"A PIECE OF YOU IS GONE:" FOSTER PARENT EXPERIENCES OF

PRE-ADOPTIVE PLACEMENT DISRUPTION

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

in the School of Social Work,

Indiana University

July 2015

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dedication

"If you're listening, if you're awake to the poignant beauty of the world, your heart

breaks regularly. In fact, your heart is made to break; its purpose is to burst open again

and again so that it can hold ever more wonders." -Andrew Harvey

I dedicate this work to my buddy, Kenny, and the many unique, amazing children like

him.

Acknowledgements

Education has been my muse for as long as I can remember. For every human, creature, natural and spiritual thing that has contributed to my learning and my quest for further knowledge, I thank you deeply and sincerely.

I would first like to thank my dissertation chair, Carol Hostetter. Carol, your mentorship and support during my dissertation and throughout my educational career has benefited me in more ways than you may ever know. I am thankful for your guidance, wisdom, and constancy. Your passion for social work education and research inspired me many years ago and continues to motivate me today. I look forward to many future opportunities to learn from you and work with you. I can say with certainty that I would not be in the position I am in today without you, Carol. I would also like to thank another one of my mentors, Bill Barton. I feel truly fortunate to have had the opportunity to work for Bill as a graduate assistant and with him on other projects. Thank you for providing me with straight-forward and honest feedback, Bill. Your wisdom and support have made me a better researcher and consumer of knowledge. Kathy Byers, thank you for sticking with me all of these years. Thank you for supporting me in my journey and for continuing to inspire me with the work that you do, even in retirement! I feel very fortunate to have been connected with Elee Wood. I appreciate your creativity and uniqueness, Elee. You push me to consider and examine knowledge in new and interesting ways. I am a far better qualitative researcher having worked with you. Phenomenerds! In addition to my dissertation committee, I would like to recognize other faculty who have guided me and supported me in my PhD journey including Margaret Adamek, Cathy Pike, Hea-Won Kim, Kathy Lay, Bob Vernon, Jim Daley, Sabrina

Sullenberger, Jim Hall, Barb Pierce, and Jeremiah Jaggers. Thank you for helping me to arrive at this point. A special thank you to Julia Carter as well.

Leila Wood, I could not and would not have wanted to do this without you. Thank you for being my work wife and one heck of an amazing friend. I appreciate you and am so happy to have been able to share my journey with you. Amy Murphy-Nugen thank you for you being a steady and reliable mentor and friend. You have taught me so much and supported me in many ways. I feel fortunate to know you and to call you my friend. In solidarity. I am also appreciative of the friendship and support I received from Kristin Trainor, Govind Dhaske, I-Hsuan Lin, Sarah Nathan, Elizabeth Dale, Sarah Anderson, Lindsay Littrell, and Katie McCarty during my doctoral journey. Thanks for being there. To my teammates, Tracy Cummings and Marie Danh, it has been a pleasure to work with you. To Brooke Bear, Brooke Clawson, and my family (especially my Mom, Dad, Pete, Diane, Abby, and Holly) – thank you for believing in me, being proud of me, and encouraging along the way. You trusted that I could and would do this and that means so much. An extra shout out to Brooke Clawson and Abby (and Paul) for being great editors (and of course amazing humans, too)! If anyone thinks it is absurd for me to acknowledge my beloved pups, you probably do not know me very well. Jones and Boo, you are missed, thanks for being awesome. Daph and Pep, thank you for keeping me company in the lonely hours of writing and making me laugh every day. And to my sweetheart, Paul Trainor—thank you for agreeing to meet, date, marry, and spend your life with a work-obsessed, at times over-committed, often stressed, sometimes fiery social worker and academic. I cannot even imagine what this adventure would have

looked like without you. Thank you for your support and sacrifices and for being my

partner.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the 11 foster parents whom I

interviewed for this study. I am honored to have had the opportunity to hear your stories

and learn from you. Thank you for your commitment to children and families and to

making the world we live in a more compassionate and empathetic one. Your dedication

to the well-being of vulnerable yet resilient children enthuses me to continue to do good

work. I hope to support you in your endeavors as foster and adoptive parents and as

people for years to come.

In conclusion, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the thousands of remarkable

children with child welfare needs. I am mindful of you each day. Thank you for giving

me strength.

Kori R. Bloomquist

"A PIECE OF YOU IS GONE:" FOSTER PARENT EXPERIENCES OF PRE-

ADOPTIVE PLACEMENT DISRUPTION

Awaiting adoption is a social problem in America that affects thousands of

children as well as families, agencies, communities, the mission of the child welfare

system, and society at large. In 2014, over 101,000 children were awaiting adoption in

the United States. On average, waiting children have been in out-of-home care for

approximately three years. One phenomenon that plagues waiting children and their

opportunity for adoption is the disruption of their pre-adoptive placements or the change

in a waiting child's placement prior to a finalized adoption. Despite unique placement

and permanency needs, waiting children and their foster parents are seldom recognized as

unique cohorts. Thus, little is known about the experience of pre-adoptive placement

disruption. The status of waiting children, foster care and adoption history and policy,

and literature and theory relevant to pre-adoptive placement disruption are discussed. In-

depth, semi-structured interviews and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis were used

to investigate the research question: *What is the experience of pre-adoptive placement

disruption for pre-adoptive foster parents?* Eleven foster parents participated in nine

interviews. Participants were licensed through public or private child welfare agencies.

The majority of participants were married, Caucasian, and had adopted from foster care.

Important findings emerged from the experiences participants shared. Pre-adoptive

placement disruption is characterized by "compound loss" including both the loss of the

child and the loss of purpose. Participants experienced the disruption like a broken social

contract and attributed the disruption to the child welfare system or the children's

perpetrators. Disruption experiences resulted in lasting effects including changes to the profiles of the children participants would foster or adopt in the future, pre-adoptive status, and advocacy efforts. Resolve emerged as a critical factor for participants to approach foster and pre-adoptive care in new ways. Vulnerability, isolation, and ambivalence emerged as essential elements of living through disruption. Findings suggest the importance of assessing pre-adoptive parents' motivations and expectations, validating their experiences, acknowledging their losses, and practicing with transparency and competency. Implications exist for child welfare and social work practice and education. Additional research is needed regarding barriers and supports of adoption from foster care.

Carol Hostetter, MSW, PhD, Chair

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<center>**Chapter I. Introduction**</center>

Awaiting Adoption

Each year, thousands of children enter the United States foster care system

because of abuse and neglect. Thousands also exit to permanency by way of

reunification and adoption. Permanency refers to a permanent, safe, family-like living

situation that offers legal rights and the status of full family membership (Barth & Berry,

1987; Casey Family Foundation, 2005). Permanency is the overarching goal for each

child who enters the United States foster care system. Reunification with a child's family

of origin (often the birth family) is the most favorable way of achieving permanency

(Barth & Berry, 1987). However, at times, reunification is not feasible, safe, or

appropriate. In these cases, adoption becomes the primary permanency alternative for

children (Snowden, Leon, & Sieracki, 2008). Adoption provides children in need of

permanency with a "substitute family that society accepts" and "requires minimal

surveillance or support from the state" (Barth & Berry, 1987, p. 72).

Despite thousands of children exiting the foster care system to permanency

annually, another group of children exists. At any given moment, thousands of children

continue to await adoption while residing in out-of-home (foster) care. These children

are referred to as waiting children (AFCARS, 2012). Waiting children lack stability and

permanency in their young lives. While there is no federal definition of waiting children,

the Adoption and Foster Care Annual Reporting System (AFCARS), the national

reporting system for case-level child welfare data, defines waiting children as children

who have a case plan (plan for permanency) that reflects adoption and/or children whose

parental rights have been terminated. Following the termination of parental rights (TPR),

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a child is considered to be free for adoption (Cushing & Greenblatt, 2013). Children whose parental rights have been terminated, who are over the age of 16, and who have a case plan of emancipation are not considered to be waiting children. A child is considered to be waiting if he or she meets these criteria on the last day of the federal fiscal year (September 30th) (AFCARS, 2014). Waiting children are also referred to as pre-adoptive children, signifying their status as available for adoption, yet without permanency. The terms waiting children and pre-adoptive children are used interchangeably throughout this document.

Waiting children are cared for by both foster and pre-adoptive foster parents. Historically, foster parents have been under-valued and under-utilized as resources for permanency. Following the passage of multiple federal laws prizing permanency, foster care and adoption practice has shifted to recognize the value of foster parent adoptions. Today, foster parents are acknowledged as the most important source of adoptive families for children in foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2013). Foster parents represent a critical link between waiting children and adoption. Pre-adoptive foster parents are those parents who foster a waiting child with an openness, willingness, or intention to adopt the child from foster care. In many cases, pre-adoptive foster parents complete additional training to prepare them for adopting from the foster care system.

Pre-adoptive children and pre-adoptive foster parents are rarely recognized as unique cohorts in child welfare legislation or literature. Pre-adoptive children and pre-adoptive foster parents have needs that differ from other children in foster care and other foster parents who are not awaiting adoption. The practical and emotional experiences

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for a child or parent with an impending or prospective adoption are inherently different than those associated with a planned reunification or a completed adoption. Permanency limbo is a distinct experience for children and parents with a pre-adoptive status. Pre-adoptive children and pre-adoptive foster parents should be recognized as unique cohorts within child welfare. Research, policy, and practice must strive to identify and distinguish these unique cohorts and respond to their needs and experiences accordingly.

Context of the Challenge

Children awaiting adoption from foster care is not a new social challenge. Children have needed stability and care from adults who are not their biological parents throughout history. Additionally, foster care and adoption are intimately interwoven throughout American history. A number of social and political forces, including the passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (AACWA), Multiethnic Placement Act of 1993 (MEPA), and Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), have culminated to acknowledge the needs of children in out-of-home care in recent decades. The modern child welfare system and its practices have gradually, and somewhat reluctantly, evolved to address the needs of children's safety, permanency, and general well-being. There is little doubt that historical practices and perceptions have shaped the way children in need of permanency are cared for and cared about today.

The practice of indentured servitude during Colonial America demonstrated a value for child production and the ways children could compensate those who accepted the burden of their care (Hacsi, 1995). Asylum care during the early to mid-1800s demonstrated the necessity to keep children in need, especially those with special medical or behavioral challenges, contained—reserved from the rest of society. The Orphan Trains of the mid-1800s to early 1900s devalued children's relationships with their

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families, cultures, and neighborhoods of origin. Children were transported from poor, urban neighborhoods across the country, placed on platforms, and asked to perform acts to entice potential caregivers to take them into their homes. Children of the Orphan Trains often worked the rural lands where they were relocated—meeting the labor needs of their new caregivers and communities. The Orphan Trains are thought of as the first experiment in adoption in the United States. During this placing-out era, younger children were routinely adopted more often than older children. However, older children were desired for their production potential. As interest in child well-being gained momentum, caregivers were no longer permitted to work the children they accepted into their homes. The desirability of older children diminished and the number of older children in need of adoption grew.

Adoption has historically been a stigmatized practice and those in need of adoption have historically been viewed as less-than, damaged, and potentially harmful to families and society. Adoption was viewed as unnatural and adoption workers, including social workers, often had to convince prospective adoptive parents that adoption was not peculiar. The rise of eugenics complicated adoption and reinforced stigma and stereotypes associated with the worthy and the unworthy (Kahan, 2006; Adoption History Project, 2012a). Dominant kinship ideologies stressed blood relationships as the measure of what was considered normal, natural, and real in family life (Herman, 2007). Children with adoption needs, especially those born to unwed mothers, were rumored to be broken, inheriting mental deficits and feeblemindedness from their unfit biological parents (Kahan, 2006, p. 59; Adoption History Project, 2012b). In some cases, adoption professionals participated in the stigmatization of adoptable children. "Even

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professionals who believed in making adoption work believed that it was a 'social crime' to place inferior children with parents who expected—and deserved—normal children" (Adoption History Project, 2012b, para. 4). Adoption was seen as a way to meet a private need (such as family formation or coping with infertility) versus a public one (such as addressing the needs of dependent children) (Rymph, 2012). Often times, placement professionals tried to match infants with the physical characteristics of adoptive parents (Testa, 2004). As a result, children who did not match the characteristics of the majority of adults seeking adoption (including children of minority groups, older children, and children with special needs) were labeled "unadoptable" (Testa, 2004, p. 118). The perversely negative perception of children in need of permanency and the parents who bore them stained the lens through which Americans looked at children and families with adoption needs and, consequently, America's response to those needs.

The foster care population grew exponentially during the 1960s and 1970s— peaking in the late 1970s (Hacsi, 1995). Changes in the demographics of children in out-of-home care and adoptable children, revolutionary medical and social developments— including the approval of the birth control pill, the sexual revolution, changing gender roles, the rediscovery of child abuse, mounting racial tensions, and rejuvenated federal activity—substantially helped to shape foster care and adoption during this time (Hacsi, 1995; Hill, 2008; Kahan, 2012; Myers, 2008; Sribnick, 2011). Socio-cultural forces, including a growing acceptability of single-motherhood and the denouncing of transracial adoptions by the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW), led to fewer white infants being available for adoption, more African American children awaiting adoption, and an increase in international adoptions in the 1970s (DellaCava, Phillips, &

Engle, 2004; Kahan, 2006; Perry, 1993-1994; Testa, 2004). International adoptions doubled from 1970 to 1980 (Kahan, 2006). Since 1980, international adoptions have continued to increase (DellaCava et al., 2004). In 2007, 25% of all adopted children in the United States (444,000) were adopted internationally (Center for Disease Control, 2012). As international adoptions gained popularity, the number of American children awaiting adoption ballooned.

The status of waiting children. There are currently over 101,000 children awaiting adoption in the United States (AFCARS, 2014). On average, a waiting child has been living in foster care for nearly three years of his or her young life (AFCARS, 2014). Adoption is the case plan for a quarter of all children residing in out-of-home care. However, only four percent of *all children* in foster care are placed in pre-adoptive homes and only 13% of *all waiting children* are placed in pre-adoptive homes (AFCARS, 2014). This means that only a small percentage of children in need of adoption are residing with pre-adoptive foster parents. On average, the parental rights of waiting children have been terminated for approximately two years (AFCARS, 2014), leaving these children to languish in the foster care system without permanency for extended periods of time.

Provisions of the 1997 ASFA, the first piece of federal legislation to recognize the rights of the child in matters of permanency, promotes timely adoptions on behalf of waiting children (United State Department of Health and Human Services [US DHHS], 1997). In 2000, the US DHHS published a final rule to establish a new system to monitor state child welfare programs (US DHHS, 2000). The Children's Bureau (CB), a federal agency focused exclusively on improving the lives of children and families, was charged

with administering the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) program. The CFSR permit the CB to ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements, to gauge experiences of children, youth, and families receiving state child welfare services, and to support states as they improve their ability to assist families to reach positive outcomes (CWIG, 2012). The CFSR assess state conformity to specific federal requirements for child protective, foster care, adoption, family preservation, family support, and independent living services (Children's Bureau, 2012a). States found to be in non-compliance are required to implement Performance Improvement Plans (PIP) and federal funds are withheld if a state does not successfully complete its PIP (Children's Bureau, 2012a; Williams-Mbenque, 2008).

To date, two rounds of CFSR have been completed and analyzed. The first round of CFSR (Round 1) took place between fiscal years 2001 and 2004. Round 1 examined states' compliance with seven outcome areas and seven system factors. Of the seven outcome areas, two pertain to the permanency of children in out-of-home care (two pertain to safety and the remaining three pertain to well-being). Conformity for permanency outcomes required timely reunification (76.2% of children reunified with parents within 12 months of most recent removal), low rates of re-entry into foster care (8.6% of children re-entered foster care in less than 12 months of a prior foster care episode), timely adoptions (at least 32% of children with a finalized adoption achieved adoption within 24 months of latest removal from their home), and placement stability (for children in foster care less than 12 months, 86.7% or more had no more than two placement settings) (US DHHS, 2004). The benchmark for timely adoptions, which

contribute to shortened wait times for pre-adoptive children, was required for less than one-third of all cases with a finalized adoption.

All 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia (D.C.) and Puerto Rico, completed Round 1 in 2004. Not a single state was found to be in substantial conformity with all seven outcomes and systemic factors (Children's Bureau, 2012b). Consequently, each state was required to develop and implement a PIP. States performed somewhat better on safety outcomes than on permanency and well-being outcomes. Timely adoptions were among the weakest state performance outcomes. No state was in compliance with permanency outcomes. These results indicate that states were failing waiting children.

The second round of CFRS (Round 2) began in 2007. All 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico completed Round 2 in 2010 (US DHHS, 2011). Although some progress is noted with regard to well-being outcomes and system factors, once again, permanency outcomes were poor. Again, not one state achieved substantial conformity with permanency outcomes. Waiting children continue to suffer. The system of adoptions from the foster care system is not adequately serving some of America's most vulnerable children and a lack of permanency persists as a social problem in America.

The third round of the CFSR (Round 3) is scheduled to take place between 2015 and 2018. It will measure states' compliance with two safety outcomes, two permanency outcomes, and three well-being outcomes in addition to seven system factors (US DHHS, 2015). Round 3 reveals a new strength-oriented rating system. The permanency outcomes for Round 3 include 11 items which are focused on children having permanency and stability in their living situations and maintaining connections with

family members (i.e., mother, father, siblings). Permanency item six pertains to achieving adoption. Generally, "timely achievement" for adoption is considered to have occurred within 24 months of the goal. However, the focus of this Round 3 item is on assessing the efforts that were made or are being made to achieve permanency, rather than on the specific time frame for each goal. At this time, it is unknown how well this new rating system will accurately measure the realities of waiting children including states' ability to achieve adoptions on behalf of waiting children in a timely manner.

Significance of the Challenge

A lack of permanency. Leaving foster care without a permanent placement is typically referred to as aging-out of the system. Achieving permanency is widely regarded as preferable to aging-out of the foster care system without permanent, enduring family relationships. However, a lack of permanency is a far too common experience for many children in the child welfare system. Childhood experiences have the potential to contribute to a host of long-term challenges for individuals, families, communities, and broader society. Achieving permanency offers children a stronger possibility of developing and maintaining life-long relationships with parents, siblings, and extended family members (Rosenthal, 1993). Stable, permanent relationships play a significant role in the development of a sense-of-self and achieving overall, long-term well-being (Freundlich, Avery, Munson, & Gerstenzang, 2006). Conversely, a lack of permanency is associated with a milieu of negative, life-long consequences in relational, social, emotional, and independent functioning. Without a permanent, stable home, the possibility of forming strong, meaningful, trusting relationships with other human beings, including caregivers, is compromised. Goldstein, Freud, and Solnit (1973) contend that children must have the opportunity to love and be loved and valued by at least one adult

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in order to develop self-esteem, self-value, and confidence in the possibility of future

achievement. When these relationships do not exist, for reasons of impermanency and

instability, a sense-of-self and ability to develop relationships with others is

compromised. In 2013, over 23,000 youth left foster care without a permanent family

(AFCARS, 2013). This figure does not include over 16,000 additional youth who exited

care via guardianship (AFCARS, 2014). Children who age-out of foster care are more

likely than other children to experience challenges with housing (including

homelessness), education, employment, physical health, mental health, substance abuse,

and criminal involvement (Schelbe, 2011). Achieving permanency does not ameliorate

the risk for future challenges or possible consequences of surviving abuse, neglect, and/or

out-of-home placement. However, the perils associated with drifting through care are

significant.

Foster care drift. A host of factors affect waiting children's journeys to

permanency. One particular phenomenon, recognized as plaguing waiting children for

decades, is referred to as foster care drift (Maas & Engler, 1959). Foster care drift

defines the experiences of children who drift from placement to placement within the

child welfare system, without the promise of permanency. Foster care drift compromises

a waiting child's opportunity for a stable, permanent, family-life experience. Children

who experience more out-of-home placements experience longer waits to permanency

(Avery, 2000; Cushing & Greenblatt, 2013; Rosenthal, 1993). Multiple types of

disruption can contribute to a child's impermanency. These include placement disruption

(the disruption of a foster care placement), reunification disruption (the disruption of a

placement for a child who has been reunified with his or her family of origin), adoption

disruption (the disruption of an adoptive placement before final legalization of an adoption), and adoption dissolution (the disruption of an adoptive placement after legal finalization of an adoption). Disruptions result in placement changes for children with permanency needs, compromise progress toward permanency, and significantly affect the lives of children and families.

Connection to the Mission of Social Work

Social work can be thought of as a profession, a practice, and a philosophy. Reamer (2008) notes that ethics and values have always been at the core of social work, and although daily ethical issues have transformed over time, the values that guide practice decisions have remained stable with respect to social, political, and economic change. The National Association of Social Worker's (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008) serves as a guiding light in establishing the foundational belief system social workers must embody in order to practice ethically and with values representative of the profession. The NASW Code of Ethics (2008) states:

> The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. (Preamble, para. 1)

> The mission of the social work profession is rooted in a set of core values. These core values, embraced by social workers throughout the profession's history, are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective. (Preamble, para. 3)

Social work's core values include service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 2008). All six of these values are inherent to social work. Three core values are particularly relevant to waiting children, adoptions from the foster care system, and the disrupted placements

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of waiting children: the dignity and worth of the person, social justice, and the importance of human relationships.

Dignity and worth of the person. As of September 30th 2013, 402,378 unique children were living their young lives in foster care (AFCARS, 2014). This aggregate number leans toward nearly one-half of one million individual children. It also demonstrates the first increase in the total number of children in foster care in many years. While it may be convenient to discuss children in foster care as a collective mass, the mission of social work and the core value of dignity and worth of the person necessitate consideration of the exceptional qualities, characteristics, histories, experiences, needs, and empowerment of each child and each person affected by foster care. To embody the core value of dignity and worth of the person means that social workers respect diversity and differences, empower people to make self-determined decisions and act in self-efficacious ways, recognize an obligation to both individual clients as well as broader society, and work to navigate and negotiate gaps when the needs of individual people are unmet at the hands of broader society's interests (NASW, 2008). Ample opportunity exists to acknowledge and embody this core value when considering children awaiting adoption from foster care. While the uniqueness of each child must be recognized, so must that of each foster parent, family of origin parent, and service professional. Systemic child welfare shortcomings are evident, thus, there is opportunity to point a collective finger toward policies, policymakers, and even professionals. However, the value of dignity and worth of the person holds social workers accountable for appreciating variance among people, working to enhance capacities, and simultaneously distinguishing conflicts in micro and macro

understandings and practices to improve well-being for all people. This value can also be understood as one that supports hearing the voices of individuals through research and reporting findings in more than just facts and figures, but also in human terms—through stories of lived experiences.

Social justice. The value of social justice rings prominently in the mission of the social work profession. The pursuit of social justice is a value in action and includes advocacy for and empowerment of vulnerable and oppressed populations. Children in foster care represent a vulnerable and oppressed population. Social workers have a responsibility to lift up these children. Social workers are obligated by this value and the mission of social work to pursue social change and challenge social injustices. These types of social justice endeavors can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including stimulating discourse, giving a voice to those who are silenced or ignored, and by embarking on research that sheds light on underrepresented perspectives and troubling phenomena that affect vulnerable and oppressed human lives. According to Finn and Jacobson (2003), moving the value of social justice into practice calls for social workers to align themselves with the people who have lived through oppression and then to challenge the practices that contribute to inequitable experiences. Over fifty years ago, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) (1959) noted that it is "the *left-over children*, the hard core of youngsters who may spend their entire lives away from their families, who must evoke the greatest human concern" (p. 4). The pursuit of social change on behalf of vulnerable children must press forward.

Importance of human relationships. As stated previously, each of the six core social work values is necessary to the mission and practice of the social work profession.

Nevertheless, perhaps the value of the importance of human relationships is primary in the case of exploring challenges of awaiting adoption from foster care and the disrupted placements of waiting children. Social work is a profession of people, of caring, of embracing. As human beings, we are wired for connection (Brown, 2007). By embodying the core value of importance of human relationships, social workers recognize that human relationships are vehicles for change and by developing and fostering relationships at all levels, change is possible (NASW, 2008). Recognizing the power and importance of human relationships is integral to fighting for a cause that says each child is worthy and capable of achieving healthy and enduring relationships. This value, in addition to dignity and worth and social justice, obligates social workers to see each child and family as worthy of respect and stability, and to pursue micro- and macro-level change to ensure each child the opportunity for a safe, nurturing home. Care, connection, and continuity are perhaps taken for granted experiences of those who indeed experienced permanent homes and forever families in their own lives.

Children in foster care are especially susceptible to broken or strained human relationships. Breakdown in relationships with biological family members, friends, child welfare case workers, and foster families are well-documented in the literature. Biological parents and families of origin are not a primary focus of this study; however, to ignore the overwhelming importance of these relationships in foster and adoptive processes and experiences would be a tremendous limitation. Despite surviving abuse and neglect at the hands of their families of origin, many children demonstrate an unwavering allegiance to their biological parents. Research indicates that relationships with biological family members, including parents and siblings, can affect placement

stability and progress toward permanency (Barth, Lloyd, Green, Leslie, & Landsverk, 2007; Cushing & Greenblatt, 2013; Rosenthal, 1993; Smith & Howard, 1991; Smith, Howard, Garnier, & Ryan, 2006). In addition to being separated from their families of origin, children who enter out-of-home care are often forced to leave behind their communities, schools, and friends resulting in complex trauma (Becker-Weidman, 2009). These moves can lead to disrupted community, educational, and social relationships with familiar and important people.

Turnover rates among child welfare case workers are high and have an effect on relational experiences (Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Dickinson & Painter, 2009). Worker turnover and persistent vacancies often plague child welfare agencies and take weeks to fill (CWLA, 2000). Worker turnover in child welfare has been associated with negative outcomes for children and families including a decreased likelihood of reunification as well as longer stays in out-of-home care (Dickinson & Painter, 2009; Fulcher & Smith, 2010). Children who experienced worker turnover were reported to experience a lack of emotional and physical stability, loss of trusting relationships with workers, and an increase in their total number of foster home placements (Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, 2010).

Children in foster care also frequently experience disrupted relationships with foster parents. A quarter to half of all children in care experience more than one foster care placement and as time spent in care increases, so does the likelihood for a higher number of placements (Barth et al., 2007; Williams-Mbenque, 2008). Each disrupted placement has the potential to affect human relationships and disrupt human connection. These relational realities should not be and cannot be disregarded when considering

foster care placements and adoptions from the foster care system. Thus, the core value of the importance of human relationships is paramount when exploring challenges of awaiting adoption and pre-adoptive placement disruption.

DellaCava et al. (2004) recognize the adoption movement as a proactive and reformative movement—one seeking social change, attempting to change the social order. These authors conclude that adoptive families, adoption advocates, professionals, institutions, and organizations work to advance social welfare policies, resources, and services that support and acknowledge a commonly perceived and growing social problem: the presence of hundreds of thousands of children in the United States who are in need of a safe, caring, permanent home. Social work should be a part of this movement. Care and stability should be recognized as basic human rights. Social workers who fail to stimulate conversation and activity to change a system that does not adequately account for this right for all children violate a professional commitment to challenge injustices. Social work has a responsibility to acknowledge the experiences of children awaiting adoption and participate in activities that advocate for permanency. Investigating the placement disruptions of waiting children represents a meaningful endeavor in adhering to this professional responsibility. This study represents an effort to begin to purposefully attend to the issue of awaiting adoption by exploring the phenomenon of pre-adoptive placement disruption as experienced by pre-adoptive foster parents. Chapter III presents a detailed introduction to this study.

Chapter II. Literature Review

Adoption Disruption Research

The placement disruptions of waiting children are not recognized as unique experiences in child welfare literature or federal documentation. This type of placement disruption can be thought of as pre-adoptive placement disruption—recognizing the unique disruption experience of all children with a case plan of adoption and/or whose parental rights have been terminated. Foster care placement disruption and adoption disruption research likely capture some pre-adoptive disruptions; however, these delineations are not clearly established. Existing adoption disruption literature represents the closest approximation to the study of pre-adoptive disruptions because this research captures disruptions prior to legally finalized adoptions. Therefore, adoption disruption literature was reviewed in an effort to glean valuable insights into a phenomenon that affects children with adoption needs and the caregivers who have attempted to support their permanency. A discussion of existing adoption disruption is described here.

Minimal adoption disruption research has been conducted in recent years (Coakley & Berrick, 2008; Cushing & Greenblatt, 2013; Smith, 2003; Smith et al., 2006; Vandivere et al., 2009). Contemporary researchers note that the majority of adoption disruption research was conducted in the 1980's and 1990's with small samples. Additionally, many of these early studies did not define adoption disruption in the same way that modern researchers do (disruption prior to a legally finalized adoption). Researchers recognized an increase in adoption disruptions following an increase in the number of pre-adoptive children with special needs in the 1970's (Rosenthal, 1993; Rosenthal, Schmidt, & Conner, 1988; Schmidt, Rosenthal, & Bombeck, 1988). Barth and Berry (1987) recognized an increase in adoption disruptions following the

permanency planning reforms of the 1980's. Thus, it is understandable why adoption

disruption research may have been of interest in the 1980's and 1990's. Although these

studies are no doubt important to the body of existing knowledge, it is possible if not

likely, that social, environmental, political, and cultural shifts have altered the context of

adoption disruption over the past several decades. The lack of recent research regarding

adoption disruption is troubling for multiple reasons. First, the experiences and events

associated with the unique cohorts of pre-adoptive populations are underrepresented in

modern child welfare literature. Also, the number and proportion of waiting children has

increased since the passage of the 1997 ASFA (Smith, 2003). Additionally, outcomes

and consequences of ASFA and other legislation relevant to adoption disruption are

largely unknown due to a lack of contemporary investigation. Despite being limited in

measure, available research can help to inform interested parties with respect to adoption

disruption and waiting children. Nevertheless, additional adoption disruption research as

well as pre-adoptive placement disruption research is needed.

Foster care placement disruption research has identified several potential causal

factors; however, far less is known about potential antecedents of adoption disruption.

Existing adoption disruption studies have primarily explored risk factors including child

factors (Barth, Berry, Yoshikami, Goodfield, & Carson, 1988; Coakley & Berrick, 2008;

Rosenthal, 1993; Rosenthal et al., 1988; Smith & Howard, 1991; Smith et al., 2006),

family factors (Coakley & Berrick, 2008; Rosenthal, 1993; Rosenthal et al., 1988; Smith

& Howard, 1991; Schmidt et al., 1988; Smith et al., 2006), and system/service factors

(Coakley & Berrick, 2008; Rosenthal et al., 1988; Smith et al., 2006).

Child factors. It may be assumed that the researchers who investigate and report on child-specific characteristics associated with an increased likelihood of adoption disruption do not blame the children themselves. However, this message is not explicit. Therefore, with the core social work values of dignity and worth of the person and social justice, as well as reflexivity in mind, I would like to make explicit that although there are reported associations between child-specific characteristics and placement disruption and/or delayed permanency, the children themselves are not to blame for these experiences.

