CONSTRUCTING HOPE: NARRATIVE AND THE FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCE

by

Shelley Hawthorne Smith

_____

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WITH A MAJOR IN RHETORIC, COMPOSITION, AND THE TEACHING OF

ENGLISH

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2012

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation
prepared by Shelley Hawthorne Smith
entitled *Constructing Hope: Narrative and the Foster Care Experience*
and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English.

_____ Date: 07/13/2012
Anne-Marie Hall

_____ Date: 07/13/2012
John Warnock

_____ Date: 07/13/2012
Cristina Ramirez

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's
submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and
recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

_____ Date: 07/13/2012
Dissertation Director: Anne-Marie Hall

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This dissertation has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at the University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this dissertation are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the head of the major department or the Dean of the Graduate College when in his or her judgment the proposed use of the material is in the interests of scholarship. In all other instances, however, permission must be obtained from the author.

SIGNED: Shelley Hawthorne Smith

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I love Bahkin's concept of heteroglossia and I resonate with the thought that many voices speak in this dissertation. To all of these voices, I am overwhelmingly grateful. What a privilege to have had Anne-Marie Hall as my adviser. Graduate students refer to her as "Santa Maria" for good reason; she guides, encourages, and instructs with patience and persistence. This dissertation would have never been completed without her generous understanding or without her confidence in the value of this project. Roxanne Mountford provided insightful guidance for the first half of my graduate studies, for which I am so grateful. I do not know if any other graduate student is more indebted to John Warnock; my writing has benefited for over ten years from his sometimes frustratingly close but always insightful reading of my work. The wide scope of Cristina Ramirez's knowledge and her perceptive comments were the perfect addition to my committee. Tilly Warnock's matter-of-fact encouragement and gentle prodding to move forward with this research through the bleary weariness of having two small babies was central to my progress in this project. Her serious consideration of my ideas brought me new insights and fresh enthusiasm for my work.

I am grateful to all the people who make Aviva Children's Services such a wonderful place – especially Cindy Lingel, Bonnie Demorotski, and Bob Heslinga; their love for children inspires me and their support for my research was invaluable. I am also grateful to the many foster parents and case workers who gave me their time and shared their thoughts. I am so humbled by their service to children.

My parents are in many ways my most important audience; thank you for your lively interest in my work and for the hours you spent reading drafts. Thank you to my extended family and to many friends who encouraged me along the way. Sara Docan-Morgan, Elena Albarran, Kelly Myers, Alwen Bledsoe, Shefali Milczarek-Desai, and others gave me fresh perspectives, inspiration, and practical advice. Georgia Ehlers has been the most understanding boss on the planet; she continually encouraged me and gave me the flexibility I needed to complete this work. I am so thankful for Nikki and Heather who cared for my children while I was writing. Finally, thank you to Mark, the love of my life, who supported me in countless ways even though he knew this work would never get him any closer to buying a boat in the desert. And to my sweet Langston and Simone who made this project so much more difficult and who make my life so much richer.

DEDICATION

For Mark. I owe you lunch.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This dissertation, *Constructing Hope: Narrative and the Foster Care Experience*, analyzes the language used to explain the foster care experience to children under the care of Arizona's Child Protective Services (CPS). The dissertation proposes revisions to the language around foster care to make the experience less confusing and makes recommendations to encourage hope for foster children. This multi-methodological study combines ethnography and textography. Engaging narrative inquiry, relying particularly on Earnest Bormann and Walter Fisher, the dissertation analyzes Arizona's training material for Child Protective Services (CPS) case managers (CORE training) and Arizona's training material for foster parents (PS-MAPP training) along with interviews of case managers and foster parents. The analysis of the CORE training for CPS case managers reveals that narratives about CPS generally focus on the birth parent as central to the plot and situate children as supporting characters. Also, the analysis shows narrative disjunctures between the characterization of birth parents in the CORE training and the experiences of the case managers interviewed. I show how the language used in the CORE training could be more coherent with the experiences of case managers and the experiences of children. The analysis of the PS-MAPP training reveals a contradiction between the characterization of the foster caregiver and the metaphor of "parent" used to describe the foster caregiver. Also, the study demonstrates ways in which the strength/needs framework, which is central to the training, could be expanded to better prepare foster caregivers for their work. Finally, examining Aviva Children's Services' Life Book program reveals ways in which hope can be cultivated for foster children. The

analysis of the Life Book project proposes a rhetoric of hope applicable to other

populations who have undergone serious trauma.

I. ARIZONA'S FOSTER CARE SYSTEM:

SAVING CHILDREN DEVASTATING NARRATIVES

In his 1968 essay, Lloyd Bitzer contends that a rhetorical situation is one in which discourse can change a situation. Richard Vatz argues that situations are not just changed by, but created and surrounded by rhetoric. In the context of Arizona's foster care system, the debate over the nature of the rhetorical situation can sound ridiculous. Does it matter whether rhetoric creates or changes a situation when *right now* a child is left in alone in an apartment without air conditioning? This fact, the child being left alone in an apartment, may elucidate some elements of the debate over the rhetorical situation, but can the debate be of any use to the child?

Perhaps not now, not this minute, but after the neighbor calls Child Protective Services (CPS) and if the child enters foster care, then that child will enter what both Bitzer and Vatz would agree is a rhetorical situation. And in the foster care situation, Vatz's contention that the meaning of a situation is "*created* by rhetors" (italics in original 157) is particularly powerful. Until children enter school, what they are told about life and their place in the world is largely a familial matter. But when children enter foster care they become a ward of the state; the state acts *in loco parentis*, or in place of the parents. This means that they are *our* children. Therefore, what they are told about the world and their place in the world is a concern for all citizens. And affirming Vatz's position, that not the situation but the speaker is primary, puts the responsibility for the nature of the foster care system in the hands of everyone who participates in the process of governing Arizona.

According to the most recent statistics available from the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System, almost 10,000 children in Arizona were in foster care in September of 2010. Each year, some of these children return to their birth families, some are adopted by family members, some age out of the system, some are adopted by non-relatives, and others remain foster children. Children's experiences within the system vary tremendously. But all of them experience the uneasiness of transition, of the unknown, and of uncertainty. In this uncertainty, they are given language through which they begin to understand their experiences. As Mary Garrett and Xiaosui Xiao point out in their discussion of the rhetorical situation, "outside of rhetorical handbooks the *topoi*, in the sense of lines of reasoning, are always instantiated in culture-specific terms, as commonplaces" (38). In the situation of CPS, the question is partly what lines of reasoning or commonplaces constitute the foster care system, but even more important is how these commonplaces are presented to the children. As I more fully explain later, because of the relationship between narrative and identity, Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm is a particularly helpful tool for analyzing the rhetorical construction of Arizona's foster care system in terms of what it informs the children about the world and their place in the world.

In the foster care situation, the influences creating the narrative world of the child are even more diverse than those of other children. And because each child, birth family, foster family, and social worker is different, many of these formative narratives cannot be studied in a systematic way. But, as I will explain in the subsequent section, elements of the foster care experience can and should be studied as systematically as possible in order to reveal possible changes to the system that could improve the experience.

I situate my analysis within the following questions:

- What narratives are introduced to case workers for understanding and explaining the experiences of foster children? What narrative disjunctures exist between the experiences of case workers and to the subsequent experience of children?

- Within what narratives are foster parents taught to position themselves and the children? How coherent are these narratives to each other and to the experiences of the foster parents and foster children?

- How can these narratives evolve to make the foster care experience less confusing for children?

- After a foster child leaves the CPS system, how can the foster care experience be framed so as to provide hope for the future?

I hypothesize that *Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm is a useful tool for uncovering ways in which the foster care experience could be less confusing for children.*

My Involvement in Foster Care

My interaction with the foster care system began in 2000, when a friend and I responded to an ad in the *Arizona Daily Wildcat*, the University of Arizona's daily newspaper about a volunteer position writing Life Books for foster children. Life Books are biographical scrapbooks created for children who have been severed from their birth parents. The books are intended to both record and explain the children's lives to the children themselves. My friend and I were interviewed by the local nonprofit that supports the creation of the books, Aviva Children's Services. We went through the

training and were assigned a case for two brothers. We loved visiting Aviva, scrapbooking together, and getting to know the brothers. I know now that the case was a fairly simple one, but I learned a great deal in the process – about parents teaching their children to steal, the complex web of the CPS system, and the effects of abuse. In the subsequent seven years I wrote four more books, learning more with each case.

My understanding of the CPS system increased one summer when I was employed with Aviva as a visit supervisor. As a visit supervisor I took foster children to meet with their birth parents or siblings. Then, several years later, Anne Sankey, Aviva's Executive Director called to ask if my husband and I would be interested in joining the Board of Directors. Because she was retiring, a new Executive Director was joining Aviva and they wanted to diversify and grow the Board. Through my involvement with Aviva, I have grown increasingly interested in how language is used to present the foster care experience to children. I wondered, how could this difficult experience be made less confusing for children?

Legal Foundation of Foster Care

The theoretical underpinning of the current foster system attempts to balance the conflicting responsibility of the state to "rescue" an abused child and the right of families to stay together. According to Title 8 Chapter 10 Article 1 of Arizona State Law, "The primary purposes of child protective services are to protect children by investigating allegations of abuse and neglect, promoting the well-being of the child in a permanent home and coordinating services to strengthen the family and prevent, intervene in and

treat abuse and neglect of children." The following four federal laws establish the

foundations of Child Protective Services (CPS) in Arizona:

- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1978 – When CAPTA

  passed it established the basis for state funding of child welfare programs. It also

  created the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect to research child abuse

  and neglect, distribute grants, and collect relevant information. The law provided

  infrastructure to collect information on child abuse and to create programs for

  education and prevention. (US Dept. of Health and Human Services, *Factsheet*).

- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978: Established "standards for the

  placement of Indian children in foster and adoptive homes and to prevent the

  breakup of Indian families" (US Dept. of Health and Human Services, *Factsheet*).

- Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994: Required equal treatment of all

  foster parents and foster children regardless of background. Called all states to

  encourage recruitment of foster caregivers from a variety of backgrounds (US

  Dept. of Health and Human Services, *Factsheet*).

- Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA): Created to privilege the needs of

  children over the needs of biological parents. It promoted adoption of foster

  children, particularly those with special needs and shortened time limits to

  permanency (US Dept. of Health and Human Services, *Factsheet*).

In Arizona, Title Eight provides more specific legislation on child welfare. Title

Eight includes definitions of abuse and neglect, protocols for the investigation of child

abuse or neglect allegations, requirements of kinship foster placements, the rights of

foster children and foster families, timelines to reunification or severance, and all the other details that comprise the CPS system. *The laws outlined above create a system intended to protect children through strengthening families.* The system is not about rescuing good children from bad parents. Many children in CPS are never removed from their birth parents.

Unfortunately, it is not always possible to protect children when they are under the care of their birth parents and, therefore, removal of children is sometimes necessary. Extreme examples of parental failure can be found on the Arizona Department of Economic Security under "CPS Fatalities and Near Fatalities." According to this website, 42 children in Arizona died in 2011 from mistreatment and 32 were reported as nearly dying. The website includes detailed reports on each case. How can one not feel outrage reading about Brooke, a two year old who almost died from "four broken ribs, a lacerated kidney and liver, a punctured lung, and issues with her spleen"? CPS had previously intervened twice with this family. How can one not feel sickened reading about the baby girl who was born to a mother in jail for child abuse and then, in the care of her mother, died a year later and was found to be malnourished with bruises, burns, scratches, and bite marks on her body? Because families can fail children so completely, cases such as these necessitate the foster care system where children are removed from their families of origin to live with relatives, acquaintances, or complete strangers.

Ideally, foster care should be a place of healing. But while removal is often necessary to protect children from their birth parents, the removal itself is extraordinarily stressful for children (Perry, *The Boy* 208). Children almost always love their birth parents even when those parents neglect or abuse them. Research has shown that the

connection between parents and children is powerful and that most children want to be with their biological parents. Furthermore, living in foster care, while ideally an opportunity for healing, is often a traumatic experience (see Kools; Bass, Shields, and Behrman). While children who are at risk of dying or being seriously damaged should be removed from dangerous situations, knowing how risky a situation is to a child is challenging and the dangers of the foster care system can be even worse than those of living with birth parents. I wrote a Life Book about Joshua[1] who was thirteen at the time of writing. He and his sister had been in the care of his mother who had a drug problem. Men cycled in and out of their home and the children were often left alone. When Joshua was eight, a neighbor called the police after finding the children hungry and cold in their mobile home. The children were put into foster care. The mother would meet her case goals by staying drug-free and responsible for several months. But she would return to her drug habit and eventually the children were severed from their mother. At the time I wrote the Life Book, one adoption had fallen through for the siblings and the most likely scenario would be that Joshua would "age out" of the system at eighteen without the support of an adoptive family. Was he better for CPS's involvement in his life? Perhaps. Perhaps not. One foster parent I interviewed cared for two of ten siblings. The mother had similar issues to Joshua's mother. But CPS's involvement resulted in the separation of the ten siblings. The foster mother I interviewed spoke a different language than the birth mother and was raising a six year old and a fifteen month old in a culture different from that of their birth parents. Because people and families are complicated, CPS is also complicated and the reality is far from a perfect system rescuing innocent children from

---

[1] All children's names have been changed.

bad parents. Among other issues foster care creates, in terms of identity it is terribly confusing.

Foster Care's Devastation of Identity

The effects of foster care on children's mental, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual health are difficult to establish through scientific studies. Often children suffer numerous traumas before entering foster care and therefore, like any cause and effect relationship, the effects of the particular experience of foster care are difficult to impossible to determine. In her study on the impact of foster care on identity development, Susan Kools found that children were impacted in their view of themselves through a decreased quality of peer relationships and through a dismal view of the future. A comprehensive 2004 study of mental health service found that use by foster children was "exceptionally high" with 94 percent using some sort of mental health service in their lifetime (McMillen et al). So while a direct relationship between foster care and decreased well-being is not easy to establish, research shows that foster children are a troubled population. Furthermore, theories linking narrative and identity reveal that the very nature of foster care damages a child's sense of identity.

Questions about identity often become an issue when significant change takes place in a person's life. "Identity," Mercer writes, "only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (43). While a crisis can come from a variety of sources, even choosing to leave home in adolescence can create a situation that brings one's own identity into question.

I first experienced a significant challenge to my identity as a junior in high school when I began a year as an exchange student in New Zealand. "I don't know who I am!" I realized as I looked out of the window of the small airplane descending into Palmerston North. Up to this very moment, I had been thrilled at the idea of spending a year in New Zealand. But suddenly I realized that no one in New Zealand knew what to expect from me and therefore I did not know what to expect from myself; I did not know how to *be* in this new situation. Rather than feeling freed by this realization, I felt lost, as if the plane had begun to fall through the air. My new "family" met me at the tiny airport and took me to my new "home." I sat for a little while in the family room, not knowing quite what to say, and then went to my room and cried myself to sleep. A warm host mother, thoughtful host father, endless extended "family," and new friends gradually knit me into a new self over the course of the following year, a happier and wiser version of my former self. But there was a calendar in the small water closet off of the kitchen. Every time I visited it I would flip through the pages, longing for July 1st, the day I would return home.

There is no comparison between being an exchange student and being a foster child: I chose to go to New Zealand; I could have chosen to go home; I always knew that my birth family loved me and would care for me if I needed them. But when I began working with foster children, I knew enough to know that their loss was greater than I could imagine; there was no calendar in the water closet telling them when they could return home. In the years after I returned from New Zealand, I had other opportunities to leave familiar and reencounter the bewildering task of being recreated within a foreign culture. Interestingly, I found that although the process became familiar, the familiarity

never made it easier. And each time I moved into an unfamiliar culture, I depended in

countless ways on the birth family I imagined was permanent. When a foster child is

removed from a familiar context and "audience," his or her purpose and, therefore, whole

self is lost. In his article on culture and identity, Jon Austin argues that even what he calls

"superficial markers," or those things that define *what* we are rather than *who* we are

(such as our names, ages, and skin color), are culturally defined because it is culture that

creates the labels we use for ourselves (7). While Child Protective Services in Arizona

does make an attempt to keep foster children within their own culture, often they are

placed in families of different color, religion, and even language. For many children,

even these superficial markers change when they are removed from their families. *I am*

white! Why do I suddenly feel fat in this family?

The rhetorical nature of identity makes community a necessary and inherent part

of knowing oneself on two levels. First, it is only within the shared language of

community that the significance and even existence of superficial markers can be

understood. Secondly, although superficial markers are part of identity, it is, as Scott

Webster argues, how we stand in relation to those markers that truly marks who we are as

people (9). In other words, whether or not I am white (a superficial marker) matters to my

identity, but my attitude towards and perspective towards my whiteness matters even

more. This orientation to superficial markers depends on defining what Charles Taylor

calls "moral and spiritual matters" (36). In other words, how we understand our own

selves depends on how we view ultimate questions about life, about what is good and

meaningful. Furthermore, Taylor argues, we must conceive of what our lives mean within

the framework of time (47). No person is a static being. We age, meet new people, learn new skills and forget them; a concept of identity must take time into consideration.

Tying all of this (superficial markers, orientation, and time) together, Taylor utilizes the concept of narrative. He explains that through telling us where we have been, where we are going, and explaining how we are situated within a social milieu, narratives shape how we understand ourselves and how we fit within the world (47). The concept of narrative so concisely ties together the nature of identity that in *Power, Intimacy and the Life Story*, psychologist Dan McAdams goes so far as to define identity as a story:

> It is an individual's story which has the power to tie together past, present, and future in his or her life. It is a story which is able to provide unity and purpose. It is a story which specifies a personalized 'niche' in the adult world and a sense of continuity and sameness across situations and over time (18).

