devices and platforms. From the interviews undertaken with foster carers and social work practitioners, too few were able to substantiate the risk in relation the young people they cared for and their contact with members of their familial network, despite the daily regime of surveillance.

Continuing with the discourse of risk and vulnerability throughout Chapter Seven frequent references to this were made by foster carers and social work practitioners. This risk appeared to be at two levels. The first was external threats posed by the Internet and through the use of mobile communication devices. This consisted of inappropriate content, financial irresponsibility and sexual predators. The other threat was the young people themselves, this was linked to the young person's fostering history and the arrangements that were in place for contact. Taylor-Goodby (2002:6) argues that there is an overlap between risk and vulnerability, pointing to the fact that they are, in fact, intertwined. The advent of the Internet and personal use of mobile communication devices means that that there is now another aspect within the discourse of risk that is available to give meaning to and explain the actions of social actors such as foster carers and social work practitioners, who are charged with the responsibility of providing care to such children.

The findings from Chapters Six and Seven revealed that it was not only risk that occupied foster carers, it was also the need to adequately safeguard the young person in their care. The intention to safeguard was a singular and prominent thought in the minds of social work practitioners and foster carers. This is in contrast to little or no thought being given to the ethics of monitoring and/or surveillance. This lack of thought towards the ethical validity of monitoring and/or surveillance and the basic right of privacy may be due to an ongoing sense of paternalism that has the characteristics of care and control. Mathiesen (2013\;265-266) comments that since children and young people are often viewed as lacking the necessary maturity to protect themselves from harm they become subject to the paternalistic attitudes and behaviours of adults. For this study, these paternalistic behaviours and attitudes took the form of viewing the communication exchanges the young person in care had with other people. Furthermore, there was an expectation that the young people in care would, under their own volition, share information about who they were communicating with.

Where the young people in care did not share details of their communication this was looked on suspiciously and raised questions in relation to trustworthiness. Notwithstanding the preoccupation of risk by foster carers and social work practitioners it came at a cost of privacy for the young people in care who took part in the study.

Sisella Bok (1982) in her consideration of secrecy highlighted four key approaches to secrecy. These were deceit, intimacy, silence or the sacred. Notably, Bok (1982) asserts that where there is a strong link between secrecy and deceit in the mind of an individual that the response is to take any form of secrecy as deceitfulness. A persuasive argument is made by Bok that not all secrecy constitutes deception, and that secrecy can be interpreted as a feature of human intimacy. Relatedly, the social work practitioners and foster carers appeared to have as a working definition of secrecy that was linked to deceptive and discreditable behaviours on the part of young people in care, as opposed to an attitude that would see privacy as part of an ongoing aspect of human development. In essence, what is seen is that the young people in care who took part in the study were unable to control the flow of information that concerned them. Bearing in mind that young people in care are the subject of, and subject to, scrutiny in terms of the wider systems and processes of being in care, a lack of privacy and the ability to conceal would seem to highlight another manifestation of power available to foster carers and social work practitioners (Bok, 1982).

Prospective lines of enquiry

The studies referred to in Chapter Two indicate that this new phenomenon of contact has the potential to be a burgeoning area of research. That said, the statement is made with a sense of caution. Bearing in mind how contact has been researched previously without any attention being given to the agency of children in care and the power dynamic that is integral to contact, it can be argued that there is now a need for any future research to be explicit as to the way in which the study addresses these concepts. Likewise, if a study does not address these concepts it will be imperative to make clear why.

It is also suggested that this area of research could potentially be ripe for alternative methodologies where children and young people in care co-produce with adult researchers studies in relation to use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact. This approach acknowledges that adults cannot necessarily infiltrate or fully understand the world of the child or young person in a way that their peers can. As Kellett (2005:9) states:

“Children observe with different eyes, ask different questions – they ask questions that adults do not even think of -, have different concerns and have immediate access to peer culture where adults are outsiders. The research agendas children prioritise, the ... questions they frame and the way in which they collect data are substantially different from adults and all of this can offer valuable insights and original contributions to knowledge”

However, before such a research paradigm can be realised there will be a need for both researchers and social work practitioners to reflect upon, as well as debate, varying perspectives on risk and vulnerability in relation to children in care. This in turn leads to another area of research which may have broader implications in terms of how risk and vulnerability are understood. It is suggested a key area of research is to understand the risks that children in care are in reality subject to when they make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet, rather than suppositions. From the literature we are aware that there is a link between vulnerability offline and online (Livingstone, 2010d), however what is not apparent when applied to children in care is which child/young person and why? A related question that could be posed is what risks, if any, do children and young people in care experience when they do make use of mobile communication devices and the Internet. Furthermore, in keeping with parenting practices, it would seem that there would be significant benefit in exploring the practices of foster carers and how they relate to age, gender and education. As a burgeoning area of research there is a much to understand and learn from this point forward and it hoped that this study creates the opportunity for researchers to think about the possibility of different questions and methodologies in relation to contact.

Implications for social work practice

As has already been indicated the use mobile communication devices and the Internet have a number of characteristics such as immediacy, duration and intensity that has made the way in which people communicate radically change. This change also encompasses a geographical reach that has enabled the young people in care who took part in the study to have contact beyond their birth parents. The study supports an argument for change in terms of an ideological shift from ‘contact’ to ongoing connection and relationship for children in care. This will require that social work practitioners, as well as policymakers enter into a meaningful debate that recognises the strength of relationships that children and young people have, despite being removed from their family home for reasons of abuse and/or neglect. Central to the debate will need to be the views of children and young people in care. These are often not fully acknowledged for reasons that are rooted in paternalistic perspectives of ‘best interests’ and safeguarding. It is appreciated that a debate of this

nature raises a number of fundamental issues in relation to children's rights, corporate parenting, the rights of parents, safeguarding and wellbeing. Therefore, it is more than likely that the debate will continue for many, many months, if not years, as adults seek to reconcile relationship, choice and agency of children in care with the need to safeguard their wellbeing. However, this does not mean that action cannot be taken.

It is apparent from the study that there are a spectrum of approaches taken to the surveillance and management of young people in care's use of mobile communication devices and their use of the Internet. In keeping with McDonald et al., (2014) there is an urgent need for both practitioners and foster carers to consider the efforts made by children and young people in care to stay in touch with members of their familial and friendship networks as a legitimate form of contact, and by default this means that Care Plans by social work practitioners should give consideration to these networks. There is also a necessity for the Care Plan to formally record the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet, so that this information can be discussed as part of the Introductory Placement meeting that takes place at the start of a new placement. Such a forum would allow the expectations of use by children in care to be shared and for the surveillance, management and access to reflect the specific needs of the child. This would be in contrast to what the findings from the study revealed which was that the prevailing methods of surveillance, management and access were motivated by unrealised risks in relation to the young people who took part in the study. Above all, it is essential that both foster carers and social work practitioner discuss with children in care how best to facilitate the continuance of the relationships they have with various members of the familial and friendship networks. By doing so, the organisation and experience of contact will expand and encapsulate a sense of connectedness, thereby going above and beyond current social work practice.

Another area of development that requires attention is the need for policies and procedures that are balanced in terms of recognising both the risks and the opportunities that are afforded by the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet by children and young people in care. These policies should be informed by children and young people themselves so as to ensure that what is developed is meaningful. To ensure the robustness of the policies and procedures, it is also suggested that local authorities should have within their social work workforce a practitioner who specialises in the use of mobile communication devices and social media. This approach would

ensure that important questions are raised at the outset with fellow practitioners and foster carers about the use and management of technology and children's rights. This suggestion should be coupled with renewed training for social work practitioners and foster carers that has an emphasis on the complexities of mobile communication and social media. This suggestion has been made in the hope that foster carers will adopt a more nuanced and child-centred approach to safeguarding, and that social work practitioners will be able to advise them to do so accordingly.

Conclusion

In closing, the use of mobile communication devices and the Internet for contact would seem to herald a new found level of freedom and choice for children in care to communicate with members of their familial and friendship networks. However, this freedom may not be so easily achieved when one begins to consider the surveillance and monitoring that the young people who took part in the study are subject to. It is also evident that the wider fostering system both supports and reinforces the monitoring of children care, which has led to these techniques of power being embraced as part of every day practices that are part of the care system.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Interview schedule for child/young person in care

A. Establishing Rapport

Hello [*name of respondent*]. Many thanks for agreeing to speak to me today. My name is Jenny Simpson and I'm a student at Edinburgh University.

B. Purpose

Today I would like to ask you some questions about how you stay in touch with members of your family using devices like mobile phones, computers, a tablet or any other kind of technology.

C. Motivation

I'll be using the information you and other children and young people share with me to write my huge report, which is a part of my studies. I will also use the information to produce a shorter report to share with you and all the people involved in the research.

D. Amount of time

The interview should take no more than 50-60 minutes depending on how much you share with me.

E. Confidentiality

If it's OK with you I just want to take a couple of minutes to repeat some important information before we start the interview. First of all, everything you say today will be treated as confidential. What I mean by that is what you say today will not be shared with anyone else, not your Social Worker or Foster Carer(s). That is unless I hear something that implies you could be harmed. If that does happen then you and I will talk about what needs to happen next. My hope is that together we will be able to decide if anyone needs to be told, when and how. Nothing will be done without discussing it with you.

It's also important that when you and are talking that you only talk about those people who are named in your Care plan and not anyone else.

I've got the Confidentiality Statement form with me can you please read it or I can do so for you. If you agree with what's on the form can you please sign it and put the date [*if the respondent cannot remember the date s/he will be reminded*].

F. Mode of Data Collection

The next important thing is that your interview will be digitally recorded because it won't be possible for me to listen to what you are saying and write everything at the same time. However, I will have a note pad which I may use to write the odd word or sentence because it will help me to remember something important you said.

It may be that there are certain questions that you do not want to answer, or you may just want to pause and think about your answer before speaking. I've developed a quick way of you letting me know what you want to happen during the interview. The system works like traffic lights. So, green representing that the interview can continue; amber that there is a need to pause the interview and red meaning that the interview should be stopped altogether, or a question is to be passed over.

G. How will the interview work?

Finally, let me share with you how the interview is going to work. I'm going to be using something called an Ecomap which will help me understand who the important people in your life are and how you stay in touch with them. I will then ask some questions based on your Ecomap like how often do you get in touch with people named in your Care Plan, how do you stay in touch, for example by text, email or through a social networking site like Facebook.

H. Consent

Before we can get started I need to make sure that you still want to go ahead with the interview. I've got a consent form with me, you can read it or I can do so for you. If you agree with what's on the form can you please sign it and put the date [*if the respondent cannot remember the date, s/he will be reminded*].

Do you have any questions?

I. Fact finding questions

Let's start with some easy questions:

- How old are you?
- How long have you lived away from your family?
- How long have you been with your current foster carers?
- How long have you know your social worker for?
- What type of mobile technology do you have? For example an android or iPhone; a tablet, a computer or any other type of technological device
- What kinds of things are you able to do with your device (s)?
- Which devices do you use and what for? [*to be asked if the respondent has more than one device*]

J. Ecomap

That's great. Let's now move to the Ecomap. As you can see the figure in the middle is you. Then there are a series of circles which is each person in your Care Plan. Between you and each person in your care plan is a line which shows the strength of relationship you have with that particular person. The line made up of dashes ----- means that you have a strong relationship with the person, the line with dashes and a single forward slash /-/-/-/-/ means that the relationship you

have with the person is weak. The final line made up of a lot of dashes and two forward slashes --//-- //--//--//--//--//-- means that the relationship is stressful or difficult. Can you have a look at the Ecomap and think about the people you have a relationship with you and you see as part of your contact arrangements.

You can see the key at the bottom of the page. Do you want me to go through with you again what each of the lines means? *[if the respondent is unclear repeat the information again]*.

- So who is the first person that needs to be written down and where?
- Why is this?
- Do you see this person regularly as part of your contact arrangements?
- Do you want to start sharing with me the names of the other people? Do you want to write in the names or shall I? Can you also tell me what kind of line should be drawn between each of the people named and yourself? If you're not sure, don't worry. If you only have a few names don't worry.