Several child-specific characteristics have been linked to a greater likelihood of adoption disruption. A history of sexual abuse, sexually acting-out and other externalized behaviors, increased age, and the presence of special needs appear to increase a child's likelihood of adoption disruption. In a study designed to identify factors indicative of disruption risk among children with the same birth year (N = 148), Smith and Howard (1991) found a link between sexually acting-out behaviors and adoption disruption. In the same study, Smith and Howard found that children who had experienced sexual abuse prior to their adoptive placement as well as those with a strong attachment to their birth mother were more likely to experience an adoption disruption compared to children without these characteristics. Based upon a systematic review of the literature on the impact of childhood sexual abuse among adopted children, Nalavany and Scott (2008) suggest, prior to adoption, children with a history of sexual abuse appear to demonstrate behavior challenges that increase their risk for adoption disruption. In a review of existing literature of adoption outcomes for children with special needs, Rosenthal (1993) found the presence of emotional and behavior challenges to be strong predictors of

adoption disruption. The most problematic behaviors identified in Rosenthal's study included aggression, sexual promiscuity, stealing, vandalism, threatening or attempting suicide, sexually acting-out, and wetting or soiling bedclothes (Rosenthal, 1993). More recently, in a study of children with adoption disruptions, using administrative data in a Midwestern state (N = 15,947), Smith et al. (2006) found multiple child-specific factors associated with a greater likelihood of adoption disruption. Caucasian children had a slightly lower rate of adoption disruption than their non-Caucasian peers, adoption disruption increased as the child's age increased, children with disabilities had a higher rate of disruption than their peers without disabilities, and children who experienced emotional or sexual abuse had higher rates of disruption (Smith et al., 2006).

Coakley and Berrick (2008) completed a more recent review of adoption disruption research. Factors such as gender, age, special needs, and attachment were associated with a greater likelihood of placement disruption (Coakley & Berrick, 2008). Specifically, male children, older children, children placed at an older age, children with special needs, and children with a strong attachment to their birth mother were more likely to experience adoption disruption (Coakley & Berrick, 2008). In a matched-pairs design (N = 54), Rosenthal et al. (1988) used questionnaires to identify predictive factors of special needs adoption disruption in a western state. The authors found older age, being male, and the presence of behavior challenges (especially aggression and sexually acting-out behaviors) to be associated with higher rates of adoption disruption (Rosenthal et al., 1988). It should be noted, however, that this study did include data for five children who experienced adoption dissolutions, in addition to the majority of children who experienced adoption disruptions.

Avery (2000) completed a study of the perceptions and practices of child welfare staff who supervised the placements of a northeastern state's hardest to place pre-adoptive children. Avery used a case history review approach (N = 80) to determine the permanency plan (adoption versus long-term foster care) of waiting children who had been waiting the longest in the state. Findings suggested that children who were older, male, African American, and had special needs were less likely than their waiting peers without these characteristics to have a plan of adoption (Avery, 2000). The results of Avery's study suggest that the perceptions of some child welfare professionals may affect the permanency plans and wait times of children in need of a permanent home. This finding will be discussed further in a subsequent section. Leathers, Spielfogel, Gleeson, and Rolock (2012) drew a sample of 31 foster parents from a large child welfare agency in an urban area to explore factors (such as behavior challenges, foster home integration, and evidence-based interventions) that predict the adoption of children in foster care. Leather et al. found that the presence of child behavior challenges led to a reduced sense of family integration (parents were less likely to view the child as a close, belonging family member). Lower levels of family integration were associated with a decreased likelihood of adoption from foster care.

Lastly, in a study to explore the permanency-vulnerability of children after the termination of their parental rights, using case reviews in a northeastern state (N = 640), Cushing and Greenblatt (2013) identified child-specific factors of adopted children and those who continued to await adoption. These authors found that when compared to pre-adoptive children who were adopted during the one-year study period, the pre-adoptive

children who continued to await adoption were more likely to be older, male, and to experience emotional, behavioral, or cognitive challenges (Cushing & Greenblatt, 2013).

It appears there are some common, child-specific qualities and experiences associated with adoption disruption. Being older and having special needs, including behavioral challenges, are consistently reported to be risk factors for adoption disruption. However, these characteristics should not be viewed as child-specific deficits. Instead, this information should be acknowledged by policymakers, programs, practitioners, and parents in an effort to contour policies and practices to support the continuity of care and permanency for these highly vulnerable children. Long ago, the CWLA (1959) noted that "the first step for any community concerned about its children is to learn the facts" (p. 16).

Family factors. In addition to child factors, research has also identified some family-related risk and protective factors for adoption disruption. Unfortunately, several studies that examined family-specific factors of adoption disruption did not define adoption disruption as a disruption prior to a legally finalized adoption. However, some of the previously discussed studies that presented child factors also identified family factors associated with adoption disruption.

Several studies found that being a new or matched parent, as opposed to being the child's foster parent, increased the likelihood of adoption disruption (Rosenthal, 1993; Rosenthal et al., 1988; Smith & Howard, 1991; Smith et al., 2006). These findings highlight the value of foster parent adoption and the importance of placing pre-adoptive children in pre-adoptive foster homes.

Smith and Howard (1991) found an association between successful adoption and the adoptive mother's parenting experience (length of time as a mother). However, the father's parenting experience (length of time as a father) was not found to be significant in the placement's stability. Rigidity in family-functioning patterns, particularly the father's non-involvement in parenting, unrealistic expectations of the child, and low levels of support from friends and family have been found to be associated with greater risk for adoption disruption (Rosenthal, 1993). Regarding family functioning, Leathers et al. (2012) found lower levels of foster family integration, or the extent the child is viewed as a belonging family member, to be predictive of adoption disruption. These authors contend that there exists a need for future research to explore what contributes to foster family integration, in an effort to support the placement stability and permanency of children (Leathers et al., 2012).

Family relationships and placement contexts are reported to affect adoption disruption. Smith et al. (2006) found that children who were placed in a relative's home experienced less adoption disruption than children placed with non-relatives. Smith et al. also found that having siblings in the home was associated with less placement disruption. In fact, as the number of siblings in the child's placement increased, the likelihood of adoption disruption decreased (Smith et al., 2006). In contrast with this finding, Avery (2000) found a high number of the longest-waiting children to have been separated from their siblings for the purpose of securing an adoptive placement. Barth et al. (2007) documented the importance of sibling relationships in predicting placement stability in general. Sibling placements appear to be a valuable factor in pre-adoptive placements. Acknowledging the power of sibling relationships may support permanency

outcomes for waiting children as well as the core social work value of the importance of human relationships. In terms of biological family contact and relationships (including plans to continue contact with biological family members), Cushing and Greenblatt (2013) found no significant difference between pre-adoptive children who were adopted during the study period and those who continued to await adoption.

Cushing and Greenblatt (2013) found evidence of pre-adoptive foster parent ambivalence in case records of the pre-adoptive children who were not adopted during the study time when compared to those who were adopted. Documented foster parent concerns included lack of resources to meet the child's needs, loss of financial support post-adoption, loss of caseworker services or support post-adoption, feeling not ready, and the child's behavior (Cushing & Greenblatt, 2013). These authors suggest that further research, possibly qualitative in nature, is needed to better understand foster parent ambivalence. Exploring foster parent ambivalence appears to be a worthwhile practice and research endeavor, especially considering that child welfare professionals and practice interventions could potentially acknowledge or influence foster parent ambivalence.

In a study to explore the supportive resources of adoptive families via telephone interviews (N = 49), Houston and Kramer (2008) found the presence of support to be an important factor for successful adoptions. Their findings regarding formal agency support will be discussed in a subsequent section. Nine of the forty-nine participants experienced an adoption disruption. Participants who experienced a disruption reported lower scores on measures of parental competency, attachment, and commitment toward the remaining children in their homes than parents who did not experience an adoption

disruption. Perhaps these parents' perceptions of their own abilities and their levels of commitment were affected by their adoption disruption experience. Perhaps lower levels of foster parent competence, attachment, and commitment place children at greater risk for adoption disruption. The sample size is too small to determine a causal relationship between these parental feelings and adoption disruption; however, further investigation into parental attitudes and self-evaluation could be beneficial to adoption disruption research.

Rosenthal et al. (1988) identified several family-related factors of adoption disruption. These authors found associations between adoption disruption and adoptive parents' age, income level, education level, minority status, and number of children in the home. Specifically, Rosenthal et al. found older age, lower education levels, more children in the home (birth and adoptive), and the minority status of the parents to be associated with less disruption (Rosenthal et al., 1988). Increased income was associated with more disruption (Rosenthal et al., 1988). Like many other studies, Rosenthal et al. found less adoption disruption among pre-adoptive foster parents when compared to adoptive placements with new or matched parents. These authors also found professionals' perceptions of positive family functioning to be associated with less adoption disruption (Rosenthal et al., 1988). Rosenthal et al. found that professionals more often viewed parental characteristics versus child characteristics as the most central factor in adoption disruption. This finding is significant because the majority of adoption disruption and placement disruption research focuses on child characteristics. Viewing parents as an active agent in the adoption disruption and/or successful adoption process

and investigating their characteristics and experiences has the potential to shed light on under-explored factors associated with awaiting adoption.

Lastly, Schmidt et al. (1988) completed a qualitative study of parents' views of adoption disruption. Schmidt et al. used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with parents in a western state (N = 15). The Schmidt et al. study is the only identified qualitative study of adoption disruption; thus, its findings are considered to be unique to the body of adoption disruption research. Adoption disruption resulted in feelings of stress, pain, grief, loss, and failure for pre-adoptive parents (Schmidt et al., 1988). Six themes emerged from their interviews: (a) the inability of the children to attach to the adopting families, (b) the children's difficulties in letting go of birth families, (c) the parents' expectations of a less difficult child, (d) the impacts of unresolved fertility issues on the adoptive process, (e) gaps in information and child history, and (f) the importance of worker expertise and support (Schmidt et al., 1988, p. 119). These themes are included in the family factors section of this literature review because they are the perspectives and experiences lived by the pre-adoptive foster parents, despite the fact that some of these themes are reflective of child and system/service characteristics. Themes (a) and (b) may be considered child factors while themes (e) and (f) may be considered system/service factors. Schmidt et al. note that just as the children who experience a disruption require intensive services and support, so do the parents who experience them. The authors suggest that losses associated with disrupted adoptions were at times likened to experiences of death. Participating in the interview process was cathartic for many parents (Schmidt et al., 1988). Greater attention to the experiences of parents who have

lived through a disrupted adoptive placement has the potential to create deeper understandings and more nuanced knowledge of adoption disruption.

Placement in a pre-adoptive foster home, the presence of other children, and foster family functioning, including foster parent attitudes and perceptions, appear to be particularly important variables to consider for adoption disruption and adoption success. However, a singular description of an ideal pre-adoptive family or family setting does not exist. It remains valuable, nevertheless, to acknowledge characteristics and factors associated with more and less successful pre-adoptive placements. These data should be used in foster and adoptive parent recruitment, screening, training, retention, and support. Family factors are of the utmost importance when contemplating how to improve adoptions from foster care. Some of these family factors can be accounted for and addressed by child welfare professionals in an effort to improve the system of foster care adoptions.

System/service factors. An additional set of factors, those related to child welfare agencies, service provision, and formal supports, emerged from the existing adoption disruption literature. Once again, many of the previously discussed works also identified system/service factors in addition to child and family factors. Multiple authors point to the importance of full disclosure and transparency in pre-adoptive practice (Coakley & Berrick, 2008; Rosenthal, 1993; Schmidt et al., 1988). Gaps in child-history reports or narratives have been found to increase the risk of adoption disruption. Worker expertise and formal agency support have been linked to less adoption disruption. Schmidt et al. (1988) found that pre-adoptive parents commonly reported a general sense of support; however, they felt upset when they perceived they were not believed when

they described the pre-adoptive child's problematic behaviors. Houston and Kramer (2008) found that families were more likely to maintain a pre-adoptive child in their home and finalize an adoption when they reported having higher levels of contact with formal agency supports such as adoption agency staff. Interestingly, contact with other forms of support including formal non-agency (teachers, medical professionals, etc.), informal non-agency (friends, family, etc.), and informal agency-linked (other adoptive parents, foster parents, etc.) was not associated with a greater likelihood of adoptive placement stability (Houston & Kramer, 2008). Smith and Howard (1991) found that support counseling for children and families was offered more frequently among adoption disruption cases than finalized adoption cases. This is most likely due to the intensive needs of children who experience longer waits to permanency and more adoption disruptions. Smith et al. (2006) found that with each year of child welfare professional experience, the likelihood of adoption disruption decreased by approximately two percent. This finding suggests that worker experience (and worker retention) may be linked to more positive adoptive placement outcomes. With this finding in mind, there are possible implications for case assignments, mentoring, and training of child welfare and adoption staff. Rosenthal et al. (1988) found the fewer number of agencies involved in pre-adoptive cases to be associated with less adoption disruption. This finding may be reflective of (a) children with fewer needs, who are also more likely not to experience an adoption disruption generally receive fewer services and fewer agencies are involved and/or (b) a greater number of agencies involved may lead to service provision fragmentation (Rosenthal et al., 1988). Fragmented services may fail to

meet the needs of the pre-adoptive children and/or families and these unmet needs may result in a greater likelihood of adoption disruption.

In related literature, Avery (2000) found that a number of child welfare professionals had "given up hope" for many of the longest-waiting children in a northeastern state (p. 415). Many professionals perceived the needs of waiting children to be "too severe" for most adoptive parents and many were not convinced of the "adoptability" of the children on their caseloads (Avery, 2000, p. 415). Professionals' skepticism resulted in reduced pre-adoptive recruitment efforts on behalf of the waiting children (Avery, 2000). Furthermore, Avery found that agency screening processes were restricting pre-adoptive placement options for waiting children. Forty-four percent of professionals regarded placement with gay or lesbian parents as inappropriate, 42% regarded transracial placements as inappropriate, 41% believed homes with other children were not appropriate, and 35% thought single-parent homes were not appropriate (Avery, 2000). It should be noted that failure to consider placement based on race, ethnicity, family characteristics, or locale violates MEPA and ASFA. While Smith et al. (2006) did not find a connection between number of workers and likelihood of adoption disruption, Cushing and Berrick (2008) found that changes in child welfare professionals (turnover) was much more common for pre-adoptive children who were not adopted during the study time (90% experienced a worker change) when compared to those who were adopted (55% experienced a worker change).

System/service factors related to support, experience, and practices that stem from perception are valuable factors to consider in adoption disruption. Perhaps even more so than family factors, system/service factors are adaptable in the majority of cases. Being

knowledgeable about system/service factors may permit child welfare professionals and even policymakers to make decisions about service availability and provision that may ultimately improve outcomes on behalf of waiting children.

Adoption disruption research synthesis. In general, adoption disruption research would benefit from identifying and using a singular, agreed-upon definition. Variations in terminology do a disservice to the efforts of those interested in investigating and improving experiences, policies, and practices related to adoption disruption (as well as pre-adoptive placement disruption and adoption dissolution). According to Coakley and Berrick (2008):

> Adoption disruption research could become far more useful to practitioners and policy-makers if researchers would agree upon a definition for measuring adoption disruption. The use of a common definition for disruption would allow scholars and practitioners to interpret research more easily and to develop trend lines that are meaningful. (p.110)

To summarize, adoption disruption research has traditionally focused on child, family, and system/service-specific risk and protective factors. Children who have experienced sexual abuse, demonstrate sexually acting-out and aggressive behaviors, older children, and children who have special needs are at greater risk than their peers without these characteristics to experience adoption disruption. Pre-adoptive foster homes, placements that include other children, and relative-care placements appear to be protective factors against adoption disruption. Additionally, more positive perceptions of foster parents' competency, commitment, and attachment as well as positive family functioning and integration appear to buffer against adoption disruption. Finally, systemic and service provision factors including formal support and increased years of worker experience appear to be protective factors against adoption disruption while

negative attitudes regarding the adoptability of some waiting children, more agencies

involved in the case, and worker turnover may work against progress toward adoption

from foster care. These findings provide a base of risk and protective factors associated

with adoption disruption.

Theoretical Considerations

Theories can be thought of as models of reality that help us "understand what is,

what is possible, and how to achieve the possible" (Turner, 1996, p. 2). Theories can

assist in attempts to answer "why" questions (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006).

Using theoretical frameworks to *explain away,* determine*,* or reduce such a complex,

human phenomenon as pre-adoptive placement disruption can be viewed as unrealistic

and irresponsible. However, exploring traditionally used theories and raising questions

about the appropriateness of others may support a greater understanding. Robbins et al.

(2006) note that a sound understanding of theory, which is essential for social work

practice, can lead to a broader understanding of the complex forces that shape people's

lives. The use of theory is by no means a panacea for questions that emerge and persist

in child welfare policy, practice, and research. However, thinking about theory and using

theory as a means of understanding has the potential to refine our knowledge about *what*

is, *what is possible*, and *how to achieve the possible* on behalf of waiting children.

Existing adoption disruption literature is substantially lacking in its discussion of

theory. Additionally, a specific theory of disruption does not exist. However, general

systems theory (sometimes referred to a dynamic systems theory or simply systems

theory), a foundational theoretical framework for social work practice, can be helpful in

framing the concept of disruption as it relates to pre-adoptive placements. Additionally,

in as much as an experience of pre-adoptive placement/adoption disruption results in a

state of crisis for the child or family, crisis theory can help to contextualize the experience of disruption.

According to Turner (1996), social workers hold a particular understanding of the relationship of individuals to various environments and the synergistic relationship each entity has to the other. Social workers are instructed to recognize that all parts of any system are "interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent"; therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of various systems and subsystems on functioning (Tuner, 1996, p. 601). General systems theory has roots in both sociology and biology. It was introduced to social workers in the late 1950's, but did not gain wide acceptance until an ecosystems perspective evolved in social work in the late 1970's (Robbins et al., 2006). Hall and Fagan (as cited in Robbins et al., 2006) provide a classic definition of systems using two basic concepts, object and environment:

> A system is a set of objects, together with relationships between the objects and between their attributes…For a given system, the environment is the set of all objects, a change in whose attributes affects the system and also those objects whose attributes are changed by the behavior of the system. (Robbins et al., 2006, p. 37)

In the case of human systems, it is more appropriate to refer to human system members as "subjects" in an effort to avoid dehumanizing the human beings of the systems (Robbins et al., 2006). One major contribution of social work to advancing general systems theory has been in the field of family systems (Turner, 1996). Robbins et al. (2006) provide an example of how general systems theory can be viewed in the context of a family system:

> A family of four, for example, can be thought of as a system in which (1) each person is a subject, (2) all family members together are mutually influencing, (3) family relationships are woven together into patterns and developmental processes, (4) the family as a whole encompasses subsystems (e.g., parent and sibling subsystems), and (5) the family

transacts with external suprasystems (e.g., neighborhood or social service agency). (p. 37)

In the case of a pre-adoptive family, each member of the pre-adoptive family (i.e., foster parent, biological/adopted children, pre-adoptive child, etc.) is considered a subject within the larger family system context and all members of the family influence one another because the family relationships are interrelated and interdependent. Within the larger family context, subsystem or subgroups exist. Take for example a pre-adoptive family of six: two foster parents, two biological children, and two pre-adoptive children. There is likely to be a parental subsystem, a biological sibling subsystem, a pre-adoptive sibling subsystem, and maybe even a child subsystem (integrating the biological and pre-adoptive siblings). In family systems where particular alliances exist, other subsystems are likely. In addition to these attributes, systems are also characterized by being dynamic, not static, and being either open (receiving input from external systems and discharging output into the environment) or closed (all transactions and communications with external systems cease to exist, which is highly unlikely), depending upon the system's boundaries (invisible lines or barriers that delineate the system from the outside environment (i.e., family versus non-family) (Turner, 1996). Considering the external systems that are in play for a pre-adoptive family (child welfare system, court system, family of origin system, school system, etc.), consideration of a pre-adoptive family's level of openness, boundaries, and transactions with external systems is extremely important.

In a related systems-based theory, structural functionalism, which is chiefly concerned with the structure and the function of social systems, such as families, Parsons (1951) theorized that social systems must perform four prerequisite functions to maintain

equilibrium (or balance), adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency. Adaptation refers to the process by which a system copes with demands and adapts for survival by securing resources. Goal attainment refers to the process by which systems prioritize goals and mobilize resources to meet those goals. Integration refers to the internal process of coordinating interrelationships of the system. Latency refers to the processes necessary to maintain motivation and manages tensions. Turner (1996) notes that dynamic systems, such as families, need to maintain continuity while also tolerating change; both processes are necessary to maintain a healthy balance or equilibrium.

Disequilibrium or system imbalance can be thought of as the opposite of equilibrium. Disequilibrium be catalyst for and experience of disruption. Disequilibrium in a system may result in a perceived crisis. Stressful life events, such as a pre-adoptive placement/adoption disruption and/or precipitating disruption events/experiences, can lead to a state of crisis where by people experience temporary feelings of distress and being overwhelmed or an inability to cope in ways that effectively reduce their distress (Turner, 1996).

Crisis theory, a theory that is still being developed and is considered a "work in progress," makes the following basic assumptions: (1) it is not uncommon for systems to experience disequilibrium in the face of stressful life events, (2) acute situational distress can happen to any system and is likely to occur at some point in the life of the system, (3) some life events will be universally distressing, (4) during a state of disequilibrium, people will evaluate the meaning of the event within the overall context of life and resources to cope with it, (5) while struggling to regain equilibrium, systems will experience vulnerability, (6) during this state of vulnerability, the system is particularly

amenable to psychological intervention, (7) the crisis response is characterized by adaptive or maladaptive resolution, and (8) crises afford the opportunity for growth, development, and negative outcomes (Tuner, 1996). Inability to enact one or more of Parsons' prerequisite functions for maintaining system balance, challenges with family system boundaries, and/or challenges with the exchange of information between and among interrelated systems could play a role in pre-adoptive placement/adoption disruption. Additionally, provided the potential stress and feelings of being overwhelmed that could accompany a change in family membership by way of a pre-adoptive placement/adoption disruption, a family and/or child who lives through a disruption may experience a crisis.

General systems theory has significant relevance for family dynamics and potential explanatory power for states of equilibrium and disequilibrium. Crisis theory recognizes that while stressful events are not uncommon for systems, sometimes systems are not able to effectively cope with these events which can lead to adaptive or maladaptive responses and negative outcomes. Provided a specific theory of disruption does not exist and provided the lack of theoretical discussion in adoption disruption literature, general systems theory and crisis theory can help to contextualize the idea of pre-adoptive placement/adoption disruption.

Additional Theoretical Frameworks

Despite a dearth of literature specifically related to adoption disruption in the knowledge base, social scientists have directed their attention to some theoretical frameworks that have relevance to the disrupted placements of waiting children. These frameworks include: attachment theory, personal construct theory, symbolic interactionism, and ambivalence theory. These four theories are discussed in an effort to

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provide further perspective for conceptualizing pre-adoptive placement/adoption

disruption. Because pre-adoptive parents are commonly foster parents first and the

majority of pre-adoptive children enter the system with a goal of reunification, both foster

and pre-adoptive populations are referenced in these additional theoretical considerations.

Attachment theory. The novice and the expert child welfare researcher or

practitioner will find attachment theory to be the pervasive explanatory model when

reviewing child welfare literature. It is important to discuss here because placement

stability may affect and be affected by attachment; additionally, disruptions may

compromise opportunities for attachment. Attachment is widely recognized as a catalyst

in a variety of negative (externalized behavior challenges, placement and adoption

disruptions, adoption dissolutions, etc.) and positive (biological parent-child

relationships, sibling relationships, successful adoptions, etc.) events and experiences in

child welfare. Several studies have addressed attachment as a factor to consider in

adoptions from foster care; a perceived lack of ability to attach to a pre-adoptive parent is

a risk factor for adoption disruption and delayed permanency in existing literature

(Coakley & Berrick, 2008; Houston & Kramer, 2008; Larsen-Rife & Brooks, 2009;

Schmidt et al., 1988; Smith & Howard, 1991; Vandivere, Malm, & Radel, 2009).

Attachment theory was developed by British psychologist and psychiatrist Dr.

John Bowlby and was greatly influenced by his student and colleague, fellow

psychologist, Mary Ainsworth. Attachment theory has long been recognized and

continues to be renowned as instrumental to studies of psychoanalysis and behavior. It is

difficult to discuss attachment theory without some mention of psychodynamic theory, a

theory of personality, as Bowlby's contributions are rooted in psychodynamic

mainstream (Robbins et al., 2006). Bowlby (1969) did, however, view instinctual drives and attachment as separate processes and viewed attachment as a class of social behavior. Bowlby credits interactional patterns of behavior between a child and his or her mother as instrumental to the development of attachments that may persist into adulthood. Interactional patterns between the child and mother during the child's first year of life shape expectations about the relationship. The established interactional pattern tends to persist as expectations about the behavior of the other in the parent-child relationship develop and are confirmed over time. While it is possible for interactional patterns of behavior to change, for better or worse, after the first 12 months of the child's life, changes are unlikely to occur and to substantially change the attachment relationship as time progresses. This tenet of attachment theory suggests the parent-child interactions during the first year of the child's life may have lasting effects for the child and his or her future relationships with others, including caregivers.

At the time of Bowlby and Ainsworth's original work, mothers were the only nurturers recognized by the dominant society. Today as a society, we recognize that fathers can nurture and bond as well. Therefore, while the original language of attachment theory only included "mother," the terms "parent" and "mother/father" are used here in an effort to be more accurate and inclusive.

Ainsworth is credited with identifying the importance of the security of the child's attachment and resulting attachment profiles—securely attached (child seeks contact with parent when distressed after a brief separation and is comforted), anxiously attached and avoidant (disinterest in parent's return after separation, more interested in a stranger), and anxiously attached and resistant (oscillates between seeking proximity to parent and also

resisting interaction and contact with parent) (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby (1969) notes that

a profile of a child's attachment can be developed based on a number of child-specific

behaviors, including behavior that initiates interaction with the mother/father, responds to

the mother/father's interactional initiatives, behavior to avoid separation, behavior to

reunify with the mother/father after separation, environmental-exploratory behavior, and

withdrawal behavior. However, to complete the picture of attachment, a profile of the

mother/father's behavior is also necessary. Thus, attachment theory underlines the

necessity of reciprocity in relationships and acknowledges the relational dynamics

between the parent and child necessary to form and maintain attachment. In fact, Bowlby

notes that the majority of challenges brought to the attention of psychiatric professionals,

originally thought to be individual in nature, are actually the result of interactional

patterns between at least two and usually more members of a family. This facet of

attachment theory is so very important when considering challenges that emerge in child

welfare. Viewing child-specific factors from an individual and often deficit-oriented

perspective places undue responsibility on a child. A child-specific, deficit perspective

fails to account for the complexity and interconnectedness of person and environment and

discounts the core social work value of the importance of human relationships. Barth,

Crea, John, Thoburn, and Quinton (2005) caution foster and adoptive parents from

attachment-based therapies that blame previous caregivers for a child's current challenges

or that view the child as the primary target of clinical intervention. Parents who feel

relieved of their responsibility to change their own parenting or behavior, despite the fact

that their actions did not *cause* the child's current challenges, often fail to recognize the

potential positive effects that changes in their parenting and behavior could have on

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placement, parenting, and permanency experiences. When considering pre-adoptive

family structures, it is necessary then to assess interactional behavioral patterns from the

child-biological parent relationship (if possible), as well as the interactional behavioral

patterns between the child and the pre-adoptive caregiver(s) and family.

Far too often, attachment theory and related clinical diagnoses, such as attachment

disorders, are used as a blanket approach to challenging experiences in child welfare

practice and literature. While rooting challenges in theoretical or clinical orientations

may be comforting to some—including stakeholders such as child welfare professionals

and parents—overuse and/or inappropriate use is cautioned. Barth et al. (2005) note

"attachment theory offers concerned parents what they believe to be a scientific

explanation about their lack of the close, satisfying parent–child relationship they desire"

(p. 257). Unfortunately, this blanket approach often fails to take into consideration the

interactional behavioral patterns of the family or families involved, it does not require

foster parents to look introspectively at their own relationships with attachment, and it

serves to blame the child for negative experiences such as placement and adoption

disruption. Using attachment theory as a blanket approach can also neglect important

environmental variables related to a child's pre-placement history. Smith and Howard

(1991) found that pre-adoptive foster parents who decided not to move forward with

adoption of the pre-adoptive child were less likely to perceive or verbalize their own

challenges with attachment, despite acknowledging the child's difficulties with

attachment as a causal factor for adoption disruption. Additionally, some researchers

question the applicability of attachment theory to children in the child welfare system and

suggest that children in need of child welfare services are vulnerable to experiencing

chaotic life events not representative of the children originally studied in the development

of attachment theory (Barth et al., 2005).

In a study of adopted children with special needs, Groze and Rosenthal (1993)

explored issues of attachment and adoption. The authors found that variables such as

abuse history, number of foster care placements, and age were related to attachment.

Children with a history of abuse were more likely to be perceived by their adoptive

parents to have attachment difficulties. Groze and Rosenthal note that children who are

exposed to abusive parenting often develop attachment styles that distance themselves

from other relationships and abuse seems to interfere with the child's development of

trust. This perspective of attachment theory considers environmental factors of the

child's pre-placement history. Groze and Rosenthal also found a relationship between a

child's number of placements and greater attachment challenges. As the number of

placements increased, the adoptive parents' level of trust decreased and levels of child

avoidance and ambivalence increased (Groze & Rosenthal, 1993). Despite a relationship

between these variables and attachment, none of the variables significantly predicted

attachment. The modest association between the predictor variables and attachment may

suggest that these variables have different effects on different children and that children

with problematic pre-placement histories are still capable of developing close

attachments (Groze & Rosenthal, 1993).

Attributing continued experiences of disruption to a child's inability to attach to

caregivers, inability to detach from his or her biological mother/father to form new

attachments with new caregivers, or because she or he displays symptoms of/has been

diagnosed with an attachment disorder fails to account for environmental and relational

factors essential to the child's experience. Bowlby (1969) notes that when practitioners

are called to treat individuals (such as children who experience multiple placement

disruptions), techniques that enable changes in all members of the family—to establish

new patterns of interaction—are necessary. This tenet of attachment theory suggests an

orientation toward general systems theory. The application of attachment theory may be

critiqued when it fails to account for environmental and relational factors. When

attachment theory is used to identify personal deficits, it is not appropriate for use in

social work. However, when attachment theory is used with a system-based orientation,

recognizing the power and influence of interactions between a person and his or her

environment, attachment theory holds greater potential. Attachment theory should be

viewed and applied as a theory of interaction versus a theory of personality. System-

based theories help to advance a holistic relational view of people and their environments

(Robbins et al., 2009).

In work with families, system-based theories assume that the family as a whole is

greater than the sum of all of its parts (members), a change in one part of the family will

lead to changes in other parts of the family, and families are always changing and

assuming different roles (Andreae, 1996). System-based theories are helpful for

exploring relationships and environmental factors that may influence a person and vice

versa as discussed above. Practitioners, researchers, and policymakers who retain a

system-based orientation while exploring or applying attachment theory stay true to

Bowlby's acknowledgement of interaction and are able to view strengths as well as

challenges from a broader perspective. Viewing attachments as valuable and capable of

change over time (through patterns of interaction) and acknowledging the role of the

environment on a person and a person on the environment hold potential for greater understanding in pre-adoptive placement/adoption disruption research.