This definition of identity as a life story highlights its communal nature. Just as culture defines superficial markers, it also supplies narratives. In "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," Margaret Somers emphasizes the social construction of narratives. The narratives that determine our identity, she argues, are largely given to us by the social structures around us, not created by our own selves (606). Both the superficial markers and the narratives that explain them are dependent on our community. In the case of foster care, children are taken from their birth families (which provides most of their superficial markers and, if they are old enough, narrative interpretations of those markers) and put into a new family. If identity is a story, it is clear that this change in community would be confusing for a child of any age. They are suddenly forced to reevaluate who they are, even before they are often able to articulate that question. A child, for example, who has lived all of his four years in an

immigrant community, may have never realized that his name was difficult for English

speakers to say. But when put into an English speaking foster family, he is suddenly

aware of this superficial marker (the sound of his name) and will either create or be

provided with narratives to explain the significance of this superficial marker. Superficial

markers and the narratives that contextualize them have immediate ramifications for

behavior. A ten year old boy with the superficial marker of being an older brother to two

siblings may accept narratives that position him as the protector of his younger siblings.

But in the foster home when he covers the two year old with a pillow, afraid that her cries

will wake the foster parents, he may be labeled as a threat to the younger child. These

sudden changes in superficial markers and the narratives that contextualize them are often

traumatic even for children who are removed from abusive situations.

According to anthropologists Lisa Capps and Elinor Ochs, trauma occurs when

one's basic narratives about life are contradicted by life's events (30). When an event

occurs that does not fit within the narratives a person believes about the world, a person

experiences trauma. Because what children believe about the world depends on their

previous experience, even being removed from an abusive situation and being put into a

safe situation can be traumatic for them. Alison Gopnik describes a study by Susan

Johnson in which children as young as twelve months were shown a brief video about a

large bubble and a small bubble going up a hill (184). The small bubble starts to "cry"

and shake. In one vignette the large bubble goes to "help" the small bubble and in the

other vignette the large bubble ignores the small bubble. Most children experience alarm

when the large bubble ignores the small bubble. But insecure children actually experience

alarm when the large bubble *helps* the small bubble. Abuse and neglect can become a

normal and accepted part of life for children and changes from any accepted pattern, even if it is a destructive pattern, can be difficult. Despite the fact that many (unfortunately, not all) foster homes are nurturing, moving into a new family is traumatic for children of any age.

While an understanding of identity as a narrative is helpful for uncovering the traumatic nature of the foster care experience, it is also necessary when trying to mitigate the damage foster care can do to a child. Yes, foster children need resources to go to college. They need caring foster families. They need support as they "age out" of the system. But they *also* need coherent stories about who they are and what has happened to them. Studies show that foster children suffer from the turbulence of their lives. In a 2003 study, psychologist Jason Whiting interviewed twenty-three foster children ages nine through twelve. He asked them to tell him the story of their lives. One of his primary findings is that the children are confused about their own stories. "Nearly every child was confused about one or both of the following: the reasons for being in care and what would happen in the future" (292). An Australian study, conducted five years after Whiting's research, focused on what foster children perceive as their needs. After the primary needs of connections to parents and siblings, children asked for clarity about their situation and control in the decisions made about them (Mason 364). Unfortunately, although foster children want control in their lives, very little agency is available to them. Most children want to return to their parents but whether or not they do is almost entirely in the hands of their parents. Foster children live in an uncertain and confusing state. The outcome of their situation is rarely in their hands. But although foster children have little control, I argue that, they can be given narratives to make some sense of their situation.

In *Acts of Meaning*, Jerome Bruner claims that narrative can function "to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern" (49-50). In other words, narrative can be used to make this traumatic experience comprehensible. I argue that the trauma of foster care can be mitigated by providing coherent stories about the experience to foster children.

The Use of Narrative to Address Toxic Stress

In late 2011, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a technical report titled "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress." The report emphasized that the health concerns of the present are different than those of previous decades; while infectious diseases and "developmental and behavioral difficulties" were primary foci in the 20th century, new scientific tools are revealing the critical impact that formerly overlooked challenges have to children's health (Shonkoff and Gardner 233). Of primary concern, according to this report, is "toxic stress." Toxic stress, as opposed to "positive" and "tolerable" stress, results from "strong, frequent or prolonged activation of the body's stress response systems in the absence of the buffering protection of a supportive adult relationship" (Shonkoff and Gardner 236). Stress for a child becomes toxic simply by the lack of a stable and supportive adult relationship. According to this definition, when children are removed from birth parents, regardless of what happens prior to CPS involvement, they will inevitably experience toxic stress. While positive and tolerable stress can strengthen children, the toxic stress can have high psychological and even physiological costs. According to the report, the eventual effects of toxic stress include "anatomic changes and/or physiologic disregulations that are the precursors of

later impairments in learning and behavior as well as the roots of chronic, stress-related physical and mental illness" (Shonkoff and Gardner 236). These effects have eventual societal costs and, because of those costs, the report calls for a strategic research into two areas, child welfare and maternal depression (Shonkoff and Gardner 241). Along with more funding, the report calls for "a deep investment in the development, testing, continuous improvement, and broad replication of innovative models . . . guided by scientific knowledge and led by practitioners in the medical, educational, and social sciences who are truly ready to work together" to find ways to ideally prevent toxic stress from occurring in the lives of children and, when it is inevitable, to mitigate its damage (241).

From the perspective of the humanities, the fact that the American Academy of Pediatrics recognizes toxic stress as one of the most pressing issues in child health is fascinating. But there is also something ironic about the report. All of the ecobiodevelopmental studies and the carefully crafted developmental neuroscientific research can be summarized by saying that children need to be safe and they need to be loved. While the findings are couched in technical language, they point to questions of philosophy and rhetoric. How can parents with few (economic, psychological, emotional, or other) resources be who they need to be for their children? What is society's role in supporting a parent? What does it mean to be a family and who has ultimate responsibility for a child?

My project is one answer to the call of the report on toxic stress. I do not address the fundamental questions about how to minimize child abuse and neglect; I leave those questions to other researchers. And, although they are desperately needed, I am not

suggesting overhauls to the CPS system. Unfortunately we must assume that for the foreseeable future there will be children who experience the toxic stress of being in the foster care system. I ask, how can that stress be reduced? Considering the limitations of the system, this dissertation asks, how can the terms, metaphors, and narratives used to describe the system be revised to make the foster care experience less confusing *for the children*?

In order to address these questions, I use fantasy theme analysis as proposed by Earnest Bormann as a method for uncovering the narratives underlying the foster care system. I then use Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm as an analytical tool to help find disjunctures or lack of coherence in the narratives. Considering the connections between theories of narrative and identity described previously, these two theories provide the necessary tools to analyze the messages given to foster children as they move through the CPS system. They also provide resources for improving those messages.

Fantasy Theme Analysis

Narrative inquiry or narrative analysis was established as an academic field of knowledge in the 1990s as psychologists and educators began to take the connection between identity, knowledge, and narrative seriously. Narrative inquiry blossomed in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and in educational research as a way of understanding learners' and educators' experiences in the classroom (Bell; Connelly and Clandinin; Phillion). In 1998, an academic journal titled *Narrative Inquiry* was established focusing on narrative theory and the role of narrative in human interaction. Narrative inquiry as described by Connelly and Clandinin generally focuses

on eliciting narratives from interviewees and analyzing these narratives for themes and categories.

Narrative researchers in psychology, education, and linguistics have not generally embraced communication scholar Ernest Bormann's theories and methods. Ernest Bormann's symbolic convergence theory, largely published in the 1970s and 1980s, assumes that humans are, at the core, storytelling creatures ("Symbolic Convergence" 128). As a communications theorist, Bormann is particularly interested in the role of narrative in communication. He postulates that when events in life occur, a "psychological or rhetorical need" might arise for stories to explain those events (*Force* 5). Fantasy theme analysis is Bormann's method to understand the narratives shared by communities. He provides the following terms to understand the method:

- *Fantasy*: A "creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need" (*Force* 5). These generally take a narrative form.

- *Dramatizing Message*: A structure that "includes good and bad characters in sequence of interrelated events" ("Symbolic" 130).

- *Symbolic Convergence*: When several people share a narrative or dramatizing message ("Symbolic" 131)

- *Rhetorical Vision*: The merging of several fantasies to produce a "broader view of things" ("Symbolic" 133).

My goal is to construct the rhetorical vision of CPS *as experienced by the child* when they enter foster care. What Bormann provides that other theorists do not provide is permission to distill narratives (or fantasies) from non-narrative texts. To uncover the

rhetorical visions of a community, Bormann suggests reconstructing fantasies through examining basic settings, plots, and characters that appear and reappear in documents or conversations ("Symbolic" 129). In order to uncover the fantasies surrounding foster children, I analyze the language around the people who are most immediately responsible for children in foster care.

Methods

In order to better understand a child's perspective, I analyze a child's two main sources of information about the foster care system: the social worker and the foster parents[2]. In order to better understand the fantasies communicated to the child through the social worker, I analyze the CORE training that all social workers in Arizona undergo. I read the training manual and discussed the curriculum with a trainer for Tucson. I then interviewed five current CPS case workers about their work and their experiences to evaluate the durability of the fantasies that were introduced to them during their training and to have exposure to other narratives that they use to explain the foster care experience to the children under their care.

Although the social workers are trained to talk about the foster care system in a certain way, they are not children's only source of information on the system. Foster children are also embedded in the language of the foster parents. Therefore I next examine the fantasies around foster parenting. In order to be licensed, foster parents must also undergo training. I analyze the PS-MAPP Preparation and Selection Program text

---

[2] I realize that the birth family is also a major source of information for the child, but there is no systematic way to include that factor in my analysis because, unlike social workers and foster parents, birth families do not undergo formal training to teach them how to articulate their experiences with and within the system.

which is used for all foster parent training in Arizona. I discussed the training with both Belva Stites the PS-MAPP trainer for Arizona's Department of Children, Youth, and Families, and Pat Alkola, a leader who conducts the training for a local non-profit. I then interviewed three foster families to understand the ways in which the training did or did not impact their understanding of the foster care experience and to hear the narratives that they brought to the experience themselves.

I argue that symbolic convergence offers the basis for a rhetorical criticism that is particularly important when looking at situations involving children. Ages of foster children range from newborn to eighteen. Most foster children enter the system prior to late adolescence when, according to psychologist Dan McAdams, people develop sophisticated and long-lasting narratives about their lives (*Power* 18). Because their personal narratives are still developing, it is particularly important to reduce the dissonance in the messages given to children, to ensure that the messages children are given cohere with each other and with the children's actual experiences.

While Bormann's method is useful for uncovering narratives or fantasies, it is limited as an analytical tool. Fantasy theme analysis has been most notably criticized for its lack of clarity (Farrell 324 and Mohrmann) and dependence on Freud (Mohrmann). Bormann refutes these criticisms in a 1982 article, but as Joshua Gunn points out, the dependence of the theory on Freud remains an issue; according to Freud, shared fantasies can be deceptive and do not reliably point to motives (51). I avoid this issue by supplementing fantasy theme analysis with Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm. Bormann's concern after reconstructing fantasies is to analyze the power structures of the group and, using this information, ask why the group shares the fantasies that it shares

("Symbolic" 129). But these are not the questions that concern me. As I show below,

Fisher's narrative paradigm provides the structure to ask more interesting and relevant

questions of the foster care system.

Interpretive Potential of Fisher's Narrative Paradigm

In the 1980's Walter Fisher proposed what he labeled the "narrative paradigm."

His assertion is that narrative is a valid way to argue and to make sense of the world. In

Human Communication as Narration, he summarizes his argument.

> My central contention is that *narrative* is a concept that can enhance understanding of human communication and action wherever those phenomena occur. To view discourse and action as occurring within the 'human story' will allow us to account for human behavior in ways that are not possible using the theories and methods of the social sciences (20).

Decades later, his assertion comes across as commonplace. Philosophy and psychology

have embraced narrative as not only a communicative tool but also as central to

epistemology (see, for example, Jerome Bruner, Dan McAdams, and Charles Taylor).

While Fisher's central contention is not at issue, his secondary argument

concerning what he calls narrative rationality has been the object of much debate. Fisher

works to go beyond the claim that narrative is central to communication to ask how

narrative and communication work. In *Human Communication as Narration*, Fisher

defines what he calls "narrative rationality." Fisher uses narrative rationality to show that

not all logic is argumentative, that good reasons can be given outside of the

argumentative form (48). He divides narrative rationality into two main parts, probability

and fidelity (47).

- *Narrative probability*, or coherence, is how the story "hangs together" within itself as a text. It consists of three internal elements, argumentative or structural coherence, material coherence, and characterological coherence (47).

- *Narrative fidelity* is related to how the story relates to factors outside of the text itself and consists of five components: fact, relevance, consequence, consistency, and transcendent issue (109). Fisher uses narrative rationality to argue that there is a type of logic to how narrative works in communication.

I analyze the fantasies, or "creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfill a psychological or rhetorical need," of social workers and foster parents through Fisher's theory. My analysis reveals the value of Fisher's narrative rationality for non-narrative texts, particularly those with children as the audience. In doing so I contradict previous critics such as Robert Roland who claim that the paradigm is best for narrative text. I then draw on Aviva Children's Services' Life Book project to show the limitations of the narrative paradigm in analyzing narrative texts. Life Books are written to counter the confusion that foster children often have about what has happened to them and to counter the guilt that they often feel for their own past. Writers research a child's story through reading their case files and talking to people who know them. They put a scrapbook together that narrates a child's life into a coherent whole using text, graphics, and photos. The stated purpose of the book is to provide "hope for the future" and to remove any blame that the child puts on his or her self for what has happened (*Life Book Workbook*). I have written a total of five books. My formal research for the Life Book

program consists of analyzing the *Life Book Workbook*, which is used to train writers, and then reviewing twenty completed books in the Aviva office.

In the fourth chapter, I show how the Life Books project reveals the limits of the narrative paradigm but also how it can provide the basis for a rhetoric of hope in difficult situations.

Narrative Possibilities

In writing about history, Hayden White argues that the "demand for closure in the historical story is a demand, I suggest, for moral meaning, a demand that the sequences of real events be assessed as to their significance as elements in a *moral* drama" (24). Looking at the foster care system in terms of a story as the narrative paradigm suggests, is to look at it in terms of meaning, to ask, what does this system mean for the children within it? I argue that this analytical frame is necessary because foster children are deprived of what most children have, a family, as both author and audience, to articulate the meaning of the experiences they create and undergo. Furthermore, the diversity of American society creates fragmented narratives for people not embedded in a specific community. According to psychologist Dan McAdams, "20th-century images of identity are frightening, partly because they lack unity and purpose . . . alienated from self and world, they [Americans] do not sense that their lives are integral parts of a super-ordinate and purposeful whole" (3). If this is true about 21st century images for mainstream Americans, how much more so for children who live with families not their own and wonder every day if they will return to the care of their birth parents. The death of a parent, even for an adult, is often a traumatic experience. But foster children live with

something even more difficult, not knowing if their parents will make choices that will legally sever their relationship. At some level, a foster child has been rejected by his or her parent (Perry, "Bonding" 6) and they do not know if they will return to their care. Most long with surprising force to return to their parents, but others, even more heartbreakingly, beg not to return.

Combining Bormann's symbolic convergence theory with Fisher's narrative paradigm provide the tools to explore the narrative world of foster children. But if I am going to analyze what exists, it is also my responsibility to offer something in return. What can one say to children living in this disconcerting space? What can anyone offer them as a coherent explanation of what has happened in their short life? If the foster care system should be less confusing for a child, what narratives are appropriate foundations for better explanations?

Foster families are often recruited through religious organizations. Some foster families rely on narratives supplied by their faith to contextualize a child's life. But the foster system exists in a secular society, or as philosopher Charles Taylor defines in *A Secular Age*, one in which "faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others" (3). Just as foster children have some measure of choice in their occupation, they also have a choice in their religious life. Although many birth and foster families offer religious training to children, the foster system itself is characterized by religious diversity.

Psychologist James Hillman offers a theory that could potentially provide a narrative structure for foster children. He claims that current understandings of what it means to be human are lacking; "today's main paradigm for understanding a human life,

the interplay of genetics and environment, omits something essential – the particularity

you feel to be you. By accepting the idea that I am the effect of a subtle buffeting

between hereditary and societal forces, I reduce myself to a result" (6). Addressing that

"something essential," Hillman claims that "each life is formed by its unique image, an

image that is the essence of that life and calls it to a destiny" (39). Hillman's claim that

each life is not random and is not determined solely by measurable influences; rather

there is something greater at work in each individual life, something calling each person

to a particular destiny. This idea of a calling can provide some sense of meaning if one

believes that the calling is directed toward a positive outcome. But Hillman does not

adequately deal with the question of evil, which he labels "the Bad Seed." Narratives for

foster children have to deal with the shortcomings of their parents as well as offer hope

for the children themselves. Foster children, at the very least, have experienced parents

who are unresponsive to their needs. At the worst, some foster children have been

systematically used to satisfy a parent's sexual desires or to satisfy a parent's need for

power through intentional physical and emotional abuse. Also, once in the system, foster

children often experience physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at the hands of other foster

children or even foster parents. Hillman's suggestions to deal with the Bad Seed mainly

concern "rituals of recognition" (246). As other children do, foster children often struggle

with the sense that their parent's life is their own destiny and Hillman's theory does not

offer adequate tools for overcoming what he calls the Bad Seed.