K. How does the child/young person stay in touch using what type of device?

- Which person from your Ecomap do you stay in touch with more than any other?
- How do you stay in touch with that person? Can you please pick up the symbol (mobile phone, computer, tablet etc.) and place it beside the person's name.
- Does this person respond to you using the same type of communication?
- Do you always start the communication or does this person?
- If you start the communication between you and the other person, what kind of general things do you talk about?
- What do you do if you don't want to talk to this person for a while?
- What is the best thing about staying in touch using *[name of device]*?
- What is the worst thing about staying in touch using *[name of device]*?
- What do you think your social worker thinks about you using *[name of device]* to stay in touch with this person?
- What do you think your foster care thinks about you using *[name of device]* to stay in touch with this person?
- Who are the other people that you stay in touch with and are part of your contact arrangements. Write each name in and then use the symbols to show how you stay in touch with them. [Repeat the final 7 questions]

L. Overview of the Ecomap

Let's take a moment to look at your Ecomap. Is there anything you want to say about it or change?

M. Closure of the interview

Thank you so much for your time and what you have said.

Do you want to say anything about the interview, or the questions asked?

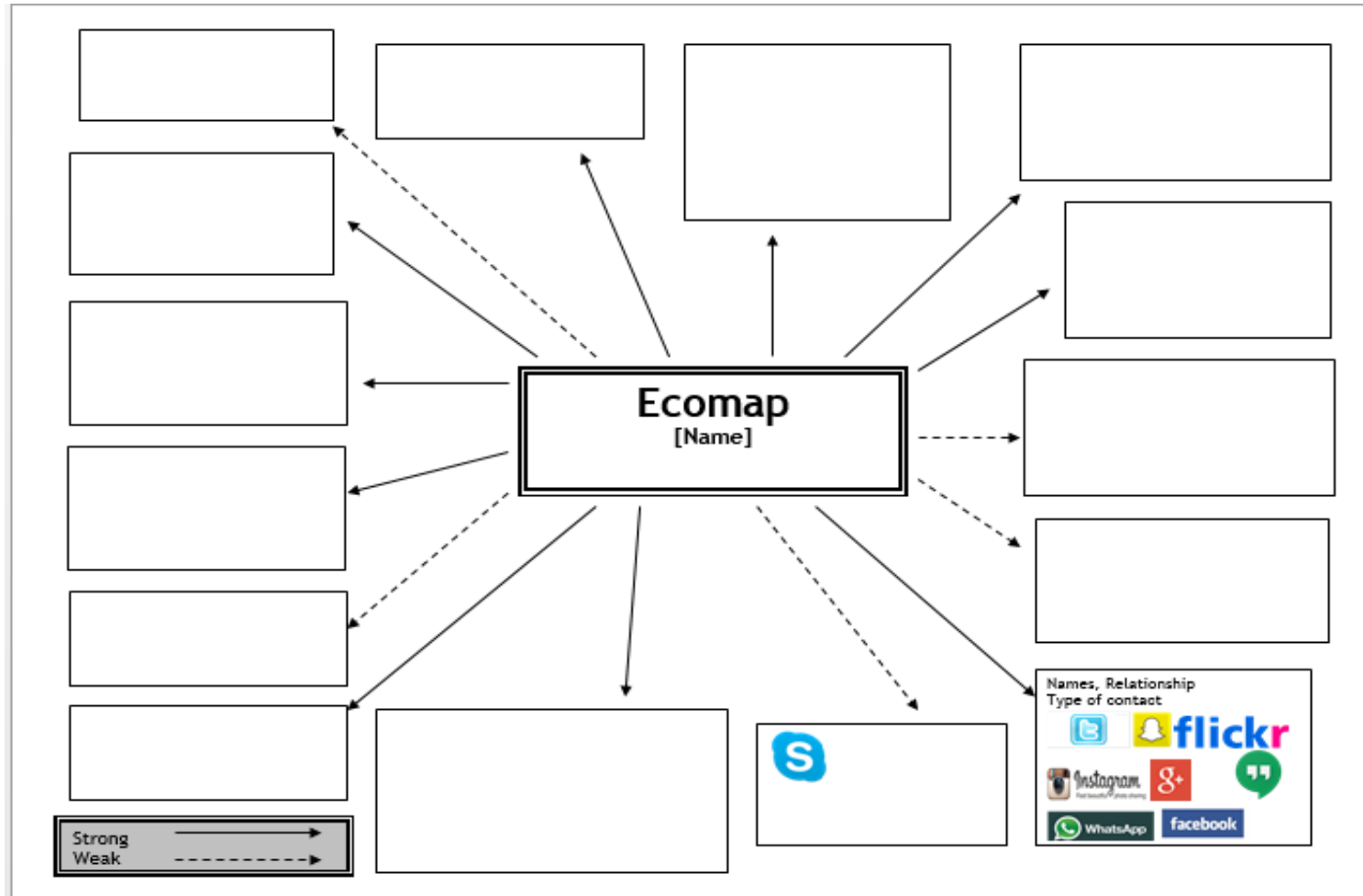
As I said before, I would like to send a brief report when the research has finished. Is that still OK?
[check correspondence details of the respondent]

You saw on the information leaflet that all the children and young people who take part in the research receive a voucher as a thank you. Her you go. I now just need you to sign to say that you have received the voucher *[assist the child/young person if necessary to sign for the gift voucher]*.

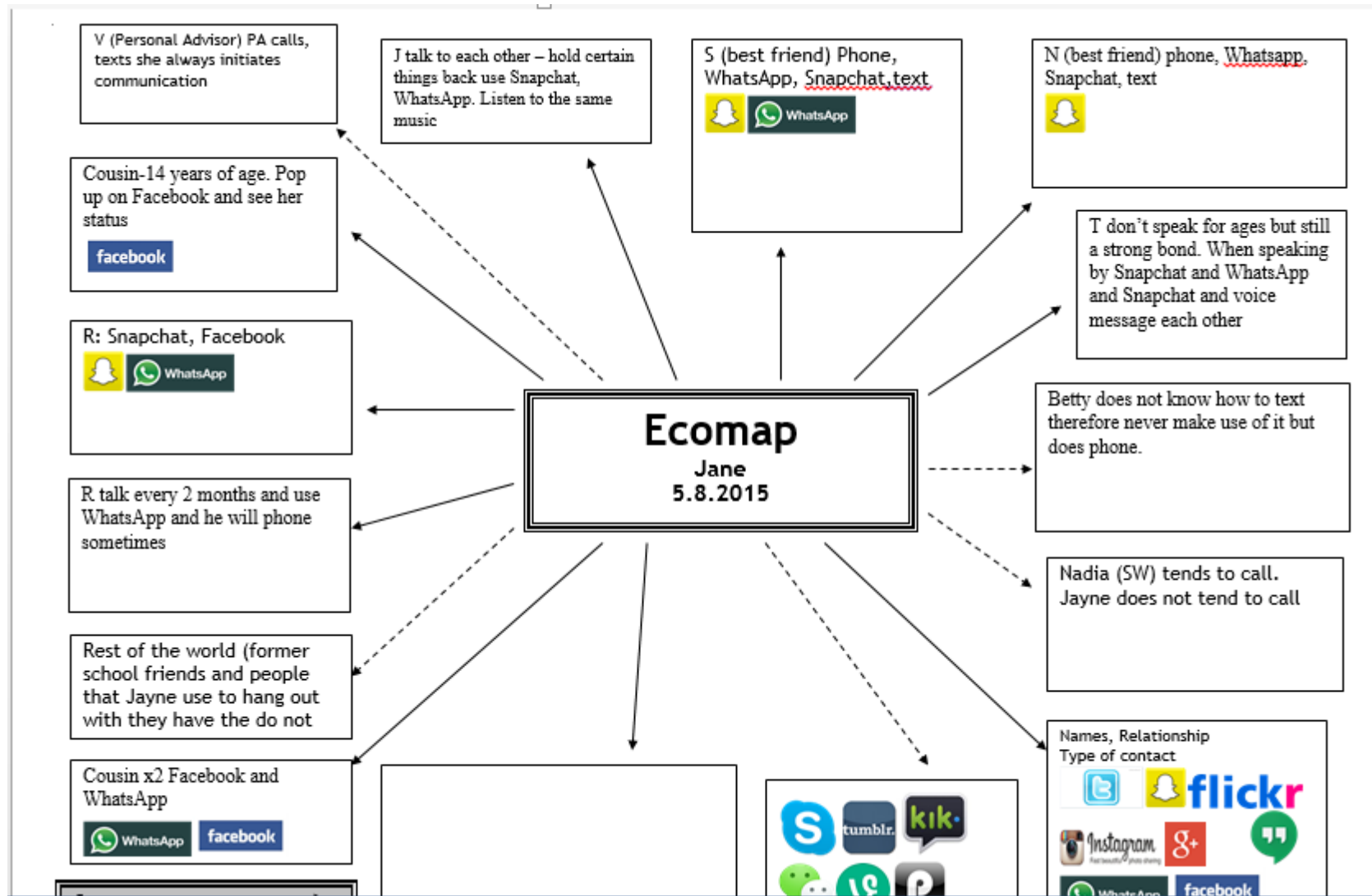
Thanks very much.

APPENDIX B

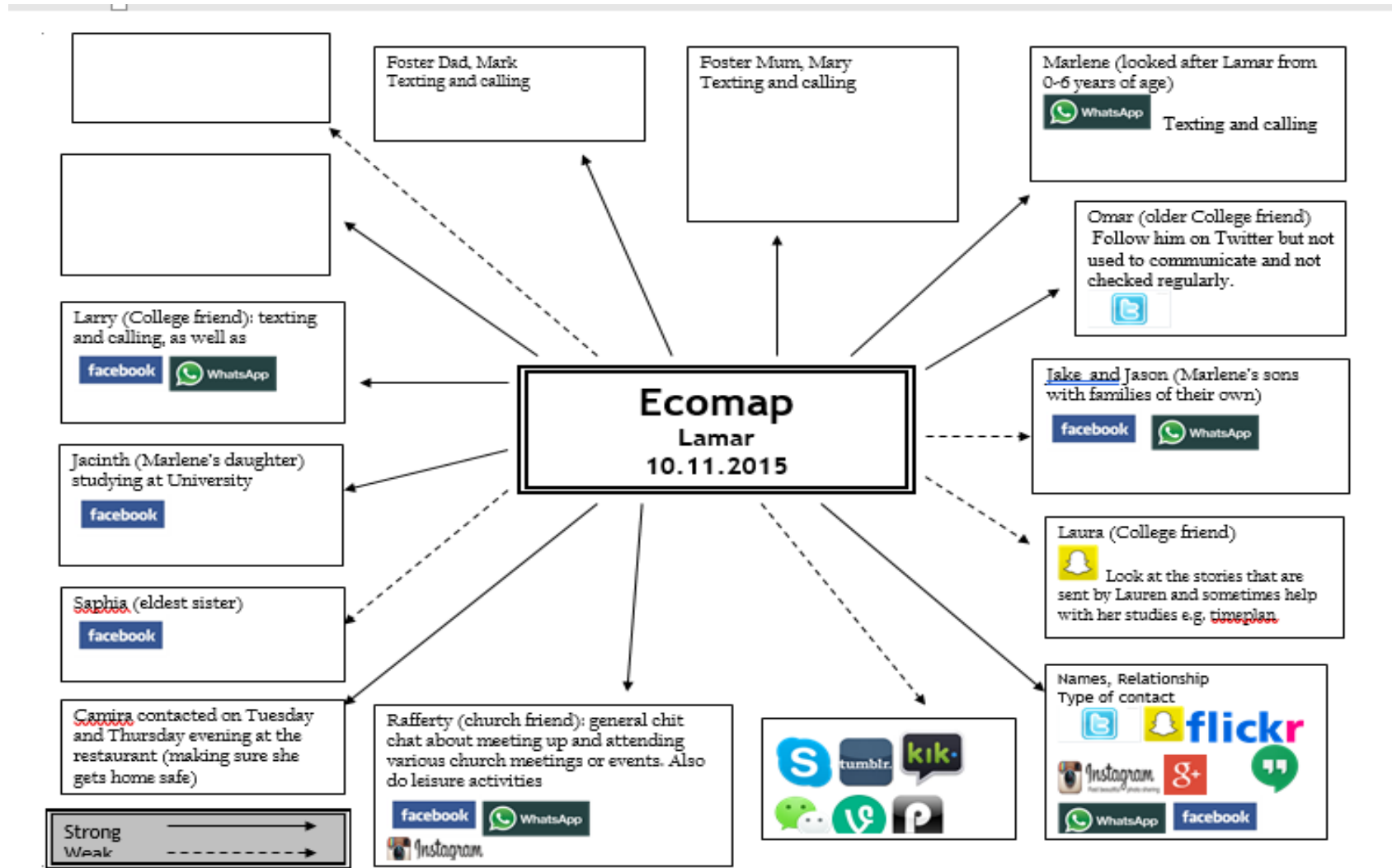
Ecomap Template



Appendix B (i) Ecomap for Jane



Appendix B (ii) Ecomap for Lamar



APPENDIX C:

Information bundle for young people in care

21st Century Contact

Information Leaflet



Who are you?