Personal construct theory. Studies suggest that pre-adoptive and foster parents enter into their caregiving roles with personal constructs and expectations about their future experiences with the children in their care (Avery, 2000; Broady, Stoyles, McMullan, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2010; Rosenthal, 1993). Exploring personal constructs appears to be important to understanding decision-making processes among foster and pre-adoptive parents. Unrealistic and unmet expectations of a child foreshadow placement instability (Rosenthal, 1993). Thus, adoption professionals should assist pre-adoptive parents to adjust their perceptions to be more realistic about parenting roles and definitions of success within the child's placement (Avery, 2000) when adjustment is appropriate or necessary. Personal construct theory is valuable to the discussion and research of pre-adoptive placement/adoption disruption because the personal constructions of the parents and professionals who work to meet the permanency of needs of children may have direct or indirect effects on children's pre-adoptive placements.

The psychology of personal constructs or personal construct theory was developed by George Kelly (1955) and is based upon constructive alternativism. Kelly contends that a person looks at the world through templates or lenses created by that individual and then tries to fit that template or lens over the realities or events of the world. He contends that the fit is not always a good one, but that even a poor fit is better than having no lens at all. Kelly refers to these templates or lenses that are "tentatively tried on for size" as constructs and the way each of us constructs our world (p. 9). Each person is a scientist of sorts, testing his or her personal constructs against the world.

Kelly suggests that people attempt to improve constructs by increasing their construct repertoire, but that sometimes people are so deeply committed to or dependent upon their own constructs that even when presented with contradictory experiences, personal construction systems do not change. At times, significant therapy or major events are necessary to adjust one's construction system to the point that new or improved constructs can be incorporated (Kelly, 1955). Personal constructs allow people to attempt to anticipate and react to the world around them (Kelly, 1955). Personal constructs are the way that each person attempts to make sense of the world. Sometimes the predictive orientations of these constructs allow people to feel safe, comfortable, and/or prepared, but other times they can be harmful. Constructs can lead to inaccurate assumptions. Invalidated constructs can leave people feeling distressed.

Situated in personal construct theory is work by Broady et al. (2010). In an effort to better understand foster parent experiences, Broady et al. elicited foster parents' stories about their expectations through qualitative interviews. Consistent with Kelly's personal construct theory, Broady et al. found that foster parents enter into their role as foster caregivers with a set of personal expectations about what it will be like to be a foster parent. Foster parents then test their expectations through actual foster caregiving. Broady and colleagues found that foster parents experience both confirming or encouraging experiences as well as refuting or discouraging experiences, based upon their original predictions of what it means to be a foster parent. Experiences that validated their expectations often perpetuated their foster parenting role, leading them to continue as a foster parent. However, experiences that invalidated their expectations more often led to feelings of dissatisfaction and compromised their identities as foster

caregivers. Invalidating experiences negatively affected their likelihood to continue

fostering. Invalidating experiences may serve to reduce the pool of potential adoptive

homes for waiting children. While Broady et al.'s study did not explore the unique

cohort of pre-adoptive parents in particular, it is reasonable to believe that these findings

may have implications for pre-adoptive foster parents—including issues surrounding

recruitment, screening, licensing, training, support, retention, and decisions to adopt.

Greater understandings of foster parents' constructs, expectations, and experiences may

lead to improved practices, more positive foster and adoption experiences, and ultimately

toward more positive permanency outcomes for waiting children.

Adhering to Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory allows researchers and

practitioners the opportunity to study and respond to the individual expectations of pre-

adoptive foster parents. There exists potential to first understand their motivations and

expectations and then to either meet their needs or work to adjust constructs to support

more realistic expectations. Meeting the needs of pre-adoptive foster parents and/or

working to adjust unrealistic expectations may then support the pre-adoptive placement

of a waiting child. This theory appreciates that each person makes sense of the world

based upon his or her own unique experiences. Although it may be difficult in some

cases to change deep-seated personal constructs, personal construct theory holds that

change is possible. Application of this theory can also help to avoid blaming foster and

pre-adoptive parents for placement disruptions. It may be possible to identify and

address unrealistic or troubling constructs foster and pre-adoptive parents hold prior to

those constructs affecting the permanency outcome of the child and the parent's

experience. Child welfare professionals also hold constructs that may influence a child's

path to permanency. Hiring and supervisory staff should explore the constructs of applicants and child welfare professionals. Appreciation of unique experiences and a belief that change in an individual's personal construction system is possible upholds the core social work value of dignity and worth of the person.

Symbolic interactionism. Research demonstrates that parents who have adopted children from foster care hold varied meanings of the term and experience of permanency (Freundlich et al., 2006). This finding, coupled with the potential that personal construct theory holds for adoption disruption practice and research, makes exploring symbolic interactionism a worthwhile endeavor. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the relationship between the person and society because that relationship is reflected in the self (Robbins et al., 2006). Symbolic interactionism fits well within social work because it recognizes that people grow and change and that identity is based upon meanings that emerge through interacting with others. Therefore, it recognizes the value of person-in-environment as well as social relationships and shared meanings. Despite a variety of theories and theorists within the field of symbolic interactionism, there is common assumption that people are first and foremost social beings who interact with each other based on shared meanings or symbols, and human interaction is symbolic interaction (Robbins et al., 2006). Once again, people are responsible for shaping their realities, but according to symbolic interactionism, this process is not purely psychological, it is social in nature. People construct their worlds through interactions with others who make up their societies.

Symbolic interactionism does not assume a singular definition of normalcy; instead, norms and values are created and agreed upon by the people who experience

them. This theory holds potential for exploring adoption disruption because, as a society, we have assigned value to permanency, stability, and family. It is widely agreed upon that children are worthy of care and concern. Nevertheless, even a concept as basic as caring for a child can vary based on the experiences and interactions a person has had in his or her life. Parents, children, and professionals may view the symbol of adoption differently. A pre-adoptive parent may assign adoption a very positive meaning based on his or her interactions as a member of a loving, caring family. However, a pre-adoptive child may assign adoption a very negative meaning based upon his or her interactions with a younger sibling being adopted and never seeing that sibling again. The pre-adoptive parent may associate adoption with love while the pre-adoptive child associates adoption with loss. These varied meanings could compromise the short and long-term experiences of both the parent and the child and could have direct bearing on the disruption experiences of pre-adoptive cohorts. Child welfare professionals may also assign adoption a very different meaning based upon his or her interactions with relief for a finalized adoption. The professional in a pre-adoptive case may associate adoption with success and duty—which may influence the professional's decision-making or practice actions. Variations on this example are plentiful. Varied perceptions of permanency, pre-adoption, and adoption have the potential to create conflict and confusion among parents, professionals, and waiting children. The meaning of these terms and experiences should be explored for each pre-adoptive parent and child throughout the permanency process. Attention to the meaning of permanency, pre-adoption, and adoption should begin during the adoption home study and continue through each case transition up to and

through adoption finalization. Failure to do so may be detrimental to potential adoptive parents and waiting children.

       Ambivalence theory. Research has revealed ambivalence among the pre-adoptive parents of waiting children and researchers have called for further exploration of ambivalence as a potential barrier to the adoption of waiting children (Cushing & Greenblatt, 2013). Ambivalence is one of the few potential underlying, subjective factors referenced in adoption disruption research. Therefore, it seems reasonable to devote attention to ambivalence theory when considering the disrupted placements of waiting children. Merton (1976) notes that the historical development of ambivalence theory is chiefly psychological in nature, but posits that the sociological orientations of ambivalence exist and should be recognized. Merton identifies three types of psychological ambivalence: the emotional type in which the same object evokes both positive and negative feelings, such as in parent-child relations; the voluntary type in which conflicting wishes make it difficult to decide how to act; and the intellectual type in which people hold contradictory ideas. Merton argues that although the psychological and sociological orientations of ambivalence are separate, they are also related and because social processes are also psychological processes, sociological ambivalence cannot be ignored. Merton refers to the sociological orientation as one that focuses on ambivalence that develops from the structure of social statuses and roles. Ambivalence, therefore, is an experience of contradiction at both the societal level as well as the individual level. Ambivalence refers to simultaneously experiencing conflicting or opposite emotions toward a person, object, action, or idea (Hess & Folaron, 1991; Luescher & Pillemer, 1998; Robbins et al, 2006) or contradictory experiences in attitudes

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and actions associated with social norms, structures, and roles (Leuescher & Pillemer, 1998).

Ambivalence theory has been used as an explanatory model in research associated with psychiatry (Corradi, 2013), intergenerational-family relationships (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Luescher & Pillmer, 1998), and parent-child relationships and reunification (Hess & Folaron, 1991). Both the sociological and psychological dimensions of ambivalence theory are applicable to foster and pre-adoptive parenting experiences and may play a role in pre-adoptive placement/adoption disruptions. The sociological dimension points to potential conflicts people may experience through the various roles they fulfill and the way society expects them to behave in each. Luescher and Pillemer (1998) give the example of a doctor who is expected to both uphold professional detachment but also be compassionate and concerned for the patient. A pre-adoptive parent may experience similar conflict when attempting to uphold respect and consideration for a child's biological family and his or her relationships with them while at the same time trying to form a connection conducive to attachment and bonding with the child. Similar role conflicts may occur when considering sets of structured social relations as woman, man, middle-class, African American, biological parent, spouse/partner, employee, etc. A pre-adoptive parent may experience role conflict when his or her spouse/partner does not want to move forward with the adoption of a child, but the other parent views the child as his or her own child and does desire to adopt. The conflict between the role of spouse/partner and parent may lead to ambivalence that affects the child's permanency.

The psychological dimension of ambivalence theory points toward contradictions in the emotions, motivations, and desires experienced by people on a basic, human level. Ambivalence is often described as embodying opposite emotions such as love and hate. A pre-adoptive parent may experience emotional turmoil when attempting to make a decision whether to adopt a child she or he cares for very much who also exhibits problematic externalized behavior, such as sexually acting-out or physically assaulting pets. The pre-adoptive parent may experience love for the child and disdain for his or her behaviors. During the decision-making process, the pre-adoptive parent may struggle to separate the child's symptoms from the actual child. These conflicting feelings could cause significant psychological distress for the pre-adoptive parent while ultimately contributing to an extended wait for a pre-adoptive child or an eventual adoption disruption.

Hess and Folaron (1991) note that most if not all parents experience ambivalence about their parenting role and about their children at times. However, deeply felt or consistent ambivalence about parenting can lead to serious challenges in fulfilling the role of parent (Hess & Folaron, 1991). While their focus was largely devoted to the ambivalence of biological parents during the reunification process, Hess and Folaron found that parents' persistent ambivalent attitudes contributed to children's impermanency. Hess and Folaron also found that ambivalence toward permanency at the child welfare system level perpetuated parents' feelings of ambivalence. Assisting parents to become less ambivalent about their parenting roles is a worthwhile service endeavor in child welfare and may contribute to improved permanency outcomes for children (Hess & Folaron, 1991).

Exploring and addressing foster and pre-adoptive parent ambivalence, system-level ambivalence (ambivalence of case workers, judges, court-appointed advocates, etc.), and the personal and social forces that influence ambivalence over time may aid in progress toward permanency on behalf of waiting children. Ambivalence theory presents as a promising theoretical framework for exploring the decision-making processes of foster and pre-adoptive parents and service providers. Luescher and Pillemer (2013) suggest that ambivalence increases around times of transition and lowers during times of stability. This finding suggests that attention to potential ambivalence should occur prior to transitions in a child's case. Possible transitions include changes from foster to pre-adoptive status (for children and parents), termination of parental rights, filing of adoption petitions, adoption proceedings, adoption finalization, etc. Ambivalence theory supports the acknowledgement of individual experience of emotion, social structures that contribute to normative expectations, and potential relational risks and consequences associated with conflicting sociological and psychological experiences. It also appears to be a good fit with the core social work values of dignity and worth of the person, social justice, and the importance of human relationships.

Findings related to perceived attachment deficits, foster parent motivations, expectations, and personal constructs, varied meanings of permanency by adoptive parents, and pre-adoptive foster parent ambivalence have contributed to the consideration of several theories for exploring the social problem of awaiting adoption. Systems theory and crisis theory as well as attachment theory, personal construct theory, symbolic interactionism, and ambivalence theory hold potential for contextualizing and exploring phenomena of awaiting adoption, including pre-adoptive placement/adoption disruption.

Some may argue that these theories and perspectives are rooted too deeply in post-modern thought and place too much emphasis on foster and pre-adoptive families. Some may contend that this discussion of theory does not focus enough on children or child welfare agencies and practice. However, I contend that the theories discussed here involve human behavior and the social environment—the foundation of theory in social work practice. Additionally, provided the focus of the study discussed in the next three chapters, theories and perspectives with particular relevance for foster and pre-adoptive families are appropriate foci. These theories address psychological, relational, sociological, and environmental factors and forces. In child welfare, these factors and forces naturally involve children and agencies as well as foster parents. Importantly, these theories permit for the exploration of key stakeholder experiences. Foster and pre-adoptive parents have a lot to offer the practice and policy realms of child welfare. According to Turner (1996), "what we do is closely connected to what we know" (p. 2). By acknowledging and exploring the psychological, relational, sociological, and environmental forces at work in the lives of foster and pre-adoptive parents, we open ourselves up to knowing and then doing more to positively affect the adoption outcomes of waiting children.

Research Gaps

Child welfare literature fails to adequately identify pre-adoptive populations and specific pre-adoptive experiences that benefit or compromise progress toward adoption. There is no federal definition of a waiting child and a database for tracking adoption disruptions does not exist. Additionally, there are varied perceptions of what constitutes a pre-adoptive parent or pre-adoptive home. Some states do not have a way to track pre-adoptive placements. These limitations make researching and monitoring the unique

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cohorts of pre-adoptive children and pre-adoptive foster parents more challenging. Beyond basic demographic information, little is known about pre-adoptive children and even less is known about foster parents who adopt from foster care. Adoption disruption literature appears to capture the disruptions of pre-adoptive children. However, without clear and federally recognized definitions of waiting or pre-adoptive children, pre-adoptive foster parents, and pre-adoptive homes, interested parties are often left uncertain of the populations under study in adoption disruption research. Studies of adoption disruption often fail to clearly define study populations. Therefore, questions arise regarding case status. For example, has TPR been completed? Has an adoption petition been filed? Have the pre-adoptive/adoptive parents completed an adoption home study? Have the pre-adoptive/adoptive parents completed pre-adoptive trainings? There are many questions as to the nature and status of the pre-adoptive child and family who experience adoption disruption.

Further challenges with adoption disruption research exist. Researchers do not always agree on the terms used to describe adoption disruption and adoption dissolution. Some researchers lump adoption disruptions and dissolutions into the same study but refer to the studied event as adoption disruption—further complicating adoption disruption research. Despite the fact that adoption disruption and adoption dissolution are related, they represent different experiences for children, families, child welfare professionals, and legal professionals. Additionally, little adoption research has been conducted in recent decades. Following an increase in the number of children with special needs who awaited adoption and the passage of permanency-related federal legislation, interest in adoption disruption increased in the 1980's and 1990's. Modern

researchers recognize limited publications in recent decades. Many of the existing

studies are dated and are unable to account for social, political, environmental, and

cultural changes in recent decades.

Adoption disruption studies are largely devoted to identifying risk and protective

factors of adoption disruption or reviewing the literature of previously conducted studies.

Many studies are small, geographically bound, and focus on specific populations (i.e.,

adolescents). Findings are not generalizable. These quantitative research studies aim to

predict and control the event of adoption disruption by identifying variables and

formulating profiles. Identifying child-specific characteristics common among children

who disrupt from pre-adoptive placements does little to inform policymakers or

practitioners in a way that can contribute to policy or practice changes to benefit waiting

children. And, because the context of each pre-adoptive placement is different,

identifying an ideal pre-adoptive setting or family profile is unrealistic and is not

especially helpful. Identifying family-specific characteristics may support foster, pre-

adoptive, and adoptive parent recruitment, training, retention, and support—which is

valuable.   However, beyond this, the knowledge of family-specific characteristics is

limited. Perhaps system/service-specific factors research has the greatest potential to

affect adoption disruption. However, research cannot stop with the identification of

system/service-related risk factors.

Research is needed to evaluate current and new practices to identify best and

evidenced-based practices with promise of supporting waiting children's opportunities

for permanency. It is noted that variations in state and agency policies and programs

make this type of research difficult.   It should be noted that some identified studies

employed a small degree of what could be considered mixed methods, however results of these studies focus on quantifiable data. Existing adoption disruption studies are missing several valuable research components. A review of the literature yielded only one study that used qualitative interviews to explore the experiences of foster parents who had lived through an adoption disruption. This study was published in 1988. The majority of studies fail to identify subjective factors and underlying realities of adoption disruption. While the studies identify "who" factors associated with adoption disruption, consideration and discussion of "what" and "how" factors are missing to a great extent. Overall, post-modern thought and qualitative methods are missing from adoption disruption research.

Existing studies also largely omit the exploration or application of theoretical frameworks. Beyond attachment theory, there is little mention of theory in adoption disruption literature. Limited discussion of personal constructs, symbolic interactionism, and ambivalence is present in other adoption and foster care research. Further efforts related to the development and application of theory are needed in research related to the disrupted placements of waiting children.

Overall, research related to awaiting adoption has many gaps. Initially, there exists a need to clarify the types of child welfare placement disruptions including foster placement disruptions, pre-adoptive placement disruptions, adoption disruptions, and adoption dissolutions. There also exists a need to clarify the populations who experience these disruptions. Secondly, pre-adoptive children and pre-adoptive foster parents need to be recognized as unique cohorts with experiences that may differ from their foster and adoptive peers. A need for permanency is present and certainly expectations of

permanency exist; however, child, parent, system, and court decisions are not finalized. This places these unique cohorts of children and parents in vulnerable positions. Finally, there exists a need for more qualitative research in the study of the disrupted placements of waiting children. Padgett (2008) describes qualitative research in contrast to quantitative research in the following ways: insider rather than outsider perspectives, person-centered rather than variable-centered, holistic rather than particularistic, contextual rather than decontextual, and depth rather than breath (p. 2). The study described in the next three chapters was designed to pay direct attention to pre-adoptive cohorts and their experiences and present person-centered, holistic, contextualized, deep research.

Chapter III. Method

Study Purpose

Awaiting adoption has personal, familial, and social ramifications. The mission of the social work profession charges social workers with enhancing the well-being of all people with special regard for those who are vulnerable and oppressed and to bridge the gaps between individual and collective challenges (NASW, 2008). Up to this point, research and policy have failed to adequately acknowledge or address the needs of the unique cohorts of waiting children and the pre-adoptive parents who attempt to support their adoptions. Barriers to permanency must be explored. The purpose of this study is to attend to the phenomenon of pre-adoptive placement disruption as experienced by foster parents in an effort to become more knowledgeable about its nuances. A greater understanding of awaiting adoption and pre-adoptive placement disruption has implications for micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level social work practice and social work education. Knowledge gleaned from this research has the potential to inform direct practice, agency programming, child welfare policy, and the teaching of child welfare content to social work students. The ultimate aim of this and related research is to contribute to an improved system of adoptions from the foster care system on behalf of a vulnerable population of children and to enhance the overall well-being of these children and those who care for them.

Research Question

Van Manen (1990) compels human scientists to ask "What human experience do I feel called upon to make topical for my investigation?" (p. 41). The phenomenon of pre-adoptive placement disruption is captivating. Despite knowing that these disruptions have ramifications for children, families, communities, and society, relatively little is

known about pre-adoptive placement disruption. I am passionate about minimizing the traumatic experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption and supporting the adoption of waiting children from foster care. This topic is not so personal, however, that is it is not of interest to others. Awaiting adoption is an issue of social justice and deserves directed attention.

The overarching mission of the child welfare system is to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. Ultimately, adoptive parents are responsible for the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children they adopt from foster care. Thus, pre-adoptive foster parents and adoptive foster parents are a tremendously valuable resource for carrying out the mission of child welfare—with specific regard to achieving and maintaining permanency on behalf of waiting children. Their perspectives and experiences must be acknowledged in an effort to learn more about the needs of pre-adoptive children and families. This is not to say that the experiences of children, first and foremost, and the experiences of professionals are not also valuable. However, children are a protected population in research. Children may have limited capacity to make voluntary and informed decisions. This makes conducting research with children challenging. Children in foster care may be especially vulnerable to research, provided their histories of abuse, neglect, and out-of-home placements. Also, obtaining parental consent may be difficult because multiple parents/legal guardians are involved when children are placed in out-of-home care. Despite these obstacles, researchers should strive to develop sound, ethical research projects that give children a voice. The experiences of professionals are also tremendously valuable in understanding pre-adoptive placement disruption, but we need a place to start. The experiences of pre-

adoptive foster parents reflect the starting point. These parents are the bridge that

connects waiting children and the system designed to meet their needs.

The research question for this study is: *What is the experience of pre-adoptive*

placement disruption for pre-adoptive foster parents? This research question is rooted in

the lifeworld, the taken-for-granted, everyday life that we lead (Smith et al., 2009).

Vagle (2014) thinks of the lifeworld as a world "vibrating with meaning" and when one

studies a phenomenon, one is studying moving, dynamic vibrations in the world (p. 78).

This research question is devoted to understanding the contextual elements of the

phenomenon, the elements that may bring us closer to an understanding of pre-adoptive

placement disruption and how the processes and outcomes of the experience are

constructed and lived by those who experience it. According to Harding (1991), "The

truth (whatever that is!) cannot set us free. But less partial and less distorted beliefs—

less false beliefs—are a crucial resource for understanding ourselves and others, and for

designing liberatory social relations" (p. xi). In an attempt to understand awaiting

adoption, to begin to know, a quest for deeper meaning should involve eliciting the

stories of pre-adoptive parents who have lived the phenomenon of pre-adoptive

placement disruption.

Research Design and Rationale

Scientific inquiry is rooted in ways of knowing. To conceptualize a research

project, researchers must explore philosophical assumptions about how the world works.

A paradigm is a "framework or philosophy of science that makes assumptions about the

nature of reality and truth, the kinds of questions to explore, and how to go about doing

so" (Glesne, 2011, p. 5). Simply stated, the values and beliefs we hold about the world

guide our research actions. There are multiple paradigmatic lenses for conducting

research. Discussing various schools of thought can be problematic because social scientists often disagree on how many paradigms exist, how to label them, how to categorize labels, and how methodologies should be divided among paradigms (Glesne, 2011). Each paradigm views the nature of reality and the relationship between the knower and the known in a different way. These various views constitute the ways researchers then go about discovering knowledge.

A paradigm or worldview serves as a starting point for questions of inquiry. Before embarking on a research journey, it is important to acknowledge a paradigmatic sense-of-self—that is, where do "I" fit in as a scientist. Patton (2002) posits that paradigms tell us what is "important, legitimate, and reasonable" (p. 69) and Creswell (2007) asserts that the belief systems within paradigms can converge in flexible ways in order to be compatible with particular worldviews that guide researchers' behavior. Guba and Lincoln (1994) recognize that paradigms help to define the nature of the world and an individual's place within it. Ultimately, the way one views the world influences the way or ways one perceives his or her relationship with knowledge and inquiry. In this study, my relationship with knowledge and inquiry, based upon my paradigmatic lens, supported my intentionality—that is, how I am meaningfully connected to the world and what to study within it (Vagle, 2014).

The majority of existing placement disruption research, regardless of disruption type, is rooted in the post-positivist paradigm, using quantitative methods of inquiry. Pragmatism is also present because many researchers have used readily accessible datasets or populations—at times resulting in small, geographically-limited, and population-restricted studies. As noted, qualitative methods are lacking in research

regarding the placement disruptions of pre-adoptive children. Quantitative studies have identified risk and protective factors and child, family, and system/service characteristics in order to predict the likelihood of disruption, presumably in an effort to control the event from occurring. However, some of these factors and characteristics, especially those associated with demographics, cannot be controlled for in real life. Reality renders identified profiles useless when the variables cannot or will not be changed. Systems (including individuals, couples, families, agencies, etc.) are not static, they are flexible and ever changing. The malleability of life can make prediction and control rather troublesome when exploring social phenomena. Reflective and contextual research is necessary to begin to understand the complex phenomena that affect and are affected by dynamic human systems.

Post-modern thought represents a separation from formal logic and scientific reasoning as the sole means for problem-solving (Glesne, 2011). Postmodernity is concerned with multiple truths, plurality, fragmentation, and uncertainty. The human phenomenon of pre-adoptive placement disruption cannot be reduced to a list of variables. Multiple truths and realities exist within the experience of the disruption and the only way to get closer to those truths is to explore the experiences of those who have lived them. When researchers conduct qualitative research, they embrace the idea of multiple realities and attempt to make sense of phenomena and the meanings people bring to them (Creswell, 2007). I believe that multiple truths and realities comprise and are embedded within foster parents' experiences of pre-adoptive placement disruption. Therefore, this study was approached from the post-modern paradigm using qualitative research methodology.

Methodology

A researcher cannot adequately choose a research approach before choosing a research question. According to Vagle (2014), "the following cannot be overstated: the phenomenon and the research question is the most important consideration, and then all other questions of method follow" (p. 77). The approach flows from the research question. Just as there are a variety of research paradigms, there are a variety of approaches for undertaking qualitative studies. This study used phenomenology to explore the question: *What is the experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption for pre-adoptive foster parents?*

Simply stated, "Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). I am chiefly interested in the lived experience of placement disruption—*what is it like* to experience a placement disruption? What are the possible meanings that can be derived by purposefully attending to the phenomenon of pre-adoptive placement disruption through data gathered from foster parents who experienced it? Provided these passionate curiosities and the focus on experience, phenomenology was the appropriate methodology for this study. Van Manen (1990) regards phenomenology as a way to question the way humans experience the world. He notes that phenomenological researchers want to know the world we live in. To question the world and theorize about it is a very intentional way of connecting ourselves to the world around us and becoming part of it. Van Manen describes phenomenological research as a "caring act" with a spirit of "intentionality" that connects the researcher and the world (p. 5). A phenomenological study was the most appropriate way for me to connect with the human experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption and to act with care and intentionality to better understand the experience. Van Manen contrasts

phenomenology with other modes of inquiry, particularly those concerned with prediction and control, as a "philosophy or theory of the unique" (p. 7). Phenomenology is concerned not with the replication and generalizability of findings. It is concerned with unique contributions, the irreplaceable, the individual stories and experiences of humans who have lived the phenomenon under study. Phenomenology is a good fit with the core social work value of dignity and worth of the person. In this spirit of inquiry, each person is unique and worthy of having their story heard and authenticated. This philosophy and method of inquiry demonstrates respect for research participants by appreciating their experiences. While phenomenology recognizes what is not replaceable and values distinctive significance, it is also a way of knowing that is relational and recognizes human connectedness. As a methodology, phenomenology works to discover the essence or the core of things, the inter-subjectivity and general consistency among experiences of a shared phenomenon. Phenomenology recognizes that we are social, relational, and connected beings. This notion connects well with the core social work value of the importance of human relationships. Illuminating the shared essence of a phenomenon could be a vehicle for change. Disseminating research findings that connect people through shared experiences is worthwhile. Each experience of a pre-adoptive placement disruption is unique to the person who experienced it, yet because we are social, relational beings, there are shared elements of our experiences—fibers that connect us to each other and to the world around us.

Phenomenological philosophy. Prior to being applied as a research methodology, phenomenology must first be recognized as a philosophy. Classic phenomenological philosophers include Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. Each of

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these philosophers has contributed to the layers of phenomenological epistemology. Husserl's work is primarily committed to the transcendental, descriptive orientations of phenomenology while Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty move in a more interpretive, relational direction (Smith et al., 2009). According to Husserl, humans exist in the "natural attitude" (Husserl & Welton, 1998, p. 60). Husserl explains that certain "things" always exist, humans are present, and we go about our lives without attending to certain physical or conceptual things or objects in our world. He posits that we cannot know these things or objects until we attend to them and even after attending to them, what we recognize is at best partial and imperfect, there is always more to know. Thus, we cannot begin to know pre-adoptive placement disruption until we attend to it, direct our purposeful attention toward this "thing," and then, even after doing so, our knowledge of the phenomenon is at best incomplete.

Heidegger was a student of Husserl. Heidegger (1927/1962) echoes Husserl's sentiments regarding purposeful, directed attention to things and argues that phenomenology is not concerned with "accidental findings" (p. 50). Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008) later clarify that phenomenology and hermeneutics (or texts and interpretations) are not concerned just with objects and events, but also with the way these objects and events are experienced—as phenomena. Pre-adoptive placement disruptions, and more specifically the experiences of pre-adoptive placement disruptions, are things, events, and phenomena in our everyday world that are frequently not attended to by child welfare professionals, policymakers, or researchers. This is evident by the dearth of pre-adoptive placement disruption literature, lack of definitional accord,

absence of monitoring systems to track these events, and the perpetual permanency needs of waiting children.

More recent methodological applications of phenomenology focus on interpretation rather than simple description. Modern phenomenologist Mark Vagle has become particularly interested in a phenomenology that moves beyond a descriptive-interpretive dualism, however (Vagle, 2014). In his newly articulated post-intentional approach to phenomenology, Vagle calls for recognition of a "through-ness" approach to phenomenology. According to Vagle, "through-ness" signifies movement, and intended meanings (meanings of the phenomenon) are always in the process of becoming; therefore, meaning making occurs in the living out process. Vagle argues that crafting this type of phenomenological research means that researchers embrace the phenomena as social and not belonging to the individual, which is particularly divergent from Husserlian phenomenology. A "through-ness" approach permits researchers to have a dialogue with the phenomenon, recognizing that the connections and relationships between people and phenomena are "multiple, partial, fleeting meanings that circulate, generate, undo, and remake themselves" (Vagle, 2014, p. 41).

Phenomenology and theory. Phenomenological philosophy acknowledges theory in a unique way. According to Husserl, theory is not used as an explanatory tool; theory is present, but it is not the lens through which phenomenological scientists use to describe the world (Husserl & Welton, 1998). Husserl notes that when attending to things and objects in the natural attitude, theory is not used to validate things or objects; description of the things must come before theory. Merleau-Ponty (1962) postulates that the world and experiences of the world precede knowledge, just as the "countryside"

precedes "geography" (p. ix). Knowledge always speaks of the world and being in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Van Manen (1990) notes that "In our efforts to make sense of our lived experiences with theories and hypothesizing frameworks we are forgetting that it is living human beings who bring schemata and frameworks into being and not the reverse" (p. 45). Being tied to a particular theoretical framework for carrying out a phenomenological study is problematic. Placing theory before the research may compromise the possibility of the research actually clarifying theory.

Phenomenology represents a philosophy that can also be practiced and identified as a style or manner of thinking (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Phenomenology can be thought of as a way to think about how you know that you know things—a philosophy of experience versus a practice of employing theory. Thus, rather than explicating a particular, presupposed theoretical framework, phenomenology was used as a guiding and founding philosophy as well as a methodology and a research approach for this study. According to Vagle (2014), "Human experience is too complex, too fluid, and too ever-changing to be captured in, or worse yet, constrained by theory" (p. 74). This being said, theory cannot and should not be ignored as theory does indeed exist in the natural world. Existing literature should be used to frame what makes the phenomenon under study important—to help the researcher answer the question, "what is this thing?" Chapter II used existing literature and theoretical considerations regarding general systems theory and crisis theory to provide context for the idea of disruption and personal construct theory and ambivalence theory were used to develop interview questions for this study. Acknowledging theory in this way helped to frame and illuminate the phenomenon while still allowing the meaning of the experience to emerge organically

from the data. After data were collected, I went back to the literature. The literature

identified and explored at the conclusion of this study does not mirror what was explored

and used at the inception of the project, which is not unusual in this type of analysis.