Coming from a different theoretical foundation, Viktor Frankl's theories as set

forth in his classic, *Man's Search for Meaning*, correspond in important ways to

Hillman's theory about image and destiny. Viktor Frankl claims that each person's task is

to find the meaning of his or her life. This meaning, he claims, can come from three sources:

> The first is by creating a work or doing a deed. The second is by experiencing something or encountering someone . . . Most important, however, is the third avenue to meaning in life: even a helpless victim of a hopeless situation, facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself, may grow beyond himself, and by so doing change himself (170).

Frankl's theory holds particular potential as a narrative structure for foster children considering that the theory was formed in the crucible of a death camp. Yet the theory seems inappropriate when considering an audience of children and babies rather than grown men or women. Frankl's message that the victim has a choice in how to deal with a tragedy has value. But it seems like a cruel offering to a child; there has to be room for a child to lament. There has to be space to say, this is terribly sad and wrong. Furthermore, choosing one's own way is radically individualistic. Is it fair to suggest to children who may have *no one* in the world to lean on, who may already have mental health issues, and who are likely on numerous medications, that they have a choice about their attitude towards life? To put all the responsibility for a child's anger and sadness on his or her own small shoulders seems fundamentally harsh.

The question about appropriate narratives to offer foster children goes back as far as the question of human suffering. While Judith Herman in her study on trauma and recovery claims that connection is central to recovery, the foster care system is based on a radical idea of individuality – that a baby or a teenager can be removed from his or her birth family and thrive in a separate family. While I do not know of a coherent message that can be given to children who experience abuse and neglect and who are removed

from their birth families, coherence itself is important because it gives children a place from which to begin understanding their own lives.

Sociologist Aaron Antonovsky began his seminal work on health when, incidental to other research he was doing, he found that more than a quarter of the World War II concentration camp survivors whom he studied were in reasonable mental and physical health (about half of the control group was judged to be in reasonable health) (xi). The difference, he claims, between those who tend toward the "health" end of a "health/disease" continuum, is a sense of coherence (15). Coherence, Antonovsky explains, can be broken into a sense of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness (16). Given the reality of the CPS system – the lack of funding, the continual turnover of case managers and foster parents, and the laws guiding the system – none of these components of coherence can be said to characterize the foster care system. But while only significant structural changes could make a radical difference in the foster care experience, providing clear language could make the experience more comprehensible and meaningful. While a coherent narrative is not necessarily a healthy narrative, in the case of the foster care system, reducing the narrative *disjunctures* is a worthy end in itself. In other words, while it may not be possible (or even desirable) to explain the foster care experience in an entirely coherent way, reducing the narrative inconsistencies or narrative conflicts in the language given to foster children can help clear the way for children to eventually make sense of the experience on their own.

McAdams argues in *Power, Intimacy and the Life Story* that "when a person finds (creates, constructs) a personalized life myth or story, he or she no longer 'deceives' the self and world. The story provides a coherent narrative framework within which the

disparate events and the various roles of a person's life can be embedded and given meaning (19)". Reducing the narrative disjunctures in the language used to explain their experiences can make the "finding/creating/constructing" process simpler. Studies in psychology have demonstrated the value of finding narrative cohesion in ones' own life. Alison Gopnik describes a study on of infant, mother, and grandmother attachment in which psychologists Diane Benoit and Kevin C. H. Parker found that mothers who could explain their experiences in a narrative form were able to change them. In a study on Alaskan teenagers, Michael Chandler and Travis Proulx found that those teenagers who could narrate their lives into a cohesive whole were much less likely to commit suicide that those who did not have the language to connect their past and present with their future. Connections to other people, to traditions, to morals, and to values are central to the health of any child, but foster children exist in a system undergirded by the concept of individuality and they will have to construct personal narratives on their own; the least the State can do is to provide coherent pieces for these individual narratives.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapters two and three examine the two major influences in a foster child's life and the narratives given to the children through those influences. The last two chapters focus on the work that is and could be done to mitigate the trauma of the experience.

- Chapter Two focuses on the language used by CPS case managers. I show how what I call "ideal fantasies" in the training materials mislead social workers and create confusion. I use Fisher's concept of narrative fidelity, as revised by critics,

to suggest revisions to the social worker training materials and to give greater cohesion to the language used with foster children.

- Chapter Three examines the narratives employed by foster parents. I outline the way in which the foster parent training materials both idealize the foster parent and create contradicting narratives about who the foster parent is to be in relation to the foster child. I show how the training materials could be made more accurate to the experience of foster parenting.

- Chapter Four demonstrates how the traumatic experience of foster care can be framed in ways to promote hope for the future. In doing so, I demonstrate the limits of the narrative paradigm for analyzing narrative texts. I use Aviva Life Book Project to show how narratives of hope can be constructed using the material of traumatic situations.

- Chapter Five concludes the dissertation by elaborating on the implications of this research for narrative inquiry and by making suggestions to create a more coherent experience for foster children.

II. CASE MANAGER TRAINING: A DEARTH OF NARRATIVE

People will say things like, "your mom and dad need to get help." "Your mom and dad are sick right now." "They can't care for you." But I don't think it is ever explained to them – THIS is where you are going to go or THIS is what foster care is.
-                      Mary, Investigative Case Worker

The main question this dissertation seeks to address is how the narratives that constitute foster care can be made less confusing for children. One of the most important avenues through which narratives about the foster care experience are conveyed to children is through the social worker or case manager who oversees their case[3]. In order to answer the broad questions of this dissertation, this chapter specifically addresses the following questions:

- What narratives are introduced to case managers in training for understanding and explaining the experiences of foster children?

- How do these narratives relate to the experiences of case managers and to the subsequent experience of children? Where are their disjunctures or gaps in these narratives?

- How could these findings be used to create a more healing experience for foster children?

I show how the narratives introduced in the Child Protective Services case manager training, or CORE Training lack cohesion with the reality experienced by case managers on the job. Because these fissures can result in disillusionment and even bitterness on the part of case managers, I contend that a wider range of narratives *must* be

---

[3] Although the CPS website uses the title "Child Protective Service Specialist," I have never heard that title used. Child Protective Service Specialists are social workers in the broad sense, just as a sculptor is an artist in the broad sense. At Aviva and in my interviews, the titles "case workers" or "case managers" were most often used. I use these two terms interchangeably.

introduced in the CORE Training. In turn, when children enter state care, they must also be introduced to both a wider variety and more complex narratives to help them make sense of their experiences.

In order to answer the question of what narratives are introduced to case managers through their training, I first analyzed the written materials that constitute the training that all CPS case managers in Arizona undertake. In Tucson, CORE training consists of six weeks of classroom work at the Child Welfare Institute. Through a contact at Aviva, I obtained a copy of the 1,056 pages of the CORE curriculum. Using Ernest Bormann's method of fantasy theme analysis, I determined the narratives that undergird the training through reviewing the written materials. To more fully understand the CORE training, I interviewed a CORE training officer at the Child Welfare Institute who was helpful in explaining the details of the training.

To answer the question of how the narratives relate to the experiences of case managers and to the subsequent experience of children, I then interviewed five case workers (See Appendix A for a copy of interview questions). I talked to one or more of each of the three types of case workers – investigators, on-going case managers, and case aides. I directly asked the case managers about the CORE training and elicited their stories about their experiences in CPS. They explained the ways in which they discuss the foster care experience to children. Using Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm as an analytical screen, I evaluated my data according to his criteria of narrative fidelity. Finally, I integrate William Kirkwood's and Scott Stroud's contributions to Fisher's theory with novelist Chimamanda Adichie's concept of "the danger of a single story" in

order to address the last question of how the foster care experience could become a more healing experience.

How the CPS System Works

Before discussing the narratives used by case managers in their interactions with children, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of how the CPS system operates. But prior to describing the system, I want to establish some basic premises that may run counter to common assumptions about CPS.

1. The official purpose of CPS is to protect children.

2. Legally, the first priority of CPS is to reunify children with their birth parents (see 1997 Adoptions and Safe Families Act. In the US Dept. of Health and Human Services *Factsheet*).

3. Many CPS case managers do their job because they love children and believe that birth parents can grow and change.

Although the CPS system (and many people who work in the system) has significant and even tragic flaws, the laws scaffolding the system are not draconian and some people working within the system are, in my estimation, deserving of sainthood. The basic structure of the system is as follows. Three types of case workers are involved with cases: investigative case workers, on-going case managers, and case aides. Every accusation of child abuse or neglect must first be registered by a call to the Child Abuse Hotline by hotline workers. Cases are then given to CPS investigators (or investigative case managers) who have the case for thirty days. Investigators determine whether or not

the call is substantiated. If the call is substantiated, they next evaluate the safety of the child or children.

A child who is considered unsafe is removed from the home. The investigator must first look for relatives or friends who can provide a safe place for the child or, if no kinship placement is found, find a foster or group home for the child. Any case that involves removing a child must be overseen by the court and all of these cases are transferred to an on-going case manager.

If the risk to the child is low enough, then the investigator can keep the child in the home and provide services to the family. If, for example, a child is hungry, the only service needed may be connections to resources to provide food for the child. Some low-risk cases are closed at this level of investigation. But, if the situation is more complicated – for example if drugs are a factor or if the case involves neglect – the investigator may determine to provide services and then transfers the case to an on-going case manager. The court is involved in all on-going cases.

An on-going case manager is responsible for cases that continue past the level of investigation. A single case involves overseeing children, caretakers (kinship placements, foster families, or group homes), and birth families. Case aides assist on-going case managers when their work becomes overwhelming; one case aide generally assists roughly seven on-going case managers. The case manager must facilitate the creation of a case plan that involves measurable goals for the birth parents. After five months, the court reviews the case and if no progress has been made by the birth parents, the case manager can recommend severance at this point. If some progress has been made, the case can be extended for another six months. If the birth parents have made exceptional

progress, the family can be reunified at this point. Legally, cases should last no more than a year. But judges have the authority to extend a case timeline and a closed case can reopen for another cycle through the system.

This simple system is, of course, far from simple in practice. The current recommended load for a case manager is twelve families. My interviewees had far more than twelve cases, most had more than twenty. Furthermore, a family often has multiple children and frequently includes multiple fathers. Case managers must provide support, including monthly visits, to birth families, foster families, and children. When children disrupt placements (the phrase used to describe situations when, for whatever reason, children can no longer live in their current placement), they must find new placements. Case managers must continually evaluate whether a case plan is being met and then review and revise case plans. They must prepare court reports and attend court. And, one of the most difficult and time-consuming elements of the job is the preponderance of paperwork.

Deciphering CORE Training

After a person is hired as a Child Protective Service Specialist by Arizona's Department of Economic Security (DES), the new employee first undergoes a six hour orientation to DES and the complex computer system. Depending on the relation of the hire date to the beginning of the next CORE training date, the new employee may then shadow an experienced case manager for few days to several months. The employee then begins six weeks of CORE training at the Child Welfare Institute.

In order to understand the CORE training process, I first reviewed the 1,056 pages of CORE training material. The materials do not read as a cohesive training manual. There is no table of contents or index and they do not seem to follow any logical progression. The materials largely consist of printed Power Point Presentations sprinkled with sundry handouts – including, for example, a graph on the normal weight and height development for girls, a printed Code of Ethics from the National Association of Social Workers, and a handout with eleven "Things to Remember about Kinship Foster Care Cash Assistance." In order to better understand the training process, I met with a training officer at the Child Welfare Training Institute in Tucson. He reviewed the material I had received and confirmed that it is basically the same as the material that is currently used, although because the laws and policies around CPS constantly change, the training materials are continually in flux. He explained that the printed materials in my possession are not handed out as a unified training manual but given to the participants as daily handouts to accompany the day's lessons. He explained that the basic outline of the course is as follows: The first two weeks of training are considered foundational information. The participants come from a variety of backgrounds, so they are given information on child development, addictions, mental health, forensic interviewing, etc. The subsequent four weeks are titled "The Life of a Case" and the training follows the "Newman family" a fictionalized case that is based on an actual family. The class follows the Newman family from the initial report of child abuse to a court hearing six months later. The training, then, is intended to give new employees both a theoretical background and practical information on how to do their job. The trainer emphasized that the training was just a launching pad of sorts, that six weeks of training could never fully prepare a

person for the work of CPS. But while his point is valid, these six weeks of training are also a framework through which the case workers will make sense of their subsequent experiences.

Availability of Narratives and Fantasy-Theme Analysis

As explained in the introduction, my methods stem from theories that claim narrative as central to identity, relationships, and ontology. As Margaret Somers nicely summarizes in her article "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," diverse fields such as history, psychology, anthropology, social work, women's studies, and medical sociology have shown that

> . . . stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories, that "experience" is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways , and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives (606).

If Somers is correct in her assertion, how does one cull these narratives from the language that creates and surrounds the CPS system? Researchers who employ narrative inquiry generally rely on data presented in the narrative form. As educational researcher Jill Sinclair Bell explains, narrative inquiry "involves working with people's consciously told

stories, recognizing that these rest on deeper stories of which people are often unaware[4]" (209). Ernest Bormann's fantasy theme analysis provides a rationale and a method for determining narratives underlying group communication that is not necessarily in the form of consciously told stories. In this way, his method is somewhat different than the method used in most narrative inquiry because it permits a researcher to gather narratives from non-narrative texts.

Bormann's theory builds on the work of Robert Bales who studied small group communication ("Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality" 396). In his research, Bales discovered that small groups of people often begin "fantasizing or dramatizing" in their communication; in other words, the group begins creating stories that dramatize events under discussion. Bormann extends Bales' observation into mass communication through the theory of symbolic convergence. Bormann's theory and accompanying method was introduced in the 1970s and continues to be of influence. Bormann primarily used the method to analyze Puritan rhetoric in his 1985 book *The Force of Fantasy*. In this book he illustrates a move from sacred to secular themes in American rhetoric, focusing largely on religious and political speeches. Fantasy theme criticism has recently been employed in the analysis of political rhetoric (see Vultee; Page and Duffy) and online communication (see Duffy; Greer). I use the method to analyze the CORE training materials.

---

[4] To clarify my terms, I use "story" and "narrative" interchangeably. The definitions used by other theorists seem to contradict themselves and each other. For example, Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin write, "Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon 'story' and the inquiry 'narrative.' Thus we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (2). In as much as I can determine, their definition contradicts Paul Cobley's definition, who explains that, "'story' consists of all the events which are to be depicted. 'Plot' is the chain of causation which dictates that these events are somehow linked . . . 'Narrative' is the showing or telling of these events and the mode selected for that to take place" (5-6).

Beginning with the assumption that humans rely on stories as cognitive tools,

Bormann postulates that when people communicate, "symbolic convergence" may take

place and people begin to share narratives or "fantasies" about their experiences

("Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality" 398). In *The Force of Fantasy*, Bormann

describes what he sees as the normal development of a fantasy. They often originate in

"consciousness-creating meetings" and then gain power as communicative tools (*Force*

10). In consciousness-creating meetings, a group of like-minded individuals dramatize a

message through personifying it "in terms of an individual, an animal, or an elemental

force, or . . . a persona acting as a human individual" (*Force* 11). In this situation, the

consciousness-creating meetings could be understood as the process of translating the

laws into the training material, a much more formalized process than the development of,

for example, a political message around a candidate. Next, "consciousness-raising

communication efforts" attract "converts" and convince them to share in the unifying

drama that has been created (*Force* 13). The process of consciousness-raising in this

situation takes place in the CORE training when trainees are introduced to the narratives

underlying CPS work. These narratives serve to explain the behavior of the people

around them. For example, if a case manager says to her supervisor, "Remember the

Weber case? Sarah just disrupted her placement last night," the supervisor will

understand that the case worker will need to find a new placement for Sarah; they share a

narrative about how a foster child should adapt to her foster family. But if the case

manager says, "Remember the Weber case? Sarah has demonstrated that her foster family

does not know how to provide for her needs," then the supervisor will likely be confused

about what the case manager is saying; they do not share a narrative about the ability of children to exert their power to get their needs met.

Fantasy theme analysis is a useful method in this situation on two levels. As Bormann explains in "Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Communication Formulation," the theory takes into account the human tendency to contextualize events and roles within a narrative, or "good and bad characters in sequence of interrelated events" (130). On the first level, Bormann gives me permission to take the non-narrative texts and to use those to construct probable narratives into which case workers contextualize their job. On the second level, the narratives or fantasies employed by case managers influence the ways in which they explain the foster care experience to children and, in turn, influence how foster children understand themselves and their place in the world.

The CORE training takes the human tendency to understand events in terms of narrative into account by introducing the Newman family as an example for trainees to follow as they learn about the laws, policies, and procedures that constitute their new job. While the training does employ the Newman family as an example, it would be overly simplistic to take their case as the only underlying fantasy for the entire course. First of all, the Newman family is not once mentioned in the printed materials I received. Secondly, the trainer with whom I spoke emphasized that the course does not depend on that single case. "The goal," he explained "is *not* to make them experts on the Newman family but to use the Newman family as a chronological model to follow a case through its life." In "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality," Bormann recommends collecting materials to look for dramatic incidences (401). He

suggests looking for patterns of characterization, dramatic situations and actions, and of setting (401).