Hello, my name is Jenny Simpson and I am a student studying at the University of Edinburgh. I am doing a research project on how children and young people living with foster carers stay in touch and talk with their family and friends using mobile phones, Skype, emails and social networking sites like Facebook and WhatsApp.

In order to understand how children and young people use their mobile phones and other things like skypeing, emails and social networking to stay in touch and talk to their family and friends, I will be speaking to other children and young people like you, their foster carers and social workers.



facebook



Why are you so interested in me and what I do?

I'm interested because children who are living with foster carers tend to have their contact arranged by their social worker or foster carer. With mobile phones and other modern methods of staying in touch and talking through things like Skype, emails and social networking sites it is now easier for children and young people like you to talk with your family. I want to find out if you do use your mobile or other things like skypeing, emails and social networking sites to stay in touch and talk with people your social worker says you can.

What will I have to do?

I will set up a meeting and we will talk about you about what it feels like to stay in touch and talk to family and friends using texting, skype, emails and social networking sites like Facebook and WhatsApp.



How are we going to meet?

I will need to have permission from you, your social worker, possibly your Mum and/or Dad and also the foster carer to meet with you. Once I have this we can meet either in your home or somewhere else where you feel comfortable.



How long will the meeting take?

We will be meeting for about 1 hour but if you have lots to say we might talk for another 20-30 minutes. I do appreciate the time you will be taking to speak to me and so you will receive a small thank you gift.

When I speak to you will it be possible to have someone with me?

Yes, anyone you would like.

When we meet are we only going to talk?

We will be mainly talking but I will also be asking you to take part in an activity involving an Ecomap. An Ecomap is like a map of your family and friends where you talk about the people you are close to and those you are less close to, when you talk to them, how often and why.

Will you be writing down what I say?

I might, but I would like to use my digital recorder when we speak, as it will help me remember everything you have said



Do I have to answer all the questions you ask me?

No you don't have to answer all the questions I ask you. Because you are the person being interviewed we will not go any slower or faster than you want. You will be able to use something called the Traffic Light system. This means that you will have 3 cards to use during the interview. You can use the amber card to pause the interview, the green card to carry on with the interview or the red card to pass over a question or stop the interview altogether.

What if I want to talk you about anyone else who is not in my Care Plan?

I understand that once you start speaking there may be a number of things that you want to share with me about your family and other people you know. The research project is only concerned with people your social worker is happy for you to talk to.

If you do find yourself wanting to talk to someone after your interview you are free to speak to your social worker, your carer or someone else you trust. If don't want to talk to any of these people you can talk at organisations like ChildLine by calling 0800 1111 or Coram Voice 0808 800 5792.

If I get involved will you able to help increase the contact I have with my family?

No I won't. This is something that is decided by your social worker. It may be that after taking part in the Youth Advisory Panel you may think about how you often you talk with members of your family. If this is the case,

please speak to your social worker or another adult that you trust about what you would like to happen.

Hopefully what my research project will do is share the views of children and young people like yourself and this might be considered by key people in Councils and national government in the future.



Will you tell anyone else about what I say to you?

No, I will not. I won't speak to either your foster carer or social worker unless you say something that may cause you to be hurt or be put in a risky situation. If I do hear something that is worrying we will talk about it and work together to decide who should be told and when.

What will you do with the information I share with you?

I will look it and then seek to understand what you and every child and young person who has been interviewed has said. The information will



then be used for the dissertation (a very long report!) that I need to write for my PhD.



I will also make sure that you and all the other children and young people, social workers and foster carers get a copy of a summary report that pulls out all the major areas of the research project. I will also be sharing the key areas of the research with national organisations like the Who Cares Trust and also The Fostering Network.

Will my name be in your research report?

No, I will remove the names of everyone I have spoken to.

What if I want to drop out of your research project?

You can do so at any time. You don't have to stay involved if you don't want to.

I'm not sure if I want to get involved

You don't need to make up your mind right now. You can talk to anyone you like, if this will help you make up your mind.



21st Century Contact and mobile technologies

Consent Form

Name of Local Authority	
Name of Social Worker	
Name of Foster Carer(s)	
Child's/Young Person's name	
Home Address	
Telephone Number	
Emergency Telephone/Mobile number	

YES I do want the above named child/young person to participate in the research study entitled *21st Century Contact and mobile technologies*.

I understand that as part of the research study the child/young person will be asked for their consent before taking part and that they will be given information as to whom they can seek support from before and after their involvement in the study.

I also understand that if any worrying information is shared by the above named child/young person it will be passed on in line with existing local authority safeguarding procedures.

Signature

Date _____

Century Contact and mobile technologies

Consent Form

This form is being given to you to make sure you are still willing to take part in the research study about how children and young people like yourself use mobile phones and other things like skyping, emails and social networking like Facebook and WhatsApp to stay in touch and talk with family and friends that your social worker says you can.

Please read each statement carefully, or you can ask someone to help you read the statements (a friend, your foster carer or the researcher) and then tick each box and sign the form. You will be asked to complete the Consent Form by the researcher before the start of your interview.

If you have any questions about the Consent Form please contact Jenny Simpson by either telephoning or emailing her or you can ask someone to do this on your behalf. Details of Jenny Simpson's contact details can be found on the document entitled '21st Century Contact and mobile technologies – Information Leaflet'.

- I consent to being interviewed for the research study entitled '21st Century Contact and mobile technologies'
- I have read '21st Century Contact and mobile technologies – Information Leaflet'.
- I have read the form about making sure that I don't share the names of people I talk about when I am being interviewed.
- I will contact with the researcher if I have any questions about the research study.
- I understand how the information from the research study will be used, both now and in the future for PhD supervision and publication purposes.

Signature _____	Date _____

Name (please PRINT)	

APPENDIX D

Interview schedule for Foster Carers

A. Establishing Rapport

Hello [*name of respondent*]. Many thanks for agreeing to speak to me today. My name is Jenny Simpson and I'm a PhD student at Edinburgh University.

B. Purpose

Today I would like to ask you some questions about [*name of child/young person*] and how s/he stays in touch with people named in the Care Plan, as well as other family and friends, and if s/he makes use of mobile devices such as an Android or iPhone, tablet or computer etc. to send texts, emails, instant messages etc.

C. Motivation

I'll be using the information you, the foster child and his/her social worker share with me to help understand how mobile technologies are used and their contribution to contact. I will also use the information to produce a shorter report to share with you and all the people involved in the research, as well as senior managers.

D. Amount of time

The interview should take no more than 45 minutes to an hour.

E. Confidentiality

If it's OK with you I just want to take a couple of minutes to repeat some important information before we start the interview. First of all, everything you say today will be treated as confidential unless information is shared with me that might be a cause of concern. Although my research is mainly concerned with people named in [*name of child/young person*]'s Care plan, please feel free to talk other people who are part of the family and friendship network.

I've got the Confidentiality Statement form with me, can you please read it. If you agree with what's on the form can you please sign it and add the date [*if the respondent cannot remember the date s/he will be reminded*].

F. Mode of Data Collection

If it's OK with you, I would like to digitally record the interview because it won't be possible for me to concentrate on what you are saying and write everything down at the same time. However, I will have a note pad which I may use to write the odd word or sentence because it will help me to remember something important you have said.

Please feel free during the course of the interview to either pass on a question or ask me to come back to a particular question later in the interview.

G. How will the interview work?

The interview will involve me asking you a series of questions about your foster care experiences, as well as your experiences of caring for [*name of child/young person*]

H. Consent

Before we can get started I need to make sure that you still want to go ahead with the interview. I've got a consent form with me can you read it again if you want. If you agree with what's on the form can you please date and sign it [*if the respondent cannot remember the date s/he will be reminded*].

Do you have any questions?

II. Fact finding questions

III. Foster Carer background

1. How long have you been a foster carer for?
2. How many children or young people have you cared for previously?
3. Can you tell me something about their ages, gender, how long each one of them stayed with you, what led to them being moved on?

III Fostering placement

4. How long has [*name of child/young person*] been with you?
5. How does [*name of child/young person*] keep in touch with family and friends
6. How does contact take place?
7. How would you describe the quality of that contact?
8. Have there been any changes to the contact arrangements recently?
9. What do you think about [*name of child/young person*] staying in touch with people named in his/her Care Plan, as well as other family and friends?
10. What type of mobile technology does [*name of child/young person*] own or has access to?
11. Do you have any thoughts on how much access children/young people in care should have to mobile technology like iPhone, Android phones and tablets etc.

Self prompts

- Which device does [*name of child/young person*] use and what for? [*to be asked if the child/young person has more than one device*]

J. Monitoring and management

1. What do you think about [*name of child/young person*] making use of his/her mobile device to stay in touch not only with people named in their Contact Plan but also family and friends?
2. Can you describe the effect, if any, on the quantity and quality of communication between [*name of child/young person*] and the people named in their Contact Plan, as well as other family and friends?
3. Can you describe the effect on [*name of child/young person*] when s/he is using mobile technology to communicate with people named in the Care Plan and/or wider family and friends?
4. What do you think about [*name of child/young person*] and his/her right to privacy (appreciating that this may reflect a matter of growing independence and autonomy)?
5. What does the use of the mobile device by [*name of child/young person*] mean to you and for you?
6. What approaches, if any, have you used or thought about using in order to minimise any undesirable effects when [*name of child/young person*] is communicating using mobile technologies with people named in the Contact Plan or wider family or friends?
7. How would you describe the social worker's reaction to [*name of child/young person's*] the use of [*mobile device*] to stay in touch not only with people named in his/her Care Plan but also wider family and friends?

K. Closure of the interview

Thank you so much for your time and what you have said.

Is there anything else that you want to add?

Do you want to say anything about the interview, or the questions asked?

As I said before, I would like to send a brief report when the research has finished. Do you want a copy of the report? [*check correspondence details of the respondent*]

Thanks very much.

APPENDIX E

Interview Schedules for Social Work Practitioners

A. Establishing Rapport

Hello [*name of respondent*]. Many thanks for agreeing to speak to me today. My name is Jenny Simpson and I'm a PhD student at Edinburgh University.

B. Purpose

Today I would like to ask you some questions about [*name of child/young person*] and how s/he stays in touch with people named in the Care Plan, and if s/he makes use of mobile devices such as an Android or iPhone, tablet or computer etc. to send texts, emails, instant messages etc.

C. Motivation

I'll be using the information you, the foster child and the foster carer share with me to help me to understand how mobile technologies are used and their contribution to contact. I will also use the information to produce a shorter report to share with you and all the people involved in the research, as well as senior managers.

D. Amount of time

The interview should take no more than 45 minutes to an hour.

E. Confidentiality

If it's OK with you I just want to take a couple of minutes to repeat some important information before we start the interview. First of all, everything you say today will be treated as confidential and will not be shared with either the child/young person or his/her foster carer(s). I've got the Confidentiality Statement form with me can you can read it again if you want. If you agree with what's on the form can you please sign it and put the date [*if the respondent cannot remember the date s/he will be reminded*].

F. Mode of Data Collection

If it's OK with you, I would like to digitally record the interview because it won't be possible for me to concentrate on what you are saying and write everything down at the same time. However, I will have a note pad which I may use to write the odd word or sentence because it will help me to remember something important you said.