Some theoretical frameworks identified at the beginning of the project did not earn their

way into the findings; other new theoretical frameworks and perspectives did, however.

The findings of hermeneutic phenomenology are about the meaning of the experience

which cannot be known until the data have been collected, analyzed, and interpreted.

Phenomenology and hermeneutics. "Hermeneutics is the study of

interpretation" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21). Hermeneutic phenomenological research is

concerned with the fullness of life, the "texts" of life, the places and the situations in

which people naturally engage in their worlds (Van Manen, 1990). Smith et al. (2009)

see phenomenology and hermeneutics not as distinct from one another, but instead as

connected. Together, phenomenology and hermeneutics inform a specific type of

phenomenological analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al.,

2009). According to Smith and colleagues, researchers use double hermeneutics in IPA.

This means that the researcher makes sense of the participant's expression of the

experience while the participant makes sense of the phenomenon itself. Essentially,

research findings from IPA are the researcher's interpretation of the participant's

interpretation of the experience. This approach to phenomenological research respects

the participant's truth. IPA also involves a tertiary level of hermeneutics when

consumers of the research interpret the researcher's interpretation of the participants'

experiences.

Crafting the Phenomenological Research

Vagle (2014) prefers to use the word "crafting" when discussing the act of phenomenological research. A craft is creative, flexible, practiced in a variety of ways, and able to be honed over time. The crafting of this study employed an IPA framework, remained mindful to the "through-ness" approach to phenomenological research as explicated by Vagle, and attended to six phenomenological themes as outlined by Van Manen (1990). Each of these approaches is discussed in further detail later in this chapter. According to Smith et al. (2009), choosing a topic of interest is the first step in an IPA research study. The researcher should care about the topic as well as the outcome (Smith et al., 2009). This tenet of IPA research was particularly important for this study. While phenomenology is not typically thought of as an action-oriented research methodology, qualitative research has often been characterized and motivated by the researcher's commitment to facilitate change (Kidder & Fine, 1997) and a willingness to reflect upon that commitment (Finlay, 2000). These aspects of qualitative research, IPA in particular, require a high level of researcher transparency. This study emerged from a passionate interest the in lives and well-being of waiting children, the parents who care for them, and a commitment to research with the potential to enhance permanency outcomes on behalf of vulnerable children and families. These attributes of the study support the core social work value of social justice. In addition to caring about the research topic and outcome, it is also necessary to consider previous knowledge, experiences, and pre-conceptions about the research topic. While an insider perspective is not necessary for IPA, it is valuable to reflect upon the researcher's ability to relate to or imagine participants' experiences and to consider the potential consequences of the researcher's preconceptions (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, prior to beginning the

research process it was necessary for me to acknowledge positionality. Being "frank" with one's self and one's research committee can be a helpful way of recognizing one's prior knowledge (Smith et al., 2009, p. 42). This purposeful attending to preconceptions about the research and its participants acknowledges the ethical consideration of researcher bias.

      Positionality and bias. Simply stated, positionality affords us the opportunity to explore how our experiences and backgrounds affect the way we see the world—and in research, the way(s) our experiences and backgrounds affect our data collection and analysis. I identify as an educationally, socio-economically, and racially privileged child welfare practitioner, researcher, and advocate. These realities and roles shape the way I see the world, including the challenges of awaiting adoption and pre-adoptive placement disruption. I have read numerous child welfare-related studies and books, conducted child welfare-related research—partnering with key stakeholders at the micro and macro level, and advocated with and on behalf of vulnerable children with foster care and adoption needs. Additionally, I have worked as a social work practitioner with children and families who have foster care and adoption needs for approximately ten years. While in practice, I have had the opportunity to build relationships with numerous children and parents—biological, foster, and adoptive. I have observed the consequences of abuse, neglect, and disruption. I have also observed joy, comfort, and selflessness. I have observed hard work and dedication as well as perceived short-cuts and short-comings of people, agencies, and systems. It is with these experiences in mind that I felt compelled to address the social challenge of awaiting adoption. These experiences also contribute to a variety of biases. Bias is a necessary ethical concern. I hold many personal biases. I

believe that each child is deserving and worthy of a stable, permanent home and family. I can also be critical about actions and activities—at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels— that undermine or compromise a child's opportunity to achieve permanency. I believe that it is inappropriate to blame a child for the negative events in his or her life as well as the consequences of those events, including behavioral and emotional reactions. I hold a bias that children and parents are insightful and deserve to have their voices heard in an effort to improve the systems that affect their lives. It is possible for biases to lead to judgments that could interfere with an open stance to the research process. Nevertheless, qualitative research does not claim to be value-free. Therefore, it is not essential to eliminate these values and biases, but instead to responsibly acknowledge them and develop and employ plans for self-correction. To address these biases, as well as the likely consequences of positionality, I routinely reflected upon them through journaling and discussion with my research committee—prior to and throughout the research process.

    Bracketing. Bracketing, or the setting aside of one's preconceived notions and ideas about a phenomenon, is an often cited and used practice for reducing bias in phenomenological research. Husserl believes it is possible to completely bracket one's consciousness about a particular phenomenon in order to shut it out from the phenomenological analysis (just as one would separate out or treat separately the contents of the bracket in a mathematical equation) (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger believes bracketing can only be partially achieved. Heidegger asserts that phenomenology is inherently an interpretive process; therefore, it is not possible to completely separate one's pre-understandings of a phenomenon from their interpretations because these pre-

understandings are inherently connected to how the researcher makes sense of the experience. Although it is not possible to ignore one's prior experiences or assumptions, these preconceptions do have the potential to interfere with the interpretation of the experience if the researcher allows his or her preconceptions to guide the analysis. Careful reflection of one's preconceptions is necessary to allow the interpretation to emerge from the phenomenon itself and not from the researcher's pre-understandings.

Dahlberg (2006) introduces a revised concept of bracketing referred to as bridling. Bridling involves the essence of bracketing in that pre-understandings are restrained so they do not interfere with the researcher's ability to remain open; it is an active project that the researcher attends to throughout the research process (Vagle, 2014). Dahlberg et al. (2008) note that bridling is an act in looking forward while bracketing looks backward. My perception of bracketing for this study is more in line with that of Heidegger and Dahlberg. It was essential to bracket or at least acknowledge preconceptions prior to initiating this research study and also before engaging with participants, while conducting interviews, and throughout data analysis. Journaling was an essential component of attending to positionality, bias, and bracketing in this study. I completed journal entries prior to beginning data collection, while recruiting participants, before and after each interview, before and after listening to each interview's recording, and throughout data analysis. In particular, journaling proved to be invaluable in acknowledging biases related to the well-being of children, my own experiences with disruption as a practitioner, and emerging themes and patterns in the data.

Evaluation criteria. Many researchers and authors agree that using criteria of rigor inherent to quantitative research is not appropriate for evaluating the quality of

qualitative research (Emden & Sandelowski, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2011; Yardley, 2000). However, there is also no final or single answer about what constitutes good qualitative research; a plethora of practices and perspectives exist (Emden & Sandelowski, 1998). McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) contend that interpretive researchers benefit from establishing his or her own foundations for rigor versus being pressured into using positivist criteria or positivist language to describe evaluation criteria in interpretive work. Yardley's (2000) four broad principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research were applied to this study. Yardley's four principles include sensitivity to context; commitment and rigor; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance. Each principle is discussed in terms of its relevance to this study.

Sensitivity to context. According to Yardley (2000), sensitivity to context involves demonstrating sensitivity to a host of contextual factors. Some of these factors include awareness of relevant theoretical and philosophical considerations prior to beginning the project, the socio-cultural setting of the research as well as the researcher's positionality, the relationship and interactions between the researcher and the participant, and the researcher's own behavior—including role and influence of power. Smith et al. (2009) add that quality IPA research can also demonstrate sensitivity to context by demonstrating sensitivity to the data itself—by including numerous verbatim extracts and cautiously offering general claims. Smith et al. also note that sensitivity to context can be demonstrated through an awareness of the existing literature—substantively (to the topic itself) or theoretically (to the underpinnings of the research method). I gave consideration to method and methodology for this study based upon the theoretical and

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philosophical underpinnings of qualitative methods, hermeneutic phenomenology, and IPA. I recruited a purposive sample of pre-adoptive foster parents who shared the experience of a pre-adoptive placement disruption, keeping in mind that socio-cultural experiences and attributes may differ significantly from parent to parent and from my own. Numerous direct quotations are presented as evidence for the essential experiences and themes that emerged from the data and the meanings participants attribute to living through the phenomenon. I reflected on positionality and bias in preparation for this study and continued that reflection throughout the project. I used skills foundational to social work practice in order build rapport with gatekeepers and participants and to demonstrate respect for the dignity and worth of each person who assisted in the creation of this study. I was mindful of power relations throughout the research process and demonstrated respect for the time, energy, effort, and expertise of all stakeholders and participants.

In some qualitative studies, member-checking is used to demonstrate value for the participant's expertise and empower participants by asking for input and feedback regarding the researcher's interpretations of their experience. Despite these potential benefits of member-checking, I did not employ member-checking in this study. McConnell-Henry et al. (2009) remind readers that Heideggerian phenomenology aims to understand shared meanings and is not concerned with generalizing findings or predicting outcomes. Although others have advocated the use of member-checking as a step toward validation, there is no directive in interpretive research to prove or generalize; therefore the idea of validation is illogical to the research (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Additionally, time, space, and context are critical to the researcher's understanding of the

participant's experience which is shared through language (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Much like a second or follow-up interview could produce a new interpretation of the experience, so could member-checking, potentially leaving the researcher as well as the participant confused. Instead of member-checking, McConnell-Henry et al. advocate for the use of a number of strategies for successful phenomenological interviewing including asking questions for clarification throughout the interview process, which can aid in a shared understanding between the researcher and the participant. McConnell-Henry et al. encourage researchers to seek the participant's inner voice or the meaning behind their words and invest time into the data collection process (allocating sufficient time to the interview to allow the participant to share). McConnell-Henry et al. also advocate for the use of probing, paraphrasing, asking open-ended questions, and overcoming a fear of silence. I employed these strategies in order build rapport with the participants and to become immersed in the co-construction of the data through a single interview. Many of these strategies mirror generalist social work practice skills such as seeking clarification, advanced reflecting, summarizing, and allowing silence as discussed by Chang, Scott, and Decker (2012). I was comfortable employing these skills with the research participants, they were effective, and only one interview was needed per person/couple. The only follow-up that was needed from participants was related to demographic and background information, such as the year the foster parent became licensed.

Commitment and rigor. Yardley (2000) suggests that the principle of commitment and rigor is fairly straightforward and responds to usual expectations for thoroughness in data collection, analysis, and reporting. She notes that commitment

refers to prolonged engagement with the topic, the development of competence in the methods, and immersion in the data. According to Yardley, rigor refers to the completeness of the interpretation, which should address the complexity of the data through multiple levels of analysis. Yardley (2000) notes that for a phenomenological analysis, commitment and rigor may be demonstrated by the use of "prolonged contemplative and empathetic exploration of the topic together with sophisticated theorizing" in order to avoid generic or primarily descriptive understandings of the experience (p. 222). To adhere to the principle of commitment and rigor, I engaged in data collection and analysis over a prolonged period of time and continued to develop competence in the methods by reading phenomenological materials, engaging in discourse with phenomenological methodologists and other research experts, and participating in trainings and educational opportunities regarding phenomenology, qualitative methods, and permanency research.

   Transparency and coherence. Transparency and coherence refer to the clarity and influence of the research product (Yardley, 2000). This principle is part of producing value and developing a reality that is meaningful to the readers of the research (Yardley, 2000). In this study, I demonstrated transparency by detailing and disclosing each step in the research process, including data collection and analysis. Smith et al. (2009) add that transparency can be supported by describing how participants were selected, how the interview schedule was constructed, how the interviews were conducted, and what steps were used in analysis. Each component of the research process as well as each step in data analysis is detailed in this document. Yardley (2000) adds that part of being transparent involves researcher reflexivity or reflecting on how the researcher's own

assumptions, intentions, and actions can potentially affect the research product. Adherence to this component of transparency was largely achieved through continual journaling and consultation with senior researchers.

Impact and importance. Yardley (2000) argues that the decisive criterion for evaluating any piece of research is its impact and utility. She adds that it is not sufficient to develop a plausible analysis if it does not have influence on the beliefs or actions of others. I felt and continue to feel compelled to engage in research that addresses social challenges that affect a vulnerable and worthy population of children. Therefore, it is critical that the principle of impact and importance be upheld. Being aware of potential theoretical, political, socio-cultural, and practice-related impact aided me in being mindful of value and utility. Research findings will be disseminated through research publications and presentations and shared with the participants and agencies who assisted in the research process.

Ethical Considerations. Prior to initiating this study, I obtained approval from the Indiana University Institutional Review Board (Protocol #1406377852). Glesne (2011) notes that ethics are not something that a researcher can forget or dismiss once university ethics committee demands are met; instead ethical considerations should be inseparable from the everyday interactions with research participants and the data. In addition to being obligated to uphold ethical standards for human subject research by the university and its boards, I am a social worker and thus bound to uphold the core values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of the NASW Code of Ethics. The following ethical standards, as outlined by the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008), were particularly relevant to this study:

Self-determination. I respected the right of potential participants and participants to make self-determined decisions prior to and throughout the research process, including voluntarily electing to participate in any and all components of the research process. Participants had the right to cease participation in the study at any time without consequence, although no participant withdrew from an interview or the study.

Informed consent. I used clear and understandable language to inform potential participants and participants about the purpose of the research, related risks, the right to refuse or withdraw consent, and time frame covered by the consent. I provided potential participants and participants with the opportunity to ask questions prior to and throughout the research process. Lastly, I obtained written informed consent from all participants prior to audio recording participant interviews.

Competence. I represented myself within the boundaries of my education and professional experience.

Cultural competence. I worked to understand and be sensitive to culture and its function in human behavior and society throughout the research process.

Conflicts of interest. There was a possibility that I would know potential participants and participants from child welfare practice experiences. Therefore, the standard of conflicts of interest was of importance to this study. I was alert to any conflicts of interest that could interfere with professional discretion and impartial judgment, although none emerged. I did not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further my interests. Additionally, I did not engage in dual relationships with participants in which there was a risk of exploitation or harm to the participants.

Privacy and confidentiality. I respected potential participants' and participants'

rights to privacy. I protected the confidentiality of all information obtained throughout

the research process. No exceptions to confidentiality (disclosure of abuse of neglect, for

example) emerged in this study. I will dispose of participants' records in a manner that

protects participants' confidentiality following the close of the study. I systematically

created and used pseudonyms for all participants as well as people and agencies named

by participants. These pseudonyms have been and will be used in all disseminations of

this work. All files with any identifying information are password protected and only I

have access to this password.

Access to records. Moving forward, I will provide participants with reasonable

access to their records as necessary.

Acknowledging credit. With special regard for respecting the expertise and

contributions of participants and being true to the data, I honestly acknowledged the work

and contributions of research participants and will continue to do so.

Integrity of the profession. I worked toward the maintenance and promotion of

high standards of research practice throughout this study and upheld the values, ethics,

knowledge, and mission of the profession. Through the dissemination of research

findings, I will contribute time and professional expertise to promote respect for the

profession and contribute to the knowledgebase.

Evaluation and research. The majority of ethical standards outlined in this

ethical standard have already been mentioned and apply to potential participants as well

as participants. These rights include obtaining voluntary consent, informing participants

of the right to withdraw at any time, respecting potential participant's and participant's

right to privacy and confidentiality, avoiding dual relationships, and educating myself about research practices. Additionally, I carefully considered possible consequences associated with engaging in the research process, protected participants from unwarranted physical or mental harm or distress, and ensured participants had access to appropriate supportive services as needed, although no services were requested or observed to be needed in this study. I collected information only for research purposes, reported research findings accurately, and will continue to do so.

Study Components

Sampling. Consistent with the qualitative paradigm and IPA research, I made use of a purposive sample of participants who could provide insight into the experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption. Participants in IPA are selected because they can provide access to the phenomenon; they represent a perspective versus a population (Smith et al., 2009). The sample for this study included 11 pre-adoptive foster parents who experienced a pre-adoptive placement disruption. To meet inclusion criteria for this study, participants had to be/have been a licensed foster parent who fostered a pre-adoptive child or sibling group with an openness, willingness, or intent to adopt the child or sibling group; however, the pre-adoptive placement disrupted, did not end in an adoption, and the pre-adoptive child(ren) were moved to an alternative placement.

Participants were recruited from three local child welfare agencies, one public (Agency A) and two private agencies (Agency B; Agency C) who contract with the public state child welfare agency. Due to my history of child welfare practice and research, I held established relationships with these three agencies and used these relationships to gain access to participants. Therefore, not only was the sample a purposive sample, but it can also be considered a convenience sample. One additional

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private agency which contracts with the state was contacted and demonstrated initial interest in assisting with recruitment efforts. However, communication with this agency broke off after several attempts to connect with the program's evaluation manager. I started the recruitment process by emailing one member of each agency's executive team with details about the study and requesting that individual's voluntary participation in identifying potential participants for the study. An agency recruitment letter (Appendix A) as well as a participant recruitment email (Appendix B) was included in the email to agency executives. The three agencies who agreed to participate were then asked to identify potential participants who met the inclusion criteria and report back to me with the total number of potential participants identified from their respective programs. Once I received totals from the agencies, I placed a corresponding number of participant recruitment letters (plus a few extra in case mistakes were made and/or additional participants were identified) into sealed, self-addressed, stamped envelopes and hand delivered them to agency executives. In an effort to protect the identities of potential participants (agency clients), agency executives were asked to address the envelopes and mail them to the identified foster parents. Agency A targeted two of the state's 18 regions (Region X and Region Y) for recruitment. Both regions have a representative mix of small and large counties and are comprised of both rural and urban areas. The state child welfare manager in Region X requested six recruitment letters for potential participants while the manager in Region Y requested eight. Agency B identified and sent letters to two potential participants. Agency C identified and sent letters to 29 potential participants. Participant recruitment letters requested that potential participants contact me if they were interested in voluntarily participating in the study. If all

identified participants received recruitment letters sent by the agencies, six of 45 foster families responded and expressed interest in the study. Six interviews were scheduled and completed with these participants. In addition to these recruitment efforts, I attempted to contact five foster families who had expressed an interest in participating in a related study in 2013. These five families expressed their interest at a foster parent training in which the topic of pre-adoptive placement disruption was presented to attendees. I succeeded in contacting three of the five families by telephone. These three families expressed their desire to voluntarily participate in the study. Three interviews were scheduled and completed with these participants. Recruitment efforts for the remaining two families ceased after three unsuccessful attempts to connect with these families. Recruitment for the study began in July 2014 and closed in October 2014 and yielded nine interviews with 11 foster parents. Additional information about the sample is presented in the study findings.

Gathering data. Vagle (2014) prefers to use the phrase "data gathering" as opposed to "data collection." Vagle believes data gathering is more representative of a free and open process by which "we could just as easily be taken up by the data than doing the taking" (Vagle, 2014, p. 78). Data were collected or "gathered" through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I developed a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C) based upon existing knowledge of child welfare and permanency practice, a pilot study I conducted in 2012-2013, existing literature, and in consultation with senior researchers and phenomenological methodologists. The interview guide consisted of 15 primary questions and was complemented with probes. Interview questions were designed to investigate and contextualize experiences before, during, and after the pre-

adoptive placement disruption and explore what it was like for the participants to live through the phenomenon. In addition to the primary interview questions and probes, I gathered demographic and background information related to the participant's age and race, length of time as a foster parent, child's age and race, length of the pre-adoptive placement, licensing agency, pre-adoptive training, current fostering status, and if the participant(s) had adopted from the foster care system. Participants were given the option of where the interview would take place, provided the setting would allow us a semi-private, quiet space in which to complete the interview. Six interviews were completed in participants' homes, one in the participants' place of business, and two in a public library. Interviews were recorded with participants' permission using a digital recorder. I also took notes on a paper copy of the interview guide. Interviews ranged in length from 23 minutes to one hour and 50 minutes. The average interview lasted approximately 48 minutes. Two interviews were with married couples. Two of the seven single-person interviews were completed with individuals who were married to one another but elected to complete separate interviews. Data were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist; considerations for privacy protection were upheld when communicating with the transcriptionist. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and identifying names were replaced with pseudonyms after the transcripts were received from the transcriptionist. Data were gathered from July 2014 to October 2014. In addition to the recorded interviews, handwritten interview notes, memos, and journal entries were completed throughout the study and were used as data in the analysis.

Data analysis. This study used Smith et al.'s (2009) six-step IPA framework for data analysis. I will detail each step in this framework later in the chapter. Components

of Vagle's (2014) post-intentional methodology and philosophy and Van Manen's (1990) six themes for a pedagogical approach to phenomenological research also informed data analysis. Vagle provides five components for conducting post-structural phenomenological research: 1) Identify a phenomenon it its multiple, partial, and varied contexts; 2) Devise a clear, yet flexible process for gathering data appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation; 3) Make a post-reflexion plan; 4) Read and write your way through your data in a systematic, responsive manner; and 5) Craft a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts (Vagle, 2014, p. 121). I used each of these components. A research journal served as my post-reflexion plan. In addition to these components, I was mindful of Vagle's attention to "through-ness." Crafting the research in this way permitted me to embrace the phenomenon as social versus individual and recognize meanings as they were lived out by participants (Vagle, 2014).

Van Manen invites researchers to: 1) Turn to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world; 2) Investigate experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; 3) Reflect on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon; 4) Describe the phenomenon through the art of writing and re-writing; 5) Maintain a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and 6) Balance the research context by considering parts and whole (Van Manen, 1990, p. 34). I embodied these six themes in this research.

Smith et al., Vagle, and Van Manen reject an overly prescriptive approach to phenomenological inquiry and celebrate flexibility and augmentations in the frameworks, components, processes, and themes they describe for research and analysis. The three

approaches are very similar and complement one another. With this spirit of inquiry and analysis in mind, Smith et al.'s six-step framework provided order for data analysis and Vagle and Van Manen's work provided additional inspiration. Smith et al. note that for novice IPA researchers, working closely with their six steps can provide a sense of manageability. As the researcher's level of comfort with this type of analysis grows, researchers can make adaptations where they feel they are appropriate and where the data require it.

Data analysis was approached from a whole-part-whole orientation, which is advocated by many prominent phenomenologists, especially those concerned with hermeneutics. The whole-part-whole orientation to analysis is concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole on a variety of levels: "to understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). All of the data together can be thought of as one "whole" while each interview can be thought of as a "part." Additionally, one transcript can be thought of as a "whole" while a particular sentence or collection of sentences within that transcript can be thought of as a "part." Data analysis in IPA research should be iterative, moving back and forth between the whole and the parts. This movement can help the researcher think about the data in a variety of ways and helps to avoid checking off steps one after another (Smith et al., 2009). Throughout data analysis, I was committed to the whole-part-whole approach.

Step 1: reading and re-reading. The first step in data analysis as outlined by Smith et al. (2009) is to become immersed in the data. Reading and re-reading, listening to the recording and imagining it taking place again, and recording striking and initial

observations are efforts toward this type of immersion. I took many sub-steps to complete the reading and re-reading step for analysis. The first step toward immersion was to review the pre-interview journal entry. Next, I reviewed the post-interview journal entry as well as the handwritten notes taken during the interview. After reviewing these documents and in preparation for listening to the interview recording, I completed a new journal entry, jotting down what stood out from entries and handwritten notes. Next, I listened to the interview recording in its entirety. While listening, I visualized the interview, reimagining the setting, listening for inflections and changes in the participant's tone, noting particular emotions or emphases expressed or emoted by the participant. This sub-step was extremely valuable to the reading and re-reading step. It helped to bring the transcript to life and contextualize the interview. After listening to the recording, I completed another journal entry, noting what was striking or compelling about the interview. Beyond reading the transcript while listening to the recording, I re-read the transcript two more times. These efforts assisted greatly in becoming immersed in the data.

   Step 2: initial noting. While reading and listening, I made any necessary corrections to the transcript, for example a missed or incorrect word. During each reading of the transcript, I underlined particularly catching words or phrases. During the final re-read, I starred words, phrases, or segments of the transcript that seemed to stand out as interesting and began the initial noting step, the next in Smith et al.'s (2009) framework. Initial notes were made in the margins of the transcript using a new ink color. Initial notes included words and phrases that indicated anything of interest. I largely noted descriptive comments (face value commentary) and conceptual comments

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(including my personal reflections), although some linguistic comments were documented (for example, one participant often shared her ideas by asking rhetorical questions, another commonly said "for example" and proceeded to share a concrete example of what he had just shared, yet another used some metaphors to describe her experience).

Step 3: developing emergent themes. Reading and re-reading and initial noting gave way to the next step in the Smith et al. (2009) framework, developing emergent themes in the transcript. I had to resist the temptation to concretize emergent themes before this step in the analysis. Smith et al. note that the data set will actually grow through the reading/re-reading and initial noting processes and this larger data set will become the focus for this stage of analysis. I used comments from the initial noting step as well as journal entries to "grow" the data set and begin the process of developing themes. Smith et al. note that to develop emergent themes, it is necessary to break the whole of the interview into parts or chunks, a sort of reorganizing of the data. I did this by highlighting particular sections of the transcript which restructured the data in a sense. I then created handwritten thematic memos that represented what seemed to be the emergent themes from the transcript data.

Step 4: searching for connections across emergent themes. The next step in Smith et al.'s (2009) framework involves looking for connections across the emergent themes. When searching for connections across emergent themes, the primary goal is to search for a way to pull together the emergent themes to produce a structure that allows the researcher to identify the most interesting and important aspects of the participant's story (Smith et al., 2009). I worked to engage in this step by drawing upon the initial

notes and the memos of emergent themes. I also re-read the transcript. Following these

sub-steps, I compiled a list of new and revised emergent themes. For interviews with two

participants, I compiled a list of new and revised emergent themes for the couple as well

as each individual. The next step involved combining like themes through abstraction

and in some cases renaming the theme to better represent a cluster of themes. I also used

a compiling technique by constructing electronic files named as the emergent theme

which included relevant transcript extracts. Smith et al. note that this step is not one that

is intended to be prescriptive and researchers must do what works for them. These

techniques worked for this analysis and the product that emerged from this step was a

new list of emergent themes that were particularly connected to the participant's

experience of disruption. I worked to connect these themes by focusing on the

experiential versus purely descriptive aspects of the themes. During this phase of

analysis, I felt a sense of moving away from the actual participant and toward a greater

level of interpretation. Smith et al. note that this experience is not uncommon, although it

can be uncomfortable. Smith et al. contend, however, that the researcher is closely

involved with the lived experiences of the participant—and the resulting analysis is a

product of both the researcher and the participant's collaborative efforts.

   Step 5: moving to the next case. The next step in Smith et al.'s (2009)

framework involves moving to the next participant's transcript and repeating steps one

through four. This requires the researcher to bracket or bridle the emergent ideas from

other transcripts to as great a degree as possible (Smith et al., 2009). Provided the

concept of positionality, one cannot help but be influenced by the previously reviewed

transcripts as those data are now part of the researcher's positionality and relationship to

the phenomenon. Adhering to the steps outlined by Smith et al. helped me to manage the

knowledge gleaned from previously reviewed transcripts in a responsible way and

allowed for new themes to emerge throughout the data analysis process. I repeated the

previously outlined steps for each of the nine interviews. It should be noted that there

was some movement through all of the transcripts prior to reaching step four as I checked

each for accuracy, reviewed journal entries, and listened to each transcript before delving

into initial noting and looking for emergent and connected themes. I acknowledged each

of the transcripts before reaching step four with the first transcript. I believe that moving

through the transcripts to some degree throughout steps one through three aided me in

thinking about the data in new ways and supported the whole-part-whole orientation of

the analysis.

 Step 6: looking for patterns across cases. In the final step of the framework,

Smith et al. encourage researchers to look across the emergent themes from all of the

transcripts. The following questions were helpful in searching for cross case themes:

What connections are there across cases? How does a theme in one case help illuminate

a different case? Which themes are the most potent? (Smith et al., 2009, p. 101). I

initiated this process by laying out the lists of emergent themes in each case and using a

different colored highlighter to identify themes that emerged across cases—a new color

for each cross-case theme or cluster of themes. Some themes need to be re-labeled or

reconfigured, which was a creative task (Smith et al., 2009). I also used the compiling

technique in this step, cutting excerpts representing emergent themes from each transcript

and grouping them together when they emerged across cases. I then physically connected

these compilations to create a cross-case transcript of sorts—documenting multiple

instances where the theme emerged across cases. This sub-step helped to bring parts together as a whole. In this step, the researcher has creative freedom in how to represent the identified patterns across cases. I worked to develop a visual representation of how the themes were connected and were *lived* across participants. During this step of data analysis, I consulted with multiple senior researchers and a phenomenological methodologist to process the emergent cross-case themes and the visual representation of the connected themes. I went back to the data to ensure the themes were truly represented in the data following each consultation. These consultation sessions greatly aided me in "taking it deeper," rethinking interpretations, and restructuring the visual representation of the connected emergent themes across cases. Multiple iterations of this visual representation were constructed throughout this step in the analysis. I was able to refocus the analysis on the experiential elements and meaning making units of the phenomenon as well as identify components of the research that need further exploration through future studies. These were extremely valuable products of this step in the analysis. This step produced an interpretive description of foster parents' pre-adoptive placement disruptions and the elements of "through-ness" that are revealed only by attending to the disruption itself. The findings that emerged from the analysis are rooted in the data. Nevertheless, they are at best "tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts" (Vagle, 2014, p. 121).

Chapter IV. Findings

The findings write-up in IPA research is critical to showing readers what the researcher found through the long, complex process of trying to make sense of what participants shared (Smith et al., 2014). The researcher's analysis of the participants' interpretation of their experience is only effective if the researcher presents the data in a way in which the reader is also able to interpret the experience. Smith et al. contend that the researcher's purpose in the findings section of an IPA write-up is two-fold: 1) The researcher needs to give an account of the data, communicating a sense of what the data are like, and 2) The researcher must offer an interpretation of the data to make a case for what they mean (p. 109). Smith et al. (2014) note that the researcher must be mindful of both the "I" and the "P" in IPA research; the "P" can be thought of as the excerpts from the participants while the researcher's analytic comments create the "I," IPA is a "joint product of researcher and researched" (Smith et al., 2014, p. 110).

Van Manen (1990) and Smith et al. (2009) posit that there is no one particular way to present the data when writing-up phenomenological findings; however, they agree that organizational form is necessary. Findings for this study begin with an introduction to each participant through a contextual profile. Next, I provide an overview of what was found. Finally, I describe the essential elements of the experience using participants' quotations to evidence the findings. I attend to the parts and the whole and use a thematic approach to structure the data.

Contextual Profiles

Prior to detailing the essential elements of the experience, it is important to acknowledge the participants (the parts) whose experiences give meaning to the phenomenon (the whole). In an effort to introduce the reader to each participant, a brief

profile of each is presented. These contextual profiles present participant characteristics

at the time of the interview. The profiles are presented in the order the participants were

interviewed. To protect confidentiality, the participants as well as the people and

agencies they described are identified by a pseudonym. The 11 foster parents who shared

their experiences of pre-adoptive placement disruption are diverse and their disruptions

occurred under varied circumstances. Participants come from a variety of professional

and personal backgrounds and cared for children with different histories and presenting

needs. Their experiences are unique. Yet, each participant experienced significant and

meaningful loss that was transformational in some way. This experience affected not

only the parents, but their families as well. Table 1 and Table 2 present participants'

demographic and background characteristics.