> When a critic has gathered a number of dramatic incidents, he can look for patterns of characterization (do the same people keep cropping up as villains?) of dramatic situations and actions (are the same stories repeated?) and of setting (where is the sacred ground and where is the profane?). The critic must then creatively reconstruct the rhetorical vision from the representative fantasy chains much as a scholar would delineate a school of drama on the basis of a number of different plays (401).

Through examining the CORE handbook, narrative patterns emerge through the handouts, copies of Power Point Presentations, and worksheets; in other words, certain characters and actions are predicted. For example, in my notes under "case manager" as character, the case manager is characterized in the following ways: calmly observing when doing an initial home visit, using positive language, suffering from compassion fatigue, engaging in self-care, fully prepared for court hearings. After over a thousand pages of text, certain narrative patterns begin to emerge. Utilizing Bormann's method, I constructed the following fantasy from the CORE training materials.

The Child Abuse Hotline receives a call from a person claiming to be a neighbor of a family abusing/neglecting a three year old. An investigative case manager takes the case for 30 days. The abuse and/or neglect are substantiated. An on-going case manager takes the case and calls a Family Group Decision Making meeting to create a case plan. The child's loving aunt, who happens to live in the same neighborhood as the child, agrees to take the child while the parents "do some work," kicking their drug habits and finding jobs. She agrees to attend foster parent training. Over the subsequent five months the birth parents enter rehab and have weekly visits with the child. The on-going case manager has monthly visits with the birth parents, child, and aunt. During these visits she

has substantive conversations about their progress. She provides bus passes to help the parents get to their jobs and provides the resources for them to see a marriage counselor, who helps them work through some of their marital issues. Because the aunt works full-time, the case manager makes sure that the child has appropriate daycare arrangements. After five months the court reviews the case and, because the parents occasionally tested positive for cocaine, the child will continue living with the aunt. Six months later, the judge agrees that such progress has been made that, yes, the family can reunify and exit the system. With a few bumps in the road, the family goes on to love and protect the child until she grows into adulthood.

The fantasy that emerged through talking with the trainer is slightly different, but as I will demonstrate, has important similarities. The trainer described the story of the Newman family as follows.

Newman family is a middle-class family with two children. The father, Steve, makes $60,000/year. Mary, the mother does not work. Steve regularly abuses his wife and, eventually, the abuse becomes such an issue that the children are no longer safe. A concerned teacher calls the Child Abuse Hotline and, after the abuse is substantiated, the children move to a foster home. Meanwhile, the mother realizes the extent of the abuse and leaves her husband to live with a family member. She regularly visits the children and claims that she will not return to her husband. In one version of the story, Mary has a breakthrough with her pastor. The story ends six months into the case at the trial where Mary is requesting that her children return to her care.

Through utilizing Bormann's method, it becomes clear that when the fantasies underlying the CORE training are fleshed out, the dramatic action, or plot, revolves

around a conversion or spiritual transformation of the parent. To distill both of the

fantasies, the plot proceeds as follows: a parent is not keeping a child safe, CPS gets

involved, the parent becomes a responsible caretaker. The fact that the plot is about the

parent is noteworthy because the central purpose of Child Protective Services is to protect

children. CPS recognizes that, despite western myths of individualism, children are

irrevocably linked to their birth families. As summarized in a power point presentation

near the beginning of the handbook, CPS attempts to provide for the safety of children

while strengthening families through four goals which are to: "Enhance the ability of

parents to create safe, stable, and nurturing home environments. Strengthen families so

children can remain safely in their homes. Find more permanent homes more quickly for

children entering out-of-home placement. Place children in the least restrictive, most

family-like settings possible."

The CORE training fantasies serve the purpose of personifying the laws and

policies undergirding Child Protective Services and predicting what the case managers

may encounter as they enact those laws and policies. In order to better understand the

training, fantasy theme analysis is useful as a data collection method and as a tool to help

understand the narratives. But in this situation, Bormann's method is not particularly

helpful for understanding the *significance* of those narratives to the case workers or to the

children. In *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*, Jerome Bruner observes that in the

legal context stories establish credibility by referring to precedent, but a fiction begins

with the known and extends into the "possible, the might-be, could have been, perhaps

will be" (13). The fiction of the Newman family and the other fantasy serve to predict

what "perhaps will be" for the new case managers. So what is most significant in this

situation is how fantasies relate to the subsequent experiences and people that the case managers will encounter or how the narratives play out against lived experience. Bormann's method of analysis is not a helpful tool for answering these questions.

CORE training differs from the rhetorical events often selected for fantasy theme analysis in that, in order to keep their job, the case workers do not have a choice about their participation. In this particular community, the fantasies are embodiments of events that unfold according to the legal framework; unfortunately, parents and children do not always act the way that the law predicts they will act. Fantasy theme analysis generally focuses on *why* certain narratives are attractive to particular social groups. The researcher seeks to discover the "dynamic tendencies" within a group and to uncover why some narratives hold particular power ("Communication Formulation" 129). However, in this situation the question of why these narratives persist is clear; they are the ones employed by the training unit to demonstrate the laws undergirding CPS. The particular (and not unique) circumstances under which they circulate create a particular type of fantasy theme that differs from the fantasy themes Bormann describes. The Child Welfare Institute is in many ways separate from the experiences of CPS case managers and, therefore, the experiences of the case mangers do not necessarily modify the training. Major disconnects, which I illustrate in the subsequent sections, exist between the fantasies circulated in training and the experiences of case managers. Despite these disconnects, case mangers generally accept the language given to them in training.

Ideal Fantasies Defined

All of the case workers with whom I spoke embrace the plotline as presented in CORE. When I asked them to describe the job, most gave a version of Aja's answer, "I manage an entire family system. I run families and help them reunify." Their answers focus on the birth family or parents as much as on the children. Furthermore, when asked how they explain foster care to the children, the answers often, along with an explanation of safety, include metaphors about the parents' improvement such as "mom has to do some work right now." Or "mom's in mom-school. She's not a bad mom . . . she's doing her homework." Most markedly, when asked to describe their successes, only one case manager brought up child safety. All of them mentioned either family reunification or parental change as a mark of success. This is particularly interesting given the fact that, according to the Administration for Children and Families, only half of the families in CPS will reunify. While verbally incorporating the fantasy of parental conversion in to their conversation, case workers simultaneously acknowledge the fact that the fantasy is only part of their lived experience.

This tension between the accepted fantasy and the lived reality of the case workers creates a different rhetorical phenomenon than the fantasies as described in Bormann's work. I propose a certain type of fantasy that fits Bormann's definition of a "creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need" (*Force* 5), but, although the fantasy fulfills the psychological or rhetorical need to some degree, it does not correspond to the felt reality of the participants. I call these *ideal fantasies*. These ideal fantasies can come from multiple sources, media, parents, friends, religion, or, as in the case of CPS, the law. In this case,

the fantasies circulating in training successfully personify the laws central to CPS but because those laws are so difficult to enact in the lives of the people with whom they eventually interact, those fantasies create frustration for the case managers. The parents, foster parents, lawyers, judges, and other characters who participate in the ideal fantasies act differently than the actual characters who participate in the real-life drama of CPS work.

Ideal fantasies can serve helpful purposes. The fact that there is a discrepancy between the ideal and the lived reality can stimulate improvement. For example, an ideal fantasy of parenthood can motivate a father to reflect on his parenting style and perhaps make improvements to his relationship with his child. In the case of CORE training, the fact that there is a marked discrepancy between the fantasies and the case manager's reality does not mean that the ideal fantasies are necessarily bad. Most importantly, these ideal fantasies inspire hope on the part of the case worker that the parent can and will change.

The drawback of an ideal fantasy is that when an actor would like to actualize the narrative but has limited power to do so, the ideal fantasy can result in disillusionment and frustration. According to a 2012 *Arizona Republic* report, the current annual turnover for CPS workers is 26% and the average case worker stays in her job for two years (Reinhart)[5]. The job of a case manager involves coordinating the actualization of the ideal fantasy, but she has limited power to control the behavior of the parents or children. The goal of this study is to point out the fissures between the ideal fantasies and the lived experiences of the case managers I interviewed. By locating these fissures, I hope to

---

[5] My findings in this study are not intended to "solve" the difficulties inherent in CPS work, only to make them somewhat more manageable.

pinpoint narrative gaps in the training that set up case workers for frustration. Walter

Fisher's theory of narrative rationality is helpful in this analysis. Fisher's intention is to

better understand the ways that people use narrative to make sense of the world. The

criteria he develops is useful for locating the discrepancies between the ideal fantasies in

the CORE training and the subsequent experiences of case workers.

Fisher's Narrative Coherence and Character

Fisher agrees with Bormann in his contention that humans naturally understand

their experiences through the lens of story, but he goes one step further in arguing that

people also actively analyze the stories around them. As explained in the introduction,

Fisher's narrative rationality consists of two criteria, probability (coherence) and fidelity

(truthfulness and reliability) (*Human Communication* 47). Although Fisher understands

probability involving factors interior to the story and fidelity as factors exterior to the

story, there are important crossovers between these two criteria in this context. Fisher

most fully describes the criterion of probability in *Human Communication as Narration:*

> Probability, whether a story 'hangs together,' is assessed in three ways: by
> its argumentative or structural coherence; by its material coherence, that
> is, by comparing and contrasting stories told in other discourses (a story
> may be internally consistent, but important facts may be omitted,
> counterarguments ignored, and relevant issues overlooked); and by
> characterological coherence. (47)

Probability, as Fisher defines it, does involve consideration of factors outside of the story.

So, in this sense, the criterion of probability crosses over with the criterion of fidelity,

which Fisher defines as "whether or not the stories they [people] experience ring true

with the stories they know to be true in their lives" (64). Fisher generally used his theory

to analyze texts with fairly clear boundaries: in, for example, "Narration, Knowledge, and

the Possibility of Wisdom" Fisher analyzes Watson and Crick's article "A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid;" In *Human Communication as Narration*, he analyzes texts such as *The Death of the Salesman* and Plato's *Gorgias*. In these texts, what is internal and external to the story is fairly clear. In the situation of CPS training and CPS work, probability and fidelity are difficult to distinguish from one another because, for example, the "important facts [that] may be omitted" and the "characterological coherence" are standards that are developed from the "stories they [case workers] know to be true in their own lives." The cross-over between the criteria create difficulty in employing Fisher's theory of narrative rationality, but this messiness does not preclude the usefulness of the theory.

Considering the crossover in this situation of probability and fidelity, Fisher's narrative rationality can be condensed into one criterion, narrative coherence. The question, then, is coherence with what? As several critics, Barbara Warnick and Kevin McClure in particular, point out, Fisher's narrative rationality depends on a subjective notion of "good reason" which is not completely dependable. Citing the example of *Mein Kampf*, Warnick illustrates that, historically, whole societies have been misguided in their evaluation of "good" reason. "Contrary to Fisher's observation, the 'people' do *not* always prefer the 'true and just' view" (Warnick 176 italics in original). The centrality of good reason to Fisher's theory is due to the fact that his main concern, most fully explained in his 1999 keynote speech at the Alta Conference on Argumentation, is reconfiguring Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom or *phronesis*; in formulating narrative rationality, he works to better understand ethical communication. In order to understand ethical communication, an understanding of the good and true is clearly

necessary. But in the situation of the CPS system, narrative coherence can be understood more narrowly.

In the context of the CORE training, narrative coherence can be analyzed against two standards, the laws behind CPS and the experiences of the case managers. According to the person I interviewed at the Child Welfare Institute, the main concern of the Institute is to be consistent with CPS laws and policies. Although I do attend to the coherence between the law and the training manual, my focus is on the cohesion and the disjunctures between the experience of my interviewees and the materials. Simply put, I ask, *how do the fantasies of the CORE training relate to the experiences of the case managers?*

I organize my analysis by character for three reasons. First, the ideal fantasies are prescriptive. Under the law, case managers *must* enact the plots as described by the ideal fantasies. Even if case managers do deviate from the plot (by, for example, not doing their best in a particular case to reunite birth parents with their children), they cannot regularly deviate from it and are certainly are not going to tell a researcher about the deviation for fear of eventual consequences. Secondly, the case managers' job and the resolution of every case centers on evaluation of character. How a case will be resolved pivots on the case managers' evaluation of the parents' ability to ensure the well-being of their children. The case managers are given thorough behavioral-based tools to make this evaluation. But, as Fisher argues, character is "a generalized perception of a person's fundamental value orientation" (*Human Communication* 148). In order to reunite a child and parent, the case worker must be convinced that the parent values the child's well-being and, this is key, has the capability to act on that value. Fisher observes that once a

person is convinced of another's good character, "one is willing to overlook or forgive many things . . . as aberrations, probably induced by circumstances but not by incompetence" (147). Because character is central to the work of a case manager, the coherence between the characters in the CORE training ideal fantasies and the characters the case managers encounter in their work is vitally important; what case managers are taught to expect will influence how they interpret the people with whom they work.

A Struggle to Find Five Case Managers

The case managers whom I interviewed are, by nature of my recruitment process, a select group. All of them work closely with Aviva, which means that they go the extra mile to find clothes for their children, to request that a Life Book be made for them, or find funds to get a bus pass for a parent. Yet even in this select group, out of the seven contacted to participate, four have quit their jobs between the period of data collection and the writing of this chapter. Originally, five case managers were asked through a contact at Aviva if they wanted to participate in the study. All five agreed, but, the job of a CPS case manager is incredibly stressful; the agency struggles to fill open positions even with the current job market (Reinhart). Because I conducted the interviews over a series of months, two case managers left the job before the interview took place. One of these two, reported to be an excellent case manager, was put on administrative leave because a baby died in a case she managed; this is precisely what makes the job so stressful, a misjudgment, even if it is made with the best information and the best intentions, can result in the death of a baby. My contact at Aviva helped me to recruit two

more case managers. In the time between the interviews and the writing of this chapter, two of my interviewees have left their work. All names have been changed.

Mary: *Investigator.*

Mary had previously been employed at Aviva and, although I had not worked directly with her, I had known her quite well. As I had seen through her interaction with my own children, she has almost a magic touch with children.

Mary and I made three appointments before finally meeting for the interview; emergencies came up twice and prevented her from meeting with me. So we finally met on her day off, a few hours before she would interview for a job working in a group home for teen girls in CPS. Mary is, perhaps, in her mid-forties. She is slim with dark hair and a quick wit. She exudes energy and something that is close to cheerfulness but a bit sharper and wiser. Her interview was full of insight and passion. She spoke of the child who, during a court case, wrote over and over "please don't let me go home" and of abusive foster families. When I asked Mary why she did the work she did, she said simply, "I'm good at it." And that seemed like the best possible answer. She got the job in the group home and, shortly after our interview, took it.

Laura: *Unit Supervisor.*

Laura looks as if she is in her mid-thirties. During the course of the interview, she explained that she had fliers for yoga on her door to encourage her case managers to take care of themselves. And she seemed to take her own advice. She seemed calm, centered, and down to earth. Laura has spent her professional life in social work, working for CPS

for thirteen years. She currently oversees seven case managers and two case aides. When I asked her what kept her going, she paused and said, "I like what I do. I believe in what I do. I believe in people's ability to change." Laura, although less outwardly passionate than some of the other people with whom I spoke, embodies what CPS lacks, a sense of stability and calm.

Tammy: *On-going case manager*

I interviewed Tammy at the end of what she described as a rough day. She had been in the office all day fielding emergencies from cases within her unit. Tammy is probably close to thirty, petite with a kind face. She majored in art education and got her master's degree in elementary education. As a special education teacher's assistant, she felt that she was not contributing to society as much as she hoped to contribute. So she applied for a position in the Department of Disabilities and, a bit to her own bewilderment, ended up as a case manager for CPS. At the time of our interview, she had been out of CORE for a little over a year and was working desperately to keep up with her cases. "I work until 8:00 most nights and on Saturdays," she said. On one hand, she felt as if she was contributing to the people who most needed help. But she was also tired and overwhelmed with the work her job involves.

Aja: *On-going case manager*.

Aja is a lovely twenty-four year old with long dark hair. As an undergrad she majored in psychology and worked as a visit supervisor with Aviva Children's Services. She was a Social Worker Assistant for almost a year before beginning the CORE

Training. She had worked as a case manager for about six months before our interview. Her love for children and the stress she felt both came through in the interview. She told me about seeing a six-month old in a body bag, and of having a father pour gasoline over himself and the mother in an attempt at a dramatic suicide/homicide. "Where do you learn to deal with that?" She mused, half joking. "Do you look it up? 'Client pours gasoline on self?'" But she spoke with great affection for the children, "especially the bad ones." Since our interview, Aja has left CPS to focus on her own studies.

Ruth: *Case Aide*

"How do you keep from getting jaded?" I could not help asking Ruth near the end of our interview. She is in her late fifties or early sixties with brown hair and smile lines around her eyes. Although she spoke to me about the fear she lives with due to parental threats, the difficulties of dealing with poverty, and her fear of lice, she explained that she enjoys her job even after eleven years.

"Something good always has to happen," she explained. "And when I get a case, I go into it thinking, 'you're *going* to get your kids back.'" She acknowledged this does not frequently happen, and that, when it does, families often cycle back into the system. Ruth explained that when she needs to do an unannounced visit to a family, she will pick up a small toy or some diapers. "I'll say, 'Oh, I was in the neighborhood and I wanted to bring these diapers or this little toy and see how you were doing.'" Ruth smiled at her own little trick and nodded. "That little one thing makes a big difference," she acknowledged.