G. How will the interview work?

The interview will involve me asking you a series of questions about the child/young person that you have case responsibility for.

H. Consent

I've got a consent form with me please read it again if you need to. If you agree with what's on the form can you please sign it and put the date [*if the respondent cannot remember the date s/he will be reminded*].

Do you have any questions?

I would like to begin with a few contextual questions about you, if that is OK

IV. Fact finding questions

1. What is your official title?
2. How long have you been working in this post?
3. Have you always worked in this team?
4. What is the average caseload for team members?
5. Taking details of your caseload a little further, what is the mix in terms of age range, ethnicity etc?
6. When did you qualify as a social worker?
7. What was your social work qualification?
8. Have you always worked as a children and families social worker?

II

1. How long has [*name of child/young person*] been in his/her current placement?
2. How long have you been [*name of child/young person*]'s social worker?
3. What are the contact arrangements for [*name of child/young person*]?
4. How would you describe the type of contact [*name of child/young person*] has?
5. How would you describe the quality of the contact [*name of child/young person*] has?
6. Has this changed since arriving at the placement, or if the [*name of child/young person*] has been in placement for a while, have you noticed any changes?
7. What type of mobile technology does [*name of child/young person*] own or have access to?

Self prompts

- Which device(s) does [*name of child/young person*] use most frequently to stay in touch with not only people named in his/her Care Plan but other family and friends?
- Which device (s) does [*name of child/young person*] use and what for? [*to be asked if the child/young person has more than one device*]
- Are you aware of [*name of child/young person*] using his/her [type of mobile device] to stay in touch with not only people named in his/her Care Plan but also other family and friends?

J. Monitoring and management

(a) What difference do you think the mobile device used by *[name of child/young person]* makes to him/her staying in touch with people named in the Care Plan, as well as other family and friends?

(b) Based on what you have said, what about the quantity or quality of contact?

(c) How would you describe the impact on the placement when *[name of child/young person]* the quantity or quality of communication using mobile technology is either good or bad. In particular what are the dynamics between *[name of child/young person]* and the foster carer?

(d) Can you describe the effect on the young person when s/he is using mobile technology to communicate with people named in the Care Plan?

(e) What are your views on privacy and the use of mobile technology/social networking by Children in Care, appreciating that this might reflect a matter of growing independence and autonomy?

(g) What approaches, if any, have you used or thought about in order to minimise the undesirable effects of mobile technology, if contact has had be reduced or has been deemed unsuitable for *[name of child/young person]*

(h) How would you describe the foster carer's reaction to *[name of child/young person]* use of mobile technologies to communicate with people named in the Care Plan and other family and friends?

K. Closure of the interview

Thank you so much for your time and what you have said.

Is there anything else that you want to add?

Do you want to say anything about the interview, or the questions asked?

As I said before, I would like to send a brief report when the research has finished. Is that still OK?
[to check correspondence details]

Thanks very much.

APPENDIX F:

Information bundle for adult respondents



My name is Jonny Simgan and I am a student studying at the University of Edinburgh

Content

- 1 What is the PhD research about?
- 2 Why should I take part in the research?
- 3 What format will the research take?
- 4 How will you recruit children and young people for the study?
- 5 What types of questions will I be asked?
- 6 If, after the interview, I or the children or young people involved need to speak to anyone, is that allowed?
- 7 What about issues related to confidentiality?
- 8 Will any special equipment be used?
- 9 How will the data from the interview be used?
- 10 What if I still have concerns about the study?

What is the PhD research about?

The overall aim of this PhD research project involves seeking to capture how contact between children in care and the people named in their Care Plan has changed as a result of mobile technologies and social media and whether or not there is a tangible impact in terms of key areas of local authority care.

Why should I take part in this research?

Your involvement as either a qualified social work practitioner or foster carer is important. Your role provides a unique perspective in terms of the practice realities of contact when mobile technologies and social media are used. You are also in an exclusive position to share your observations on how individual children and young people, as well as others respond.

What format will the research take?

The format of the research will involve interviewing a child in care, the child's social work and foster carer separately using qualitative interviews. In other words a 'conversation with a purpose', where respondents will be asked a series of questions and will answer as they think fit. Throughout the interviews there will be occasions when follow up questions will be asked in order to further expand on a theme that is being discussed, or to confirm my understanding of what has been said. The duration of the qualitative interview will be approximately an hour for each respondent.

For the child participants their face-to-face interview will comprise of 2 distinct parts that are aimed at adopting an approach that is child-centred and activity based. The first half of the interview will see the use of an 'iceberg' that has been designed to identify those individuals named in the Care Plan. This tool will be used to ask the child/young person what contact they have and with whom, and how often. The second half of the semi-structured interview will then be used to ask questions regarding whether or not the child/young person is making use of mobile technologies for communicating with individuals named in his/her Care Plan.

It is acknowledged that as the sample of child participants is due to range between 10-14 years of age there will be developmental differences. Therefore, two versions of this aspect of the interview will be developed.

Your role as either a
qualified social worker
or foster carer is
important

One version will be offline which will cater for the younger respondents, and the other computerised, for the more mature and computer literate child/young person. For children with disabilities further adaptations will be made in the form of making use of assistive technologies, as well as language tools such as the Talking Book and Makaton. For those children who first language is not English an interpreter will be used.

In order to ensure that all the material is as relevant as possible I will be asking for 3-4 children and young people to be involved in a Youth Advisory Panel. The role of the Panel will be to give me advice about how best to gather and otherwise present the material that will be used with children and young people that are interviewed.

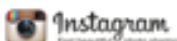
How will you recruit children and young people for the study?

The sample of the children and young people will be recruited via the child's social worker who has case responsibility. These individuals will be asked to take into account the sampling framework for the study and then make suggestions regarding which children/young people and foster cars can be approached. The fact that the recruitment process begins with the child's social worker is a reflection of the fact that they will have the latest information regarding placement arrangements and will be attuned as to the possible consequences of involvement. The child's social worker will be asked about who to approach for consent and whether or not there are any arrangements that exist for delegated authority. If consent is given for the child/young person to take part in the study I will then seek consent from the individual child/young person as well.

What types of questions will I be asked?

The questions will focus on your experiences, feelings and perspective of how contact between children/young people in care and their birth families and friends has changed as a result of mobile technologies and social media. There is no expectation that you will have all the answers or know everything about technological developments. It is your personal perspective and understanding which is important.

If you want information regarding how the children and young people will be interviewed, please ask for a copy of the information leaflet.



If after the interview, I or the children and young people involved in the study need to speak to anyone, is that allowed?

Yes it is. It could be that after the interview respondents you may want to talk to someone. You will be provided with details in relation to The Foster Care Network (<http://www.fostercare.net/>) or the British Association of Social Workers (<http://www.basw.co.uk/basw/>). For the children and young people involved in the study they can speak either to their social worker, foster carer, or a trusted adult. Alternatively they will be given information regarding contacting organisations such as ChildLine or Carem Voice.

What about issues related to confidentiality?

Confidentiality is deemed an integral and important aspect of this study and to this end a number of activities will be undertaken to maintain confidentiality throughout and after it has finished. Firstly, you will be asked to sign a Confidentiality Statement which details how your identity and that of others will remain anonymous.

Secondly, the individual used to transcribe the digital recording of the qualitative interviews will be asked to sign a Confidentiality Statement which states that your right for confidentiality must be respected at all times, that the digital recording itself must be stored securely, and that under no circumstances must the data from the qualitative interview be discussed with anyone other than the researcher.

Thirdly, all the material relating to the qualitative interviews e.g. digital recording, and transcript will be stored securely in a locked file which will only be accessed by me.



*Your role as either a
qualified social worker
or foster carer is
important*



21st Century Contact and mobile technologies

Consent Form

This form has been provided to you as part of ensuring that you are still willing to take part in a research study related to children in care and their use of mobile technologies to communicate with people identified in their Care Plan.

Please do take the time to read and consider each statement carefully, and then tick the box to express your consent and then provide your name and signature accordingly. You will be asked for the completed Consent Form by the researcher before the start of the interview.

If you have any questions about the Consent Form please contact Jenny Simpson by either telephoning or emailing her. Details of Jenny Simpson's contact details can be found on the document entitled '21st Century Contact and mobile technologies – Explanatory Leaflet'.

I consent to being interviewed for the research study entitled '21st Century Contact and mobile technologies'

I confirm that I have read the document entitled '21st Century Contact and mobile technologies – Explanatory leaflet'

I confirm that I have read the document entitled Confidentiality Statement and understand the need to ensure that when providing exemplars that I use fictitious names in order to maintain the anonymity of service users, carers and other professionals

I will, where necessary, make contact with the researcher if I have any outstanding queries related to this research study.

I confirm that I have understood how the data from the research will be used, both now and in the future for PhD supervision and publication purposes.

Signature _____	Date _____

Name (please PRINT)	

21st Century Contact and mobile technologies

Confidentiality Statement

This Confidentiality Statement has been provided to you as part of ensuring that throughout the study your identity and that of others remains confidential

Please do take the time to read and consider each statement carefully and indicate your agreement by ticking the individual boxes and then sign and date the form accordingly. You will be asked for the completed Statement by the researcher before the start of the interview.

If you have any questions about the Confidentiality Statement please contact Jenny Simpson by either telephoning or emailing her. Details of Jenny Simpson's contact details can be found on the document entitled '21st Century Contact and mobile technologies – Explanatory Leaflet'.

I understand that my personal details for the purposes of this research study will remain anonymous and that at all times no identifying details pertaining to my name or the organisation that I work for will be made known.

I understand that when providing the researcher with any exemplars that I will use fictitious names in order to maintain the anonymity of service users, carers and other professionals.

I understand that the digital recordings of my interview will only be transcribed by an individual who has signed a Transcribers Confidentiality Statement

I understand that my details as a respondent and the case exemplars shared as part of the qualitative interview will only be shared with the researcher's PhD supervisors.

I understand that at all times the researcher when writing for academic journals; conference papers and presentations, as well as the PhD thesis, will make every effort to ensure that no other individual will be able to identify either me or others.

I understand that at all times the data from the interview will be kept securely using a password protected harddrive and also a locked file.

Signature _____	Date _____
Name (please PRINT) _____	

APPENDIX G

Transcriber Confidentiality Statement 21st Century contact and mobile technologies

This Confidentiality Statement has been provided to you as part of ensuring that throughout the transcription of the data provided the confidentiality of the respondents as well as others will be maintained at all times.

Please do take the time to read and consider each statement carefully and indicate your agreement by ticking the individual boxes and then sign and date the form accordingly. You will be asked for the completed Confidentiality Statement by the researcher before the process of transcription begins.

If you have any questions in relation to this document, please contact Jenny Simpson either on 0785 558 3930 or email J.E.Simpson@sms.ed.ac.uk

I understand that by signing the Transcriber Confidentiality Statement I am respecting all the respondents' right to confidentiality.

I understand that by signing the Transcriber Confidentiality Statement I will, at all times, ensure that the digital recordings and the transcripts produced will be kept securely until they are collected by the researcher.

I understand that by signing the Transcriber Confidentiality Statement I am confirming that the contents of the digital recordings will not be discussed with anyone other than the researcher.

Signature _____	Date _____
Name (please PRINT) _____	

APPENDIX H

Guidance for transcription

General Instructions

The **transcriber** shall transcribe all individual and focus group interviews using the following formatting:

1. Arial 10-point face-font
2. One-inch top, bottom, right, and left margins
3. All text shall begin at the left-hand margin (no indents)
4. Entire document shall be left justified

Each individual interview transcript shall include the following labelling information:

Triad: Triad Initial

Type of interview: F2F (Face-to-Face) ; TI (Telephone Interview)

#Participant:

Date of Interview:

Recorder ID:

Transcriber:

Content

- Each MP3 shall be transcribed verbatim
- The interviewer will be identified in the transcript as JS

Nonverbal sounds shall be typed, for example, (short sharp laugh), (group laughter), (police siren in background).