  Tracy. Tracy is a 47-year-old African American woman. She is single and lives

with her children in suburban Central Indiana. Tracy has three biological children and

has adopted four children from the foster care system. At the time of the interview, Tracy

was a foster and pre-adoptive parent and was licensed through a private agency that

contracts with the state child welfare department. Her eldest biological daughter lives on

her own. Tracy began fostering in 1998. She has family members who also foster and

have adopted from the foster care system. In her interview, Tracy shared about her pre-

adoptive placement disruption experience with three young girls, Lindsey, Lydia, and

Layla. The girls are African American. At the time of their placement with Tracy,

Lindsey was seven years old, Lydia was five, and Layla was four. The sisters were

placed with Tracy in 2009 and resided in her home for approximately eight months.

Lindsey, Lydia, and Layla's placement with Tracy disrupted when the state child welfare

department decided that Tracy was caring for too many children to also adopt the girls. During the placement, a new regulation went into effect that calls for special approval from the state child welfare department to foster more than two children at one time. Tracy worked with the agency where she was licensed to be exempt from the new rule; however, the department did not approve the request (an exemption can be denied if the department feels there is not enough space for more children, for example). The three sisters continue to reside in out-of-home care and are not adopted. Tracy has provided respite care for Lindsey since the disruption.

Eric. Eric is a 52-year-old Caucasian man. Eric and his wife, Susan, reside with their children in a rural community in Central Indiana. Eric has 20 years of prior military experience and Susan is a nurse. The couple has adopted three children from foster care. Susan is adopted herself. Eric and Susan became licensed through a private agency that contracts with the state child welfare department in 2004. In his interview, Eric shared about his disruption experience with a pre-adoptive child named Tiffany. Tiffany is Caucasian and was 10 years old when she was placed with Eric and his family in 2006. She was in need of an adoptive home. Tiffany had been sexually abused by her grandfather for multiple years. Her biological parents were aware of the abuse. While she was in foster care, fearing prosecution, her biological parents abandoned her. Tiffany was in foster care for approximately two years when she was diagnosed with childhood diabetes, which requires constant monitoring. Tiffany also managed symptoms of a sexually transmitted disease that she had contracted during the sexual abuse. Tiffany's placement with Eric and Susan lasted approximately six months. The pre-adoptive placement disrupted when Tiffany was admitted to a psychiatric hospital for children. At

that time, Eric and his family realized they were unable to meet Tiffany's needs and resigned their status as her pre-adoptive parents. She did not return to their home. Tiffany now resides in a residential care facility. Eric and Susan visited Tiffany at the residential care facility one time after the disruption. At that time, she gave them a letter apologizing for her behavior and telling them she knew she missed out on her chance to be adopted when the placement disrupted.

     Nancy. Nancy is a 38-year-old Caucasian woman. She is married and has two biological children and two adoptive children with her husband, Kyle. Kyle participated in a separate interview for this study. Nancy and Kyle decided to participate in interviews separately because they felt they had different experiences of the same disruption. Nancy and her family reside in a small town in Southern Indiana. At the time of the interview, Nancy and Kyle no longer held a foster care license as they did not want their family to grow beyond four children. Nancy would like to foster again when her children are grown. Nancy has an extensive work history with children and families in a professional setting. Nancy and Kyle became foster parents in 2005 through the state child welfare department. In her interview, Nancy shared about her pre-adoptive placement disruption experience with Darian. Darian is bi-racial and was 18 months old when he was placed with Nancy and her family in 2010. Darian only spent a number of days in the family's home before the state child welfare department made the decision to place Darian with a relative. Just days later, the department made the decision to remove Darian from this relative placement and place him back into foster care. The department called Nancy to see if she and Kyle were interested in Darian being placed back into their home. Nancy requested time to speak with her husband about the decision. Darian's

disrupted placement days earlier had been very difficult for Nancy and her children. By the time Nancy returned the department's call later that day, she was told Darian had already been placed with an alternative family. Darian was adopted by this new pre-adoptive family.

Kyle. Kyle is a 39-year-old Caucasian man. He is married to Nancy, whose profile is described above. Kyle resides with Nancy, his two biological children, and his two adoptive children in a small town in Southern Indiana. The couple became licensed with a plan to adopt from the foster care system and not "just foster to foster" in Kyle's words. Kyle has experience working with children and families in a professional setting and is pursing graduate studies to further his expertise. At the time of the interview, Kyle and Nancy no longer held a foster care license—Kyle attributes this, at least in part, to the disruption experience he shared in the interview. Like Nancy, Kyle described the experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption with Darian. Kyle did not know Darian was going to be placed with his family until he arrived home from work one day to find the child. In his interview, Kyle expressed some frustration with not having the opportunity to discuss Darian's placement with Nancy before Darian was placed in their home.

Chad. Chad is a 37-year-old Caucasian man. He resides with his wife, Lisa, in their suburban Central Indiana home. The couple participated in the interview together. Chad was married one time prior to his marriage with Lisa. He has no biological children. He is a working professional with a master's degree and has experience in the social sciences. Chad believed he would be a parent someday, but did not think about becoming a parent by way of adoption until he met Lisa. Chad knew early on in their

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relationship that not being open to adoption was a "deal breaker" for Lisa. The couple became licensed through a private agency that contracts with the state child welfare department in 2013. Chad described the experience of awaiting the placement of the couple's first pre-adoptive children as being "paper pregnant". Together, the couple shared of their pre-adoptive placement disruption with siblings, Blake and Carly. Both children are Caucasian. At the time they were placed with Chad and Lisa, Blake was five years old and Carly was four. Blake and Carly were the couple's first placement. Both children had been sexually abused before being placed with Chad and Lisa; however, the children did not disclose the abuse until after their placement. The placement disrupted following significant challenges with Blake's behavior, including his sexual perpetration of Carly. Chad and Lisa requested support to meet Blake's needs and expressed a desire to adopt Carly, should the decision to separate the children be made by the department. Blake and Carly were placed with Chad and Lisa for approximately 10 months. While Chad and Lisa were caring for the children, a team of professionals identified a new pre-adoptive home for Blake and Carly.

Lisa. Lisa is a 36-year-old Caucasian female. She is married to Chad, whose profile is described above. Lisa was married one time prior to her marriage to Chad. She has no children of her own. She has a history of trauma, including four miscarriages with her previous spouse. Lisa knew from a young age that she wanted to adopt children from foster care and shared this desire with Chad early on in their relationship. Lisa is a working professional with a master's degree. She has experience in the social sciences and working with children and families. Lisa and Chad do not know if Blake and Carly have been adopted since they left the couple's home.

Debra. Debra is a 52-year-old Caucasian woman. Deborah is widowed; however, her husband was alive during the pre-adoptive placement disruption she shared about in her interview. Debra became licensed through a private agency that contracts with the state child welfare department in 2004. She has an adult biological son. Debra has adopted one child from foster care and is in the process of adopting another child. She also continues to provide foster care. Although Debra and her husband had two prior experiences of pre-adoptive placement disruption, she chose to talk about the pre-adoptive placement disruptions of two sisters, Bethany and Melissa, who were placed in her home in 2008. Both girls are Caucasian. At the time of the placement, Bethany was nine years old and Melissa was eight. Bethany and Melissa resided with Debra for approximately nine months before the decision was made to place the sisters in an alternative pre-adoptive home. Prior to the placement disruption, Bethany was removed from the home by the police related to physical aggression. At that time, Debra, her husband, and Melissa were interested in the possibility of the sisters being separated so that Melissa could be successfully adopted by Debra and her husband. The decision was made to keep the siblings together and move them both to a new pre-adoptive home. Bethany's placement in this new home disrupted, but Melissa was adopted by the new pre-adoptive family. Following multiple additional disruptions for Bethany and the death of her husband, Debra was approached again about Bethany's placement. She agreed and Bethany continues to reside with Nancy and her children. There is no plan for Bethany to be adopted. Debra and Bethany have very little contact with Melissa.

Leanne. Leanne is a 28-year-old Caucasian woman. Leanne and her husband, Luke, participated in the interview together. Leanne and Luke live in suburban Central

Indiana. The couple has no biological children. They became licensed through a private agency that contracts with the state child welfare department in 2013. Leanne desires to become a parent by way of adoption from foster care. Leanne and Luke shared of their pre-adoptive placement disruption with Felicity. Felicity is Caucasian and was seven-years-old when she was placed with Leanne and Luke. She was the couple's second placement and resided with them for approximately six months. Prior to Felicity's disrupted placement, her externalized behaviors were a challenge for Leanne and Luke. The couple was being asked to make an adoption decision by a specific deadline. Prior to that date arriving, Leanne and Luke were notified that a new pre-adoptive placement had been identified for Felicity and she would be leaving their home.

Luke. Luke is a 29-year-old Caucasian man and is married to Leanne, whose profile is described above. When asked about his motivations to become a pre-adoptive parent, Luke shared his reasoning, "to make my wife happy". Luke runs a local business in Central Indiana with Leanne. Luke and Leanne note that Luke "checked out" of Felicity's placement before it ended. Felicity continues to reside in out-of-home care and is not adopted.

Marcy. Marcy is a 58-year-old Caucasian woman. She is now widowed, although her husband was alive when the pre-adoptive child she spoke of in her interview, Courtney, was placed in their home. Marcy resides with her two adoptive children and one foster child in a small town in Southeastern Indiana. Marcy and her husband became licensed through a private agency which contracts with the state child welfare department in 2002, specifically to adopt their two children. They enjoyed the experience so much that they decided to continue being foster parents for other children.

Courtney was placed with Marcy and her family three times between 2008 and 2013. Marcy's husband passed away between Courtney's second and third placement. Following two pre-adoptive placement disruptions with others families and with the consent of her children, Marcy and Courtney agreed to work toward adoption. Meanwhile, Courtney's already challenging externalized behaviors continued to become more difficult to manage. Marcy found a note in Courtney's backpack before school one morning. The note stated that Courtney was planning to commit suicide in front of a teacher with whom she had an infatuation. Marcy was planning to attend a case conference with Courtney's treatment team that day. Marcy informed the team of the note and the team determined that Courtney needed to be placed in a psychiatric treatment center that day. Courtney continues to reside in residential care. Marcy continues to visit and have contact with Courtney.

Tina. Tina is a 45-year-old Caucasian woman. Tina, her husband, their biological children, two adoptive children, and one pre-adoptive child reside in a rural town in Southeastern Indiana. Tina and her husband became licensed through a private agency that contracts with the state child welfare department in 2004. They began fostering Bryce, a three-year-old Caucasian boy, and his two sisters who were age 18 months and five years old in 2003. In the six months the children were there, the family developed a particular attachment to Bryce and expressed that if he came back into the system without his sisters, they would be interested in his placement. The family knew that because of Bryce's behavioral challenges, the siblings' grandmother was more interested in the placement of Bryce's sisters than she was in Bryce's placement. Between 2003 and 2006, Bryce was placed with Tina and her family three separate times.

Each time he left, he was placed in relative care. Each time he returned, his behavior had deteriorated. Despite challenges, Tina and her family expressed a desire to adopt Bryce. However, the state child welfare department decided to attempt to reunify Bryce with his biological mother. The family decided at that time that if Bryce came back into the system a fourth time, they could not take his placement again—it was just too painful for the family (and for Bryce they believed) to keep experiencing disruptions. The family was not contacted again about Bryce's placement. Bryce continues to reside with biological family—he has bounced between family members and residential care facilities since leaving Tina's home. Bryce resides in the same small town as Tina. She and her husband ran into Bryce one time. He told Tina and her husband that his mother said he was not allowed to talk to them. People in the community sometimes share information they have learned about Bryce with Tina. Tina noted the news is never positive.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics I

Participant	Age	Race	Marital Status	Year Licensed	Agency Type
Tracy	47	African American	Single	1998	Private
Eric	52	Caucasian	Married	2004	Private
Nancy	38	Caucasian	Married	2005	Public
Kyle	39	Caucasian	Married	2005	Public
Chad	37	Caucasian	Married	2013	Private
Lisa	36	Caucasian	Married	2013	Private
Deborah	52	Caucasian	Widowed	2004	Private
Leanne	28	Caucasian	Married	2013	Private
Luke	29	Caucasian	Married	2013	Private
Marcy	58	Caucasian	Widowed	2002	Private
Tina	45	Caucasian	Married	2003	Private

Table 2. Participant Characteristics II

| Participant	Pre-adopt Training	Placement Year	Disruption Year	Placement Length	Ever Adopted
Tracy	Yes	2009	2009	8 months	Yes
Eric	Yes	2007	2008	6 months	Yes
Nancy	Yes	2010	2010	< 1 month	Yes
Kyle	Yes	2010	2010	< 1 month	Yes
Chad	Yes	2013	2013	10 months	No
Lisa	Yes	2013	2013	10 months	No
Deborah	Yes	2008	2008	9 months	Yes
Leanne	No	2013	2013	6 months	No
Luke	No	2013	2013	6 months	No
Marcy	Yes	2008	2013	5 years	Yes
Tina	Yes	2003	2006	3 years	Yes

Overview of the Experience

The essential experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption for foster parents is characterized by "compound loss". Compound loss can be thought of as experiencing multiple losses and the consequences that accompany those multiple losses (Grief Link Forum, 2014). The experience of "compound loss" has two essential parts. One loss of the experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption is that of the child—the child is no longer physically present in the parents' lives. The other loss is that of purpose, a goal-oriented purpose that leads foster parents toward achieving positive outcomes on behalf of children and families. The foster parent's goal-oriented sense of purpose motivates the parent to seek and carryout the placement of children in need. The disruption experience cannot happen without the child's placement. Parts of the "through-ness" of the disruption experience are lived out during the child's placement in the home while the parent(s) work toward desired outcomes. Recall that "through-ness" signifies movement; the meanings people attribute to their experience come into being as the experience is being lived (Vagle, 2014). One particular "through-ness" experience lived by pre-

adoptive parents is that of ambivalence. When the disruption occurs, the "compound loss" of the child and the loss of the purpose occur and foster parents seek attribution for the placement disruption. Some foster parents attribute the disruption to the perpetrators who abused and neglected the pre-adoptive child. Others attribute the disruption to the child welfare system. The lived experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption results in the experience of a broken social contract. The parent's purpose and the goals attached to that purpose are rooted in treating children well and acting in the best interest of children. Participants perceive that when perpetrating parents or the system act in ways that do not treat children well or work against children's best interest, they violate the social contract. Parents who attribute the disruption and resulting broken social contract to the system experience a sense of betrayal and broken promises. Parents who attribute the disruption and resulting broken social contract to the perpetrating parents embody a strong sense of empathy for the child. The disruption and sense of broken social contract have lasting effects for parents. Some parents altered the profile of pre-adoptive children they are willing to foster or adopt in the future. Others decided not to pursue adoption as an outcome. Some parents became stronger advocates. Still others experienced the disruption and broken social contract as a motivating factor for pursuing adoption on behalf of other children. Each of these types of lasting effects support the resolve that is necessary to bring the parents back to their purpose—to achieve desired outcomes on behalf of children, outcomes that are rooted in treating children well and acting in the best interest of children. Figure 1 demonstrates the overview of the pre-adoptive placement disruption experience for foster parents as revealed by this study.

Figure 1. Pre-adoptive Placement Disruption Lived by Foster Parents
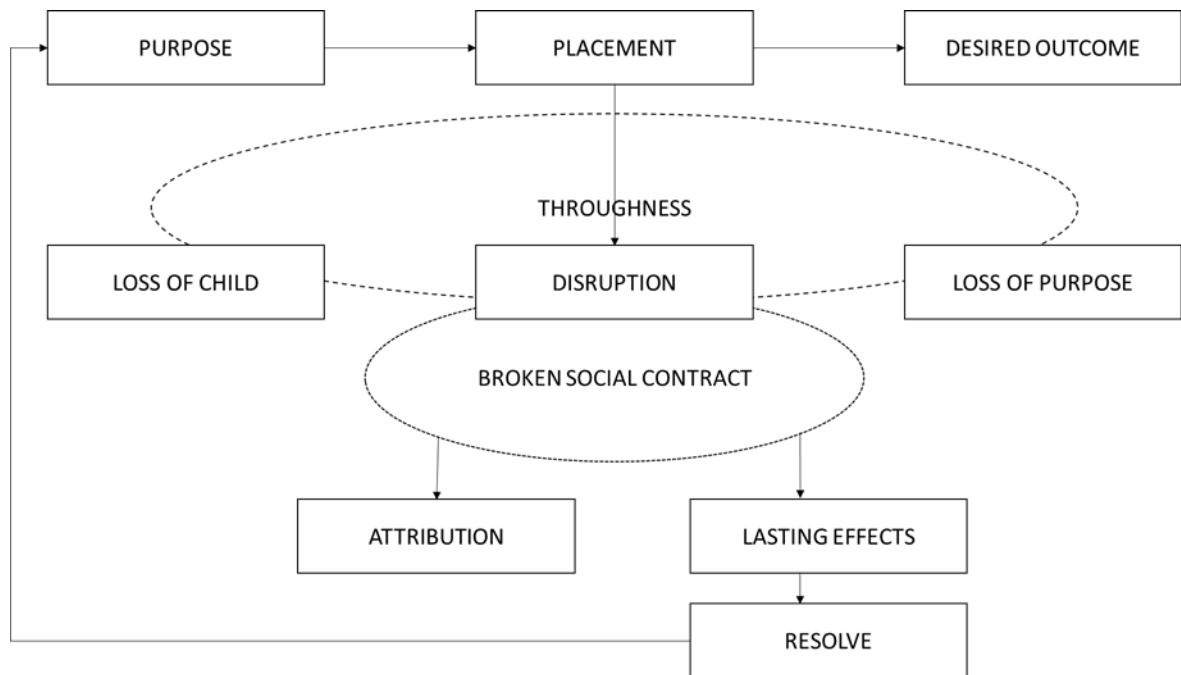
The Experience of Compound Loss

      The loss of the child. The loss of the child is a significant and profound loss characterized by sadness, pain, and grief. Multiple participants likened this experience to the death of a child. Some foster parents expressed an intense fear or anxiety associated with not knowing about the child's well-being after the child left the home. Others shared about the lasting sorrow they feel knowing the child's well-being is in some way compromised as a result of their current placement (i.e., a residential care facility or with a biological parent who is perceived to be unable to meet the child's needs). The loss of the child also means the loss of the child's future and the ways in which parents had imagined that child as part of their lives and the lives of their family members. In pre-adoptive placement disruption, the child physically moves to a new and alternative setting and there is no longer a plan for the parent and child to be together forever. Therefore, the loss of the child finding is not unexpected. Nevertheless, this loss

deserves attention. Recognizing this loss helps to validate the parent's experience of losing the child and recognizes the core social work value of the importance of human relationships. Excerpts from multiple transcripts are presented as evidence for this finding. Tracy shared how she felt when the three pre-adoptive sisters in her home were removed and how the absence of the girls affected her family:

> Sad. Dark. Mad. Angry. Crying. I mean, it was a mess. It was, I mean, my kids – we all just shut down for a while. My kids were like, "Momma, where are they going?" You know – I don't know… It just made us all wonder what was going on with them. What are they doing today? What – we were all just wondering. Are they okay? Will we ever see them again? We had 101 questions within ourselves, my daughter – she had went to work and she made it through the day. She came home and told me, "Mom, I've just been crying for no reason all day." I was like, 'okay, she said it was for no reason', but I know she missed them, she didn't understand it, but she knew we had to send them back and I mean, they're human, they're people. I think you just don't – they have feelings, they have all of it, so, if I was going through it, I can just imagine what they went through.

Nancy shared about trying to put the pieces back together after Darian left and how her children reacted:

> Well, I was devastated, I was really sad. I was sobbing, I was – I think I wasn't as effectively parenting the kids that I had in my home because I was missing him so desperately,…because I was trying to rearrange my life back to what had been before him and even though [he] was there for a very short time, he kinda became this mythos, and the other kids were like "I remember when Darian used to do this…."

Chad described the family's efforts to deal with their loss after the children moved to a new home:

> Yeah, we cleansed the house. We took everything off the walls, we took all the pictures and boxed them up. We took all books, anything – you name it – if it was child-like, it was put up away, out of sight, out of mind so that we could begin the healing process. I don't know if that's the best way to do it, but it's the way we did it. And we told them, we did a two hour window – I think it took us 90 minutes and the second we were done, mom and sis left, and we got the hell outta this house.

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In particular, Lisa grieved the loss of Carly; she spoke of one of her last days with Carly:

> I was holding Carly and she was like "you're my mom, you're my mom, I want you to be my mom! And I was like, ' I know,' and we had this thing where we had matching bird necklaces, except for hers was small and so she was my baby bird and I was the momma bird because that's how she liked to talk about it instead of saying, "Well, my real mom," because she didn't—that was really confusing for her, so momma bird worked and I'm like, 'I'm always gonna be your momma bird, I'll always be thinking of you, I'm always gonna love you'.

Deborah equated her experience of disruption to that of a child's death:

> It's like losing a child, kind-of…Like, you know—they're no longer a part of your life and it's not like you can wake up and see them every day like you did before. I mean, even if a child gets adopted by another foster family, they should let—if the prior ones want to be involved—I think they should let them.

Marcy shared the pain associated with her loss – like losing a child, a lasting pain:

> It hurts. I mean, it hurts when you know you can't do anything. It's almost like losing one of your own children, it really is, and that's just what it felt like – just what I felt like – it was so hard and it was hard for me to pack up her things, it was hard for me to pack up her room up. Because I knew this time it was final…I didn't want it to happen and it just hurt like that, like they were gone and it was like a piece of you is gone. A piece of you is gone.

Living in a small town where Bryce still resides, Tina shared about how difficult it is to learn about his life now and his current challenges, having lost the ability to protect and care for him when he left her home:

> It's hard – it really is! Because any child that's been here we love and we really loved him and we knew we could do more for him and it's just really hard to hear those negative things. I almost wish people wouldn't tell me at all…I don't need to know that he's not doing well. You know, if somebody could come and tell me – you know what, he just graduated high school or he made the honor roll or something – that would be amazing! I would love to hear those things! I don't want him not to succeed – I would have loved for him to succeed wherever he went, but to hear negative things – I'd rather people just keep them to themselves. It's sad and hurtful to know that things aren't going well for him.

As noted, the loss of the child in the pre-adoptive placement disruption experience is profound. It affects not only the parents but their family members as well. The loss of the child is a lasting and painful loss.

  The loss of the purpose. An additional loss within the "compound loss" experience is deeply connected to the participant's sense of purpose and desire to achieve positive outcomes on behalf of this purpose. Foster parents are motivated to provide foster care and adopt from the foster care system based upon a personal mission of sorts. For couples in this study, at least one parent embodied this purpose. One consequence of the loss of purpose is the loss of desired outcomes—something the parent had imagined for themselves, their families, or the pre-adoptive children. The desired outcomes of the purpose include a successful adoption and related goals like giving the child the best possible chance in life and seeing the child develop and grow into a healthy, contributing adult. In some cases, parents had goals of completing or starting a family through adoption. Disruption compromises the ability to enact this purpose and achieve desired outcomes. The parent's purpose, the mission, the desired outcomes are unrealized. This loss can result feelings of guilt, regret, failure, and anger. This loss is intense. The excerpts presented here demonstrate parents' sense of purpose and the goals and outcomes they hoped to achieve by fostering pre-adoptive children. Participants shared about this sense of purpose by describing some of their motivations and expectations for providing pre-adoptive foster care. Lisa described it as a "calling":

> Well, my boss is a nun and we were talking about this maybe my third day
> at work and I was telling her about it and she just looked at me and said,
> "It's your calling, it's that simple, it's your calling," and I thought, 'Wow,
> she just summed it up!' There's a lot of backstory there that we could go
> through, but she's right and as I've gotten older and I've worked with kids
> in youth opportunity center, in housing projects, I know some of those

terrible situations that are out there and I was just called to it, that's the only way to talk about it, I think. It's just one of those things you know you should do. Period.

Chad shared some of the motivating ideas he held about adopting from foster care as a

way to grow his family:

> … I was like, 'Why not? Why can't we,' – there are plenty of kids out there, so why not? I mean, nowadays, you talk about the 20s it would have been weird, nowadays, anything goes nowadays, you define family nowadays, there is no such thing as the nuclear family or a normal (making air quotations) family. …Feeling really adamant that you have something to give and that you really want to.

Tracy discussed her reasoning for becoming a pre-adoptive parent and her overall goal:

> …I'm like, 'really? Is there that many kids out [there]?' and then to actually see them. We had a program where I got to actually see how many kids were out there and that just made me feel like somebody's got to do something, somebody has to help somewhere. And then to see my cousin back then – because it's been years since when I really started thinking about it, that made me really want to push for being an adoptive parent – to try to help somebody….For me, my goal is to help any child that comes through my path and I mean any child – that's my biological kids, my foster kids, my adopted kids.

Nancy discussed some of her motivations to become a foster and adoptive parent:

> In the beginning I thought that I'm going to become a foster parent, I'm going to become an adoptive parent because we're going to take these kids that have homes that really need them, they need to be disrupted from their biological home…– and maybe I'll be able to do something to help, not only them, but then the family of origin.

Lisa was clear about the couple's goal for Blake and Carly's placement:

> *Yes, they were placed with us because we were pre-adoptive. And that was our intent. We're foster parents only to get to the adoption part. That's it, we don't have the intention of fostering, so this was going to be a permanent placement—that's what we wanted, even before we met the kids, that's what we were looking for.*

Kyle described knowing from a young age that he would adopt children. Like Lisa, he

also discussed that his purpose as a foster parent was always to achieve the outcome of

adoption, not to provide on-going or short-term foster care:

> From the time I was little I always knew that there was – we were going to
> have some biological children, not many and then have other children who
> either came into the home and went somewhere else or came into the
> home and stayed. That's kind-of how I was raised, so that's always been
> my path, I've never questioned it. There are different ways I tell different
> people, depending on whom I'm talking to, but that's the real core of it.
>
> There's no child that comes in our home that doesn't have that potential.
> So it's never a question, it was never a foster-to-foster for us. We've
> talked about [it] and both [are] pretty strong about [providing foster care]
> in the future maybe – but with children in the home, it's unfair to –
> especially if – for the children we have in general, with having attachment
> issues – it's unfair to say that this person goes out and then potentially
> back to their birth home, but you can't. And we didn't want to do that to
> any of our children.

Eric shared sentiments similar to Kyle's. He shared how even if a child is coming to their

home for what is expected to be a short-term stay, the family considers life with that child

forever, they always consider the child to be pre-adoptive:

> Well, every kid that comes in our home – whether it's short-term or long-
> term, we consider 'ok, is this someone that we could adopt?' and we've
> had numerous kids come to our home with the intentions that the long-
> term goal is adoption. We've had kids come into our home that, ok, the
> long-term goal is to go home, but if long-term fails, would you consider,
> and we consider all kids.

When asked about some of her motivations for becoming a pre-adoptive foster parent,

Leanne stated:

> Giving a child a home, that security, stability.

While Debra was discussing her desire to adopt a child in need of permanency recently,

an acquaintance said to her "what are you going to do with a child for the rest of your

life?" Debra was genuinely perplexed by this question, and for Debra, the response was

simple. She did not question what she would do, she just planned to do it, because it was part of her purpose. In response, Debra shared:

> *What else would I do? What else is there?*

These data demonstrate that the parent's sense of purpose gives them direction for the caregiving efforts they embark upon and engage in on behalf of children and families— including their own family. In many ways, this sense of purpose is central to who the parents are, how they view and experience the world, and what they want out of the lives they lead.

The Broken Social Contract

In an effort to support their sense of purpose and achieve the goals that support this purpose, parents enter into a social contact—one that is aligned with their purpose and goals as pre-adoptive parents, one that pledges to treat children well, act in the best interest of children, and support those who care for children in need. Parents view the child welfare system, professionals, and other parents as active participants in this social contract and they believe or at least hope that these players share their sense of purpose. To act outside of this contract in ways that do not treat children well, do not act in children's best interest, or do not support the parents who care for them is to violate the contract. Pre-adoptive placement disruption represents a broken social contract. Participants' beliefs and expectations about how social actors (including child welfare professionals and other parents) are supposed to respond to children in need were inconsistent with their lived experiences. Excerpts from multiple participant transcripts below provide evidence for what is like to experience the broken social contract. Luke expressed the disappointment he felt when he and Leanne did not receive the support he believed they needed in order to successfully adopt Felicity:

It was hard because I knew Leanne really wanted to do this and at the
time, in the beginning I did, too, I loved Felicity – my whole family did,
she was a great little girl for the most part. But, once we didn't get the
help [that we needed] and [the agency] kept saying [this is] the best
therapist we have [for Felicity]…nothing was happening, and to me, we
can't – it sounds horrible – but we can't sign away the rest of our lives
without the help that little girl needs. We couldn't do her any good at that
point. I actually approached Leanne with that – we wanted to adopt her to
change her life and how would we change her life without the help?

Chad discussed how being the best advocate he could be resulted in the parents getting

"burned" and resulted in a lack of trust toward the system:

I'm going to second guess myself and whether or not I should share
something with [the state child welfare department] because I'm going to
be worried about how they might interpret that because this last
experience to me has told me that you only get one chance and if you
instill any doubt within your case worker, it's over. If they start to doubt
you, you're done. And I have enough confidence in my own background
and in my wife's background that I feel confident in making that decision
and the sad part is, I shouldn't have to make that decision. I should feel
comfortable with sharing one hundred percent of everything and not worry
about the interpretation because you want to be the best advocate you can
be and you should be able to share everything, but the experience tells you
that if you do, there's a good chance that you could get burned.

Lisa also commented on being an advocate for children and how the experience has

changed her idea of serving in the advocate role as a pre-adoptive parent. Her experience

with being an advocate did not live up her expectations, based upon how the system

reacted to her efforts:

…your job is to be the advocate, you are the advocate, you are the
advocate. I took that seriously. And really? The system doesn't want you
to be the advocate. They want you to follow and that's so unfortunate and
I find myself more attracted to advocacy efforts, too, because I mean, this
is ridiculous that here we have a home, we have two kids that could have
made it here and we would have done them well. The system is broken,
completely at so many levels and you know, as much of a control freak as
I already am and I don't ask for help often – I feel like the next time, it's
like, well if I'm having a problem I better just figure it out.

Lisa also shared how the experience was like a betrayal:

We didn't know that they were looking for another placement until a month before the kids left. We thought they were still trying to help us. It was not communicated to us that they were definitely looking for someone else. Because when they said, "well, maybe we need to start looking for a new family," I was like, 'Tell me what to do! I'll try it, we'll do it!' The kids went and spent the night someplace and that family didn't want them and we were still saying, 'Tell us what we can do! Help us! We need help with Blake!' and there was just no support at all and when [the state child welfare department case worker] called me, I was driving home – I was actually going to pick up the kids and she was like, "We found a family, we're picking them up on December 13, you have two weeks." And I said, 'Excuse me?' And she said, "Well, we just think it's best."