With one exception, my interviewees were fairly positive about the training. Most importantly, the case managers emphasized that the training debunks the notion that their job consists of rescuing children from their parents. They seemed to fully embrace the idea that they were there to support a birth family while simultaneously providing safety for children. The job of a case manager is so complex and, according to my sources, the trainers emphasize that CORE is only a beginning and that learning to be a case manager is a continual process. Yet, even though they were positive about the training, most of the case managers commented on the fissure between CORE and their subsequent experiences. "They [trainees] come out and it [the world of CPS] is not like what they were trained," one person told me. Another explained that, "When you get to the field [experienced] people tell you to forget what you learned in CORE."

As I review the most notable fissures between the CORE ideal fantasies and the accounts of the case workers, I will make recommendations to address these fissures.

Birth Parents: A Lack of Emotion

The stress of the CPS experience for parents is tremendous. If a mother truly does not care about her children, she will quickly end her involvement with CPS through severance of parental rights. But most parents do care about their children despite their inadequate parenting skills and fight their way through the CPS system. Aviva's executive director often points out how difficult CPS is for the parents. "I can tell someone that I am a recovering alcoholic," he acknowledges, "but imagine if I told you that I am a recovering child abuser?" On top of the shame of CPS involvement, parents must deal with numerous logistics – holding down a job, getting tested for drugs, getting

to and from visits (often without a car), attending court, just to name a few. They encounter numerous people and an unbelievable number of acronyms (the CORE training contains a list of over 280 acronyms for reference and, even after roughly ten years of interaction with CPS, I had to refer to the list when transcribing interviews). The ideal fantasies in the CORE training work well to create sympathy on the part of the case worker towards the parent. Many social workers begin from an impulse to help children; feeling sympathy for people who abuse or neglect children is not natural. As Tammy explained, in the training she learned that parents are not "'evil people,' but that they need *help*."

But parents who deal with the stress of the CPS system are human – often particularly damaged humans – and the ideal fantasies do not illustrate the human emotions that the parents experience or the behaviors that result from these emotions. All of the case workers expressed frustration at trying to enact the plot of the CORE fantasies while dealing with the reality of the birth parents' emotions. The lack of cohesion between the ideal fantasies and the case managers' experiences generally centers on the issues of parental anger and irrationality.

Most parents would feel anger if the government removed their children from their care. On-going case workers are seldom the ones who actually do the removal and, although their recommendations are important to the judge, it is the judge who makes the decision about if and when to return the children. But case managers represent the government to the parents. While interviewees explained that often parents want their help, most also described experiencing the parents' anger through outbursts and threats.

Ruth[6] described one case in which the birth father's anger created enormous stress for her.

> One father, who happened to live down the street from me, threatened me saying, "You have no idea what I am capable of." I was so afraid. I never let down my guard, but at that time even when I went out my front door I would look around. The visits between the father and children were first in the office, but they were doing well and so the visits moved to his house. He was calm and polite, but I knew what he had said and I had seen him angry. I would sit by the door and have my keys in hand. I would look for cues and suggest we go to the park or go outside. Or I would ask someone to come with me. I don't want to say it was scary, but . . . uncomfortable. I would go to the grocery store and be looking around. I was really aware of my surroundings. He did end up killing himself and trying to kill his wife.

Aja identified one of her biggest challenges as dealing with angry or aggressive parents. One parent threatened to have her shot. "It was weird to see him the next time," she nodded, without an obvious stab at understatement. Anger and its resulting behaviors are almost an inevitable part of a parent's CPS experience, but it is not part of the ideal fantasies as described in CORE. It is not addressed in the printed material and several of my interviewees expressed frustration with a lack of skills to deal with parents. As Tammy explained, CORE "left out how to deal with conflict, how to deal with irrational, irate parents." Although the rational behavior of the characters in the ideal fantasies serves to personify the laws that the case managers must enact, they do not account for the emotions that parents will likely experience. As Ruth's story illustrates, the anger parents feel and express can be frightening. It can also hinder the type of dialogue featured in the CORE ideal fantasies.

---

[6] Ruth requested that I not record our interview for reasons of privacy; her dialogue is from my notes.

When people are angry, they are often irrational. As described in the first CORE ideal fantasy, CORE centers on "family-centered practice," engaging parents and other family members in developing and enacting a case plan for the healing of their own family. While an excellent idea both in theory and often in practice, it depends on what Patricia Roberts-Miller identifies as dialogic rhetoric or an understanding of argument in which "people participate in order to change and be changed" (ix). Roberts-Miller contrasts dialogic rhetoric with monologic discourse which "presumes that public argument is (and should be) a form of combat or display" (x). Roberts-Miller describes how college students often actively dislike the idea of dialogic rhetoric and are committed to their own approach to discourse (x). When the idea of family-centered practice is introduced in CORE training, case managers must be also introduced to the idea that parents may be committed to monologic discourse, and case managers should be given resources to engage those parents.

Chemical influence adds a heightened dimension to emotions and to the difficulty of engaging parents in dialogic family-centered practice. As Laura explained, in CORE they "talk about doing the SRA [Safety Risk Assessment] and the case plan with the family, but if the family is high on meth or high on whatever, they're not going to sit around and design the case plan with you." Despite the fact that the parents are angry and irrational, the case managers I interviewed wanted to engage in family-centered practice. Most either lacked the skills to do so or developed those skills through extensive experience. Before becoming a CPS investigator, Mary had considerable experience dealing with alcohol and drug recovery. She explained that,

> In CORE they spend a lot of time on how to recognize a meth house. What
> they don't do is they don't work with case workers on how to deal with

someone who is a substance abuser. How to work with them. How to understand how their mind works. How to understand the most effective way to work with them.

All of the case managers with whom I spoke want to engage parents and believe in their ability to change. But when faced with the characteristics of anger, irrationality, entitlement, and especially with calculated abuse of children, it is difficult to maintain belief in the ideal plot of parental conversion. I argue that the CORE training needs to incorporate a wider variety of narratives, particularly emphasizing narratives in which the parents experience and express difficult emotions. In their article on political narratives, Bennett and Edelman argue,

> If stories can be constructed to wall off the senses to the dilemmas and contractions of social life, perhaps they also can be presented in ways that open up the mind to creative possibilities developed in ways that provoke intellectual struggle, the resolution of contradiction, and the creation of a more workable human order (161-2).

In other words, stories are excellent tools to help develop imaginative and creative solutions to difficult situations. William Kirkwood reiterates this claim, explaining that narratives hold a unique role in "acquainting people with creative possibilities of awareness and action" (44). Kirkwood has practical suggestions for ways in which narratives can be presented to open these possibilities. He argues for complex narratives which disclose the characters' state of mind (34) and, when appropriate, elicit audience participation or role playing (38). Parents come into the CPS system for a variety of reasons and with a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, while social workers need to be familiar with CPS laws and policies, they also need to develop an imagination that will enable them to best envision the ways in which they could work with various people. Incorporating narratives that reveal the parents' state of mind and incorporating more role

playing[7] will help future case workers develop skills to deal with the complex emotions experienced by parents in CPS. Furthermore, the use of a wider variety of narrative can help case workers broaden their perception of success.

Case Managers: Facilitating the Wrong Plot

While a number of answers revealed fissures in the CORE ideal fantasies, the responses I received to one particular question point to an especially critical disconnect between the characterization of the case managers in CORE and their subsequent experiences. When asked what was most rewarding about their job, or what kept them going, three of the five brought up family reunion. But this answer was invariably modified by "but it doesn't happen very often." When I asked Ruth what was rewarding about her job, she replied, "When the kids go home to their parents. When the parents did what they were supposed to do." But she followed the answer with this story:

> Sometimes parents do everything they need to do, but you know something is going to happen [to bring them back into the system]. I had one case where a mother with four children did *everything* she was supposed to do. But then a year later, I was at Casa de Los Ninos and I felt someone tugging on my sleeve. I looked down and it was one of the children. "Ruth, take me home," she said.

While the social workers could, of course, give any answer to this question, only Mary gave a technically "right" answer. According to the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act, the three national goals for children in foster care are "safety, permanency, and well-being" (US Dept. of Health and Human Services, *Factsheet*). Mary, who has been involved with CPS for years, answered that the goal of child safety kept her going.

---

[7] At least some role-playing is already incorporated into CORE.

Laura, who has also been involved with CPS for many years, gave the most interesting

answer:

> I like what I do. I believe in what I do. I believe in people's ability to
> change. I think that you learn to hang on to the good things. You learn to
> recognize that it's a success, not only if you reunify, but if you're not able
> to and you have a child in an adoptive home and they are going to have
> safety and stability and permanency for the rest of their lives, then that's a
> success too. So you learn to look at things a bit differently.

Although Laura's answer, "safety and stability and permanency," is precisely in line with

the law, she says that this perspective is looking at "things a bit differently" than other

case workers. Her answer reveals the persistence of a single ideal fantasy that only

through experience did she learn to modify. The ideal fantasy of reuniting families

through parental conversion does not adequately convey the complexity of CPS laws. In a

2009 talk, Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie describes the danger of what she calls

the "single story." She explains how she grew up reading stories about little girls with

blond hair who drank ginger beer and ate apples and, in turn, she wrote stories about little

girls with blond hair who drank ginger beer and ate apples. Then Adichie describes

discovering African authors.

> But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye I went
> through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people
> like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not
> form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things
> I recognized. Now, I loved those American and British books I read. They
> stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the
> unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could
> exist in literature. *So what the discovery of African writers did for me was
> this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.*

Adichie goes on to explain the danger of a single story for characterizing people. In the

same way, social workers are presented with a single story of what it means to be a case

manager for CPS. When they encounter angry parents or families who do not reunify,

that single story is put in jeopardy and new workers can feel a sense of failure despite the fact that they are working to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. As well as feeling failure themselves, they are also in danger of creating a personal counter-story in which parents always fail in reunification. The trainer with whom I spoke acknowledged this difficulty. "If you have four cases where a single mom loses her children, how do you still retain hope for that fifth case?" he mused. Scott Stroud provides an answer by building on Kirkwood's research, asking how and why ancient Indian texts can become relevant for a contemporary Western audience. He suggests the existence of "multivalent narratives," which combine conflicting values within one narrative and thereby "expose audiences to new values and ideas while not alienating them through extreme novelty" ("Multivalent" 370). Counter to Kirkwood's suggestions, Stroud recommends narratives that tend towards ambiguity. Two stories, told by Laura and Ruth, illustrate the idea of multivalent narratives.

Laura described one case in which she promised a mother that she would keep her girls safe. The case went on and on with the mother continually returning to drug use but simultaneously fighting to keep her two daughters. The case eventually went to trial by jury where the mother's rights were severed and the girls were adopted. Years later, Laura received a letter from the birth mother. "At first I hated you," the mother wrote (presumably because she felt Laura was keeping her apart from her children), "but you kept your promise. Thank you." Years after the case closed, the mother realized that Laura had fought in the best interest of her children. Stories such as these are multivalent in the sense that they value permanence for the children beyond the birth family.

Knowledge of similar stories would help give case workers a sense of success even when birth ties are severed and their clients are upset at the resolution of the case.

Ruth's story was in response to my question about birth control. Ruth was the fifth person I interviewed, and I had heard so many stories about mothers having one child after another and losing each one to the foster care system; I wondered if women had information about and access to birth control. Ruth assured me that they did, but that sometimes women want someone to love and to love them and they think that if they try one more time, then maybe it will work out. I shook my head sadly. But Ruth corrected me. "But sometimes" she said, "sometimes it happens. Sometimes it clicks. They have they fourth or fifth child and something clicks and they get it together." Again, stories such as this one may help a future case worker see that even if a mother loses her parental rights, the case may not be a failure in the long run. This is not to suggest, of course, that case managers should encourage their clients to continue having children, but that offering stories such as these may give case workers some hope for clients who seem caught in a negative cycle.

The issue of the ideal fantasies in relation to parental characterization is peripheral to my main question of how the foster care experience is presented to children. Case managers can be better prepared for their work by adding the following to the CORE training:

- More complex narratives in which the parents express a range of emotions.
- Narratives that encourage case managers to practice creative ways of working with clients.

- Multivalent narratives in which success on the part of the case manager is defined more broadly than as facilitator of parental conversion.

But I argue that a wider variety of narratives must also be available to foster children.

Children: Not the Supporting Character

As pointed out in the section above, the parent is the central character in the ideal fantasies. As a result, the children are portrayed as first suffering from the abuse of the parent and then passively waiting for their parents to reform. This characterization of children, given the nature of children, is unrealistic. Due to the nature of time, no person is a static being but children in particular are constantly changing. In many cases, expecting a child to wait for five minutes is unreasonable; characterizing children as passively waiting for six months to a year while the parent reforms is naïve at best. In this section I show how the ideal fantasies also inadequately characterize children and a reconfiguration of the plot is necessary to create new stories that give the children a sense of agency.

What was particularly interesting about my interviews is that, without prompting, *none* of the case workers named abuse and neglect as a major challenge to children. If asked specifically if dealing with the effects and abuse was a challenge to children, they agreed that it was but no one brought it up without prompting. I attribute this to the cohesion between the ideal narrative and the experiences of the case managers. The CORE handouts thoroughly describe the effects of abuse. One seventeen-page handout titled "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders" presented near the beginning of the training gives extensive information on mental issues that both parents

and children may experience. Shortly after the manual is a fifteen page handout titled "Introduction to Sexual Abuse" that gives detailed descriptions of what children may experience and how these experiences may affect them. Also included near the beginning of the handbook is a sixty four page *Child Development Reader* written by Dr. Ann E MacEachron from the ASU School of Social Work which outlines typical child developmental patterns and the effects of neglect and abuse on development. Furthermore, the trainer and the case workers both explained that graphic videos about abuse and neglect are shown during training. The comprehensive information on child abuse and neglect seems to fully prepare the case managers for dealing with the children's experience. Case managers expect and are fully prepared to work with children who are hurting. The CORE materials might lead a trainee to expect abuse and neglect to be the most difficult challenge for foster children to overcome. Yet *every single interviewee* said that change or instability is the biggest challenge for foster children.

The issue of instability is not left unaddressed by the CORE training materials but it is diluted by the preponderance of material. Within the 1,056 pages, several handouts discuss the importance of attachment. In one handout titled "The Normal Grieving Process" (Day 19 P.M. NB O1 at bottom of page), the loss of removal is discussed: "The loss of one's parents or primary caregiver is generally the most significant loss a child can experience. Children who have lost their parents almost always experience crisis." The handout describes what are labeled the normal stages of grief, those identified by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross: shock/denial, anger, bargaining, depression, resolution/acceptance. After a careful search through the materials, I found, near the end of the binder, a six page handout titled "Developmental Perspective of Separation and

Grief in Children" (Day 19 P.M. NB 02 at bottom of page). The handout reviews the understanding of separation and loss by age group and the behavioral expressions that are common for each age group. Again, this handout depends on the Kubler-Ross five-stage model of grief. The fact that there is so much material in the CORE handbook dilutes the significance of these materials, particularly without any clear organization of the content. When talking with the Child Welfare Institute trainer, he explained that whenever something goes wrong in CPS, the investigation begins with CORE. (Despite being friendly and open, the trainer did ask in the middle of the interview if I was an undercover reporter.) So there is tremendous pressure to cover every legal aspect during training, but this comes at the cost of inadvertently burying important information.

Case managers continually emphasize the damage that instability and change does to children. Mary explained that she does not think most people appreciate the bond between children and their biological parents. She went on to explain that she has become more and more hesitant to change a child's placement. "They aren't as resilient as we think they are," she commented. "They have lost everything that they know. They've lost *everything.*" Later in the interview she went on to elaborate. "You can't place your roots when you are going to be removed again. A lot of children make sure *they* are the ones to disrupt the placement." Laura explained that despite efforts to keep children in their neighborhood and schools, this is difficult to do. They are often removed from their biological family, from their neighborhood, and from their school. "Really helping them to flourish and to thrive is difficult. That [the change] would be confusing for *me.*" Beyond the change that foster children experience in new placements, Laura explained

that there is also a lot of change within the system; children will often move through several case managers, several therapists, and several lawyers.

Although all of the case managers describe change and instability as the central challenge for foster children, they have few tools to help children to deal with this challenge. When I asked the trainer about how the foster care experience is explained to children, he said that it was integrated throughout the training but was unable to point me to specific texts. In my search through the CORE materials, I found one two-sided handout titled "Preparing the Child for Placement" with practical suggestions for smoothing transitions for different age groups. The handout emphasizes age-appropriate explanations, detailed descriptions of new placements, consistent messages, and continued contact with birth families. The handout contains helpful and practical ways to make the changes inherent in foster care easier for children but even when searching for this specific information, it was difficult to find. So it is safe to assume that it is often lost in the barrage of information provided to the trainees.

Beyond understanding instability as a central challenge to children, case managers seemed unsatisfied with the tools they had to explain the experience of change and instability to children. When asked how foster care is explained to children, case managers' answers were similar to those found in CORE training but they seem dissatisfied with the efficacy of these explanations. When talking to children, Tammy focuses on child safety, explaining that "we want you to be safe" and that the parents are not able to care for the child. She presents foster parents as "our 'friends' to keep you safe," while pointing out toys or other comforting objects. Laura, Aja, Ruth and Mary also focus on child safety in their explanations and describe the "work" that birth parents

need to do. Ruth and Mary both said that the foster care experience is often *not* explained to children by anyone – case workers, police, or foster parents. Laura said that even if children understand the nature of foster care, they often do not *like* it and may worry about who will care for their birth parents. The case managers seem to lack any meaningful way to explain foster care to children.