- If interviewers or interviewees mispronounce words, these words shall be transcribed as the individual said them. The transcript shall not be “cleaned up” by removing foul language, slang, grammatical errors, or misuse of words or concepts. If an incorrect or unexpected pronunciation results in difficulties with comprehension of the text, the correct word shall be typed in square brackets. A forward slash shall be placed immediately behind the open square bracket and another in front of the closed square bracket.

Example: I thought that was pretty pacific [/specific/], but they disagreed.

- The spelling of key words, blended or compound words, common phrases, and identifiers shall be standardized across all individual and focus group transcripts. Enunciated reductions (e.g., *betcha*, *cuz*, *'em*, *gimme*, *gotta*, *hafta*, *kinda*, *lotta*, *oughta*, *sorta*, *wanna*, *coulda*, *could've*, *couldn't*, *coudn've*, *couldna*, *woulda*, *would've*, *wouldn't*, *wouldn've*, *wouldna*, *shoulda*, *should've*, *shouldn't*,

shouldn'tve, shouldna) plus standard contractions of *is, am, are, had, have, would, and not* shall be used.

- Filler words such as *hm, huh, mm, mhm, uh huh, um, mkay, yeah, yuhuh, nah, huh, ugh, whoa, uh oh, ah, and ahah* shall not be transcribed.
- Word or phrase repetitions shall be transcribed. If a word is cut off or truncated, a hyphen shall be inserted at the end of the last letter or audible sound (e.g., he wen- he went and did what I told him he shouldn'tve).

Inaudible Information

The transcriber shall identify portions of the audiotape that are inaudible or difficult to decipher. If a relatively small segment of the tape (a word or short sentence) is partially unintelligible, the transcriber shall type the phrase "inaudible segment." This information shall appear in square brackets.

Example:

The process of identifying missing words in an audiotaped interview of poor quality is [inaudible segment]. If a lengthy segment of the tape is inaudible, unintelligible, or is "dead air" where no one is speaking, the transcriber shall record this information in square brackets. In addition, the transcriber shall provide a time estimate for information that could not be transcribed.

Example:

[Inaudible: 2 minutes of interview missing]

Overlapping Speech

If individuals are speaking at the same time (i.e., overlapping speech) and it is not possible to distinguish what each person is saying, the transcriber shall place the phrase "cross talk" in square brackets immediately after the last identifiable speaker's text and pick up with the next audible speaker.

Example:

Turn taking may not always occur. People may simultaneously contribute to the conversation; hence, making it difficult to differentiate between one person's statement [cross talk]. This results in loss of some information.

Sensitive Information

If an individual uses his or her own name during the discussion, the transcriber shall replace this information with the appropriate interviewee identification label/naming convention.

Example:

##A1_JS##

My foster carer always reminds me, "A1_JS, think about things before you open your mouth."

If an individual provides others' names, locations, organizations, and so on, the transcriber shall enter an equal sign immediately before and after the named information. Analysts will use this labelling information to easily identify sensitive information that may require substitution.

Example:

##A2_BR##

We went over to =John Doe's= house last night and we ended up going to = O'Malley's Bar= over on =22nd Street= and spending the entire night talking about the very same thing.

End of Interview

In addition, the transcriber shall indicate when the interview session has reached completion by typing END OF INTERVIEW in uppercase letters on the last line of the transcript along with information along with the date the transcription was completed. A double space should precede this information.

Example:

##Interviewer##

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

##A1_JS##

Nope, I think that about covers it.

##Interviewer##

Well, thanks for taking the time to talk with me today. I really appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX I

Participants Payment Guidance

Payment of Expenses

Any payment made as part of the research project entitled *21st Century contact and mobile technologies* is not offered to participants as a way of gaining favour or influence in relation to participating. Rather, it is a form of recognition of the time, effort and inconvenience that have been incurred as a result of taking part in the research. Furthermore, it is important to note that, payment is not related to the level of risk involved in research participation, nor is it contingent upon completion of the research project. For these reasons payment will not be withheld because of a participant withdrawing from the study part way through. Neither will payments to participants be pro-rated regardless of whether their withdrawal from the research was voluntary or involuntary. More often than not, continued participation in a study and the payment of expenses are given so as to demonstrate that the researcher is not influencing or coercing participants.

The research project entitled *21st Century Contact and mobile technologies* will, for ethical reasons, only make two types of payment for research participation:

1. *Reimbursement payments* which compensates participants for research related expenses e.g. transport
2. *Compensation payments* which is designed to compensate participants for the time, effort and inconvenience of taking part in the research

It should also be noted that when consideration is made in relation to payment for participating in a research project, the nature, level and method of payment has been arrived at in the context of cultural practices, the age of the participants and the general economic wellbeing of participants. As stated earlier thought has been given to the type of payment and it is recognised that not only cash payments can be made but also payments in kind i.e. the giving of refreshments as appropriate to a group of participants.

As part of ensuring that any payment made to a participant is not considered as an incentive and thereby unwittingly impacts on the participant's decision to take part in the research, the documentation made available to potential participants will not draw undue attention to the payment of participants. For example, use will not be made of bold type or capital letters to describe the payment.

Payments to groups of participants

It may be that a research project requires a group of participants to come together as part of a Focus Group or an Advisory Panel. Payments to such groups will be made in kind e.g. the provision of refreshments. Payments to such group will not be given where it is being used as part of a recruitment process or ensuring that a group of participants complete a particular task.

Purchasing and Payment Policies and Procedures for Payments

As the research project involves both child and adult participants consideration has been given to recommended payments. For payments that are less than £20, these will be distributed using:

- Gift cards
- Petty cash for travel related expenses, or
- Payments in kind (food and drink)

Information for all payment methods

Any payment made to a research participant will require him or her to sign a receipt of payment made.

Travel related expenses

Participants will be reimbursed for reasonable and appropriate expenses. It is preferable that receipts are submitted to substantiate expenses as they will be required for any transaction either over or totalling £10.00. Receipts are not required for mileage, public transport or taxi reimbursements. This exception is limited to participants however the following documentation is required:

- Mileage
- Log of public transport used which notes who was reimbursed when, the date and mode of transportation.

Documentation for distribution of payments

Regardless of the payment amount or method there is an expectation that all payments will be documented. The documentation will include the following details:

- Name of participant
- The date
- Acknowledgement of participation (signature or verbal consent)
- Acknowledgement of the researcher (signature or verbal confirmation)

For Reimbursement and Compensation payments that are less than £20 the Participant Payment Form must be completed in order to document the provision of funds and the participant's acknowledgement. A copy of the documentation will be retained for 12 months after the research project has been completed. It will be the responsibility of the researcher to validate the payments.

Gift Cards Processing Information

The monetary value of this payment method should be considered as equal to a cash payment. Gift Cards will have an acceptable expiry date and will be redeemable for a variety of goods and services, or at a number of locations. The number of Gift cards issued will be equal to the amount of participants.

Schedule and Timing of Payment

In order to avoid any misunderstanding about when payments in relation to participation are made, the researcher will inform participants as accurately as possible when payment for their participation will be due. For example, the researcher will specify if the payment is to be made at either the end of the study or immediately after the interview. Research participants will also be informed, as part of the consent process if there are likely to be any delays in payment.

If you have any questions in relation to the Guidance please feel free to contact Jenny Simpson on the following number 0785 558 3930 or email her at J.E.Simpson@sms.ed.ac.uk

21st Century Contact and mobile technologies

Research Participant Payment Form

Research Study Title: _____

Date of Study Participation _____

Type of Payment Reimbursement Payment e.g. transport

Compensation e.g. Gift Card

Amount due and method of Payment _____

Authorising Personnel _____

Participant Name _____

Payment Date: _____

Amount received: _____

Participant Signature _____

I confirm the following:

- The participant information is correct
- I have participated in the study
- The amount I will or have received for participating in this study does not exceed £20.00

APPENDIX J

Information bundle for Local Authorities

Letter to local authority

Dear

My name is Jenny Simpson and I am a PhD student studying at Edinburgh University. I am writing to ask if you will help me with my research.

My intention is to identify if contact between a Looked After Child and his/her birth family and friends has changed since the widespread use of mobile technologies. This study will be especially useful for child and family social work practitioners and also foster carers who have wide ranging responsibilities in relation to Looked After Children.

The research will involve interviewing individual Looked After Children along with their Social Worker and Foster Carer. Furthermore, to ensure that the research being undertaken is relevant to Looked After Children, I would like the help of 3-4 children and/or young people who would have the role of acting as an Advisor.

The research will be conducted according to the University of Edinburgh's ethical guidelines which means that everyone involved in the research would need to give their informed consent and anonymity will be maintained at all times. I fully appreciate that although people welcome the idea of supporting a piece of research the realities can be quite different because more often than not it will involve some additional work. In terms of what I can offer to social work practitioners, foster carers and Looked After Children is the main findings and recommendations of the research in the form of a summary report. I am also willing to make a series of presentations at various Team Meetings and to Senior Managers regarding the research.

Please find below a link to my student and work profiles (I am a Social Work Staff Tutor with The Open University) will confirm my area of research and also the fact that I have published and presented at Conferences in relation to my area of research.

http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/gradschool/our_students/research_student_profiles/social_work/jennifer_simpson

<http://www.open.ac.uk/people/js25984#tab2>

Finally, please find attached a letter confirming my credentials as a student with Edinburgh University.

I appreciate the time you have taken to read this letter and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Simpson
The University of Edinburgh
School of Social and Political Science, Crystal Macmillan Building, 15a George Square,
Edinburgh EH8 9LD

By email

7 May 2015

Dear Jennifer,

Request for ADCS research approval – University of Edinburgh - 21st Century Contact and mobile technologies

ADCS ref: RGE140413

I write on behalf of Sue Wald, Chair of the ADCS Research Group regarding your request for research approval for the above named project.

The Research Group has considered your request and given its approval believing that the results of the project will be useful to local authorities. We would be grateful if when contacting local authorities you would quote the reference above.

The Group's encouragement to respond to the survey will be communicated to ADCS members in local authorities in England in the next edition of the ADCS weekly e-bulletin which is produced and circulated on Friday afternoons. A list of approved research projects can be found on the ADCS website. The Research Group wishes you well with the project.

As mentioned in the ADCS Guidelines for Research Approvals, please send the Research Group a copy of the full report and the summary of your main findings when the research is complete.

If you have any queries about this feedback, please contact me in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

Gary Dumbarton, on behalf of Sue Wald, Chair of the ADCS Research Group

The Association of Directors of Children's Services

Research Group, The ADCS Ltd, Piccadilly House, 49 Piccadilly, Manchester, M1 2AP

Tel: 0161 826 9484 Email: research@adcs.org.uk Website: www.adcs.org.uk/research

Registered in England & Wales. Company Number: 06801922. VAT registration number: 948814381.

Saturday, February 28, 2015



Dr. Angus Bancroft
Senior Lecturer
Sociology
School of Social and Political Science
Chrystal Macmillan Building
15a George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LD
Tel: 0131 6506642
angus.bancroft@ed.ac.uk

To whom it may concern

This is to confirm that Jenny Simpson's research proposal has been subject to the School of Social and Political Science's ethics review and that she has received ethical approval.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Angus Bancroft
Senior Lecturer, Sociology
Director (Research), Graduate School of Social and Political Science



Social Work
SCHOOL of SOCIAL and POLITICAL SCIENCE
Gary Clapton
The University of Edinburgh
Crystal Macmillan Building
15a George Square
Edinburgh
EH8 9LD
Tel: 0131 650 3903
Email: gary.clapton@ed.ac.uk

5 January 2015

Dear Mr Hardman,

This is a letter to confirm that Jenny Simpson is a PhD student at the Edinburgh of University and she is being supervised in her studies by myself as her Senior Supervisor and Janice McGhee, as her second Supervisor.

As Jenny Simpson has already pointed out her topic of research is Looked After Children and their use of mobile technologies for contact. I can also confirm that she has received ethical approval from the University for her research in November 2014 and therefore has formal permission to undertake fieldwork in her chosen topic of research.