Nancy provided her thoughts on the message that is sent to children and families when the social contract is broken and a pre-adoptive placement disruption occurs:

…a lot of this is we are dealing with the very psyche and core of people – attachments to people, and we're telling them that everything about your life is uncertain and where you're going to be is uncertain and that something about you or this family is not ok and when it's a disruption, it means that there's already been that removal from the biological family and so it's just that every time it happens that it's a reinforcement of 'this world is not stable and it's not ok' and so we're not transitioning it in a way that makes it ok, [a way] that allows people to stay connected and maintain that fullness because I think that every time we move in that way, it chips away a piece.

Debra expressed similar thoughts about how children can be harmed by pre-adoptive placement disruption:

I just feel that there should be more than removing the child and sending them to another environment. I think that that just makes the child think, 'nobody wants me.' It gives them a sense of insecurity….That the child says, "Where is my future gonna be?"…And that they just get tossed around and tossed around and that's not something that should happen to a child.

Kyle's perspective on the broken social contract echoed the thoughts of Nancy and Debra:

Darian came in and they handled that so poorly – by considering him an object really, just a suitcase – so you just pack it and put it in and it's fine. Humans shouldn't be treated that way…You don't do that to a family or to children. That's not a way to treat anyone and not only is it unfair to just think that you can pull a child from here to there and they'll be ok

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regardless of why or what – unless they're being harmed. It's just not ok. There's no way in which a person should have to put up with that kind of treatment…

Tracy expressed her reaction to the department's decision that she could not adopt the children when the children wanted to say with her. She discussed what that experience meant for her:

> When they said no, I'm thinking to myself, 'Well, why did you have them here? Just to upset me?' And [the department] did almost make me say forget this foster bit because I can't handle being separated and being able just to imagine that they're being separated again and having to go through it. It's like 'why do you do this to kids?' And you never understand it – I'm like, these girls are being bounced around! Somebody has to do something! (crying) It's like you get them comfortable, you get them to open up to you, you get them to the point where they're at least showing you something rather than being closed up. They're being sheltered within themselves and you finally get them to open up and then all of a sudden, they have to go through it again! That's not fair to kids!! That makes me feel like my job is just worthless and it made me want to give up!
>
> It made me feel like I wasn't being used like I wanted to be used – to help a child. I mean, it made me feel like I can't do it. It made me feel like, 'Tracy, you're just wasting your time. Tracy, you're just there.'…What did it mean for me? Not to be able to adopt them? I really don't know – I don't know how – it meant a let-down. It meant in vain work. It meant that I didn't meet my goal of helping those kids.

The experience had similar "work in vain" features for Nancy—she felt that the acknowledgment of the people involved in the disruption was missing:

> I wanted to have acknowledgement that there is something there, that there is a relationship and that you would have a vested interest in this child's future, that you could know that this is somebody who is important to me and even if I can't help them by being their parent, I can help them by being a person in their life – that I could write part of their story, if nothing else, or sit down with them and help write their story because then you have this moving system that creates a person instead of a trading card.

These data demonstrate the anguish and treachery participants experienced when their sense of purpose was compromised by the broken social contract, by the inability or

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unwillingness of the other players to act in ways that treat children well, act in their best

interest, and support the parents who care for them.

Attribution

When the placement disrupted, parents attributed the disruption to either the child

welfare system or the children's perpetrators. Transgressions by the system or the

perpetrators resulted in disruption; the system failed or the perpetrator's abuse or neglect

resulted in insurmountable trauma that the parents could just not work through with the

pre-adoptive child. Although pre-adoptive parents did not directly attribute the disruption

to themselves or their families, some did express guilt and self-doubt related to not being

able to meet the child's permanency need. Excerpts from multiple transcripts

demonstrate this finding of pre-adoptive placement disruption attribution. Quotations

associated with attributing the disruption to the system are presented first, followed by

the perpetrators, and finally evidence of guilt and self-doubt.

The system. Many participants attributed their experience of disruption to the

child welfare system. These participants experienced a break in the social contract they

believed they held with the system. Parents often times felt unsupported and even

undermined in their efforts to contribute to and play their part in upholding the social

contract as foster and pre-adoptive parents on behalf of children and families. They felt

underprepared and pressured to make adoption decisions. In response to a question

regarding what if anything could have changed the outcome of Darian's placement, Kyle

shared his perspective on how the system compromised Kyle's ability meet Darian's

needs:

> If [the state child welfare department] would have done what the
> regulations and guidelines state that they should have done. And what's in
> the best interest of the child. Not necessarily saying we're the best

adoptive placement, but then we would have had a chance to do whatever was supportive of him instead of I don't know what happened to him.

Kyle added thoughts about system failures:

> I have had other people tell me why they decided to foster and not to adopt or to adopt and not foster, or however it goes. But in the end, except for people who do it for selfish reasons, which is rare, the whole goal is that the children have a positive experience and if they're going to be reunited, that everyone's able to be reunited as a whole and as a family, not as parts put together, but as a family. There wasn't and isn't that support from [the state child welfare department] at this point nor at that point, so if the goal is to create healthy families which I think is one of the stated essential core rules, that wasn't and isn't happening currently.

Tracy expressed her frustration associated with not receiving enough information or support:

> I just feel like [the state child welfare department] should give us more information, they should try to help us more. They basically throw you in and you have to figure it out and even the kids have to figure out 'who am I going to?' They don't pre-warn the kids. They're scared to death as it is, they're in the system. So it's like they lose – they're losing either way. We've gotta find some kind of way to help kids…. Giving some background on why they were moving, giving background on their parents….They don't do their homework – they don't investigate these kids like I think they should. And I know there's more kids out here than case managers, case workers, and everything else and it's overloading, but I think we need to find something. We need to find something so that we can help these kids.

Debra shared similar thoughts about feeling underprepared. She was not given a key

piece of information that she felt was critical to Bethany's pre-adoptive placement.

Ultimately, it affected Debra not having the opportunity to adopt Melissa:

> And I wasn't told beforehand that that was what [Bethany] would do – was disrupt [the] placement when she knew it was getting close to adoption and so therefore, we weren't warned about it. If we had, we could have been more prepared - and then when they decided, no, they didn't want to separate them, they moved them onto another pre-adoptive home to where [Bethany] did the same thing – disrupted the placement and then they decided to separate them and [Melissa] got adopted.

In most cases in Indiana, pre-adoptive parents can petition the court to adopt a child after the child has been in their care for six months. Therefore, many agencies encourage or ask parents to make an adoption decision within six months of the child's placement so that the court can be petitioned as soon as possible. Although these timelines exist to expedite permanency, six months may not be enough time for some parents to be ready to commit to adopting the children. Pre-adoptive parents or children may feel additional time for bonding or treatment is necessary before the adoption decision is made, for example. In her interview, Debra revealed that she began to feel real pressure to make an adoption decision at the sixth month mark of Bethany and Melissa's placement. Luke and Leanne also felt pressure to make an adoption decision too quickly. Luke expressed:

> …when you're seeing what we were seeing, and you're telling us that we have this deadline – we have to have a decision made by January and you're not helping us…

And Leanne added:

> I think they saw that we were eager to adopt her, so they were trying to get her through, trying to get it done before there was another disruption. Instead of helping the girl, they rushed it. They gave us a deadline of, "well, you must make up your mind by January 1."

Leanne also shared:

> I thought that there was hope and that we were building a strong foundation, but she just needed 1,000 times more than what the case workers were willing to give her.

In the current child welfare system, except in extreme cases, the most favorable permanency outcome is for the child to be safely reunified with the family of origin. Therefore, the system often prioritizes efforts related to supporting the reunification of children with their biological family. Tina expressed her thoughts on the system's protection of biological parents' rights versus acting in the best interest of the child:

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I believe that [the department] should have quit – I don't think that [the department] always had his best interests in mind. I think [the department] [was] giving the parent rights. I hear so much about parent rights when kids are taken out of the home and I think she had the right is what I'd hear. [Bryce's mother] has the right to have him with family if she wants, or she has the right – so it was always parent's rights instead of what was in the best interests of Bryce….I feel like too many times we're looking at the parents' rights versus what's in the best interest of the child. I've seen that over and over. I've done foster care for ten years and over and over I see, I hear parents have rights, parents have rights – well, I think that they should lose some of those rights when they lose the child. When they've hurt their child, when they've neglected their child, they should lose some of those rights and I think far too often a parent has rights that they shouldn't have. We should look more in the interest of the child. I mean, one of the rules – I don't know how many laws and rules you know, but a parent is given a visit within 48 hours of an emergency removal. Even if they've beaten that child 48 hours earlier, that child is subject to go and seeing their parent. How is that in the best interest of that child? It doesn't say we're doing this because it's in the best interest of the child, we're doing it because it's a parents' right to see their child and that's just an example. There are many things that happen along the way that I think if we said is that in the best interest of the child versus that's the parents' right that we would find that it's not always in the best interest of the child. You know, I think there should be guidelines and rules, but I think that we should look at those with the idea is that in that child's best interest? And you may have a sibling group of three and it being the best interest for one of the children, but not the other two. Or you know, vice versa – I mean, it could be, I think they need to look more at individual cases instead of this is the rule so we have to follow this rule because that's the rules, that's the laws or that's the guidelines, you know – we have to follow them – I don't always think that's in the best interest of the child and I think that the system is flawed because we give the rights to the parents versus what's in the best interest of the child always.

Tracy also shared her thoughts on acting in the best interest of the child. She believes that the state child welfare department should have listened to the girls' voices telling the department that they wanted to remain in her home:

And it's just – if a child can tell you, I don't care how old they are – there's something there that they need that they're not getting somewhere else. Not to say that another home isn't perfect for them, but sometimes you have to realize you have to try to meet the needs of the kids – it's not about what [the state child welfare department] wants. It's the kids we should be concerned about and I know [the state child welfare department] tries to keep it in the best interests of the child, but when you have a child

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that's telling you "I want to stay here," showing you I want to stay here – that within itself should speak for itself, I think.

The perpetrators. Eric and Marcy are two participants whose pre-adoptive placement disruption ended when the pre-adoptive children in their care entered a psychiatric treatment facility. The parents believe they tried all that they could to meet the needs of the children in their care; however, the trauma the children endured prior to placement in their homes was too much for the parents and children to overcome together in order for a successful adoption to occur. Eric and Marcy embodied an understanding of Tiffany and Courtney's trauma respectively and demonstrated empathy.

Eric spoke of the consequences of Tiffany's abuse and neglect, which were ultimately catalysts for his disruption experience:

> Here's what should have been a normal kid, most of her undoing was at the hands of people that should have been caring for her the most. And that's why I say she was mad at the world and everybody in it. So, when you take a child – and they estimate the sexual abuse started at age 3 or 4 and lasted until she went into foster care at approximately 8 years old, so she was aware of what was going on – it's not like it had happened once or twice, it was an ongoing abuse. So, you put that on top [of being] abandoned by her parents, then I think at approximately age 9, you're diagnosed with childhood diabetes…that's why I said she was mad at the world and everybody in it. So, a very hard kid to love, but she had a lot of love to give, but it was on her terms and sometimes her terms weren't convenient or safe for anybody else around.

Marcy shared similar thoughts:

> [Courtney] has no conscience, no remorse, but it's not her fault and that's what people see – they see Courtney and they're like, 'how can you stand that kid?' and everything and I say, 'you have to remember, she did not do this to herself – her environment did this to her. It's not her fault!' and that's what people don't understand at all. It's not her fault! She was a little kid – she's a victim and they don't see that a lot….I always tell people that fostering is the hardest job you'll ever love. And it is and there are not enough foster parents and they need foster parents badly and when I talk to people, they'll say, "I couldn't do this, I couldn't do this" because they see what I go through with my kids, but they don't understand these

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kids – they see the behaviors, but they don't know where these kids have been, they don't know what it's like and you just have to really put yourself in these kids' shoes! You know – what is the reason? If you knew this child is used to being hungry, this child is used to being hurt.

The self. Although Eric and Marcy recognize they are not to blame for the disruptions, and they ultimately attributed the disruption to the perpetrators, they still struggled with some guilt and self-doubt. Eric shared:

Well, sometimes we wondered if we failed her, did we not do our part, were we not flexible enough, were our expectations too high, because regardless of what their background is, what their medical needs are, we still treat every kid that comes into our home like a regular kid.

Marcy talked about the fear of adding to Courtney's trauma by not being able to adopt her:

…she thinks there's something wrong with her – she's inferior – what's wrong with me? Why can't people love me? Why don't they wanna keep me? I mean, three failed adoptions, you know? What child wouldn't? And I feel like I contributed to that. I feel like I'm one of those rotten people that didn't follow through on what I said I would do.

Leanne, who attributes her experience of disruption to the child welfare system, also experienced feelings of guilt. She wonders what she could have done differently, and she has lasting regret:

…I just wish we would have done more for her…. It sucks. I wish I could go back and I wish we would have gone to [the case worker's] supervisor more. The case workers, the supervisor and I wish that we would have found our own therapist, could we afford it – no, but I wish that we would have. Would it have helped? I don't know, but I'd feel better about myself if we wouldn't have gave up so easily…. it was hard – I still – I'll regret it every day for the rest of my life…

Long-term Effects

The consequences of pre-adoptive placement disruption have long-lasting effects. Each interview for this study revealed some sort of consequence that emerged as a result of living through the experience. Some parents reported that they changed the profile of

the child or children they would consider fostering or adopting in the future. Overall, these profile changes resulted in a lower likelihood that parents would foster or adopt children who have been sexually abused, exhibit externalized behaviors, are male children, are sibling groups, and are older children. These are many of characteristics of children who await adoption longest and are more likely to experience pre-adoptive placement disruption. Implications for this finding will be discussed further in the next chapter. In one case, the pre-adoptive placement and the disruption resulted in the parents determining that they definitely wanted to become adoptive parents. The parents put energy toward adoption in a new way following their disruption experience. In another case, the parent decided that she could not and should not plan to adopt from the foster care system. Her experience rendered her unwilling to potentially experience disruption again in the future. Ultimately, her experience of disruption reduced the pool of available adoptive parents on behalf of waiting kids. Other parents became stronger advocates on behalf of children and families. The following quotations provide evidence of some of these long-term effects. Chad and Lisa shared some of the consequences of their pre-adoptive placement disruption experience:

> Chad: We decided that we needed to take a break and that we would maintain our license. At first, we weren't sure what we were going to do. We worked some of that out in therapy.

> Lisa: Yeah.

> Chad: She wasn't quite sure – Lisa wasn't quite sure whether or not I would wanna go down that road again and we, of course, originally had said anywhere from two years old to probably six years old, a sibling group preferably a boy and a girl or two girls because Lisa really wants a girl and I'm like, 'eh, whatever!' I'm happy with whatever – I don't care, boy, girl, whatever. Now that I've had the experience, I think I'd much rather have a girl.

Lisa: It's hard.

Chad: And that's changed now. It's now a single child only.

Luke shared about how their disruption experience changed their perspective and approach to pre-adoptive and foster care. The couple felt they could possibly be better supported by a different agency. They also felt they may have greater success with children with different characteristics:

> …we are withdrawing from our current agency [to] go straight through [the state child welfare department]. We went through an agency to begin with because we were always told [the department] is impossible to work with. Well, once we learned that agencies are impossible to work with, why not go straight to the source? And we have actually put in for pre-adoption of an infant up to two, preferably. That way – in our mind – and this could be wrong because Felicity was pretty messed up – in our mind if we had Felicity from day one maybe we could have made a difference. And then part of us thinks genetically maybe there was no way to make a difference, but that's kinda how it affected us – we've had teenagers and stuff, too, and a lot of it just hasn't gone well.

Eric shared how the experience did not change their status as pre-adoptive foster parents, but did change their "outlook:"

> It hasn't changed our status, but it has changed our outlook. We no longer feel that love can fix everything. A lot of the kids in the foster care system are searching for love and somebody to treat them like a normal kid. Now we kinda have to look at it like well, love can't fix everything, so it was a big eye-opener. When it comes to other kids, we have become a little more selective about the backgrounds of kids that we allow in our homes because we do have other kids in the home now. So, we have to be extremely aware of their background and when they call us about a placement – whether it's for respite or short-term, long-term care, what's the background history that we need to be aware of before we can make a decision?

Marcy's disruption experience resulted in her changing her status as a pre-adoptive foster parent. She continues to foster, but she will not adopt from foster care after her Courtney's disruption:

I won't adopt anymore… I think my future holds fostering and like I said, maybe guardianship for Courtney or something, but as far as adopting – no… I feel like I let Courtney down, but in my heart, I know I didn't – I did everything that I could, but I will always be here for her. She will always be part of our family, she will always be a part of our life and, but it also means that I realize I can't adopt another child. I can't talk to another child about adoption because I'm afraid the same thing would happen that happened to Courtney and I just feel like I could not do that to another child.

Prior to Bryce's placement, Tina and her family were not opposed to adoption, but they had only planned on being a foster family. Bryce's need for permanency was the first time they considered adopting a child from foster care. The family's experience with Bryce was ultimately a catalyst for adopting from foster care in the future:

He was probably the point where we said, 'you know what, adoption is not out of the question'. I think whether we said the words or not, we knew that at that point it wasn't out of the question – that me and my husband were both open to [adoption] happening, so I think he was probably the point when [wanting to adopt] did happen.

As a result of their disruption experience, Chad has become more of an advocate for himself and his wife as pre-adoptive foster parents. He is hopeful that by advocating for their needs, they may avoid another disruption in the future:

This time, I'm adamant there will be no sight unseen adoption kids coming into the house. It will be – there will be a Saturday or a Friday where we go spend a few hours with them or they come over and then they will go home or wherever they go and then they will do an overnight and then they will go home or wherever they go and then they will do a whole weekend and then they will go home or wherever they go and then [the state child welfare department] worker is going to leave because I know the drill – [the state child welfare department] worker is going to say, "So, what's your decision?" The decision is – you leave. And my wife and I are going to have a private conversation and sometime this week, we're going to call you on whether or not they're going to come back to stay next weekend and if at any time any of that is not ok with them, then the answer is no….For me, the experience of this adoption placement and the disruption means I will do things a whole lot differently the next time.

Nancy shared her thoughts on advocacy after her disruption experience:

> It changed the dynamic that I had – like I said, I already had good
> experiences with the biological parents, but it made me more want to be
> on this level on where it was almost like the biological parent and I against
> [the state child welfare department]… so it made me become a stronger
> advocate where I would start documenting my own lists of things, I would
> try to get as many records as I could, I would talk to the biological
> relatives… I was just—it's a really messed up system.

Tina described how their disruption experience changed how they support their extended

family members who are also part of the foster and pre-adoptive experience:

> I think Bryce's placement was probably one of them where me and my
> husband became more aware of how a foster child, whether pre-adoptive
> or not, affects our family as a whole….? And I didn't realize how
> attached some of the extended family would be to the children to the point
> where I didn't always tell them that a child was leaving…. So that was
> something after Bryce I kinda realized more because Bryce had come and
> gone and been here off and on for several years, he had become kinda
> attached to my nephew and they played together quite a bit and everything
> and it was kinda – my sister even mentioned this the other day – I was
> kinda surprised that how he still mentions Bryce and how it was hurtful to
> him when Bryce left. He felt upset that Bryce was no longer living with
> us, so I had to – I think that was one thing that kinda opened my eyes… I
> need to let those other people know, especially if their children have been
> here playing with the children or somehow have been together, that those
> children are leaving our home. And I didn't always do that…

These data indicate that the pre-adoptive placement disruption experiences of participants

were transformational, the experience changed them in some way. These changes have

implications for waiting children and the foster and pre-adoptive families who care for

them.

Resolve

Despite the parents' experiences of loss and the resulting effects of those losses,

the participants in this study demonstrated resolve to get back to their purpose of

achieving positive outcomes on behalf of children and families. Merriam-Webster (2015)

defines resolve as finding an answer or solution to something. In the case of the

participants in this study, they used the lasting effects of the disruption to re-solve the challenges that compromised their purpose and related goals. They worked to find an answer or solution that would permit them to continue their mission. Not a single participant withdrew completely from the arena of foster care and adoption after living through this experience. Each parent found a way to continue to pursue his or her purpose and mission. Since her disruption experience, Tracy has adopted two children and continues to be a foster and pre-adoptive parent. Eric and his wife adopted two children from foster care and continue to be foster and pre-adoptive parents. Nancy and Kyle adopted another child from foster care and continue to provide respite care for children they previously fostered. They both also continue to work with children and families in a professional capacity and will consider fostering or adopting again when their four children are grown. After taking a break to work through their disruption experience and come back together as pre-adoptive parents, Chad and Lisa are awaiting a new pre-adoptive placement and look forward to adopting from the foster care system to complete their family. Since her disruption experience, Debra has adopted one child from the foster care system and is in the process of adopting again. She continues to be a foster and pre-adoptive parent as well. After changing agencies, Luke and Leanne continue to be pre-adoptive and foster parents. Marcy continues to provide foster care on behalf of children in need and is open to the idea of guardianship, possibly for Courtney when she is discharged from residential care. Lastly, Tina and her husband have adopted from the foster care system since their experience of disruption and they continue to provide foster and pre-adoptive care. All of these parents have demonstrated resolve that has led them back to their purpose. The following quotations reflect this resolve.

Nancy shared how a new approach to working with the system allowed her to continue to

pursue her purpose:

> And so I guess it was just – and I think I'm stubborn. I was like 'this is a
> really screwed up system and I'm going to try to fight it from the inside,'
> and I was like, 'I can sit and badmouth it from the outside all I want and it
> does nothing and it's not helping anybody. If I get inside, maybe I can
> influence a few new case workers and get to know some of the people
> higher up in the system and start to talk about change.' So I could either
> fight it from the outside or fight it from the inside and it's doing me no
> good to sit here and talk about how crappy they are.

Eric and Debra shared how, despite the disruption being difficult, they were pushing on

with their purpose. Eric noted:

> …just because of a disruption with her doesn't mean that we're not
> [continuing] to do foster care.

And Debra expressed:

> [The disruption] really hasn't [changed my status as a pre-adoptive parent]
> because there's so many children out there that need to be placed and I'm
> in the process of adopting another little girl.

Similarly, Tina shared how she and her family survive in the wake of trauma in order to

be able to help other children in need:

> …so yes in some ways [Bryce] did cross that line [in my heart], but we
> still had to keep some of those barriers up just to be able to survive. I
> mean, otherwise, it's like the death of a child or something, you know?
> It's really hard to explain unless you do it on a regular basis, it's just really
> difficult to explain how you can love them so much, but you love them
> knowing you're gonna let go….that's kinda the way we do things here –
> we love them, we're part of their lives and they're a part of ours, but at a
> certain point, we gotta let them go because there's someone else that needs
> to come here and stay and needs that same attention and that same love.

The "Through-ness"

By purposefully attending to the "thing" of pre-adoptive placement disruption,

elements of the "through-ness" of the experience, as described and advocated by Husserl

and Heidegger and other modern phenomenologists, became discoverable, so to speak.

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Additional elements emerged that at first seem to be part of the placement and not the disruption. Nevertheless, upon further consideration of the movement through a disruption experience, these additional elements emerged as essential to the experience shared by the participants. The disruption is more fluid than a point-in-time experience. The elements of "through-ness" shared by participants help to contextualize how participants lived the experience before, during, and after the physical move of the child to an alternative placement. There is evidence to suggest vulnerability and isolation are common in pre-adoptive placement disruption. Participants revealed some of their fears associated with perceived judgment and scrutiny. Chad and Nancy revealed some of the vulnerability they experienced. Chad was concerned about "measuring up":

> …and then you have all these people coming into your house, so it's a little bit nerve-racking because, we keep a clean house but you're always worried, you know – did the dog throw up or something before you got home and you know someone's going to meet you at the door, you just never know as you're going through the process, so there is that uncertainty as well. Do you measure up to the ruler that they're going to stand next to you?

As a result of her disruption experience, Nancy experienced vulnerability in her role as a parent in general:

> …the hand of judgment is strong in [the state child welfare department] - so I began to think about the scrutiny which I was under as a foster parent as well and I began to think that little things which are completely normal, I would be scared, 'Oh, what if they saw this?' or 'What if they saw that?' but it wasn't anything that was big, it was like if I accidently let my kid go out to play at the wrong time. So, I began to question a lot of parenting decisions where before I would have been affirmative. And I think it was just –it made me question whether or not I could do this again because I was worried about the kids already in the home, was worried – I just became worried about everything…

Participants also discussed how the experience of fostering a pre-adoptive child can create a sense of separation from others who do not understand their experiences. Eric

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expressed how meeting Tiffany's needs created an awkward awareness when around

extended family:

> Well, we try not to give up on any kid. As hard as it sounds, and we've
> even had our family saying, "You guys are crazy," because they were
> aware of things that were going on because having her in our home did
> affect how we were around other people – especially family members –
> because of her past sexual abuse. You know if we went to where there
> were younger kids, we never had an incident of her acting out sexually
> with other kids, but as a precautionary, 'okay, where is she at? Where are
> the smaller kids at?' just to make sure… for her safety or other kids' safety
> because of her past. It kinda made things a little awkward when you
> would go around family members because of "where are your kids?
> Where is our kid at?"

Nancy described the challenges of not being able to share what she was going through

with important people in her life:

> …under confidentiality you can't just say anything – I guess that's
> probably the reason why I didn't, I couldn't just say, 'here's why Darian
> was taken, here's who he's been taken to,' I couldn't discuss any of the
> real issues which was weird in a way when I think about life – the things
> you talk about to your best friends with or you talk about [with] your
> family… – I couldn't tell them anything so they didn't really know why he
> was with us in the first place and I couldn't really tell them why he was
> taken or who he went to – it was just like there's this person who's in our
> lives and now they're not and don't ask a lot of questions.

The experience of ambivalence transcended participants' experiences and presented as

central to the "through-ness" of pre-adoptive placement disruption. Recall that

ambivalence refers to simultaneously experiencing conflicting or opposite emotions

toward a person, object, action, or idea (Hess & Folaron, 1991; Robbins et al, 2006;

Luescher & Pillemer, 1998) or contradictory experiences in attitudes and actions

associated with social norms, structures, and roles (Leuescher & Pillemer, 1998). In

many cases, the decisions participants made about adoption and disruption were rooted in

utilitarianism—acting for the most good for the most people (i.e., not adopting in an

effort to keep others safe and allow the child to get necessary intensive treatment or

deciding to say no to the child's placement in the future because the prior disruptions

were too painful for the child and the family). These decisions were difficult, but often

necessary for parents to stay true to their purpose. The following excerpts demonstrate

the conflicting emotions and experiences parents lived through as a part of the disruption

as well as some of the difficult decisions they made along the way. Leanne, Nancy, and

Lisa described the social ambivalence they felt when their roles of pre-adoptive parent

and spouse conflicted. Leanne expressed differences in the way she and Luke

experienced Felicity's placement and how it affected them:

> I think it became more of a psychological issue for the both of us, I think
> he checked out long before I did, so I had that laying on my shoulders of
> you know, I'm giving up on her-type thing, so it definitely interfered with
> everybody's relationship in the house…

Nancy described how having to make extremely important decisions in a short amount of

time could affect her communication and relationship with Kyle:

> …it was always that you would have five to ten minutes to decide yes or
> no. So I think it was also hard for my husband and I because you have to
> learn how to talk and communicate and it's really quick, life-changing
> decisions in moments about whether or not you're going to have a child
> that is yours for the rest of your life and you're ready for adoption, but
> you're also – and we've been through it once before, multiple times, I'm
> sorry, but this was one of those cases where like I said, it kinda fit all the
> criteria so we said yes right away.

Lisa spoke of the exhaustion of ambivalence; she wanted to move forward with adoption,

but her husband did not:

> I think part of it was I was just so worn out, I was so tired of the fight and
> I wanted Carly so badly and I knew my husband wasn't happy and it was
> like, what am I supposed to do? Sacrifice my marriage and keep two of
> them just so I can have Carly? Or do I let Carly go so I can maintain my
> marriage? ...It was complete loss anyway you looked at it.

Lisa also described social or role ambivalence when discussing the conflict she

experienced by being a pre-adoptive parent for both Carly and Blake, but also being a

protector of Carly who was being victimized by Blake:

> Yeah, and it's like [the treatment team] stopped taking Carly seriously and
> I knew at that point I became a mother bear, I was all about protecting her
> because she wasn't even safe in my house. And I tried so hard not to fault
> Blake, but I think you can't help but be like, 'you're the one doing this,'
> and it's horrible! It's awful! Because here I have these two kids, I'm
> supposed to love them both and be a mother to both, we've agreed, we've
> committed, we're in this pre-adoptive situation and right now I can't stand
> him! It's like, how – no one could help us with that and when we put the
> alarm on his door and things started to get worse, and [child protective
> services] is saying, "Yeah, split them up," even if we just do temporary.
> You know, let's do eight weeks, get him some treatment because
> obviously he's a much more dominant personality, he's obviously gonna
> keep going with this, and she's going to be vulnerable at any point, we've
> got to help them and how do you do that in one place?

Eric also struggled with conflict that emerged from being a pre-adoptive parent to Tiffany

and upholding his responsibility to the other members of his family:

> …so at that point, when the physical threats started coming, it was like, we
> talked to her counselor and her counselor's suggestion was to lock up
> everything that's harmful. That kind-of started a downhill spiral because
> it was like, anything that could be considered dangerous – it was like, I'm
> not going to live in a prison in my own home, and that's what we started
> to feel like. If I have to lock up anything that's sharp, I have to lock up
> anything that's flammable, at what point do we balance what we're
> locking up – is what we're locking up, is it beneficial to everybody in the
> house, or are we trying to cater to one individual and that may actually be
> the problem.

Likewise, Tina shared about balancing the needs and interests of Bryce with those of the

entire family:

> I (laughter) – there was a lot of sadness because – and I felt kinda guilty
> because I felt like if we didn't take him, he would end up in a residential
> facility and someplace like that, he would eventually end up there. I felt
> like we were probably his best option, the best thing for his future, but I
> also felt torn because is that the best thing for the biological children that
> are living in this home? Am I doing what's best for them? Am I
> sacrificing them to save one child or possibly help save a child that may

already be on a path to complete destruction? I mean, I know that's horrible at five, but he had seen and done so much at that point in time. So, it was kinda a struggle if we were doing what's best for everyone involved at that time.

Nancy shared how she felt when she was approached about taking Darian back into her home after the initial disruption. She discussed the psychological distress that accompanied the decision-making process:

> …we were like, what if he gets pulled to another relative home…'can my heart take this?' 'can my kids take this?' if he leaves…so it was more like I was talking myself out of something I really wanted because I was like 'I can't stand to be hurt again by this'…it was like I had time to think about all the ways he could be messed up…I was justifying why they just had to come and take him from the house…they've never done that with any of the other kids, but it was just in this instance. [I was] trying to figure out how I justified that in my own head, so I was pulled in two different – I think there was definitely this 'Do I keep him or do I not?'

Marcy shared about the struggle she experienced when trying to work toward Courtney's adoption, trying to make the right decision:

> It was very hard. It was hard because there's times when Courtney's behavior was so bad, I'd think, 'Am I doing the right thing? Can I provide what this child needs? Can I give her the help that she needs?' And also after you adopt, you have all these services while they're in foster care, but after you adopt, you're on your own and I just didn't know if I could provide services that she needed because her illness was just getting worse and worse and worse. I had talked with different providers and stuff and there were a lot of things that were negative, a lot of things where they were saying, "she's not gonna get better, are you sure you wanna do this? Even after she's 18, you're gonna be responsible for her because of her illness and stuff." So, it was a real wrestling match, it really was [between] my heart and my head because my heart wanted this child here. My head was telling me to really think about this – really, can you do this? You're by yourself now, when your husband's here, you have the help, when you're on your own, you have it all – can you do this? I really had to work through it – try to work through it.