Explaining the change, instability, and resulting loss of foster care to children in a constructive way is difficult. First is the issue of audience. A newborn whose mother tests positive for drugs cannot possibly understand what is happening when he is taken to a foster home. A semi-verbal toddler removed for the first time will have a very different understanding of the foster care experience than a fourteen year old who has already been to several foster homes. Second is the issue of the plot. The ideal narrative depends on the parent's own conflict within himself or herself (in cases of drug dependency and mental issues) or against society (in cases of crime or unemployment) or against another character (in relational abuse). The character of the child simply has to wait, while possibly experiencing Kubler-Ross's five stage grief process. There is nothing he or she can do resolve the conflict. Using Kirkwood and Stroud's theories around narrative and possibility, I suggest that the plot of the ideal narrative can be reconfigured to situate the child as a central character.

Before moving forward, I want to reiterate the difficulties of foster care for children. As detailed in the introduction, according the technical report issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics, "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," the difference between toxic stress and manageable stress for children is the presence or absence of a trusted and supportive adult presence (Shonkoff and

Gardner 236). The absence of a stable adult presence in a child's life creates toxic stress for a child. Unless a kinship placement is found, foster care removes a child from any familiar adults, so it is almost invariably a "toxic" experience. In her canonical work, *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman describes how survival depends on connection to others (33). When this connection is broken in and through trauma, this creates a loss of "control, connection, and meaning" for children (33). If, particularly for children, trauma is about a lack of meaningful connection, the emphasis that case workers put on instability and change is better understood. Children are first disconnected from their parents (with whom they are unlikely to have a solid attachment) and put with strangers. At that point, there is no clarity about if and when they will reunite with their birth parents. If children do not attach to a foster family, they remain in a toxic situation. If they do develop meaningful relationships with the foster family, they may be removed from that family for a variety of reasons. The difficulty of the foster care experience is that, despite the fact that it may provide physical and even emotional safety for the child, it is temporary and the future is uncertain.

After considering the fissures between the CORE fantasies and the social workers' interviews, I propose that the CORE training should present a plot to social workers that can be used to help to explain the foster care experience to children. This plot should be broad enough to guard against the danger of the single story and the central character in the plot must be the child, not the parents. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief (shock/denial, anger, bargaining, depression, resolution/acceptance) may be helpful in some ways for understanding emotions that foster children may experience; children who are separated from their birth parents often experience the first

two stages. But foster care is an ongoing trauma. Whether a child reunites with a birth parent or is severed from that parent, the trauma will likely continue; in the case of reunification even in the best situations birth parents will likely not be predictable parents and in the case of severance the process of finding an adoptive placement is often not easy. Unlike terminal illness, the foster care experience does not have a clear outcome and, although foster children will likely experience emotions such as anger and depression, they may not be in a position to work towards resolution. Herman offers a process of recovery for victims of trauma that differs from the Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's five stage process. Whereas Kulber-Ross's process helps to inform people about the emotional process after loss, Herman's process helps to inform people about ways they can actively work towards healing. Herman's model is based on social relationships. She claims that healing "can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (133). But, simultaneously, the person who has suffered trauma "must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery" (133). Herman's process unfolds through three "tasks." First, a person must establish safety, then she must remember and mourn, and finally, she must reconnect with herself and others (155). Because foster care is a state of uncertainty, recovery in foster care can only be partial – they cannot make solid connections to other people. Furthermore, foster children may not be in the position to recognize that they need healing from both the trauma of abuse and the trauma of separating from their birth parents. But I propose that using the narrative of a journey to safety to help children understand foster care will put them in a better position to eventually become "author and arbiter" of their recovery.

Recommendations for Explaining Foster Care to Children

The Metaphor of Journey as a Central Plot

I propose that characterizing children as travelers can give them an understanding of both the control and lack of control they have over their own destiny. A social worker can say to children that they did not chose to go on this trip and the end of the journey is unknown, but between present and the end of the trip, they have some difficult work to do. For example, the basic narrative goes something like this:

This is a really big day for you. It is probably a sad and difficult day, but also the beginning of a big adventure. You are going to live in a new home for a while so that your parents can work on making a safe home for you. While they are working on making a safe home, you are on a journey – we hope that you will be able to return to your parents soon but we don't know exactly what will happen next. You'll meet lots of new people and do lots of new things. This means that you will have to have courage and be strong. I will do my best to help you along the way and your foster family is here to help you too.

This plot is general enough to allow for several narrative possibilities. It also puts the child in an active position and supplies him or her with the knowledge that the process is not easy for anyone. A social worker can explain that she, the foster family, the therapist, and the lawyer are here to help the children on this journey, but what the child does will make a difference in what he or she experiences. Conceptualizing the foster care experience as a journey also helps explain the change and instability that is inherent in the experience. It situates the child as the central character without making the parent

the villain or hero. What it does not do, and what children need most, is give a child a *person* on whom to rely.

Narrative Companions

Although it is impossible to ensure a stable adult presence for all foster children, they can be given a *sense* of presence through narrative. Foster children quickly realize that they are different than other children who live with their parents. This difference can be isolating. Foster children need to understand that other children have also made the same journey through foster care. Case managers should be provided with a book containing a wide variety of narratives by current and former foster children. As appropriate, some of these narratives could be, as Kirkwood suggests, revealing of inner states of mind, and, as Stroud suggests, some of them could be ambiguous and multivalent. Case workers could adapt their telling to the age and situation of the child. But having common narratives could give a sense of consistency to children so that even if new case managers take their case, those case managers could refer to the same characters. For example, if a child is confronted with the possibility of parental severance, the case worker could ask, "Do you remember what happened to Juan Pablo?" And remind the child of a story in which a child was, for example, severed from his birth parents and adopted by an uncle.

Truth is Stranger than Fiction

Recently, when I went into Aviva Children's Services, I spoke with the Life Book coordinator. She told me about a strange case in which a father traveled for years with his

five children throughout Mexico and the United States. They traveled, often stopping in one place for several months, always on the lookout for the cartel. During the day, the children always stayed inside with the curtains drawn, caring for one another and reading a picture Bible they had happened upon. The father, who had taught them to read, went out to work during the day and brought food back at night. Then, suddenly, the father would announce that it was no longer safe and they would leave, often by foot. One day, when the eldest was eighteen and the youngest was five, the father disappeared from where they were currently living in Arizona. The two eldest, without papers, were deported to Mexico. And the other three are in a foster home surrounded by suburbia. The foster family hopes to adopt the three.

I have changed some details of this story. The "real" story is stranger. But my point is, as several case managers pointed out, there is no typical foster care experience. Many stories could not be imagined, or, if they were, would make unbelievable fiction. Case workers must be equipped with a strong foundation on the laws and policies of CPS, knowledge of child development, insight into the legal process, and other practicalities. But they also must have an imagination to help them manage outrageous narratives and unbelievable characters with whom they work. The training should be full of narratives that illustrate the complexity of the work they do. Then, in turn, children should be provided with narratives that give them a sense that other children have, both successfully and disastrously, journeyed though foster care. What happens in that journey is partly out of their control, but they are the central character who will help make decisions about the outcome of the journey.

In the next chapter, I examine another central component of many foster children's experiences, the language used in the foster parent training and by foster parents themselves. Through analyzing the training materials for foster parents and my interviews of foster families, I point out contradictions in how key figures are characterized and make recommendations to improve these narratives.

III. CONFLICTING CHARACTERIZATIONS IN FOSTER

PARENT TRAINING

Although Ben is my first and only child, I am his twelfth mother . . . I'm not sure how many of his eleven mothers he called "Mom," but I know it's what he called the single mother who had fostered him for the previous three years – the one who loved him but gave him up because she said he was an active boy who needed an active, two-parent family.

- Jennifer Munro

Foster homes vary tremendously. Some foster parents have birth children who have grown up and left home. Others struggled with infertility. Some are motivated to become foster parents by religious or humanitarian values; others simply want children. Some have biological connections to the children for whom they care. Foster parents might be young, old, married, or single. They come from all different religious, cultural, and racial backgrounds. As a result of the diversity of foster families, how these caregivers present the foster care experience to the children differs in each situation.

Regardless of their background, all licensed resource parents[8] in Arizona share the common experience of the PS-MAPP Training: Partnering for Safety and Permanence – the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting. The materials present various aspects of the foster care system and prepare the participants to take children into their home. As well as providing information, the thirty-hour training is also presented as a decision-making process for the participants. In leading the participants through this decision, the materials shape the fantasies about the experience of foster parenting. How the foster parents understand themselves in relation to the children and how they conceive of the

---

[8] The 2009 version of the PS-MAPP training materials uses the term "resource parents" whereas previous versions of the materials use the terms "foster and adoptive parents." According to Pat Alkola, who does not particularly like the term and seldom uses it herself, "resource parents" is an umbrella term that refers to foster parents, respite families, therapeutic foster families, and families hoping to adopt. I will use the terms "resource" and "foster" interchangeably.

foster care system, in turn shapes how they communicate the experience to the children. In order to more fully understand the ways in which foster care is presented to children, this chapter specifically addresses the following questions:

- What narratives are introduced to foster parents in the PS-MAPP training for understanding and explaining the experiences of foster children?

- How do these narratives relate to the experiences of foster parents?

- How could these findings be used to reduce the confusion of the foster care experience?

In order to answer these questions, I first clarify my theoretical framework and then outline the official narratives about foster care as they are presented in the PS-MAPP training. In the process of illustrating the narratives, I analyze contradictions created by these narratives. After introducing the foster parents I interviewed, I identify the various actors in the foster care experience and describe the ways in which the actors are characterized. In each section I offer rhetorical moves that could be used to resolve these contradictions and to create more coherent narratives for the children about the foster care experience.

Consideration of Metaphor in the Theoretical Framework

To return to the basic inquiry of this project, in this dissertation I seek to understand the rhetorical construction of the foster care system as presented to children. Because of the centrality of narrative in making sense of the world and one's place in the world, I primarily approach this question through the lens of narrative. Bormann's fantasy theme analysis provides a method for distilling the underlying narratives from a

collection of materials. As I point out in the previous chapter, identifying the narratives is only the first step; the next question is how those narratives relate to the experiences of the foster parents. I demonstrated how in the situation of the case worker training, Walter Fisher's two criteria of probability (what is interior to the story) and fidelity (what is exterior to the story) intersect in ways that make the two criteria difficult to separate. The intersection between probability and fidelity is further complicated when considering the nature of metaphor.

Metaphor can be understood as a trope that elucidates the nature of one entity (target) by drawing a comparison with something that is different from that entity (source). Metaphor is so integral to language that where it begins and ends is a mystery, especially when taking into account how metaphor is introduced to children. Consider, for example, a child who has, with some frequency, been called "pumpkin." For adults, it is fairly clear that the child is the target and the pumpkin is the source. But for a two-year-old in October, who is just now being introduced to a vegetable pumpkin, both the vegetable and his own self suddenly become both the source and target; the fact that "pumpkin" is not another name that his mother uses for him suddenly illuminates both the vegetable and his own self. Because children do not have frames of reference in the same way adults do, metaphorical language has a different significance at different ages. This is most interesting in terms of what John Saeed explains as conceptual structures, tropes by which the participants speak and conceive of abstractions – time, love, and argument are typical examples of abstractions that are generally understood through conceptual structures. Cognitivists Lakoff and Johnson argue in *Metaphors We Live By*, that the deeply engrained metaphors that constitute conceptual structures profoundly

influence our thoughts and experiences. Children, for example, are not born knowing that time "moves forward;" a three year old may confidently tell you that he will use that little shirt next time he is a baby. Parents use the metaphor of movement, which children understand experientially, to explain that you cannot return to when you were a baby. Gradually, through an interchange of language and experience, children begin to understand abstractions such as time as they are constructed within their own culture.

Richard Sheehan argues that the most productive way to examine metaphor is to approach it from a rhetorical, rather than linguistic standpoint. While linguists often try to understand metaphor through an examination of how they work logically, Sheehan prefers to look at how they are used (62). Therefore, his definition of metaphor relies on how they are interpreted and the way in which their meaning is construed (47). "The distinction," writes Sheehan, "that sets metaphors apart from other expressions is their role in the invention of narratives" (61). So, for Sheehan, the difference between literal language and metaphorical language lies in the impetus for a narrative that will bring a metaphor into harmony with the terms used. This is particularly interesting when considering children's penchant for pretend. Through pretend, children continually explore how the world is and is not a certain way. Within the space of a few minutes, a banana is a fish, then a tractor, and then a boat. Each metaphor is accompanied by a narrative that can change according to the way in which others or the object reacts. For example, a child may be a dog, but when a playmate is scared by her barks, she will quickly whimper and add that "I'm a nice doggy." Or a tiny toddler may crawl around pretending to be a baby, but when her father explains that babies have to go to bed, the child's metaphor for herself will quickly change. When seen through the lens of pretend,

children continually create and narrate metaphors – testing them for their correlation with experience and for their narrative plasticity. For this reason, particular attention should be paid to the metaphors used to describe the foster care experience to children.

In relation to Fisher's narrative paradigm, the nature of metaphorical language again demonstrates the difficulty of separating probability and fidelity. Metaphors internal to a narrative must relate to the narrative being told. But the only way consistency between the metaphor and narrative can be assessed is through previous and current experiences that illuminate the metaphor. For example, a child in the foster care system is told that she has a foster "mother." How she understands the woman to whom she is introduced depends on her previous experience with mothers and her subsequent experience with this woman will change what the word mother means to her. In the situation of the PS-MAPP training, the fantasy themes that are introduced to participants who plan to become foster parent are accompanied by metaphors intended to relate to the past and future experiences of the participants. In this situation, where I analyze the coherence of the characterizations in fantasy themes, I include a consideration of how the metaphors used relate to both the internal narratives and the experiences of the participants.

Fantasy Themes and Characters in PS-MAPP Training

Background on PS-MAPP Training Curriculum

Protocol for training foster parents is determined on a state level. State requirements vary widely (Grimm 1). Two major standardized foster parent training curricula are available for state use, but not all states select to use a standardized curricula

(Grimm 23). The PS-MAPP training curriculum, which Arizona uses, is a revised version of one of these standardized curricula. The first *MAPP* materials were created in the 1980s by the Child Welfare Institute (*Implementation* i). After undergoing several revisions, the materials were bought by Arizona's Department of Economic Security around 2005 (Stites). In 2009, Arizona revised the materials to include laws specific to the state and case studies that were more appropriate to Arizona (Stites). Several different agencies throughout Tucson conduct the PS-MAPP training. I made a connection with one of these agencies, Christian Family Care Agency (CFCA), a medium-sized, faith-based organization which is fairly representative of the several in Tucson that do the training. On its website and brochures CFCA describes itself as a "private, nonprofit, social services agency that provides adoption, pregnancy assistance/decision-making counseling, adoption, foster care, and counseling programs." Because of privacy issues, I could not attend the training. Instead I analyzed the training manual given to the attendees of the training (the manual is consistent regardless of the agency doing the training). I also talked with both Belva Stites the PS-MAPP Training Supervisor for Arizona's Department of Children, Youth, and Families and Pat Alkola, the leader who conducts the training for CFCA.

At this point I want to acknowledge that my analysis misses a major component of the experience, the people. The trainings sessions are guided by leaders and take place over ten weeks in groups of about ten to eighteen participants. Reading the materials on my own is a markedly different experience than going through the materials with a group of people. But the contradictions I observe in the materials exist even if they are balanced or mitigated by the interactions.

Description of the PS-MAPP Preparation and Selection Program

The PS-MAPP training unfolds through ten meetings of about three hours each.

The ten meetings cover the following topics:

1. Welcome to the PS-MAPP Preparation and Selection Program
2. Where the MAPP Leads: A Foster Care and Adoption Experience
3. Losses and Gains: The Need to Be a Loss Expert
4. Helping Children with Attachments
5. Helping Children Learn to Manage their Behaviors
6. Helping Children with Birth Family Connections
7. Gains and Losses: Helping Children Leave Foster Care
8. Understanding the Impact of Fostering and Adopting
9. Perspectives in Adoptive Parenting and Foster Parenting
10. Endings and Beginnings

Each meeting is introduced with an agenda, filled with information and activities relevant to the session's topic, and then concluded with a summary of that session's main points. Each meeting also has "roadwork" (homework) for the next meeting. For example, in Meeting 5: Helping Children Learn to Manage Behaviors, the agenda is as follows:

15 minutes	Introduction to Meeting 5
25 minutes	The important role of foster and adoptive parents in helping children express feelings and manage behaviors. *This section includes, among other things, a "Discipline Methods Worksheet" and some case examples.*
25 minutes	Issues of safety in helping children manage their behaviors
10 minutes	Break
15 minutes	The power of positive reinforcement
45 minutes	Helping children manage challenging behaviors. *This section includes, among other things, a handout with information on the importance of contact with birth parents and why foster children may act out after contact and a chart titled "Goals of Misbehavior" with reasons children might misbehave and strategies to deal with their actions.*
20 minutes	Summary of meeting 5 and preview of meeting 6

The training materials appear well organized and follow a systematic progression

from foundational information early in the training, to concrete details about fostering,

and then to information about adopting and about children returning to birth families. The materials are given to participants in a three-ringed binder and consist of 564 pages.