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Gary Clapton
Senior Lecturer
Social Work, School of Social and Political Science

APPENDIX K

Table of key characteristics of triad respondents

Triad	Young Person in Care	Foster Carer	Allocated social work practitioner
A	JANE	BETTY	NADIA
	<p>Age: 17</p> <p>Entry into care: Allegation of physical assault made against birth father</p> <p>Duration of placement: 9 months</p> <p>Contact arrangements: All members of the birth family have refused to speak to Jane</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: 4 mobile phones and tablet</p> <p>Social media accounts: Snapchat, WhatsApp and Facebook</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 12</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: 12-17</p> <p>No. of children cared for: Not known</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: Mobile phone</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Poor</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Turns of Wi-Fi, changes password to the Wi-Fi available in the fostering household</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: 1 year</p> <p>Average caseload: 20</p> <p>Current caseload: 21</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Speaks to the foster carer Expectation of monitoring and updates from foster carers</p>
B	NORA	TONI	CATH
	<p>Age: 14</p> <p>Entry into care: Entered care as a mother was incarcerated</p> <p>Duration of placement: 9 months</p> <p>Contact arrangements: Has face-to-face contact with elder brother and sister and also makes contact using social media</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 7-8</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: 7-17 years</p> <p>No. of children cared for: Not known</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: Mobile phone and Facebook</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Fair</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: 10</p> <p>Average caseload: Not known</p> <p>Current caseload: Not known</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Speaks to the Foster Carer Expectation of monitoring and updates from foster carers</p>

	Mobile technologies used: iPhone, Social media accounts: Ovo, Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Snapchat, Twitter, Facetime and Instagram	Monitoring and management techniques used: Mobile phone handed in at night	
C	KAITLIN	PERRY	CAMLYN
	Age:14 Entry into care: Main care giver was not able to provide the necessary level of care Duration of placement: 7 years Contact arrangements: Face-to-face contact with elder brother and sister; limited contact with younger siblings Mobile technologies used: iPhone, Tablet and laptop Social media accounts :Kik, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp	No. of years a foster carer: 12 Age range of children cared for: Not known No. of children cared for: Not known Mobile technologies used: mobile phone Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Fair Mobile technologies used: iPhone Monitoring and management techniques used: Mobile phone handed in a night, Facebook friend,	No of years a social work practitioner: 5 years Average caseload:20 Current caseload: 11 (fte) Monitoring and management techniques used: Blocking of birth mother's access to daughter's Facebook Expectation of monitoring and updates from foster carers Assessment of birth mother in relation contact with Kaitlin Reviewing whether or not contact should continue with Kaitlin's father
D	MATT	BEV	MARGARET
	Age: 15 Entry into care: Main carer not able to provide the necessary care Duration of placement: 5 years Contact arrangements: Has no official contact with any member of his family however, does make use of Facebook to contact birth family members. Does not have any contact with his nieces and nephew	No. of years a foster carer: 6 years Age range of children cared for: 6-16 years No. of children cared for: 3 Mobile technologies used: iPhone Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Good Monitoring and management techniques used: Facebook Friend	No of years a social work practitioner: 20 Average caseload: 18-20 Current caseload: 23 Monitoring and management techniques used: Expectation of monitoring and updates from foster carers

	<p>Mobile technologies used: iPhone, Tablet and laptop</p> <p>Social media accounts :Facebook, WhatsApp and Snapchat</p>	<p>Daily monitoring of Facebook account, threat to check contents of mobile phone</p> <p>Confiscation of mobile phone</p>	
E	LAMAR	MARY	ZAYLA
	<p>Age: 17</p> <p>Entry into care: Placed as a result of his carer at the time no longer being able to care for him</p> <p>Duration of placement: 10 years</p> <p>Contact arrangements: Has contact with his birth sisters. Recently entered into contact with the former carer</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: Android phone and tablet</p> <p>Social media accounts: Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Gmail and Facebook Messenger</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 23</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: 2-17</p> <p>No. of children cared for: 30-40</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Poor</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Mobile phone and other electrical equipment kept downstairs</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: 1 month</p> <p>Average caseload: 20</p> <p>Current caseload: co-working 16 as not formally registered with the HCPC</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Speak to the foster carer</p>
F	JUSTINE	LAURA	VERONE
	<p>Age: 14 (Learning Disability)</p> <p>Entry into care: Placed as a result of neglect</p> <p>Duration of placement: 2 years</p> <p>Contact arrangements: Has contact with birth parents once a month seperately</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone with no SIM</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 12</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: 11-19</p> <p>No. of children cared for: 5</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Poor</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: 6.5 years</p> <p>Average caseload: 21</p> <p>Current caseload: 24</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Expects foster carer to monitor use of appropriate and age-related use of social media</p>

	Social media accounts: Facebook (but is not used)	Monitoring and management techniques used: No SIM in mobile phone, wifi turned off at night, threat of mobile phone confiscation	
G	LEO	NANCI	CARISSA
	<p>Age: 14</p> <p>Entry into care: As a result of emotional abuse</p> <p>Duration of placement: 2.5 years</p> <p>Contact arrangements: Has supervised face-to-face contact with birth mother once a month; contact in the community with elder brother and monthly contact with younger brother</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone with no access to Wi-Fi</p> <p>Social media accounts: None</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 3</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: 4-16</p> <p>No. of children cared for: 12</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Poor</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Threat of mobile phone confiscation, cutting off electrical plugs, turning off wifi, mobile phone handed in at night</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: 7 months</p> <p>Average caseload: 22-23</p> <p>Current caseload: unknown</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Expects foster carer to monitor use of appropriate and age-related use of social media</p>
H	LEIGHTON	TODD	CANDICE
	<p>Age: 15</p> <p>Entry into care: Section 20</p> <p>Duration of placement: 3 years</p> <p>Contact arrangements: Has fortnightly face-to-face contact with his birth father in a rehabilitation centre and is accompanied by carers</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 11</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: baby to 17 years</p> <p>No. of children cared for: 150</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone, tablet and GPS</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Good</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: 2 years</p> <p>Average caseload: 19-22</p> <p>Current caseload: unknown</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Expects foster carer to monitor use of appropriate and age-related use of social media</p>

	<p>Mobile technologies used: smart phone and X-Box</p> <p>Social media accounts: Facebook and WhatsApp</p>	<p>Monitoring and management techniques used: mobile phone confiscation, change of Wi-Fi code, curfew time for use of Wi-Fi, reviewing mobile phone bill on a regular basis</p>	
I	JAIDEN	MADALINE & REX	BERNICE
	<p>Age: 18</p> <p>Entry into care: Placed in care as a result of neglect</p> <p>Duration of placement: 15 years</p> <p>Contact arrangements: Had face-to-face contact with birth mother supervised by foster carers and also telephone contact until the age of 15, then stopped all contact with birth mother as a matter of choice</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: iPhone, Tablet, computer and X-Box</p> <p>Social media accounts: Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 15</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: 5-17 years</p> <p>No. of children cared for: 1</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Fair</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Threat of confiscation of mobile phone, member of family monitoring Jaiden's use of Facebook; monitoring software, parental permissions</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: retrospective interview</p> <p>Average caseload: retrospective interview</p> <p>Current caseload: retrospective interview</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: retrospective interview</p>
J	BRADLEY	ROSE	CASEY
	<p>Age: 17</p> <p>Entry into care: Section 20</p> <p>Duration of placement: 6 years</p> <p>Contact arrangements: Birth mother does not attend contact that is arranged</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: Mobile phone</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 12</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: 12-17 years</p> <p>No. of children cared for: 2</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Poor</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: 6-7 months</p> <p>Average caseload: 21-24</p> <p>Current caseload: 16</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Expects foster carer to monitor use of appropriate and age-related use of social media</p>

	Social media accounts: Facebook and Gmail	Monitoring and management techniques used: None, has a tendency to rely upon others to monitor e.g. carer of siblings and local college	
K	KAYNE	PIERS	CANDICE
	<p>Age: 16</p> <p>Entry into care: Section 20</p> <p>Duration of placement: 3 years</p> <p>Contact arrangements: Has unsupervised face-to-face contact with his birth mother every other month which includes younger brother and on occasion infant siblings. Has face-to-face contact with young brother every month organised by carers</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: smart phone, X-Box; laptop and tablet</p> <p>Social media accounts: Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram and FriendLife</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 12</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: 10-17</p> <p>No. of children cared for: 2</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone, tablet and GPS</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Very good</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: software programme that monitors data traffic on mobile phone, social media sites and email. Curfew on Wi-Fi, will automatically turn off after a certain period.</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: 2 years</p> <p>Average caseload: 19-22</p> <p>Current caseload: unknown</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Expects foster carer to monitor use of appropriate and age-related use of social media</p>
L	DARRELL	RAYANNA	ELAINE
	<p>Age: 13 (Learning Disability)</p> <p>Entry into care: Abuse and neglect</p> <p>Duration of placement: 3 years</p> <p>Contact arrangements: Has face-to-face supervised contact with his birth father</p>	<p>No. of years a foster carer: 4</p> <p>Age range of children cared for: 10-14 years</p> <p>No. of children cared for: 1</p> <p>Mobile technologies used: mobile phone</p> <p>Self-description of proficiency with Mobile communications: Poor</p>	<p>No of years a social work practitioner: 3 years</p> <p>Average caseload: 24-26</p> <p>Current caseload: 14-16</p> <p>Monitoring and management techniques used: Expects foster carer to monitor use of appropriate and age-related use of social media</p>

	Mobile technologies used: mobile phone, tablet and X-Box Social media accounts: Facebook	Monitoring and management techniques used: mobile phone confiscation, mobile phone checked on a regular basis and parental permissions	
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APPENDIX L

Thematic framework of analysed data

Indexing

1. Monitoring and Management

- 1.1.1 Action taken by other members of the fostering household
- 1.1.2 Checking internet history
- 1.1.3 Delay in providing a mobile phone or other mobile device
- 1.1.4 Foster Carer manually puts the code to enable access to the Wi-Fi
- 1.1.5 GPS tracker
- 1.1.6 Hand in mobile communication device before going to bed
- 1.1.7 LAC Review
- 1.1.8 Mobile phone confiscated
- 1.1.9 Mobile phone not taken to school
- 1.1.10 Mobile phone not to be used during meal times
- 1.1.11 Monitoring software
- 1.1.12 Negotiating use based on level of trust
- 1.1.13 No access to family computer
- 1.1.14 No mobile communication technology in the upper part of the house
- 1.1.15 No Wi-Fi in the bedroom
- 1.1.16 Overseeing use and sharing information
- 1.1.17 Parental permissions
- 1.1.18 Phone calls from birth parent go via the foster carer
- 1.1.19 Random checking of mobile phone
- 1.1.20 Regular checking of mobile phone
- 1.1.21 Removal of fuses from electrical plugs
- 1.1.22 Reviewing phone bill of young person in care
- 1.1.23 SIM is not in the mobile phone
- 1.1.24 Supervising use of Facebook
- 1.1.25 Threat of confiscation of mobile phone
- 1.1.26 Turn off Wi-Fi or change Internet code
- 1.1.27 Use of a curfew

- 1.1.28 Wi-Fi code put into device by foster carers
- 1.1.29 Written Agreement
- 1.2 Counteractivity by young people in care
- 1.3 Difficulties associated with monitoring and management
- 1.4 Safeguarding
- 1.5 Rules and Regulations
- 1.6 Risk
 - 1.6.1 Minimisation of undesirable effects
- 1.7 Foster Carer proficiency with mobile communication technologies
 - 1.7.1 Unable to use mobile communication technology
 - 1.7.2 Lack of knowledge
 - 1.7.3 Foster carer makes use of mobile communication technology
- 1.8 Social Work Practitioner proficiency with mobile communication technologies
 - 1.8.1 Unable to use mobile communication technology
 - 1.8.2 Makes use of mobile communication technology
 - 1.8.3 Lack of knowledge
- 2. Contact**
 - 2.1 Contact arrangements
 - 2.2 Contact using mobile communication technology
 - 2.3 Contact with siblings
 - 2.4 Contact with infants and other birth relatives
 - 2.4.1 Intervention online by birth relatives
 - 2.5 Topics of conversation when communicating with birth parent
 - 2.5.1 Physical health and wellbeing
 - 2.5.2 Functional and Planning
 - 2.5.3 Daily happenings
 - 2.6 Maturity
 - 2.7 Privacy