These data demonstrate that the "through-ness" of the disruption experience, including what occurs within the family and individual systems prior to the child leaving the home, often involves conflict and struggle. Parents are often pulled in multiple directions while

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trying to meet the needs of multiple people and achieve desirable and favorable outcomes on behalf of children and families. This ambivalence can be a heavy weight to carry through the placement and disruption experience.

Findings Summary

In conclusion, pre-adoptive placement disruption as experienced by foster parents is characterized by "compound loss" that involves both the physical loss of the child and the child's future as well as the loss of the parent's purpose to achieve positive outcomes on behalf of children and families. For the participants in this study, pre-adoptive placement disruption meant that a social contract, which involves treating children well, acting in their best interest, and supporting parents who care for them, has been broken. The broken social contract compromised their ability to achieve the positive outcomes they set out to achieve. Disappointment, anger, and empathy emerged and the disruption was ultimately attributed to an "other"—someone or something outside of the parent. In this study, disruption experiences were attributed to the child welfare system and the professionals who comprise it and to the children's perpetrators who caused overwhelming trauma. The disruption experience had long-term or lasting effects for the participants. These effects included changes to the profiles of children they are willing to foster or adopt in the future, changes to their status as pre-adoptive parents, and a strengthened sense of advocacy for themselves and others. Although the disruption experience was difficult and painful, in some ways, the lasting effects permitted the participants to re-solve the disruption issue and find new solutions for enacting their purpose. While participants found a way to move forward toward desired outcomes in new ways, negative consequences for children, families, and agencies are noted.

Discussion and implications of these findings as well as plans for future research are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter V. Discussion

This study explored the experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption as lived by foster parents. Eleven pre-adoptive foster parents participated in a total of nine recorded interviews. Participants from this study resided in urban, suburban, and rural communities in Indiana. The audio recordings from these interviews as well as journal entries and memos throughout the research process became the data for the analysis. These data revealed essential elements of the experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption for foster parents including the experience of "compound loss" which involves both the loss of the child and the loss of purpose, pre-adoptive placement disruption experienced as a broken social contract, attribution of the disruption, lasting effects of the disruption, resolve, and the "through-ness" of the experience, including lived vulnerability, isolation, and ambivalence.

Because a profile of pre-adoptive foster parents does not exist, it is difficult to compare the study's sample to existing pre-adoptive foster parents. Four of the 11 participants were male and seven were female. The majority of participants were married. The remaining participants were single or widowed women. Foster and pre-adoptive parents' characteristics are not available through AFCARS. In 2013, 68% of adoptive couples were married while 27% were single women (AFCARS, 2014). Participants in this sample ranged in age from 28 to 58, with the average being approximately 42 years. Almost all of the participants in this sample were Caucasian, one participant was African American. Most of the participants were licensed through a private agency which contracts with the state child welfare department. This finding is reasonable considering more total participants were recruited directly from private

agencies. Also, the public agency that assisted with recruitment identified potential participants who were licensed through the department as well as foster parents who were licensed through private agencies. The pre-adoptive children discussed in these disruption experiences ranged in age from less than two years to 10 years of age. None of the children was a teenager. This finding is expected provided that the average age of adopted children (approximately six years old) and waiting children (approximately eight years old) (AFCARS, 2014). Although this finding is somewhat expected, it is notable and, to the degree possible provided the small sample size, may highlight the decreased likelihood of older child adoption. Many of the participants in this sample have adopted from the foster care system. The four most recently licensed participants (they began pre-adoptive care in 2013) are the only participants who have not yet adopted. This finding is reasonable provided the year of the interviews (2014) and the average length of time that elapses (approximately 13 months) between a waiting child's TPR and a completed adoption (AFCARS, 2014). The sample includes seven participants who have successfully adopted from foster care. These participants have both adoption and disruption experiences, which may enrich their perspectives. Additionally, these participants may be willing to share their experiences of success in future studies that can help to deepen an understanding of waiting children and permanency.

Compound Loss

As noted, "compound loss" occurs when someone experiences more than one loss and that person's grief is compounded by the multiple losses they are suffering (GriefLink Forum, 2014). The experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption is characterized by "compound loss" because the pre-adoptive foster parent is suffering at least the loss of the child physically and emotionally as well as the loss of the desired

outcome they set out to achieve on behalf of the child and/or their family. The losses associated with pre-adoptive placement disruption may be complicated or further compounded by additional losses the parent has experienced (i.e., miscarriages, previous placement disruptions, the death of a loved one, etc.). Many of the participants in this study had experienced significant losses, such as the ones just listed, prior to living through the pre-adoptive placement disruption they shared in the interview.

Edelstein, Burge, and Waterman (2001) note that major changes in permanency planning for children in foster care, including concurrent planning (which often involves pre-adoptive care for the child in the event reunification does not occur) and foster parent versus newly matched adoptions, have resulted in significant modifications in the roles and expectations of parents who care for children in out-of-home care. These new roles (i.e., pre-adoptive parent) and expectations (i.e., foster parent will adopt if reunification is not actualized) present unique risks for grief and loss on behalf of foster and pre-adoptive parents.

Professional literature and practice have devoted only limited attention to interventions and supports to assist foster family members with the losses they encounter as foster parents and families (Edelstein et al., 2001). Edelstein et al. (2001) identify multiple ways in which foster parents encounter grief and loss including the foster parent's grief of the family of origin, foster parent's grief associated with the child's abuse, neglect, and placement in foster care, the foster parent's own grief associated with a child's placement change, and the grief experienced by other foster family members when a child leaves the home. In their study of foster care placement disruption, Taylor and McQuillan (2014) also found that disruption resulted in experiences of loss,

bereavement, and emotional upset. In addition to feelings of grief, many foster parents reported feeling relief, compounded with guilt and regret. Foster parents reported that feeling listened to, supported, and valued—as opposed to feeling like a failure—were critically important following a disruption experience (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

Foster parent grief can have lasting negative effects if not resolved. Unresolved grief may interfere with the parent's attachments to other children in the home and those placed subsequently, it can take the form of anger that is expressed in complaints against child welfare agencies, it may create relational challenges with partners and other children, and some foster parents may find the experience of unresolved and unsupported loss and grief so intense and damaging that they withdraw from providing foster or pre-adoptive care (Edelstein et al., 2001). Unresolved grief was not specifically explored or found to be essential to the experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption in this study. However, existing literature and findings that emerged from the data in the study do warrant further exploration of unresolved grief and loss in disruption experiences. I hope that this study and its reported findings in part acknowledge the loss pre-adoptive parents experience as a result of disruption.

The child. Multiple participants in this study likened the loss of the child to an alternative placement to that of the death of a child. Schmidt et al. (1988) also discovered that foster parents who lived through a pre-adoptive placement disruption experienced grief and loss and at times likened the experience to the death of a child. Participants who did not make this specific comparison still often spoke of the grief they experienced and in some cases still experience as a result of the child no longer being in their home or their life. Edelstein et al. (2001) note that a foster parent's loss of a child to another

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placement is likely to result in a significant grief reaction, in part because the parent has invested in the child in a variety of ways and when the child moves, the parent loses the relationship they formed with that child. Edelstein et al. posit that grief may be prolonged and complicated if the foster parent felt ambivalent about the child or feels relief about the child leaving the family. Ambivalence is noted as an essential element of the disruption experience in this study; therefore, it is possible if not likely that participants experienced prolonged and or complicated grief and loss associated with their experiences of disruption.

A move that is well-planned and cooperatively executed from one placement to another can elicit less complicated grieving than an abrupt, unexpected, or conflicted transition (Edelstein et al., 2001). The disruption experiences shared by participants in this study do not appear to be those associated with well-planned moves that elicit less complicated grief. Many of the placement changes took place abruptly when the state child welfare department or other child welfare professionals came to pick up the child unexpectedly. Other disruptions were chaotic and unplanned as the children moved into the care of a treatment facility or police custody. Multiple participants expressed that a new pre-adoptive home was identified for the children without the parents' knowledge. Other participants contested the removal and re-placement of the pre-adoptive child or sibling set. Each of the placement disruptions discussed by participants were either unexpected, disorganized, or in some way conflicted, potentially further complicating the parent's loss of the child and intensifying the negative aspects of the disruption.

The purpose. Malm and Welti (2010) recognize that what motivates families to adopt is an important question for child welfare; however, the lack of data on adoptive

families and limited adoptive parent research in general results in a lack of knowledge about why parents choose to adopt. Existing literature suggests that adoptive parents often cite intrinsic motivations, such as altruism (Leathers Falconnier, & Spielfogel, 2010; Malm & Weli, 2010), exposure to adoption (by family or being adopted themselves), infertility, and adopting a known child (Malm & Welti, 2010). These motivations are consistent with many of the histories shared by participants in this study. In an effort to narrow the gap in knowledge about adoption motivations, Malm and Welti explored motivations using National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP) data. These authors found that across adoption types examined in the NSAP study (foster care, private domestic, and international), providing a permanent home for a child and expanding the family were the most frequently cited adoption motivations overall. In general, their findings show adoptive parents to be altruistic with more than 80% of adopted children having parents who wanted to adopt in order to provide a permanent home for a child (Malm & Welti, 2010). Findings from the current study are consistent with those of Malm and Welti, suggesting that pre-adoptive parents set out to achieve positive outcomes on behalf of children in need of permanency and add to their families by adopting children from the foster care system. Not achieving those positive or intended outcomes, outcomes that are associated with motivations to adopt, resulted in loss. Even in situations when parents request a child's removal, complications in the process of grieving can arise and be more intense because the parents grieve the loss of the child and also the loss of the sense of being a competent caregiver in their own eyes as well as in the opinion of others (Edelstein et al., 2001).

Foster parents can feel angry or hurt that they were unable or not approved to adopt the child themselves when a disruption occurs (Edelstein et al, 2001). These losses connect with the finding of the parent's loss of purpose—parents grieve the loss of the intended, desired, or expected outcome. Edelstein et al. (2001) note that foster parents who care for children in an effort to give back to society and who feel fulfilled by knowing they contributed positively to the life of the child are likely to experience less intense grief when the child leaves the home. A parent's belief that they positively impacted the child's life, regardless of the permanency outcome, can mediate feelings of grief. When a pre-adoptive foster parent is unable to achieve the goal of adoption or when the parent does not feel as if the care the child received while residing in her or his home was transformational in some way, not only is the desired outcome unrealized, but the grief associated with that loss may be more intense. The intensity of grief and the experience of loss is likely connected to the meanings a parent holds of foster and pre-adoptive care and the constructs that shape how the parent feels about his or her contribution to the child's life and permanency. Therefore, symbolic interactionism and personal construct theory can help us to consider and better understand a parent's experience of the loss of purpose.

According to Edelstein et al., some parents who provide foster care begin to imagine what their lives would be like if the child stayed with them forever. The sense of a future orientation is stronger for parents who participate in concurrent planning (i.e., pre-adoptive parents). The stronger the motivations and hopes are for achieving permanency with the child, the more severe the parent's grief reaction is likely to be (Edelstein et al, 2001). This means that a parent's sense of purpose and the desired

outcomes they seek to achieve are connected to their experience of loss when not actualized.

The Social Contract

Rubin (2012) notes that social contracts can be thought of as a conceptual vehicle that link individuals and their constructs to the larger social structure in which the individual is situated and/or acts. Social contracts connect individuals to public issues and the micro to the macro (Rubin, 2012). Implicit social contracts provide a foundation for most social relationships, they are developed through active participation in collective life, and they contribute to rational, stable social processes that are part of social structures and organizations (Moghaddam, 2008; Rubin, 2012). People enact social life based upon constructs or schemas—expectations and assumptions about social relations. Rubin (2012) argues that "schemas are the mechanisms that enliven social contracts and put them into motion," they are the normative expectations that organize people's orientation to work, family, and community (p. 330). Social contracts exist in a variety of social arenas including employment, education, marriage, sex, parenting, immigration, medical care, religion, etc. (Rubin, 2012). This study demonstrates that social contracts also exist in the realm of child welfare. Rubin posits that social contracts are essentially the glue that holds societies together. Therefore, a break in the social contract would likely result in the social structure falling apart or *disrupting*.

Participants in this study experienced pre-adoptive placement disruption as a break in the social contract—based upon their constructs or schemas. Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory as well as symbolic interactionism are at work in social contract participation and in the experience of a broken social contract. Participants believed they were actors in a social contract in which treating children well, acting in children's best

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interest, and supporting parents who care for children were shared social schema. The actions and decisions by other social actors, including child welfare professionals and perpetrating parents, worked in contrast to the participants' schemas regarding the welfare and well-being of children in need of permanency. Provided the dearth of pre-adoptive placement disruption literature and research that asks and acknowledges the perspectives of pre-adoptive parents (and foster parents in general), it is difficult to compare this essential element of pre-adoptive placement disruption to findings from other studies. This finding is novel, in part due to a lack of investigation. Nevertheless, it has emerged as core to the experiences of participants in this study and the finding warrants further, purposeful examination. What types of social contracts exist in child welfare? How are they experienced by professionals? What are the additional effects of broken social contracts? In experiences of successful outcomes, is the social contract reinforced? What is the role of social work in upholding, shifting, or advocating social contracts? Although much that has been written about social contract theory exists in the logical and psychological realms, with particular political and economic implications, the sociological orientation of social contract theory may have a place in social work. Further development of this theory and its role in social enterprises associated with the well-being of people and communities is necessary.

Disruption Attribution

In each of the nine interviews for this study, participants provided attribution for the disruption. Attribution research is the science of understanding how people interpret events or other people's motives and how people choose a cause of an outcome for blame or praise (Brooks, & Clarke, 2011; McLeod, 2012; O'Connor, Kotze, & Wright, 2011).

When faced with particularly stressful events, people tend to seek causal explanations for how and why things happened (O'Connor et al., 2011). Attribution is a reasonable response to the grief that arises from loss because it provides people with a way to deal with complex inter-personal and situational problems (O'Connor et al., 2011). Attributing culpability to an "other" can provide people with a cathartic focus for anger, it can help to preserve one's own sense of justification or assist in avoiding responsibility (O'Connor et al., 2011).

Attribution theory and related theories of blame can help us to understand the attribution of disruption for study participants. Participants who attributed the disruption experience to the system did so clearly and in a straight-forward manner. Findings from this study regarding system-related failures are consistent with other studies related to disruption (Coakley & Berrick, 2008; Osborne & Alfano, 2011; Rosenthal et al., 1988; Schmidt et al., 1988; Smith et al., 2006). Participants who attributed the disruption to the perpetrators who caused significant and insurmountable trauma did so in a less direct way, but their interpretations revealed that the transgressions of the children's perpetrators ultimately compromised the children's pre-adoptive placements and opportunities for permanency. Research demonstrates that abuse and neglect both have lasting effects on the brain and can affect foster and adoptive relationships (Gomez & Brown, 2007). According to Gomez and Brown (2007), "children at times express anxiety, anger, and other feelings connected with abuse through interactions in relationships with caregivers" (p. 69). Members of the foster/adoptive family must deal with the impact of a child's traumatic history, despite having no involvement in the initial abuse or neglect (Gomez & Brown, 2007). There is little doubt that the effects of abuse

and neglect inflicted by the children's perpetrators played a significant role in the disruption experiences of participants in this study.

As noted in Chapter II, only one identified article specifically and qualitatively explored foster parents' experiences of pre-adoptive placement disruption (Schmidt et al., 1988). This article was published in 1988, 26 years before the current study was conducted. It seems valuable, nevertheless, to compare findings from this study to the one existing foster parent pre-adoptive placement disruption study. Six themes emerged from the data collected by Schmidt et al. (1988); five of the themes appear to be attributional in nature and relevant to the current study. Findings from the current study are dissimilar from Schmidt et al. and related studies in that participants did not identify challenges with attachment as a causal factor for the disruption. In general, participants spoke positively about family integration, another cited factor in pre-adoptive placement disruption (Leathers et al., 2010; Leathers et al., 2012). Participants largely discussed a good fit and overall positive relationships with the children in their homes. This finding is similar to findings of Taylor and McQuillan (2014) who found that foster parents perceived relationships with the children in their homes to be more than satisfactory, despite an eventual foster care placement disruption. In their discussion of attachment challenges, Schmidt et al. discussed the externalized behaviors that participants in their study cited as problematic for a successful adoption. Multiple participants in the current study shared about challenges with similar behaviors. While the participants in the current study did not attribute the placement disruption to the children themselves, they did acknowledge these behaviors as playing some role in the placement disruption (i.e., compromised the safety of others, need to be treated at a treatment center, created or

enhanced ambivalence, etc.). Externalized behaviors are well-noted as a child-related factor of adoption disruption (Avery, 2000; Cushing & Greenblatt, 2013; Leathers et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 1988, Rosenthal, 1993; Smith & Howard, 1991; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

Another theme identified by Schmidt et al. was that of the child's difficulty letting go of the birth family. In the current study, only one participant expressed that this was an issue. Nevertheless, the child's birth family did play a role in multiple interviews in this study (allegiance to the birth family, trauma as a result of abuse or neglect from the birth family, reunification with biological family members during the pre-adoptive placement, etc.). Participants in the Schmidt et al. study did not cite trauma at the hands of biological family as attributional to the disruption, unlike participants in the current study. It is possible that the child welfare system has advanced to recognize trauma as a legitimate and significant source of externalized behaviors, which assists with less child-blaming in current practice. The role of birth families in pre-adoptive placements and pre-adoptive disruptions deserves further consideration and exploration. Participants in the current study did not express the expectation of a less difficult child, an additional theme identified in the Schmidt et al. study. However, in some cases, parents' expectations of the children's needs did not match the children's actual needs nor parents' expectations of what the system could or should do to meet those needs and/or assist the parents in meeting those needs.

Not having enough time to get used to one other quickly enough to meet agency and court deadlines was identified as a factor in the Schmidt et al. study. Feeling

pressure to make an adoption decision quickly played a role in the disruption experiences of multiple participants in the current study.

A common concern of parents in the Schmidt et al. study involved gaps in the child's history as provided to them by the system; parents voiced that there were unknowns in the child's past which should have been filled in for the parents and the child. Participants in the current study expressed frustration with the system for not providing more or adequate information about the children's histories. This finding is also consistent with findings from Osborne and Alfano (2011). Being transparent, identifying pertinent child history information, and sharing it with pre-adoptive parents appears to be a worthwhile step in positive permanency practice. Pollack (2012) notes that "information helps give us real choice" (p. 31). He advocates that information expands knowledge and that reducing or withholding information promotes uncertainty. Pollack encourages accurate information sharing of children to foster parents in an effort to achieve positive outcomes.

The last of the six themes identified by Schmidt et al. is that of the importance of worker expertise and support. This finding is particularly relevant to the current study, provided that nine of the eleven participants attributed the disruption to the system. Unlike many participants in the Schmidt et al. study, a generally positive picture of worker expertise and services did not emerge from the current study. This could be due to the study's sample—it is possible that those who participated in this study did so in part to have their experience of being wronged by the system heard and validated. It should be noted that multiple participants expressed appreciation for the knowledge, expertise, and support of many different parts of the professional system; however, an

overriding sentiment of incompetence and lack of support emerged from the data. Parents in the current study expressed frustration and anger with agency and system decisions (i.e., not to separate siblings, to find an alternative placement, to not permit an adoption when it was desired, etc.), lack of adequate response to meet children's needs, a lack of support, and feelings of disrespect and invalidation. These findings are consistent with those of Osborne and Alfano (2011) and Schmidt et al. (1988).

Despite ultimately attributing the disruption to someone or something other than themselves, multiple participants expressed feelings of guilt, self-blame, and regret. Self-blame and regret are noted as components of loss-related guilt and are the most frequently identified forms of guilt in the bereavement literature (Stroebe et al., 2014). Guilt is defined as a remorseful emotional reaction in bereavement, with recognition of having failed to live up to one's expectations in the relationship with the lost person. Self-blame refers to making self-attributions about the cause of the loss and regret involves painful thoughts and feelings about past actions and how one could have achieved a better outcome (Stroebe et al., 2014). Based upon these definitions, findings from the current study suggest that pre-adoptive foster parents who experienced placement disruption often experienced guilt in the form of regret. In particular, one participant expressed that she would regret the disruption for the rest of her life, she wished the couple did not give up so easily, and she wished she had taken different actions such as identifying a new therapist and going to the case manager's supervisor more often. Another participant expressed fear that the parents' expectations were too rigid for the child and perhaps contributed to some of the challenges they experienced. Yet another participant shared feelings of failure and questioned what she could have

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done differently to demonstrate to the child that she was worthy of love and permanence. Many additional participants questioned their approach and were left wondering if they did everything they could do in the best possible way to prevent the disruption and the losses that characterized the disruption. Exploring foster parent guilt as a component or consequence of disruption appears to be a worthwhile endeavor for future research; findings from this line of inquiry have the potential to better support the pre-adoptive parents of waiting children.

Lasting Effects of Disruption

Crisis theory postulates that although stressful events are not uncommon for systems (such as families), sometimes systems are not able to effectively cope with these events which can lead to adaptive or maladaptive responses. Pre-adoptive placement disruption represents a crisis in the lives of the participants. Participants described their responses to the crisis in terms of the lasting effects of their disruption experiences. These effects include changes in the profile of children they are willing to foster or adopt, their pre-adoptive status, and their advocacy efforts. These effects have implications for the agencies where participants are or were licensed, the participants' families, and for waiting children. Because of the lack of investigation into pre-adoptive placement disruption, it is difficult to compare the lasting effects that participants reported in this study to existing literature.

In cases in which participants changed the profile of the child they are willing to foster or adopt, changes typically disadvantaged children with characteristics of those who wait longer and experience more disruption. Characteristics identified by participants as undesirable in future placements included being male, having a history of sexual abuse, exhibiting emotional and behavioral challenges, and being older. Existing

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literature demonstrates that older age, being male, presence of behavioral challenges (especially aggression and sexually acting-out behaviors), and a history of sexual abuse are associated with higher rates of adoption disruption (Rosenthal et al., 1988; Smith et al., 1991) as well as a greater likelihood of continuing to await adoption when compared to peers without these characteristics (Cushing & Greenblatt, 2013). These findings do not suggest that children with these characteristics are not adoptable or will always disrupt in pre-adoptive placements. What these findings do suggest is that the system is not adequately assessing and/or meeting the needs of these pre-adoptive children and the parents who provide their pre-adoptive care. Far more investigation is necessary to identify the best ways to meet the needs of these children and families.

Schmidt et al. found that following a pre-adoptive placement disruption, some parents relinquished their roles as a foster parent. Although participants in this study did not report relinquishing their role as foster parents, three couples described taking a break after their disruption experience and one participant changed her status from pre-adoptive to foster care only. One couple decided to transfer their license to an alternative agency, in hope of being better supported in their efforts there. Unresolved issues related to pre-adoptive placement disruption have the potential to compromise the pool of available and willing pre-adoptive parents—which has direct negative implications for waiting children. It is possible that potential participants who did not express interest in this study did so because they are no longer involved in providing foster or pre-adoptive care. Further inquiry into the consequences of pre-adoptive placement disruption is warranted.

Many of the participants in this study noted that they continue to have some form of contact with the child or siblings from their disruption experience. Some participants

reported visiting the child in the residential center where the child is placed, others communicate with the child's current foster or pre-adoptive parent or plan to see the children at agency events, and others provide respite care for the child. This finding is consistent with Schmidt et al. (1988) who found it difficult for some pre-adoptive parents to separate from the child emotionally after the disruption, finding ways to keep in contact well after the child left the home. The relationship that continues beyond the disrupted placement can be thought of as a lasting (positive) consequence of the placement, a symptom of unresolved grief, or an additional example of resolve that permits parents to continue caring for the child even after they have left the home. It is also possible that the parent and child may have formed a meaningful attachment during the placement, despite permanency not being achieved. Exploring the role of attachment in relationships that extend beyond the child's physical placement appears to be worthwhile for future research. Specifically attending to these types of connections has the potential to illuminate nuances of attachment theory in disruption that did not explicitly emerge from this study.

Living through Disruption

Some of the essential elements of living through pre-adoptive placement disruption emerged as a result of directing purposeful attention to the phenomenon itself. Knowledge of the "through-ness" of the disruption experience may not have otherwise been discoverable. As noted, Vagle (2014) recognizes that the preposition "through" signifies movement and it changes the focus from one of "being" to one of "becoming" (p. 41). In this study, experiences of vulnerability, isolation, and ambivalence were generative experiences that were essential to the participants "becoming" pre-adoptive foster parents who lived through a pre-adoptive placement disruption. Experiences of

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perceived scrutiny by the department's "strong hand of judgment," difficulty explaining what it is like "unless you do it," being viewed as "crazy" by extended family members and friends, and living through a "wrestling match" between one's heart and one's head made it possible to have both a literal and figurative dialogue with the phenomenon of pre-adoptive placement disruption (Vagle, 2014). These "through-ness" experiences were taxing for participants. According to Osborne and Alfano (2011), foster parents who experienced greater levels of strain during a child's placement demonstrated a decreased ability to respond to the child's emotional needs, were less committed to the child, made less effort toward integration, and were less likely to actually like the child. Social support, by both professionals and family and friends, was a critical factor in alleviating placement-related strain. These findings are particularly interesting when considering the distressed relationships participants often felt with professionals and the death of two participants' spouses during the pre-adoptive placement.

Vulnerability is defined as the quality or state of having little resistance to some outside agent (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Participants revealed feelings of judgment, inferiority, and fear with regard to their relationship with the state child welfare department and child welfare professionals. They described vulnerability. Participants appeared to observe a hierarchy that positioned them as less powerful or even powerless in a variety of situations. Their voices seemed to go unheard or under-acknowledged in issues that mattered most to them—the safety of the child, the well-being of other family members, the child's future. In some cases, early in the child's placement, the experience of vulnerability was almost motivating—pushing participants to put their best foot forward and demonstrate competence. However, when the vulnerability grew to be an

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issue of power, participants experienced it as defeating and compromising to their efforts to achieve positive outcomes. Follan and McNamara (2013) found that experiences of fighting for recognition and being labeled a failure by professionals added to experiences of insecurity in adoptive parenting.

Participants expressed feelings of isolation at times. The experience of isolation made it difficult for participants to relate to others or feel as if others understood their lives or experiences. Participants described how they felt different from other parents, how they felt alone in their frustration and anxiety about the children's needs when professionals minimized or ignored their concerns, and how they felt rejected by those who did not understand their lives. Participants indicated that their pre-adoptive experiences extended beyond just the parent or couple to other members of their families—biological or adopted children, parents, cousins, friends, etc. When asked who they first told that the placement was not going to end in an adoption, participants routinely cited best friends, immediate family members, or the child's case worker. Participants in this study did not acknowledge support from other foster or pre-adoptive parents nor did they identify a connection to groups or therapeutic outlets with parents who live/have lived through similar experiences. Investigation of formal and informal supports was not a primary focus of this study; however, a connection to others who could empathize in relatable ways with the participants seemed to be lacking from participants' disruption experiences. Exploring solidarity as a means for supporting pre-adoptive parents appears to be a valuable task for foster care adoption research and practice.

Ambivalence emerged as an essential element of the 'lived-through" experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption. Participants described experiencing conflicting emotions, fluctuation, and uncertainty in their roles, feelings, and decision-making. Schofield, Beek, Ward, and Biggart (2013) note that while work and family are usually two different realms for most people, for foster parents, "in many significant ways, their family is their work and their work is their family—so roles are not so clearly separated and boundaries are not so clearly defined" (p.46). Considering the balance pre-adoptive parents are asked to strike when carrying out responsibilities for a variety of roles (parent, partner, child welfare system actor, advocate, etc.) across many different systems, it is no surprise that ambivalence emerged as essential to the pre-adoptive disruption experience. This finding also highlights the applicability of general systems theory in pre-adoptive care and parenting. Schofield et al. advocate that the social roles of foster parents need to be understood because these roles give meaning and purpose to their lives. It is not unusual for foster parents to have to navigate multiple roles across multiple systems, but for them "the negotiation is likely to be emotionally intense and represents particular sources of stress when the future well-being of their foster children, themselves, and other members of their family is at stake" (Schofield et al., 2013, p. 49). Hess and Folaron (1991) found that parental ambivalence played a role in the permanency outcomes of reunification cases. These authors contend that a combination of personal forces (social and financial resources, parent experiences and characteristics, children's characteristics, parent-child relationship, etc.) and social forces (parent's role during placement, child welfare professionals, agency and community resources, etc.) shape parental ambivalence. Effective permanency planning requires an understanding of the

interaction of personal and social forces that contribute to and reinforce parental ambivalence (Hess & Folaron, 1991). This concept is central to the person-in-environment or ecosystems perspective in practice. Findings from the current study coupled with existing parental ambivalence literature in reunification cases (Hess & Folaron, 1991) as well as pre-adoptive cases (Coakley & Berrick, 2013) merit further investigation into the relevance of ambivalence theory in child welfare practice and the role ambivalence plays in matters of placement and permanency. Further attention to the multiple roles of pre-adoptive parents and the meanings they ascribe to those roles also appears to be a worthwhile endeavor in permanency practice and research.

Resolve and Resilience

Edelstein et al. (2001) note that although disruption may be a deeply emotional time for foster parents, it may also present an opportunity for growth and change. Participants in this study experienced "compound loss" as a result of their disruption experience, yet resolve permitted them to make changes and repurpose their efforts in ways that continued to benefit children and families. Foster parents may emerge from loss with a renewed energy for providing care by reframing their role (Edelstein et al., 2001). This seems to be the case for the participants in the current study. Resolve as an essential element of pre-adoptive placement disruption in this study is similar to another concept common in social work, resilience. Begun (1993) defines resilience as "an ability to cope with adversity, stress and deprivation" and notes that resilience is shaped by both intrinsic factors (what individuals bring to a situation, including past experience and learning) and extrinsic factors (including environmental risk and protective factors) (pp. 28-29). Taylor and McQuillan (2014) acknowledge increasing attention to the resilience of social workers and other human service professionals; they advocate that

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similar attention be paid to foster parents and members of their families. Although

resolve was interpreted to be an essential element of pre-adoptive disruption in this study,

the scope of the study (including the interview questions) limit the discussion of this

finding. Further research is needed to explore intrinsic and extrinsic factors that may

play a role in successful and disrupted pre-adoptive placements. Knowledge gleaned

from studies of this nature may help to explore and illuminate elements of resolve and

resilience in pre-adoptive families which may support pre-adoptive recruitment and

retention and permanency practice.

Implications for Education

Partnerships between social work education programs and public child welfare

agencies have become extremely important in recent years, educating current and future

child welfare workers, improving agency working conditions, and developing

competency-based education (Zlotnik, 2002). These partnerships have reciprocal

benefits for social work programs and public child welfare. The current study and other

child welfare research have the opportunity to benefit students and educators involved in

partnership education efforts. Research and new learning should be incorporated into

child welfare-specific courses, but there is also room for this research in other areas of the

social work curriculum.

Findings from this study have the opportunity to enhance theory education, with

particular regard to how personal constructs and schema related to social interactions

affect the way the people (including foster and pre-adoptive parents) view, anticipate, and

experience the world (including placement, disruption, and permanency experiences).