According to the introduction in the binder, titled *PS-MAPP Implementation Guide,* the materials are intended to both present the participants with the necessary skills for foster parenting and to encourage a "mutual selection" by both the agency and the participants (2). The *PS-MAPP* materials continually emphasize that the training is intended to help the foster care agency and the prospective foster parent make an informed decision together about if the trainees will become foster parents. In the first meeting, the second handout explains that the decision is "based on the capability and willingness to take on the 'role' and develop skills needed to foster and/or adopt." The training is intended to convey information, but it is also about shaping trainees to take on a particular persona. For this reason, the narratives underlying the training are most interesting in terms of character.

As described in the previous chapter, in order to identify fantasy themes Bormann suggests taking note of patterns of characterization, dramatic situations and actions, and of setting ("Social Reality" 401). For example, some excerpts from my notes include the following:

Actions: *abuse, licensing and relicensing, separation, going to school, hearings,*
   rejection of child, parental visits, partnering, placement, caring, adoption
Setting: *home, court, school*
Foster parents: *reflective, grieve own loss, help child with attachments, discipline not*
   punish, second in child's heart, manage emotions

Child: *grieving, might be in shock, traumatized by move, "terrible realization you are*

      unwanted," loss – anger/fear/sadness/sorrow, job of being a child

Birth parents: *"almost sure to be difficult," disturbing to foster parents, also has*

      strengths, often unreasonable and often give false promises to child, own difficult

      past

      Through my analysis, I found that the fantasy themes about the CPS are coherent with the CPS laws. On one level, the underlying fantasy themes about the CPS system is identical to the one presented to the case workers: a parent is not keeping a child safe; CPS gets involved; the parent becomes a responsible caretaker. As explained in the previous chapter, this fantasy theme does not fully embody the complexity of the laws undergirding the CPS system. But, unlike the CORE curriculum, the PS-MAPP materials include a second fantasy that exists alongside the first. The second fantasy can be summarized as follows: a child is not safe; a child enters foster care; the child heals and finds permanence. These two fantasy themes together more fully embody the legal framework for CPS than the single fantasy about the parents. The fantasies underlying the PS-MAPP training more accurately convey the laws behind CPS than the fantasies underlying the CORE training for the case managers.

      The fantasy themes about foster parenting, however, are difficult to construct from the content of the PS-MAPP training. Largely, this difficulty is due to the fact that the materials contain what the CORE materials lack, a variety of multivalent narratives. For example, the last handout in Meeting 1, titled "The Rewards of Foster Parenting," tells a story of two young children who were "totally unsocialized" and "lived like

animals," but gradually attached to the foster parents and were adopted by them. Meeting 5 (Handout 7) gives a story of an eleven year old girl who has been severely sexually abused and is acting out sexually with the boys in the foster parent's church. In Meeting 7, Handout 15, a foster mother recounts her difficult experience fostering a six year old boy and concludes by explaining that, despite their best efforts, they were not successful in helping the boy. Furthermore, the mother realizes that foster is not for their family; she explains that "we came to realize that we were not a family who could survive the continuous emotional upheavals of foster care." The narratives contain a wide variety of plots, ranging from ideal stories where hurting children and birth parents find healing through constructive relationships with foster families to stories where no one seems to benefit from the foster care experience.

What is consistent, however, is the character taken on by each major player in the foster care experience. So while a variety of plots form fantasy themes for the PS-MAPP materials, the narratives are enacted by fairly consistent characters.

- Foster parents: Foster parents are thoughtful, consistent, and controlled. They prioritize relationships with one another, with the child, and with the child's birth family. They are team players. But above all they are reflective about the people around them and about their own actions and decisions.

- Birth parents: Birth parents have many problems. They are often out of control and difficult. But they also have strengths and their difficulties in parenting are due to mistakes rather than a bad character. They love their children.

- Children: Children have been damaged by their birth parents and by the separation from those parents. Their grief manifests in anger, depression, and sadness. They respond positively to love and to boundaries.

- Case managers: Case managers fulfill their roles dutifully. They support the birth and foster parents.

This analysis requires a different analytical criterion than the previous chapter. In my analysis of the case manager's CORE training, I condensed Fisher's criteria into the single criterion of narrative coherence, asking how the fantasy theme in the CORE training relates to the experiences of the case managers and to the laws around CPS. Analyzing the fantasy themes underlying the PS-MAPP training for narrative coherence is difficult due to the fact that such a variety of plots are both alluded to and directly presented to the trainees. But in this situation, character is equally, or even more, central than plot. In this chapter I analyze the coherence of the characters presented in the PS-MAPP training.

Fisher defines character as "an organized set of actional tendencies" (*Narration* 47). So character is determined by evaluating past actions and decisions to determine a person's values and to predict how he or she will act in the future. In order to determine narrative cohesion in the PS-MAPP materials, I examine the actions, decisions, and values of each character as described in the training materials and compare those to the accounts of my interviewees.

Characterological cohesion in the PS-MAPP training is important for three reasons. First, the foster parents are being trained to take on a certain persona and this

persona should be appropriate to the experiences and legal responsibilities of the foster

caregivers. Secondly, the training introduces foster parents to the other characters that

constitute the foster care experience and, in order to reduce frustration, the participants

should develop reasonable expectations for those characters. And, finally, the way that

each role in the foster care experience is understood by the foster parent will dictate how

the foster parents present themselves to the children and how they communicate the roles

of the other people in the child's life. So characterological cohesion is central to

clarifying the narratives around the foster care experience as conveyed to the child.

Foster Family Interviews

I recruited foster parents through the Christian Family Care Agency (CFCA)

described previously. My connection with CFCA was made through Aviva Children's

Services, which works with all of the agencies in Pima County that recruit and support

foster families. Aviva is not a faith-based organization, but some who work at Aviva feel

the faith-based agencies that support foster families tend to focus less on monetary

concerns when making decisions. People with whom I work at Aviva recommended

CFCA as one of the most professional and compassionate local agencies. According to

Pat Alkola, the leader who conducts the training for CFCA and the person with whom I

had the most contact, most of the people recruited and trained through their agency self-

identify as Christian. Throughout the process of doing this research I have been

impressed with the professionalism and responsiveness of CFCA. Foster children have

endless needs. Anyone who works with them is constantly swamped with incredibly

pressing issues. But, despite their limited time, the employees of CFCA were willing to

work with me and encouraged my research. They had an internal process by which they reviewed my project. Next they met with me to discuss what I needed. And then, as recommended by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Arizona, they worked to make contacts for me.

Because of concerns about privacy and coercion, the IRB only agreed to the interviews after I set up the following recruitment process. After establishing the connection with CFCA, the agency *selected* foster families to be given a description of the study I was conducting. The foster families who had been contacted and wanted to take part in the study then gave consent for their contact information to be given to me. At that point, I could contact the families to ask for an interview. Because I was not able to recruit the families directly through brochures, fliers, or presentations, I had to wait for them to contact me. Although I had planned to interview at least five sets of foster families about their experiences in the training and as foster parents, this process proved difficult and I was only able to interview three families. These families were highly selected. They were chosen by CFCA as participants who would give me good interviews and then they self-selected by being willing to spend an hour sharing their own experiences with a researcher.

Foster families are so diverse; even if I interviewed one hundred foster families, I would not have a scientifically reliable sample of how all foster families interpret the experience. Interviewing these families gave me three case studies of the issues encountered by foster families, a personal account of what it is like to care for foster children from the perspective of those who do so. For privacy, the names of foster parents

have been changed and, when relevant, details regarding their foster children have also been changed.

- **Angie**, a woman in her mid-forties, has fostered children with her husband for about a year. I interviewed her on a Friday afternoon after she came home from her full-time job and just before her husband arrived home with the two children in their care.

- **Holly and Seth**, a young couple, have also fostered for several years. Both talked with me on a morning when they were off of work and while one of their daughters napped. Their home was simple and cheerful with toys and photos obviously intended to make a child feel at home.

- **Kay**, also in her mid forties, has fostered for several years. We talked just after a set of three siblings had returned to their birth mother. Her home was lovely and obviously set up to welcome children.

I met each family in their home and talked with them for about an hour. I left each one of these interviews humbled, wishing I could be equally open-hearted, and feeling far from the analytic researcher I sometimes suppose myself to be. But these interviews brought up critical issues about how the foster system is presented to potential foster parents and how this confusing process could be made more coherent for foster children.

Discordant Characterization of the Foster Parent

Fisher's description of character as "an organized set of actional tendencies" can be supplemented with insights from the field of literary studies. As literary critic Uri Margolin notes, there are a myriad of ways to approach the topic of character in a written

text (66). In the context of the foster parent training, the cognitive-psychological approach seems most appropriate. Margolin describes this approach as the reader "opening a mental file" on a character introduced in a text (76). Readers continue to add to this file as they receive more information about the character (Margolin 76). Although all the information received about the character influences the reader's overall appraisal of the character, some information is more important than other information. Narratologist Mieke Bal suggests that in order to best understand a character, a reader should prioritize information about what a character wants or what a character aims towards (26). Foster parents as characterized in the PS-MAPP materials have goals on several levels but their primary goal is established through their legal responsibilities.

These legal responsibilities are one of the first topics covered in the PS-MAPP training. In the first meeting, the attendees review a handout titled "A Brief Summary of Child Welfare Laws Important to Resource Parents" (Handout 6). The handout explains two core child welfare laws, passed in 1980 and 1997. In 1980, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, Public Law 96-272 was introduced. This law emphasizes the importance of keeping families together and of reunifying families after children are removed. The law identifies the best place for a child as a healthy birth family but acknowledges that a child's need for "nurturance and protection" is of primary importance. In 1997, the Adoption and Safe Families Act, Public Law 105-89 was passed. Although reunification is still emphasized, this law pushes permanence, the stability of a consistent family, for a child. Because children had been growing up in the foster care system, this law encourages adoption if birth families cannot be reunified within a specified amount of time. Legally, the primary goal of foster parents is the safety

of a child. As explained in the training, after child safety, the law prioritizes the "parent-child attachment," and then the "child's need for nurturance."

Inherent in the law, and therefore in the foster parent training, is a central contradiction. A child needs protection from her birth family while simultaneously needing her family. The foster care system protects children from their birth families while working to reunite children with their birth families. For this reason, a conversion on the part of the birth parent is central to the underlying narratives of CPS. In this context, some of the most important questions involve how this central conflict is presented to prospective foster parents, how the conflict influences the characterization of the foster parent, and, finally, how it unfolds in communication with foster children.

Foster Parents as Ally for the Birth Family

Foster parents can be characterized on one level in terms of their legal responsibilities. But the foster parents as characterized in the PS-MAPP materials fulfill these responsibilities through embodying certain attributes. The materials present twelve criteria for successful foster families. These twelve characteristics are repeated many times throughout the training materials. According to the materials truly successful foster and adoptive parents must:

1. Know your own family.
2. Communicate effectively.
3. Know the children
4. Build on strengths: meet needs.
5. Work in partnership.
6. Be loss and attachment experts.
7. Manage behaviors.
8. Build connections.
9. Build self-esteem.

10.   Assure health and safety.
11.   Assess impact.
12.   Make an informed decision. (Meeting 1 Handout 2)

In the abstract, perhaps, this list does not seem daunting. But as a parent who knows the whirl of energy surrounding children, this list seems beyond the capability of a normal human. Something as basic as "know the children" is not simple; an eighteen month old may have a melt-down due to anger at 6:15 pm and have another meltdown due to exhaustion at 6:45 pm. Children and their needs are continually changing. Because meeting all of these criteria at all times is beyond what a normal human can do, some criteria are emphasized more than others.

According to the materials, a foster parent must fulfill the legal goal of ensuring a child's need for safety, nurturance, and permanence through building connections. One of the first handouts presented to participants identifies teamwork as central to foster parenting; foster parents must successfully work with "the agency, birth families, and others" (Meeting 1 Handout 2 Page 1). In the second meeting, the participants are given a handout titled, "The Alliance Model of Child Welfare Practice" (Handout 2). In this handout, the participants are informed that, although their first priority is the protection and nurturance of the children, they must achieve this goal through working with the case manager to align with the birth parents. The terms "alliance" and "team" are used repeatedly in the materials to characterize the people around the foster child. Because the primary goal of foster care is to reunite the child with the birth parents, the foster parents are encouraged to help and support the birth parents. In choosing to foster a child, foster parents are also choosing another role, that of being an ally to the birth parent.

These two goals, protecting and parenting a child and creating an alliance with the birth parent, manifest the contradiction created by the legal framework for CPS. Unless something has gone wrong with the system, children in foster care have experienced some level of abuse or neglect. So a reasonable instinct on the part of the foster parents would be to protect the children by shielding them from the person who abused or neglected them. But the training materials emphasize that the best place for the child is in the birth family and demonstrate that the foster family can be of support to the birth family. In the second meeting, participants are told that foster parents "play vital roles, supplementing and supporting birth families rather than substituting for them" (Meeting 2 Handout 2 Page 5). Foster families must aim towards the well-being of the child through encouraging the healing and reunification of the birth family. Despite a natural instinct to shield the children from the parents, the materials encourage the foster families to create an alliance with the birth parents. Although developing this alliance is anti-intuitive, it is presented as a powerful tool for healing regardless of if the child returns to the family of origin or not.

While most of the participants may not have anticipated the dual roles of foster parenting (parent to child and ally to birth parent), the two roles do work together to create narrative cohesion. Because most children are attached to their birth parents, constructing an alliance between the birth parents and the child's caregivers is logical. Furthermore, legal goals of safety, nurturance, and permanence are fulfilled by creating these dual roles for one character. But, as I will explain later, the foster parent's role of ally is contradicted by one pervasive metaphor.

The training materials give concrete suggestions for supporting birth families. One handout titled "The Role of Resource Parents in Building Alliances with Parents of Children in Foster Care" (Meeting 2 Handout 4) gives guidelines for interacting with birth parents, such as "recognize and support parent strengths," (1) "manage personal emotions," (3) and "share power and control (3). The subsequent handout, "Bridging the Gap of Separation: A Continuum of Contact" (Meeting 2 Handout 5) gives a long list of practical advice for supporting birth families which includes suggestions such as, "refer to child as 'your child' to parent," "welcome parents into your home," "give parents pictures of child," and "send snack/activity for visit." Although these suggestions sound reasonable on paper, I read them with some cynicism.

Through Aviva, I worked for several months as a visit supervisor, taking foster children to visit their birth parents. By the end of the few months, I had lost patience with the parents. If Brian's mother loved him, why couldn't she stay off drugs? If Josie loved her two girls, why couldn't she leave the man who abused them? I remember the two preteen girls who bubbled with excitement as I drove them a half hour from their school to the CPS office where they were to meet their mother. They had so many things to tell her. But during the visit the mother seemed distracted, thumbing through a magazine and grunting in response to her daughters' comments. The girls were quiet on the way home.

The dual role of carrying out the normal parental duties for children while supporting the birth family is complicated. Foster parents are expected to love, protect, and nurture a damaged child while simultaneously supporting that child's parent (who is almost invariably a difficult adult). After loving this little person and helping her heal and grow, they are often expected to give the child back to the birth parents, the very people

who abused or neglected the child. Even if the parent has done all she is required to do for reunification (for example, stay off of drugs, find employment, secure a clean place to live), they have not necessarily gone through a fundamental conversion that will ensure that they put the child's needs before their own. After analyzing the training material, I began to wonder what sort of people would volunteer to do the work of fostering. Quite honestly, I doubted that anyone could ever be as open-hearted and supportive towards the parents as the materials prescribe. In the following section I will describe two of the interviews and how these foster parents interpreted the characterization as outlined in the PS-MAPP training.

Building Connections through Considering Needs and Strengths

As I drove north towards my first interview, I decided that I was about to meet either someone who disregarded most of the described work of fostering or someone who was a saint. I was about to talk with "Angie" who had been a foster mother for about a year and a half. I drove into a subdivision of simple adobe condos, bright against the desert sun. After finding the address, I opened the gate. The door was open but the security door was closed and locked. A dog barked as he pawed the metal screen. I rang the doorbell.

"Let me take the dog out," Angie called from inside. I nodded but I could not see anything because of the brightness of the sun. A minute later she opened the gate and welcomed me with a warm smile. She was in her mid-forties, casual and friendly. After we sat down at her kitchen table and introduced ourselves, Angie described how she became a foster mother. She married in her early forties and she and her husband talked

about adopting. But she felt moved by God to go into foster care instead. "I really believe God put it on my heart," she described. In other words, it was a calling. While she wanted children, she felt a divine direction to care for children who would, odds were, reserve their most profound love for another mother.

Angie described the first two children she had, two of an eight sibling group. They were only with her for only five days when she got a call at work telling her that she needed to pick up the girls from school immediately and bring them back to the CPS office so that they could be reunited with their father.

The next two children were from a six sibling group. She explained that she and her husband had committed to caring for children from two years on up, that she had never really wanted an infant. But they took a little boy and when they were told that he had five siblings, they offered to take another child. CPS needed a place for the boy's baby sister, so what was she to do? They accepted the baby thinking that this would probably be another short term placement. At the time of the interview the children had been with them for over a year.

"The time" she shook her head thinking about the work of caring for a baby. "The time it takes, and the devotion. You really give up who you are. It means that you have to work from the minute you wake up to the minute to go to bed at night."