3. Use of mobile communication technology

3.1. Use of mobile communication technology by young people in care

3.1.1 Avoid unwanted attention

3.1.2 Communicate with social work practitioner

3.1.3 Emotional support

3.1.4 Entertainment

3.1.4.1 Gaming

3.1.4.2 Watching YouTube/Films etc

3.1.5 Functional purposes

3.1.6 Homework

3.1.7 Information sharing

3.1.8 Keeping in touch with friends and acquaintances

3.1.9 Managing the behaviour of other children in the placement

3.1.10 Official communication

3.1.11 Organising contact

3.1.12 Organising social gatherings with peers and friends

3.1.13 Provide support and information about bullying

3.1.14 Sharing daily life events with birth family members

3.2 Behaviours of young people in care when using mobile communication technologies

4. Attitudes

4.1 Attitudes towards mobile communication technology by foster carers

4.1.1 Negative

4.1.2 Positive

4.1.3 Negative examples of mobile communication technology

4.1.4 Positive examples of mobile communication technology

4.2 Attitudes towards mobile communication technology by social work practitioners

4.2.1 Negative

4.2.2 Positive

4.2.3 Negative examples of mobile communication technology

- 4.2.4 Positive examples of mobile communication technology
- 4.3 Attitudes towards mobile communication technology by young people in care
 - 4.3.1 Negative
 - 4.3.2 Positive
- 4.4. How young people in care perceive adult responses to use of mobile communication technology**
 - 4.4.1 Positive
 - 4.4.2 Negative
 - 4.4.3 Lacking the knowledge and skill to understand social media
- 5. Young people in care with a learning disability**
 - 5.1 Monitoring and management
 - 5.1.1 Rules and regulations
 - 5.2 Contact arrangements
 - 5.3 Use of technology
 - 5.4 Proficiency of Foster Carer
 - 5.5 Attitude of Foster Carer
 - 5.6 Attitude of Social Work Practitioner
 - 5.7 Privacy
 - 5.8 Maturity

APPENDIX M

Thematic Matrix: use of mobile devices and Internet for contact by young people respondent group

Microsoft Excel interface showing a thematic matrix. The ribbon includes FILE, HOME, INSERT, PAGE LAYOUT, FORMULAS, DATA, REVIEW, and VIEW. The active cell is C6, containing the following text:

Not physically seen members of birth family for 2 years. Speaks to father occasionally on Facebook, asks how his father is doing. To check out that everyone is 'cool' Does not feel the need to speak to birth father and prefers to wait until he is older to have a 'real relationship' e.g. have a drink with his birth father, see his family when he wants. Contacts elder sisters, one to find out about his nieces and nephew. Misses nieces and nephews and has a sense of attachment as he was around and held them when they were babies. The other elder sister he has had an argument with on Facebook. The argument was linked to family loyalties and an unwillingness to accept the wrong done to another member of the family. Argument confined to him and his sister via Facebook messenger. Deliberately did not involve other members of the family. Most hurtful

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE - CONTACT					
2		2.1 Contact arrangements	2.2 Contact using mobile technology	2.3 Contact with siblings	2.4 Contact with infants and other birth relatives	2.5.1 Physical health and wellb
8	F1 14 years of age. White British. Learning Disability. Care order in place. In care a period of 2.5 years. Contact takes place with both birth parents seperately	Did not comment on her contact	Did not comment on her contact	Did not comment on her contact	Makes no mention of contact with infants and other birth relatives	Did not comment on her conta
	G1 male, 14 years of age. White	Supervised face-to-face contact with birth mother in a contact centre. Birth mother did not always handle	Supervised face-to-face contact with birth mother in a contact centre. Birth mother has not always handled contact 'correctly' and supervisor had to intervene. Would tend to talk about things in relation and this would often cause upset. The use of mobile communication technology is a waste of time because his birth mother is not allowed to contact him. G1's birth mother texting and calling him could ruin thing for him. G1 keeps things from his birth mother in order not to upset her. No contact with birth father. Has face-to-face contact with elder brother in the community, organised via the foster carer, but also calls are made via the house phone. Sees elder brother regularly but he does have a family and job and therefore is busy. Does not use social media to contact birth mother, this is not			

At the bottom of the Excel window, there are tabs for 'CIC', 'Foster Carers', 'SW practitioners', 'Siblings', 'Type of communication', and 'Contact with peers ...'. The taskbar at the bottom shows various application icons and the system clock displays 07:39 on 26/01/2019.

APPENDIX N

Contact: Elements and key dimensions

A. Detected elements across the data set for 'Contact: familial and friendship networks'	Key dimensions	Catergorisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple platforms of communication used with friendship network (A1, B1, C1, D1, F1, H1, J1, K1, L1) - Multiple platforms of communication used with members of familial network (B1, C1, E1, H1, J1, K1) - Use of pictures: shared record of life achievements (B1, E1, H1, J1) - Variability in relation to contact using mobile communication technology (B1, B2, D2, K2) - Change in intensity of contact using mobile communication technology due to a change in circumstances (H3) - Using mobile communication technology only (D1) - Young person in care instigates communication (C1, D1, E1, J1, K1) - Unmediated and unexpected contact (C1, C2, C3) - Unmediated contact that cannot be managed by young person in care(I1 and I2) - The concern that unmediated contact cannot be managed by young person in care (G1, G2) 	<p><i>Patterns of communication</i></p>	<p><i>Multi-dimensional communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication in 3D - multi-modal (friendship networks)</i> • <i>Communication in 2D –contact plus up to two social networking platforms</i> • <i>Communication in one dimension – face-to-face contact</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Members of the familial network are leading their own lives and have their own impact all of which influence the patterns of communication (C1, D1, E1, G1, K1, L1) - Contact with siblings (B1, E1, K1) - References to traditional contact with siblings (B3, C3, D3, G3, J3, K3) - Birth parents instigates contact (H1, I1) - Breakdown in relationship with either siblings or members of familial network – affects pattern of communication (D1, D2, E1, E3) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of communication – adult gatekeepers (A1, A3, C2, D1, D3, F2, G2, I2, K3, L2, L3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o All communication via foster carer (F2, G2) o Influence of patriarchal birth parent (A1,A3) o No access to younger siblings by social work practitioners (, D1, D2,D3, G3, I3, L3) o No access to younger siblings because of adoption process (C1, C2, I2, I3) o No access to younger siblings because of step-family (K1) - Unwanted contact with birth parent (B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3, G1, G2, H1, I1, I2, I3) - Young people management of communication with members of familial and friendship network (B1, C1, F1, G1, H1, I1, K1) 	<p><i>Management of communication</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Outside interference e.g. birth relatives, former foster carers</i> • <i>Containing, restraining and restricting communication</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interference by birth family members (C2) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can maintain relationships with wider members of familial network (A1, B1, C1, D1, K1) - Breakdown in relationship with either siblings or members of familial network – door is always tentatively open as a result of social media e.g. comments on Facebook postings (D1, D2, F1, F3) - Know what is going on in the wider family network (A1, B1, D1, E1) - Emotional connections with particular family members (A1, B1, D1, E1, H1, J2, K1) 	<p>Maintenance of relationships</p>	<p>Relationship preservation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young person in care has an understanding of various issues and matters taking place within the familial network (A1, B1, D1, E1,) - 	<p>Awareness of what is happening in the family</p>	<p>Cognizance about the familial unit</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allocated social work practitioner not sure of what communication takes place (A3, B3, D3, E3, H3, I3, J3, K3) - Foster carers not sure what communication takes place (A2, B2, C2, D2, E2, H2, J2, K2) - Use of certain platforms for the purposes of privacy (A1, D1, E1, I1,) 	<p>Privacy – perspective of adults</p> <p>Privacy- perspective of young people in care</p>	<p>Public and private domains of mobile phone use</p> <p>Private domain characterised by Intimacy, Personal, Seclusion</p> <p>Public domain characterised by sharing information publicly with multiple audiences</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foster carer mediates contact where mobile communication technology is used (C2, H3, I2,) 	<p>Mediated contact</p>	<p>Management of outside interference</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contact via mobile communication technology has to be sanctioned (D2, D3) - Not seen as good as face-to-face contact (B2, H3, K2, K3) 	<p><i>Legitimacy of contact via mobile communication technology</i></p>	<p><i>Legitimacy of mobile communication technology</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instantaneous (B1, C1, D1, E1, H1, K1,) - Enables planning for contact (C1, E1, H1, K1) - Spontaneous (A1, B1, E1, H1, K1) - Choice (A1, B1, C1, D1, E1, H1, I1, K1 and L1) - Provision of moral support and encouragement (B1, C1, E1, L1) - Can maintain relationships with wider members of the familial network (A1, B1, C1, D1, E1, H1, J1, K1) - Managing patterns of communication with family members (F3) 	<p><i>Benefits of contact by mobile communication technology</i></p>	<p><i>Mirroring effect</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instantaneous (C1, G3, H3, I2, I3, L3) - Inappropriate conversations (C1, C2, G3, H3, I1, I2, I3, L3) - Inappropriate requests for information (C1, C2) - Negative and conflicting emotions raised about being in care (C1, E1) 	<p><i>Disadvantages of contact by mobile communication technology</i></p>	<p><i>Mirroring effect</i></p>

APPENDIX O

Additional quotes from Chapter 5: Staying in Touch

Existing arrangements for contact

“In terms of my last communication with the family abroad, they were very – they were very child focussed. It’s a good thing. Yeah, we actually promoted it in the sense of we used to buy sim cards for the girls to initially speak to family members that were supervised using an interpreter.” (Cath, Social Work Practitioner)

As far as I’m aware, Leo has phone contact with his young brother which is always appropriate and there’s no issue there but it’s always supervised. (Carissa, Social Work practitioner)

Use of mobile communication devices by young people in care

“You know, he can ring me and say –so when he goes to see his elder brother for example or if he meets his social worker in town when we’re going there. It’s like, you need to phone and tell them. OK! And then you need to tell them or ask them to ring me while you’re there. Or you ring me when you’ve met up with them” (Nanci, Foster Carer)

“Only that I think mobile phones take up too much time in teenagers” (Bev, Foster Carer)

“They’ve- got sites now where, you know, is not very healthy for children, and you can’t monitor ‘em” (Mary, Foster Carer)

“I think it’s their way of communicating with the outside world. And whether that is contacting parents or friends, you know, it is very much just the norm I think” (Nadia, Social Work Practitioner)

The use of mobile communication devices with familial networks – staying in touch

“The contact I had with my Mum consisted of phone calls and text. That was the primary part of it. And you know before we met up or something, it was like, hi son, how are you doing, I love you lots. Or after a day out she would text me saying how much she loved me. And you know, just simple little things like that” (Jaiden, aged 18)

“The contact I had with my Mum consisted of phone calls and text. That was the primary part of it. And you know before we met up or something, it was like, hi son, how are you doing, I love you lots. Or after a day out she would text me saying how much she loved me. And you know, just simple little things like that” (Jaiden, aged 18)

“I message Mum like... randomly. It’s not always definite that I speak to her in a week, but. Yeah it’s either normally, like a full conversation or me just finding something that I like, and like, asking for it” (Kayne, aged 16)

“My older brother, we use Facebook Messenger. And like... you get to share things. So he sometimes shares things with me and I sometimes share things with him” (Kaitlin, aged 14)

“My brothers they both work, so that’s the only way we keep in contact is by Facebook or Whatsapp but it’s just general chitchat, ‘how’re you getting on’, like the same with my mum, I always send

them pictures and they always say 'oh that looks nice', like and then we arrange times when we're all gonna go up to mum and have like a family dinner or something" (Lamar, aged 17)

"Kaitlin was getting quite frustrated you know that - every time she put something on Facebook her mum liked it, or put comments on it – she found it a bit annoying. Like you know, normally they expect that they [birth parents] would kind of make contact with Children's Services. We'd kind of assess it, look into it, whether it'd be appropriate, which we're kind of having to do – we're kind of having to take a back step to do that after the event" (Camlyn, Social Work practitioner)

Sibling relationships

"When Margaret first approached for Matt to have contact with his nieces and nephew, I think because of the family... what's the word.... reputation, they just thought Matt was gonna be the same. So they wasn't happy letting him see the children" (Bev, Foster Carer)