Ambivalence theory is relevant in the discussion and application of person-in-

environment perspectives. Its psychological and sociological components and its

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applicability to navigating multiple systems make it a good fit for the foundational ecosystems perspective in social work education.

Findings from this study demonstrate the importance of learning and applying social work practice skills and values related to building rapport, demonstrating core qualities such as genuineness and respect, actively listening, assessing motivations and expectations, working collaboratively, developing competency, and practicing with integrity. These skills and values can go a long way in establishing the types of working relationships that will best support waiting children and the parents who care for them.

The ways in which the history of foster care and adoption have affected the current welfare state's response to children in need of care as well as the significance of the social challenge of awaiting adoption are under acknowledged in social work education. Policy courses can be infused with content relevant to this study. Perhaps a greater understanding of the needs of waiting children will stimulate interest in advocacy efforts and attention to child welfare matters at the macro level. Current policy is not meeting the needs of waiting children and there exists tremendous opportunity for improved legislation to address and meet these needs.

This study can also support research courses. Qualitative methods on their own produce meaningful research. Qualitative studies can also serve as jumping off points for underexplored phenomenon and large-scale, quantitative studies. This study demonstrates that valuable research can begin with burning questions and curiosities that originate in practice. Students and practitioners should be encouraged to ask questions and engage in research to inform practice. Social work students should be empowered to seek answers to questions that affect the lives of people and communities. Research can

be designed to acknowledge and share the voices of people who experience challenges and demonstrate resilience. Scholars can and should learn from the people who experience our topics of interest. This study and its findings have multiple rich implications for social work education—in child welfare courses and beyond them.

Implications for Practice

Implications for improved practice emerged from this study's findings. The personal grief and loss that foster parents experience as a result of pre-adoptive placement disruption needs to be shared with a professional who can listen and validate their experience, reassuring them that vulnerability, pain, confusion, etc. are normal (Edelstein et al., 2001). Anderson (2010) postulates that "the work of grieving is an alternation between remembering and hoping" (p. 135). He notes that hope is necessary for doing the painful work of remembering and that finding hope often requires collaboration with others. Anderson advocates that when people experience grief and loss, they need to be heard and have their stories validated; an empathetic response and the experience of mutuality can help to change grief into hope. Child welfare practice would benefit from acknowledging foster parent loss and working to mutually address it. Recognizing loss and responding in empathetic ways may support positive changes in the ways that pre-adoptive foster parents repurpose their efforts. It also supports the core social work value of the importance of human relationships.

Exploring and addressing ambivalence is necessary in permanency practice. According to Hess and Folaron (1991), helping parents explore ambivalent feelings requires knowledge about the forces at work in ambivalence, effective assessment skills, relationship building skills, patience, and self-awareness. The personal biases and values of professionals can influence the ways in which professionals approach and respond to

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parental ambivalence. Social workers and other child welfare professionals should be

equipped with knowledge and training regarding the dynamics of ambivalence.

Clarifying personal values, effective supervision, and team decision-making are

advocated interventions for professionals engaged in permanency practice (Hess and

Folaron, 1991).

Gaps in the information shared with pre-adoptive parents about the child's history

is noted as a challenge in this and other studies (Coakley & Berrick, 2007; Rosenthal

1993; Schmidt et al, 1988). A comprehensive history could benefit prospective adoptive

families, equipping parents with knowledge and empowering parents to make informed

decisions on behalf of the child and the pre-adoptive family. Schmidt et al. (1988) agree,

noting that professionals who are aware of the significance of a child's past should draw

together as complete a history as possible for the child and their subsequent caregivers.

Being diligent about discovering and accurately reporting a child's history has the

potential to support the child, the parents, and the providers working with the pre-

adoptive family.

Participants in this study also reported feeling rushed or pressured to make an

adoption decision based upon agency timelines. In particular, parents expressed feeling

pressure to make a decision around the sixth month mark of the child's placement. The

ASFA established guidelines for permanency-related decision-making and the CFSR

monitor states' compliance with timely adoptions. Permanency-related timeframes were

established to expedite permanency and prevent children from languishing in out-of-

home care. However, without the appropriate care and concern for the sheer magnitude

of an adoption decision, ASFA and CFSR timeframes and decision deadlines of specific

agencies or professionals may work against waiting children. Further investigation into policies associated with timeframes and deadlines is necessary to ensure they are being communicated and enacted accurately. It would be a true disservice if imposed deadlines were meeting the needs of workers or agencies instead of the children they were designed to protect.

Participants in this and related studies (Osborne & Alfano, 2011; Schmidt et al., 1988) have expressed a perceived lack of formal support in conjunction with their disruption experiences. Houston and Kramer (2008) found that families were more likely to maintain a pre-adoptive child in their home and finalize an adoption when they reported having higher levels of contact with formal agency supports. It is recommended that child welfare professionals be clear about their roles and the roles of pre-adoptive foster parents, the boundaries of those roles, and the services and supports that are available to pre-adoptive parents. Both professionals and pre-adoptive parents should be transparent with regard to expectations for support. Communication between professionals and parents is critical and should be attended to with the utmost care. It is recommended that professionals and parents strive to work collaboratively and in partnership on behalf of successful permanency outcomes. Not all child welfare workers are social workers; however, social work curricula have been found to contain the most comprehensive match of skills, theories, and values for the learning needs of child welfare workers (Folaron & Hostetter, 2007). In particular, social workers are equipped with a unique skill set for developing and maintaining rapport, listening to and validating individual experiences, brokering, empowerment, mediation, and conflict resolution. These skills should be employed by child welfare social workers to provide effective

formal support to pre-adoptive parents and children. Child welfare social workers should also model and share these skills with child welfare professionals from other disciples in an effort to support practice. In general, child welfare practice will benefit from listening to and acting upon the voices of pre-adoptive parents and children. The people who experience placements, disruptions, and permanency must be called upon to share their experiences in an effort to support and strengthen practice on behalf of those who need effective practice most.

Limitations

Despite this study's value, it does present with notable limitations. Recruitment is noted as a challenge in this study. Recruitment efforts over the course of four months yielded nine interviews (and three of these interviews were with previously identified participants). Pre-adoptive placement disruption is a sensitive topic for many parents to discuss. Stigma and other feelings of discomfort may have played a role in limiting participation in the study. Changes to recruitment efforts for future studies that explore a sensitive topic such as pre-adoptive placement disruption may be necessary to better support the target population. The focus of this study is limited to the particular experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption; however, the social challenge of awaiting adoption is broad and nuanced. There are multiple additional factors to consider and explore when attempting to understand barriers to permanency and address permanency practice on behalf of children and families. Additionally, the sample is limited in terms of what it can reveal about pre-adoptive placement disruption, in part because only the experiences of foster parents were explored. Although foster parents have tremendous insights to offer with regard to this experience, the voices and perspectives of other players, such as professionals and children and youth who have also

lived through the experience, are necessary to have a more complete understanding of pre-adoptive placement disruption. The perspectives of biological parents may also be helpful. In retrospect, I wish I would have asked more specific questions regarding participants' motivations to become pre-adoptive foster parents as well as questions related to participants' motivations to participate in the study. Responses to these questions would likely have complemented and enriched the study's findings and my understanding of the phenomenon. This study represents an initial attempt at investigating one barrier to adoption from the foster care system. The findings are rich, they add to the knowledge base, and they reveal many aspects of foster and pre-adoptive care in need of further exploration.

Future Research

This study has illuminated a variety of areas for future study and next steps are currently being developed. The study's first participant asked about the possibility for foster parents who participated in the study to come together and share their experiences. I asked additional participants about their interest in participating in a focus group following the conclusion of the current study; all but one participant expressed an interest in participating (interestingly, this participant declined because she said it would be like sharing "war stories," which would be too painful). Next steps for this research include organizing and conducting a focus group with foster parents who have experienced pre-adoptive placement disruption in an effort to more deeply explore some of the finding of this study. Some areas of interest for this focus group include formal and informal supports, foster parent expectations, guilt, resolve, and redemption. Additional future research includes interviews with public and private child welfare professionals and

youth who experienced pre-adoptive placement disruption as well as interviews with foster parents who successfully adopted from the foster care system, professionals who facilitated adoption, and youth/young adults who were adopted from foster care. These future qualitative studies have the potential to shed further light on barriers to and supports for foster care adoption. They also seek to acknowledge multiple voices and perspectives in the process. A future quantitative study of interest involves the development of profiles of foster, pre-adoptive, and adoptive parents in public child welfare. These profiles can help to identify demographic characteristics as well as motivations, strengths, and challenges for each type of parent. Following greater knowledge of barriers and supports and those who provide care on behalf of waiting children, long-term projects will seek to develop and evaluate evidence-based interventions and models for best foster care adoption practices. The insights gleaned from these types of projects have the potential to inform and enhance social work education, practice, and research as well as the skills and approaches of related professions that assist in efforts of child welfare. I agree with the sentiments of Gomez and Brown (2007) who highlight the utmost importance of scholars remaining focused on the priority of understanding and caring for vulnerable children. They assert that additional research regarding factors that contribute to the development of successful foster and adoptive relationships will be helpful to professionals as they work to support policies and practices on behalf of foster and adoptive children and families.

Conclusion

Despite noted limitations, this study revealed valuable information about an under-studied phenomenon that affects the permanency of waiting children—pre-

adoptive placement disruption. The phenomenon was explored by giving voice to pre-adoptive parents who undertake the extremely important work of caring for children in need of adoption from the foster care system. An initial review of the literature yielded limited findings of the disrupted placements of pre-adoptive children and foster parents. Existing adoption disruption literature, overwhelmingly quantitative in nature, identified various child, family, and system factors associated with the likelihood of disruption. Existing studies largely answered questions related to the "who" and "what" of disruption, but failed to acknowledge the "how" and "why." Additionally, the perspectives and experiences of those who actually lived through disruption were largely absent from existing literature. My practice experience, gaps identified in literature, and the supreme value of pre-adoptive parents in the adoption of waiting children, led me to develop the research question for this study: *What is the experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption for pre-adoptive foster parents?* The interpretive phenomenological nature of the research resulted in a greater understanding of how pre-adoptive placement disruption is experienced by foster parents. In the true spirit of phenomenological investigation, these findings are at best partial and incomplete; yet they are meaningful and represent the truths of the participants who lived the experience.

Findings from this study revealed that foster parents who live through a pre-adoptive placement disruption experience multiple losses including the physical loss of the child and the child's future, as well as the parent's sense of purpose in achieving a positive outcome for the child and their own family. Participants experienced the disruption as a break in the social contract. They were let down, disappointed, and even betrayed by the actions and decisions of others to whom they attribute the disruption.

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Some experienced anger, some experienced empathy. The disruption led to long-term or lasting effects with implications for their family, for agencies, and for waiting children. Despite the losses they experienced and pain associated with the broken social contract they believed they held with the child welfare system and other parents, the participants demonstrated resolve. Participants worked to adjust or repurpose their efforts so that they could again work to achieve positive outcomes on behalf of children and families. This study has the opportunity to influence social work and child welfare in important ways.

Rooted in a mission of social justice and well-being, the social work profession is poised to make significant and lasting contributions to the realm of child welfare and waiting children in particular. Social work education, research, and practice across levels have the opportunity to explore and illuminate policies, practices, and perspectives that lead to improved permanency outcomes. Permanency is an issue of social justice and one that affects vulnerable populations of children. It is also an issue of dignity and worth and of human relationships. Social work educators can bring content regarding permanency into courses across the curriculum—including practice, policy, theory, and research. Child welfare-specific social work courses should purposefully attend to the social challenge of awaiting adoption in the United States and address permanency barriers and supports. Child welfare social workers and other child welfare professionals should acknowledge the voices of children and families and implement evidence-informed interventions to strengthen endeavors in the field. Social work researchers must continue to question and investigate issues of permanency, collaborate with key stakeholders, and disseminate meaningful findings on behalf of children and families with permanency needs. Pre-adoptive children and parents are worthy of directed

attention and deliberate efforts. Permanency can become a reality for all children and

youth and social work is well-positioned to be a leader of this charge.

Appendices

Appendix A: Agency Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

My name is Kori Bloomquist. I am a social worker and a researcher; I am also deeply passionate about the well-being of children—in particular, children who have survived abuse or and neglect and are in need of permanency. I have combined these identities and this passion to frame my dissertation study.

Awaiting adoption is a social problem in America that affects thousands of children as well as families, agencies, communities, the mission of the child welfare system, and society at large. In 2012, there were over 101,000 children awaiting adoption. More than one-quarter of all children in foster care were waiting to be adopted. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 requires states to comply with regulations for the timely adoption of children from foster care. The first two rounds of reviews to monitor states' compliance with these federal regulations revealed poor outcomes for the timely adoption of children and child permanency in general. Children who do not achieve permanency are at risk for a host of negative, long-term consequences. One phenomenon that plagues waiting children and their opportunity for adoption is the disruption of their pre-adoptive placements. Pre-adoptive placement disruption refers to the change in a waiting child's placement prior to a finalized adoption. Despite unique placement and permanency needs, waiting children and the foster parents who care for them are seldom recognized as unique cohorts in child welfare policy or literature. Thus, little is known about the experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption.

I believe foster parents represent a bridge between children in need of permanency and the system designed to serve and protect them. Foster parents have the capacity to provide significant insight into to the experiences and processes associated with the child welfare system. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Indiana University has approved my protocol for a qualitative study to explore the experiences of foster parents who have had a pre-adoptive placement disruption—in an effort to learn more about this phenomenon. My research question is: *What is the experience of a pre-adoptive foster parent who has had a pre-adoptive placement disruption*? I will use in-depth, semi-structured interviews to learn about this lived experience. It is my hope that by better understanding the nuances associated with pre-adoptive placement disruption, we can better support children, foster parents, agencies, and permanency practice in general to promote more timely and more effective placement and permanency decisions and outcomes. I am hopeful you and your agency will support my endeavors.

Should you choose to assist me with this study, I would ask you to 1) identify potential participants who a) are or were licensed b) fostered a child who had a permanency plan of

adoption and had an openness/willingness/intention to adopt the child c) however, the placement disrupted and did not end an adoption, and d) the child moved to an alternative placement; 2) after identifying potential participants, send my recruitment letters in an Indiana University School of Social Work envelope (both of which I will provide to you) to potential participants. These would be your only two responsibilities. Should potential participants be interested in participating in the study, they will be asked in the recruitment letter to contact me directly. Therefore, unless participants inform you personally, you will have no indication if they accepted or declined the invitation to voluntarily participate in the study.

It should be noted that all participant information will be kept confidential. Participants and the children and agencies they describe in interviews will receive pseudonyms. In an effort to protect the identities of all those involved in the completion of this study, no child, foster parent, or agency identifiable information will be reported or published. Although complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed, I will take all necessary precautions to keep sensitive and identifiable information confidential through the use of multiple privacy measures which have been reviewed and approved by the IRB and my dissertation committee.

I have included my approval letter from the IRB for your review and records. I look forward to the opportunity to share more with you about this study and/or answer any questions you may have for me. I would greatly appreciate your thoughts regarding assisting me with this very important study on behalf of waiting children. Please contact me with any questions, concerns, or insights. I look forward to hearing from you!

Respectfully,

Kori R. Bloomquist, BSW, MSW, PhD(c)
Doctoral Candidate
Indiana University School of Social Work

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Foster Parent,

You have received this letter because of your important role as a foster parent and because you may be eligible to voluntarily participate in a research study regarding your experience fostering a pre-adoptive child. Foster parents are a group of people who are committed to the well-being of children and families and should be recognized as invaluable resources to our children, communities, and the child welfare system. Knowing more about your experience with pre-adoptive placement disruption is an important research endeavor and a first step toward greater understanding.

The purpose of this study is to explore foster parents' experience of pre-adoptive placement disruption. This study is sponsored by Indiana University. The research will be carried out by doctoral candidate, Kori Bloomquist, and overseen by a committee of professorial-level researchers.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you decide to participate you may decline to answer any question that you do not want to answer. Additionally, you may decide to drop out of the study at any point in time. Your personal information will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and members of the committee will have access to your personal information and information you share during the research process. Should you choose to volunteer for the study, you will participate in a face-to-face interview at a time and place convenient for you.

To be eligible for this study you must a) be or have been licensed by a public or private child welfare agency b) fostered a child who had a permanency plan that reflected adoption with an intention/willingness/openness to adopt the child c) however, the pre-adoptive placement disrupted and the child moved to a new placement.

If you meet these criteria and are interested in participating in this study, please contact me by phone at 317-201-3281 or by email at kbloomqu@umail.iu.edu. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns as well. Thank you for your commitment to children and families and your prospective assistance with better understanding pre-adoptive placement disruption.

Respectfully,

Kori R. Bloomquist, BSW, MSW
Doctoral Candidate
Indiana University School of Social Work

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

- Tell me about becoming a pre-adoptive parent.

- What is the first name of the child will be talking about today?

- What was the first day __ (child's name) ___ was placed with you like?

- How were you feeling on that day? (probe)

- Tell me about a time when you thought the placement had the potential to work.

- What did that look like? (probe)

- Tell me about a time you felt pulled in multiple directions related to the adoption decision.

- How were you feeling then? (probe)

- Tell me how this child fit into your family.

- Tell me about a time when you knew the placement was not going to work.

- Tell me about the first time you told someone the placement was not going to work?

- What led you to tell this person/these people first?

- What factors, if any, could have saved this placement from being disrupted?

- Tell me more about what _____ means? (probe)

- Tell me about the day ____ (child's name) ___ left your home.

- What do you remember about the days following his/her leaving?

- How, if at all, has your experience of a pre-adoptive placement disruption affected your status as a pre-adoptive foster parent?

- Before we end, what else about this experience would you like for me to know?

Background Characteristics

- Who are/were you licensed through?

- Did you complete pre-adoptive training before fostering _____?

- What is _____'s race/ethnicity?

- How long have you been fostering?

- Have you ever adopted a child from foster care?

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    services-reviews/round3

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Williams-Mbenque, N. (2008). Permanency: A key concept for children in foster care.

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    Conduct of Social Workers). Washington, DC: NASW.

Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology and Health,*

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Zlotnik, J. L. (2002). Preparing social workers for child welfare practice: Lessons from

    an historical review of the literature. *Journal of Health & Social Policy*, *15*(3/4),

    5-21

<div align="center">

Curriculum Vitae
Kori R. Bloomquist

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EDUCATION:

Graduate

Indiana University, Indianapolis, Indiana	PhD	2015
Indiana University, Indianapolis, Indiana	MSW	2008

Undergraduate

Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana	BSW	2004

APPOINTMENTS:

Academic

Indiana University School of Social Senior Research Associate	2014 – Present
Indiana University School of Social Work Visiting Lecturer	2012 – 2014
Indiana University School of Social Work Research Assistant	2012 – 2014
Indiana University School of Social Work Associate Faculty	2011 – 2012
Indiana University School of Social Work Doctoral Research Assistant, PhD Program	2010 – 2012
Indiana University School of Social Work Teaching Assistant	2010

TEACHING:

Graduate

S504 Professional Practice Skills I Enrollment: 12	Spring 2012

Undergraduate

S332 Generalist Social Work Practice II: Theory and Skills Enrollment: 17	Spring 2014

S332	Generalist Social Work Practice II: Theory and Skills Hybrid format Enrollment: 13	Spring 2014
S402	Integrative Practicum Seminar II Enrollment: 12	Spring 2014
S482	Social Work Practicum II Enrollment 12	Spring 2014
S331	Generalist Social Work Practice I: Theory and Skills Enrollment: 18	Fall 2013
S331	Generalist Social Work Practice I: Theory and Skills Hybrid format Enrollment: 13	Fall 2013
S401	Integrative Practicum Seminar I Enrollment: 11	Fall 2013
S481	Social Work Practicum I Enrollment: 12	Fall 2013
S332	Generalist Social Work Practice II: Theory and Skills Enrollment: 21	Spring 2013
S332	Generalist Social Work Practice II: Theory and Skills Online format Enrollment: 13	Spring 2013
S402	Integrative Practicum Seminar II Enrollment: 12	Spring 2013
S482	Social Work Practicum II Enrollment: 12	Spring 2013
S331	Generalist Social Work Practice I: Theory and Skills Enrollment: 17	Fall 2012
S331	Generalist Social Work Practice I: Theory and Skills Online format Enrollment: 18	Fall 2012
S401	Integrative Practicum Seminar I Enrollment: 12	Fall 2012

S481	Social Work Practicum I Enrollment: 12	Fall 2012
S332	Generalist Social Work Practice II: Theory and Skills Enrollment: 13	Spring 2012
S231	Generalist Social Work Practice I: Theory and Skills Enrollment: 12	Fall 2011
S231	Generalist Social Work Practice II: Theory and Skills Enrollment: 12	Spring 2011

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Children's Bureau, Inc. Assessment Specialist	2014 – Present
Adult and Child Center Intake Therapist	2014
Easter Seals Crossroads Respite Team Leader	2009 – 2013
Adult and Child Center Staff Therapist	2006 – 2012
Meadow Lakes Extended Care Facility Contractual Social Worker	2009 – 2010
Forest Creek Village Social Worker	2004 – 2006
Home Remedies Intensive Family Preservation MSW Social Work Intern	2007 – 2008
Homeless Initiative Program MSW Social Work Intern	2007
Hospice of Bloomington Hospital BSW Social Work Intern	2004
Bell Trace Health and Living Center BSW Social Work Intern	2003

RESEARCH:

Foster Parent Experiences of Pre-adoptive Placement Disruption   2014 – Present
Dissertation Study Collaboration with Dr. Carol Hostetter

Attitudes on Poverty
Collaboration with Dr. Carol Hostetter, Dr. Sabina Williamson,   2014 – Present
& Dr. Leila Wood

Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration   2013 – 2014
Collaboration with MDRC and MEF Associates

Indiana Title VI-E Waiver Demonstration Project Evaluation   2012 – Present
Collaboration with Dr. William H. Barton, Dr. James A. Hall,
Dr. Barbara Pierce, Dr. Devon J. Hensel, Marie Danh, MSW,
Teresa Cummings, B.A., & Ben Turney, B.S

Social Worker Self-care and Professional Well-being   2011 – Present
Collaboration with Kristin Friedmeyer-Trainor, MSW, LSW,
Dr. Leila Wood, & Dr. Hea-Won Kim

Foster Parent Experiences of Failed Pre-adoptive Placements   2011 – 2013
Collaboration with Dr. Robert Helfenbein

Indiana High Risk Youth Reentry Program   2010 – 2012
Collaboration with Dr. William H. Barton &
Dr. Amy Murphy-Nugen

PUBLICATIONS:

Under review

Bloomquist, K. R., Wood, L., Friedmeyer-Trainor, K., & Kim, H. (n.d.). Social worker
self-care and professional well-being. Submitted to *Human Service Organizations:
Management, Leadership, & Governance.* Under Review.

Bloomquist, K. R., Wood, L., Sullenberger, S., & Hostetter, C. (n.d.). "Doin' meth or
doing math": Clients' constructions of poverty and social class. Submitted to *Journal of
Community Practice*. Under Review.

Sullenberger, S., Hostetter, C., Wood, L., & Bloomquist, K. R. (n.d.). "You really have to
play the hand you're dealt": Graduating college young adults and their constructions of
social class. Submitted to *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment.* Under
Review.

Wood, L. & Bloomquist, K. R. (n.d.). The DV basics 2.0: The process of domestic violence advocacy. Submitted to *Violence and Victims*. Under Review.

In progress

Bloomquist, K. R.., Cummings, T., Danh, M., Hall, J. A., Pierce, B. (n.d.). Qualitative analysis in Title IV-E waiver evaluation: Gaining perspective from middle managers. In preparation for re-submission to *Journal of Public Child Welfare.* Under Review.

MULTI-MEDIA PUBLICATIONS:

Kori R. Bloomquist. Episode 117. Social Worker Self-Care: Practice, Perceptions, and Professional Well-Being. (2013, April 15). *inSocialWork Podcast Series*. [Audio Podcast] Retrieved from http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/podcast/episode.asp?ep=117

TECHNICAL REPORTS:

Hall, J. A., Pierce, B., Bloomquist, K. R., Danh, M., Cummings, T., & Turney, B. (2015, February). Indiana Department of Child Services Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Project: Mid-term Report. Prepared for the Administration of Children and Families. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University School of Social Work.

Hall, J. A., Pierce, B., Bloomquist, K. R., Danh, M., Cummings, T., & Turney, B. (2015, January). Indiana Department of Child Services Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Project: Semi-Annual Report. Prepared for the Administration of Children and Families. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University School of Social Work.

Barton, W. H., Hall, J. A., Pierce, B., Bloomquist, K. R., Danh, M., Cummings, T., & Turney, B. (2014, July). Indiana Department of Child Services Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Project: Semi-Annual Report. Prepared for the Administration of Children and Families. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University School of Social Work.

Barton, W. H., Hall, J. A., Bloomquist, K. R., Danh, M., Cummings, T., & Turney, B. (2014, January). Indiana Department of Child Services Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Project: Semi-Annual Report. Prepared for the Administration of Children and Families. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University School of Social Work.

Barton, W. H., Hall, J. A., Bloomquist, K. R., Danh, M., Cummings, T., & Turney, B. (2013, July). Indiana Department of Child Services Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Project: Semi-Annual Report. Prepared for the Administration of Children and Families. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University School of Social Work.

Barton, W. H., Hall, J. A., Bloomquist, K. R., Danh, M., Cummings, T., & Turney, B. (2013, January). Indiana Department of Child Services Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Project: Semi-Annual Report. Prepared for the Administration of Children and Families. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University School of Social Work.

Barton, W. H., Murphy-Nugen, A., & Bloomquist, K. R. (2012). *Evaluation of the Indiana High Risk Youth Reentry Project.* Prepared for the Indiana Juvenile Justice Task Force. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University School of Social Work.

PRESENTATIONS:

Hall, J. A., Pierce, B., Cummings, T., Bloomquist, K. R., Danh, M., Turney, B. (2015). Mixed Methods Evaluation: Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Program. Symposium. Annual Conference for the Society of Social Work and Research. New Orleans, LA.

Bloomquist, K. R. (October, 2014). "Communication, Communication, Communication": Qualitative Analysis in Title IV-E Evaluation Research. Poster presented at the 60th Annual Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, Tampa, FL.

Bloomquist, K. R. (September, 2014). Permanency and Placement Disruption. Paper presented at the 70th Annual Indiana Association of Resources and Child Advocacy, Indianapolis, IN.

Bloomquist, K. R. (May, 2014). Case Study Analysis in Child Welfare Evaluation Research. Paper presented at the Tenth Annual International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry, Champaign, IL.

Bloomquist, K. R., Wood, L., & Trainor, K. E. (March, 2014). Social Work Self-care Practice, Perceptions, and Professional Sustainability: A Call to Educators. Paper presented at the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors 2014 Annual Conference, Louisville, KY.

Bloomquist, K. R. (November, 2013). Foster Parent Experiences of Failed Pre-adoptive Placements. Poster presented at the Council on Social Work Education 59th Annual Program Meeting, Dallas, TX.

Bloomquist, K. R. (August, 2013). Defining Yourself as a Teacher. Presentation at the Educational Training for Teaching Assistants (ETTA) Fall Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

Bloomquist, K. R. (April, 2013). "I gave him love. I gave him everything": A Phenomenological Endeavor in Permanency Research. Poster Presented at the annual Indiana University PhD Spring Symposium, Indianapolis, IN.

Bloomquist, K. R. & Helfenbein, R. (April, 2013). "Failure looks like this child is still in limbo": Foster Parent Experiences of Failed Pre-adoptive Placements. Poster presented at the Indiana University Purdue University Research Day. Indianapolis, IN.

Trainor, K. E., Bloomquist, K. R., & Kim, H. (November, 2012). Social Worker Self-care: A Tool for Professional Well-being and Effective Practice. Paper presented at the Council on Social Work Education 58th Annual Program Meeting, Washington, D.C.

Bloomquist, K. R., Trainor Friedmeyer, K., Wood, L., & Kim, H. (July, 2012). Social Worker Self-care in Rural Practice. Paper presented at the 37th Annual National Institute for Social Work and Human Services in Rural Areas, Nashville, IN.

Bloomquist, K. R., Trainor, K., Wood, L., & Kim, H. (April, 2012). Social Worker Self-care and Professional Well-being. Paper presented at the annual Indiana University PhD Spring Symposium, Indianapolis, IN.

Barton, W. H., Murphy-Nugen, A., & Bloomquist, K. (2011, November). Indiana High-Risk Youth Reentry Program: Preliminary evaluation findings. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Society of Criminology, Washington, DC.

Bloomquist, K. R. (2011, April). Trauma Assessment and Empowerment: A Shift toward Improved Adoption Outcomes for Children in Foster Care. Paper presented at the annual Indiana University PhD Spring Symposium, Indianapolis, IN.

Accepted Presentation Proposals

Bloomquist, K. R. (2015). Pre-adoptive Placement Disruption as Lived by Foster Parents. Paper Accepted. Eleventh Annual International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry. Champaign, IL.

Bloomquist, K. R., Wood, L., Hostetter, C., & Sullenberger, S. (2015). "Doin' Meth or Doin' Math: What client Constructions of Poverty Mean for Social Work Practice. Paper Accepted. Eleventh Annual International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry. Champaign, IL.

SERVICE:

Academic

Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership, & Governance Journal Reviewer	2014
Session Chair, International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry	2014
Educational Training for Teaching Assistants Fall Conference	2013
Indiana University School of Social Work Field Instructor Orientation	2013
Indiana University School of Social Work Student Field Orientation	2013
Perspectives on Social Work Journal Reviewer	2012
Indiana University School of Social Work Student Field Orientation	2012
Indiana University School of Social Work BSW Committee Member	2012 – 2014
Indiana University School of Social Work PhD Committee Student Rep.	2010 – 2013
Indiana University School of Social Work PhD Student Association	2011 – 2012

Community

Indiana Association of Resources and Child Advocacy	2014

Indiana Community Action Association   2014
Indiana Community Action of East-Central Indiana   2014
Children's Bureau Trauma Informed Care Curriculum Revision Team   2014
Indy Back Pack Attack Academic Department Contact & Coordinator   2014
Children's Bureau Foster Parent & Staff Training   2013
Indiana Community Action Association Training   2013
Department of Child Services Peer Coach Training   2013
Adult and Child Therapeutic Foster Care Foster Parent Training   2013
Adult and Child Therapeutic Foster Care Foster Parent Training   2012
Indiana Foster Care and Adoption Associate Annual Training Conference 2011

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS:

Society for Social Work and Research   2014 – Present
The Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors 2013 – Present
Council on Social Work Education   2012 – Present
Human Rights Campaign   2012 – Present
National Institute for Social Workers and Human Services in
Rural Areas Caucus   2012 – Present
National Association of Social Workers   2011 – Present

SPECIALIZED TRAINING:
Institute for Hermeneutic Phenomenology   2014

HONORS AND AWARDS:

Certificate of Recognition for Excellent in Teaching, Indiana University 2014
IUPUI Department of Athletics Favorite Professor Award   2014
Certificate of Recognition for Excellence in Teaching, Indiana University 2013
Jerry Powers Spirit of Inquiry Esprit Award, Indiana University   2012
Phi Alpha Honors Society Scholar, Indiana University   2008
Founders Day Scholar, Indiana University   2005