"I mean Kaitlin has got younger brothers – she's got 3 younger brothers. She's seen the twins who must be 4 now I think. She's seen those once. And she's got a baby brother who's 2, I think, and she's seen him once and we are in the process of getting contact for Kaitlin and the youngest one again because I think he's been adopted by a couple" (Perry, Foster Carer)

And then there's Charlotte who's my sister, she's in year 9 I think. She gets a bit annoying, always messaging me on Facebook. She's always like using the Facebook call function to call me on Facebook and ... it gets a bit annoying after a while" (Kayne, aged 16)

Management of difficult relationships

"Well – Nora sorts of just - you know, shake her head as if to say no, and then say for instance her sister might make the excuse or something, or say she's not there, or... it puts her in a position, makes it difficult for her" (Toni, Foster Carer)

"As time went on she [birth mother] started contacting him on his mobile phone, and occasionally he would come down and say, "Will you ring my mum, I don't think she's gonna stay sober for long. And she's upset". So I'd often ring her back, always mainly to get her off Jaiden's back. I think she might, although I don't really know for certain, got into a bit of a pattern of ringing him or texting him when not entirely sober" (Madaline and Rex, Foster Carers)

Young people with Learning Disabilities

"She don't go online with anybody she don't know. It's only her friends at school. Yeah, the kids from her previous school could go at her that way thinking that, you know, nobody'd know and you don't know, she might've got frightened and having to go back to school, they could say 'if you say anything, we will beat you up at school'. I weren't having none of that, so - you know, I didn't allow her on it at all" (Laura, Foster Carer)

"I don't want, you know, Bradley to be wrapped up in cotton wool, because he does need to take appropriate risks, doesn't he, or else he's never gonna learn if he doesn't take risks. For me as his social worker it's about managing those risks, and I have expressed, I would want Rose to kind of check in frequently on his Internet use what he's accessing" (Casey, Social Work practitioner)

Legitimacy of contact via mobile communication devices and the Internet

“My view of it is, and I’m obviously called an old fuddy duddy I’m sure - but my view is there’s far too much time spent on mobile phones. And I can only see it getting worse really. Because of technology improving, which is great in some respects, but on the negative side, there’s – they lose- they lose that face to face contact, that social element of communicating” (Toni)

“Within Kayne’s life. And a lot of children lives now. I mean I’m actually – I’m troubled that ...you know, we’re becoming a little detached. I’ve talked about it to Kayne that my opinion – well, my feeling is that, you know, you’ve got all these people on Facebook and you call them friends. To me a friend is someone you can go and knock on their door and say, can I kip ‘ere tonight? Cos I’ve had a crap time, and they’d let you in with open arms, and I have a number of people that I feel I can do that with, and I really don’t think that Kayne has” (Piers, Foster Carer)

The use of mobile communication devices with friendship networks

“So it’s just basically ‘what time are you coming to college’ ‘why aren’t you in today’, stuff like that, so. Because we’re like – he’s one of a close friends in college. So he just wants to know where I am and stuff or I want to know where he is” (Lamar, aged 17)

“Like before I go out, they kind of text me like all of us in the group chat? And then we start like planning where to go and everything. Then - and then back from there it’s just messages you know, messing around. And then plan for the next day” (Nora, aged 14)

“Things like Snapchat they’re a waste o’ time because the amount of people I see staying on Instagram and Snapchat, I just don’t wanna get sucked into it” (Leighton, aged 16)

“I don’t have him on Snapchat because Snapchat’s one of them apps that I’m like funny with. Like I only use it for certain things like images. If I’m talking with Lorraine [mother] like if she needs a timeplan recipe or summat, I just take a picture of that and send it via Snapchat” (Lamar, aged 17)

“It’s mostly Whatsapp and Facebook is where arguments occur. Like, because I’m a religious person sometimes somebody can put something up. And then I’ll write a comment. And someone else will comment. Then it comes into like into an argument, a debate? Kind of thing, depends how heavy the people are, like on - however they’re taking, then it can either come out argument or it can become a debate” (Lamar, aged 17)

“I had Facebook then, when I was with my mum, and I could text people. But the thing is, its kinda weird, if you leave a school – it’s hard to keep in contact with them. Because... you just feel all emotional because you get an emotional bond with everyone like – all your mates and everyone. And once you leave, it’s just like - everything just goes downhill. And people just ask you questions and I don’t like it when they do that” (Leo, aged 14)

“S’kind of different because everybody’s talking about ‘oh, did you hear about that thing on Facebook or something and it’s going around. And it’s like, no, cos I don’t really... and I can’t use it cos I’m in foster care, and my foster carer says that I’m not old enough, and I have to stick by her rules cos I don’t wanna...lose her trust” (Leo, aged 14)

APPENDIX P

Additional quotes from Chapter 6

The statutory gaze

"I said to him, can I just need to go through your phone Darrell? And he just knows that I have to do it cos I have to keep him safe. I've got a duty of care to keep him safe and one of the things I have to do is check what he's doing on the phone" (Rayanna, Foster Carer)

"I explained to Bradley it's not because we don't want him to go on the computer, and we're being spiteful, it's just to keep him safe." (Rose, Foster Carer)

The influence of age and maturity

"He was sending text messages to a girl that he didn't know. I had to explain to Darrell that if that girl was my daughter, I would be phoning the police with those text messages. You explain to him the dangers of text messages and just how dangerous it was. I said how would that girl's mum know that it's a 13 year old boy sending her those text messages and not a 25 year old man?" (Rayanna, Foster Carer)

Interviewer: *"As Matt matures and it sounds like he's matured quite a lot in recent times. How much more freedom will you give him?"*

Bev: *"In terms of..."*

Interviewer: *"His just use of Facebook and other mobile apps and stuff like that."*

Bev: *"I don't know it depends what technology comes forward I suppose!"*

Interviewer: *"Will you stop monitoring his Facebook account? [Laughs]"*

Bev: *"No!" [Laughs]*

(Bev, Foster Carer)

"He was sending text messages to a girl that he didn't know. I had to explain to Darrell that if that girl was my daughter, I would be phoning the police with those text messages. You explain to him the dangers of text messages and just how dangerous it was. I said how would that girl's mum know that it's a 13 year old boy sending her those text messages and not a 25 year old man?" (Rayanna, Foster Carer)

Social Work Practitioner expectations of monitoring

"I think the difficulty is like – the girls aren't honest in terms of who they're communicating with. I think we're aware that they're communicating with a lot of people, in their own community. But we don't know what they're up to. Thing is that, we now know because of a recent incident, that's occurred, that the girls are very closed in terms of who they're communicating with." (Cath, Social Work practitioner)

Privacy

"I think he does go on Facebook to certain friends, um and he uses his phone, you know, texting and the usual Whats- I don't know, I'm not very au fait on you know, the media stuff but – it's always sort of around the carers, so they can monitor it, and as I say, he doesn't hide anything from them, he's very good like that" (Margaret, Social Work Practitioner)

"I don't know half the stuff they have out now. Snapchat I've heard of. Obviously Facebook. Um – there's so many – er – apps and things I don't even know what you call them" (Toni, Foster Carer)

"I suppose that's her – you know, private stuff and ...um... there's not a lot of control. You know, being in care and I think it – I'm assuming that, you know, it's private and it's the only bit of control you do have" (Toni, Foster Carer)

It's really difficult. Because - especially with children in care – they're different. And I don't think these should be treated as different because everything that Kaitlin does or says has to be passed on to everybody else for everybody else to make decision on Kaitlin. And it's wrong. But it's right! (Perry, Foster Carer)





Small acts of resistance







"That'd be for a weekday obviously, if it's on a weekend I'm on it 'til like 11 o'clock. Todd won't mind. Long as I'm quiet, it's fine. Always on a school night, like – that's my option, I enjoy my sleep" (Leighton, 16 years)






"Basically they set up a thing called either child permissions or parental blocks or whatever. So it meant that I was not allowed to add friends without my parents' permission, or purchase content though credit or debit cards, that had a block on as well. Me being a feisty little boy that I was, I managed to find a way round all of these" (Jaiden, 18 years)


APPENDIX Q

Glossary of social media platforms

Name	Symbol	Description of the social network tool
Tango		<p>Tango is messaging platform app that can be used on smartphones. This application allows its users to make video calls using Wifi networks. It was developed by TangoME.</p>
Facetime		<p>FaceTime allows it users who own either a iPhone, iPad or iPod to make video calls using Wifi networks</p>
Snapchat		<p>This application allows its users to use a number of mediums to communicate with others e.g. photos, recordings, video, drawing and texts (also known as ‘snaps’). These mediums of communication can be sent the user’s list of recipients. The unique feature of the application is that the user can decide how long the medium of communication can be made available to recipients for e.g. from 1 to 15 sections. After this period the ‘snap’ will be removed from the Snapchat server.</p> <p>This versatility has been compromised because users have found a way of keeping the ‘snap’ beyond the time specified by the sender. This has been achieved through Snapchat users taking a screenshot of the ‘snap’.</p>
Tumblr		<p>Tumblr (recognised by the logo <i>tumblr.</i>) provides the capability of social networking and also the ability of its users to microblog using multi-media.</p> <p>Users need to make use of a dashboard to post their content. Users are also able to comment on posts published on <i>tumblr.</i> as well as reply and reblog which all appear on the dashboard.</p> <p>The capability of this platform extends to users being able to connect their blogs to other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook,</p>

		meaning that a tweet and a status update are automatically generated.
Kik		Kik Messenger is an instant messaging application that is available on a number of smartphones that includes Android and Windows phones. Using either Wifi or smartphone data Kik enables users to share a range of content that includes videos, photos, webpages, as well as send and receive messages.
Vine		Vine represents a video sharing service that allows its user to exchange six second long video clips. Vine has its own social network where users can exchange video clips, but they can also share the videos on other platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.
Twitter		Twitter is an online social networking service allows users to exchange short 140-character messages called "tweets". Users are also able to follow individuals and celebrities. One of the unique features of the service is that users are able to respond in real time to a situation.
Skype		Skype is an application that allows it users to video call, as well as record video messages using a number of mobile communication technology devices e.g. smartphones, computers, tablets.
Flickr		Flickr is a website able to host both images and videos. Users are able to build communities of interest that are the catalyst for sharing content. The content available on flickr does not require an account to be set up and therefore, as a website it is used frequently by bloggers and photo researchers. However, if users want to post images or videos they will be required to have an account
Instagram		Instagram is a social networking service that allows its users to share videos and photos, as well as share content on a range of other social networking platforms such Tumbler.; Flickr, Facebook and Twitter. The image of the photo camera reflects a

		key characteristic of this service which was that photo sent using Instagram looked like polaroid photographs that were square in shape. More recently, users of Instagram have been able to change the ratio of any photo thereby creating choice.
Google +		Google+ is similar to the other social networking sites in that a range of communication mediums can be shared e.g. photos, videos. It is primarily interest-based and users share biographical details. A unique feature of Google+ is the ability for users to organise themselves into groups and to share information across other Google platforms. This is call Circles. Content can be shared across Google platforms using the drag and drop function.
WhatsApp		WhatsApp is a messaging app for smartphones allowing its users to make use of Wifi to send messages, images, video and audio media messages, as well as calls. Users are able to connect with existing friends via existing phone contacts.
Facebook		Facebook is one of the largest social networking sites that is used across the world. Users create their own profile and then connect to other friends and friends of friends through the exchange of messages, status updates. Facebook users can be connected through interest groups that include family members, work or college friends. The interest groups can either be open entirely meaning that anyone can join, or a closed group that is only open to specific members.
FriendLife		FriendLife has been described as an application that was a cross between Instagram and Twitter. It also allowed its users to broadcast live videos to an online audience. The application closed in mid 2017.
Steam		Steam enables its users to download games and other software. A unique aspect of the service is that it provides digital rights management for its

		users which enables them to install the software downloaded to a range of devices.
BBM (Blackberry Messenger)		BlackBerry Messenger was an application included as part of the Blackberry device that allowed its users to engage in synchronous messaging with multiple users. Additionally, the application allowed its user to exchange pictures and audio messages, as well as stickers and emoticons. The emergence of applications such as WhatsApp that could be used on a variety of Android devices.