But the part of mothering that is unique to fostering that of supporting and helping another parent, she described in a matter-of-fact manner that surprised me. She had no anger or even resentment towards the mother. "You realize that hey, she's having a hard time. *She* needs help" Angie explained. This realization is skillfully encouraged in the training material. After the participants list and reflect on their own strengths and needs,

they are asked to consider that birth parents also have strengths and needs. In a handout

on building alliances with birth parents, the participants read that "Foster parents may be

judging the parent by the worst thing that parent ever did in his or her life. All of us

probably have a worst thing that we did in our lives, and we do not want to be judged by

that forever" (Meeting 2 Handout 4 Page 2). Angie spoke of the birth mother with

compassion.

> I think it is probably a very difficult situation for her. We do just let her
> know that we're there to support her, no matter what happens. Our main
> goal is, of course, the kids. But part of that is for them to understand that
> although mom can't take care of you today, that doesn't make her a bad
> person or a bad mom. She just can't take care of you today. That's all we
> say about it. 'Your mom has some things to do so she can't take care of
> you today so that's why you're here with us. But, hey, we're going to see
> her next week.' And we try to keep that connection.

Angie focused on the fact that both she and the birth mother love the children. The

materials describe the support of the birth parent in a matter of fact way without

acknowledging that supporting them requires the difficult spiritual practice of

forgiveness. As someone with less sympathy than Angie, I can say that her attitude is rare

and difficult to cultivate. So while the birth parents and the foster parents share an

objective, the foster parents must cultivate a deep sympathy towards the birth parent. It is

difficult to forgive anyone who hurts a child. But to forgive someone who hurts a child

whom you love and then to return that child to the person who hurt them takes profound

compassion towards the parent. As I left the interview, I told Angie how much I admire

her and the work she does.

"Oh," she shrugged, "I got into it for selfish reasons." Then she paused for a

minute and smiled, "But I'm not staying in it for selfish reasons." She laughed, "I'm

giving a lot more than I'm getting!" We both laughed – because her comment was probably true. Angie embodies the characterization of a foster parent as a support for the entire birth family. Although she does it with grace and humor, the job is not easy.

Several weeks later I knocked on the door of Seth and Holly's compact brick home. Inside, their home was neat, with toys in one corner and simple furniture. One large wall was decorated with framed photos of children. Holly and Seth looked young, perhaps in their late twenties or early thirties. Holly explained that one of their girls was napping and the other was at school. They both sat on the couch to talk with me.

Holly explained that after trying to have biological children, they were referred to a fertility specialist. But because the specialist was not covered by their insurance, they went to Christian Family Care Agency planning to adopt. In the process of the training, though, in Holly's words, "our hearts were really changed." Holly explained that they decided they wanted to open their home to any child who needed them and to adopt those foster children who needed them long-term. "We realized there were *so* many kids that needed a home. And some of them come up for adoption. Some go to a family member to be adopted and some of them end up going home. We wanted to be available for *all* of them." Pointing at the photos on the wall, they told me about all the children they had fostered: the newborn whom they nurtured through detox, the three siblings they had for almost a year, the baby Seth took on an airplane to unite with her grandparents, their biological daughter – a welcome surprise, and the three year old they have had for almost three years.

As they described their work, it was clear that they worked to embody the role of foster parent as described in the PS-MAPP materials. They were equally committed to the children and the birth families of the children. Seth explained that they "try a lot to interact with the parents any time we can. . . We call or email them and say, 'Hey, here's the kind of questions they [the children] are asking. Let's work together on giving the same answer' . . . [So] the parents don't start talking in a way that we are the enemy and we are talking in a way that the parents aren't the enemy." This attitude and the work Seth and Holly do embody the recommendations of the training materials. Although they want to be a resource for the biological family even after the children leave their care, they realize this is difficult for the parents.

As well as reaching out to biological parents, Seth and Holly go beyond what is recommended in the materials to try to connect with any part of the biological family that is healthy. In one case, they found a healthy biological aunt and they worked to nourish the relationship between the aunt and the child. In the case of the child they are planning to adopt, Seth said, "her grandparents have become grandparents for all our kids." Seth and Holly have fully embraced the narrative suggested by the characterization of foster parents as team members. They see themselves as primarily supporting the child but doing that through an alliance with the birth family to the extent possible.

Seth and Holly fully embody the characterization of foster parents in the training manual, but the birth parents, according to their interview, do not always respond positively. Why do the parents not immediately see them as the support they strive to be? Certainly, the question has no simple answer. Getting help is not easy. It takes humility and the determination to change. But I would like to suggest that a single metaphor

creates an especially difficult barrier between the birth and the foster parents. This metaphor conflicts with the characterization of foster parents as support for the birth family.

Contradiction Created through Parental Terms

In his emphasis on understanding metaphor through narrative, Richard Sheehan identifies a three part process interpreters use to make sense of metaphor. The process begins with identification, then involves invention, and finally narration (59). Identification of a metaphor relies on a clash between a literal meaning and context. For example, when a child is told, "Holly is your foster mother," if the child is more than one or two years of age, she quickly realizes that Holly is not literally her mother. Invention involves bringing previous experience to create coherence between the metaphor and the overall meaning (59). The child then considers associations with the word "mother," which ideally would be a person who is a caregiver and nurturer to a child (but in this case may involve other less positive characteristics). Narration involves a carrying out of this invention into a familiar "metanarrative" that is supported by the metaphor (61). At this point the child brings together previous experiences with her mother, stories about mothers, and experiences with other children's mothers to make sense of who Holly is in relation to herself.

I posit that the narratives implicit in parental terms contradict the characterization of the foster caregiver as described in the training materials. While the training materials characterize the foster parent as a helper to the birth parents, this role is contradicted by the metaphor of "parent." When a child is removed from his birth mother and given a

foster "mother," the logical conclusion is that this new mother is in competition with, or at least at odds with, the birth mother. Furthermore, a mother-child relationship lasts forever so it is also logical for the child to think that the new mother is working to keep him, even if he is told that foster care is a temporary situation. None of the foster parents whom I interviewed ask the children to call them mom and dad. Most let the children call them whatever feels comfortable to them. But the official title given to the foster parents is "parents." Even if the foster children choose to call Holly by her first name, they are still told that Holly is their foster mother.

This metaphor of foster "mother" and "father" is outdated and creates a confusing clash of narratives for a foster child. The lack of coherence between the role of the foster caregiver and the title "parent" creates dissonance on many levels. According to the case workers I interviewed, birth parents often feel deeply hurt or get angry if their child refers to a foster parent as "mom" or "dad." Yet both the training materials and my interviews emphasize the importance *to the child* of knowing that the adults are working together. Angie recalls that the realization that she and her husband supported her foster son's mother was a turning point in their relationship to Jose. Angie remembered how he would comment on seeing them talk at a baseball game.

> "He'd be like, 'You know my mom?'
> "Yeah, I know your mom."
> "Are you friends with my mom?"
> "Yeah, I'm a friend of your mom's. And that's why I'm helping her out. I'm a friend of your mom's."

Angie felt that establishing this relationship created a more stable environment for Jose. She could see him thinking, "Oh, my mom knows you. Oh, okay, this might not be so bad. I can stay with you now."

Even if the child is eventually severed from his birth parents, the metaphor creates problems in the relationship with his future adoptive parents. In her article about adopting a six-year old boy who had been in eleven previous placements, Jennifer Munro explains the confusion the multiple past "mothers" created for her child, herself, and her husband.

> The confusion wasn't just mine. Once when I wasn't home, Ben [the child] screamed at my husband, "I want my mommy! I want Mama!" Patrick panicked. *Which one?* (47)

Foster parents need a title. They have a vital role in the foster care system and they need a label. The label of "foster friends" as suggested by Angie's story is perhaps the most obvious possibility. The term "friend" has such a variety of meanings that is not necessarily a metaphor. After a few brief encounters, a foster parent could, under many understandings of the word, be labeled a friend of the birth parent. But because "friend" is not even a metaphor, it has no significant narrative to accompany it. While the lack of explanatory narratives could or could not be an issue for the child, this could create questions in public. Munro describes how the fact that her son called her "Jennifer" in public raised questions and called for qualifications. This explanation immediately brought out the child's complicated history. "We were technically his foster parents until his adoption was finalized, which made him a foster child, which made him a child with a not-so-nice label, a child who just might spell trouble" (47). While the label for foster parents must suggest appropriate narratives for the child, birth parent, and foster family, it also should raise as few questions as possible.

Rather than using the title foster "mother" and "father," a more appropriate metaphor for describing the role of caregivers is foster "aunt" and "uncle." Foster care compensates for extended family when a healthy extended family cannot be found. If

parents are unable for any reason to care for their children, social workers first look for grandparents, aunts, or uncles to care for the child and to simultaneously help the parents get to the place where they can take the child. Only when extended family cannot be found are children placed in foster families. The terms aunt and uncle prioritize both the relationship between the adult and child and the relationship between the adults in the child's life.

I am not suggesting that using the terms "foster aunt" and "foster uncle" would take a significant piece of the terror of foster care out of the experience. But the current terms that are used to introduce foster caregivers add to the ambiguity and confusion of the foster experience by suggesting that the child's birth parents are being replaced. Reassurances that this is not the case creates conflicting narratives about the nature of the foster care experience. Replacing "mother" and "father" with "aunt" and "uncle" would create a more coherent narrative of the experience for the child and, in turn, reduce the confusion around the experience.

I would advocate the use of the terms "foster aunt and foster uncle" only as the *official* terms for foster caregivers in order to reduce the confusion of the foster care experience. In many situations, calling the foster caregivers "mom" and "dad" is appropriate. For example, some children enter foster care as newborns and their primary attachment is to the foster parents. Other children enter foster families that include birth as well as foster children. For some foster children, calling the parents "aunt" and "uncle" might put them in an uneasy relationship with the birth children, although other foster children might feel more comfortable identifying with the birth children as cousins rather than siblings.

"But that [identifying the foster caregivers as aunt and uncle] is a lie too!" someone commented when I suggested the terms. She is right; identifying foster caregivers as parents is a misrepresentation, yet identifying them as extended family is also a misrepresentation. Many children, depending on their age and cognitive abilities, realize that the terms they use are metaphors. But not all do. In an essay titled "Bonding and Attachment" (Handout 7) that is given to participants in the third meeting, the potential foster parents are told that children do not always have the mental associations needed to create appropriate narratives about their situation.

> They [foster children] don't know where they came from. It is not unusual for foster children to think they came full grown, that they did not grow inside a mother, and that they were not born. Some foster children under eight or nine will tell you they were never born, that they just came, that they somehow appeared in a foster home at about age three (Meeting 3 Handout 7 Page 2).

Metaphors are useful only if they can be properly narrated. Unfortunately, there is no entirely clear and coherent way to present the foster care experience to a child because the experience is not clear or coherent. Some experiences only make sense in retrospect. In chapter four I will discuss some rhetorical tools used to help children narrate their own past.

Narrative Cohesion through Reflection

While the PS-MAPP materials recognize that not every situation works out perfectly (such as in the descriptions in Meeting 7 of placements disrupting), foster parents are characterized as selflessly helping both the children and the birth parents in a way that is best for all parties involved. As Fisher points out, actional tendencies are

interpreted as a reflection of values. Above all else, the foster parents in these materials

value the well-being of the foster children. Furthermore, even though scenarios do not

always end happily, they consistently act on that value; foster parents in the materials are

characterized in the ideal[9]. But the lack of cohesion between the ideal portrayal of the

characters in the materials and what one could reasonably expect from a human being is

mitigated through the encouragement of reflection on the part of the participants.

On one level, the representation of foster parents as saints was useful for the

people I interviewed because they have, at least, saintly tendencies. They are optimistic,

compassionate, and forgiving. None of the foster families I interviewed wore rose tinted

glasses. They understood that they were simply trying to write a cheerful chapter in a

tragedy. For example, Angie explained that there was no way around the sadness in her

children's lives. "No matter what happens, it's going to be sad. If they stay (and are

adopted by Angie and her husband), it's going to be very sad (because the children want

to be with their birth family). If they go, it's going to be very sad (because the mother is

not equipped to care for them)." She expects that the children will always have

attachment issues. Seth and Holly explained that they hoped to simply give a child a good

memory of how life can be, in hopes that the child will try to recreate that happiness later

in life. The foster parents I interviewed accept their own limitations in helping the

children. The PS-MAPP materials allow for limitations on the part of the foster parent by

facilitating reflection in the participants. The materials encourage foster parents to

---

[9] There are two exceptions to this characterization, which are shocking because they are such aberrations. In an anecdote given in Meeting 8 a husband has an affair (Handout 8). In Meeting 9 when allegations (against foster parents) of abuse are discussed, the participants are told to be honest, "if you slapped Sally – say you slapped Sally" (Handout 6 Page 3).

embody the characterization of the ideal foster parent to the extent they can, while articulating their limitations.

The materials encourage participants to hold the ideal in their consciousness while recognizing the ways in which they do not embody the ideal. This rhetorical move on the part of the training is the central strength of the training. The materials outline I see as an unrealistic portrayal of a foster parent. But simultaneously the materials encourage participants to narrate and re-narrate who they are in relation to this ideal. Construction of an ideal and realistic character is achieved through encouraging reflection in the participants.

The training material both extols the importance of being reflective and skillfully works to shape participants into reflective people. The participants are asked to practice reflection as they decide whether or not to foster children and this process is ideally a model for the parents to use in other decisions in their lives. The first part of being reflective requires something to measure oneself against. The "Twelve Criteria for Successful Fostering and Adopting" introduced previously are used throughout the course as a measure by which to evaluate themselves (Meeting 1 Handout 2 Page 1). The criteria are ambitious, for example number seven is "manage behaviors; help children and youth manage behaviors" (Meeting 1 Handout 2). In other words, the foster parents need to both manage the children's behaviors and teach the children how to manage their own behavior. This is something that all parents both succeed and fail at every day. Implicitly, the criteria by which the participants measure themselves are not intended to be skills to master but rather goals towards which to strive.

The training acknowledges the criteria as ideals by introducing the taxonomy of strengths and needs (Meeting 1 Handout 4). The participants are told that every family is different and that each family has "many skills that will be helpful in their new roles. Likewise, every family has a set of needs that must be fulfilled to take on their new roles" (Meeting 1 Handout 4). Each individual and couple comes up with a list of strengths and needs in relation to the twelve criteria. They are led through the process of seeing themselves not as either achieving or failing to reach a goal, but as being in a process and taking intentional steps towards the goal. The essence of being reflective is to know an ideal and be able to see oneself in relation to that ideal. In terms of illustrating a goal towards which to strive, the characterization of foster parents is helpful.

Although most agencies that conduct the training are desperate for more foster families, the PS-MAPP materials seem to prioritize the goal of shaping reflective people over recruiting more foster parents. At the end of each session participants are asked to consider the twelve criteria and decide if they are going to continue the training. Worksheets throughout the training ask them to consider how fostering might affect other family relationships, their roles in various communities, and how issues such as struggles with infertility might influence their job as a foster parent. At the end of the training, the participants are asked to make a final decision about being a foster parent, to decide what sorts of children they feel equipped to foster, and to consider other options for helping foster children such as being a mentor or providing respite care (Meeting 9 Handout 9). The training sets up the ideal foster parent and takes the participants by the hand as they compare themselves to this mythical figure. This process helps the participants acknowledge their own limitations and set goals to overcome those limitations.

The portrayal of foster parents in the ideal is mitigated by the encouragement of reflection and by the introduction of actual foster parents who come to the training and talk to the participants. But setting up an ideal foster parent in the materials also has some risks. One risk is that participants might not take their job description seriously, believing that some parts of the job are not realistic. In particular, the part of the characterization that involves allying with the birth parents seems beyond the scope of foster parenting. Although conversations with experienced foster parents who come to the training provide concrete examples of people carrying out the role, these experienced foster parents probably do not want to share their most serious mistakes.

Further Cohesion through Anecdotes of Reflection

A written anecdote with anonymous characters is a safe place to illustrate mistakes that can be made and to demonstrate ways one can learn from those mistakes. The training materials largely miss the opportunity to acknowledge that every foster parent will break character sometimes. If the training portrayed examples of foster parents making mistakes, of trying to connect with birth parents and not succeeding or of getting angry at a non-responsive case worker, then the participants could see ways in which reflection can make a practical difference. In other words, the training could portray examples of reflective foster parents who fail in realistic ways and who also strive towards the ideal. While maintaining the ideal, the materials could illustrate realistic situations in which foster parents do not embody that ideal and then show how the parent reflects on the situation.

A Simple Characterization of Foster Children

In the training materials, the characterization of the child is less critical than the characterization of the foster parents. The foster parents are being trained to enact a role and the training material is their script. How foster parents perceive the child who enters their home will depend on previous experiences they have had with children and other information they have learned about children in general. But the training materials matter in that they create a screen through which the foster parent will view the children for whom they care.

The PS-MAPP materials almost exclusively focus on the needs of the child. As someone who spends many of her waking (and too many of her resting) hours with children, I understand this focus. In some sense, children are great vortexes of need; they need time, they need attention, they need food, they need bigger pajamas, they need someone to help fasten the doll into their baby sister's car seat. But the training materials only partly meet Fisher's criteria. Fisher asks what is excluded as well as what is included in a narrative (*Narration* 47). With this in mind, this focus on need is one-sided. When asked to reflect on themselves and the birth parents, the participants are given the terms "strengths" and "needs." But this taxonomy is not encouraged when describing the children; their needs are emphasized without observing that they also have strengths.

This tendency to portray the children in terms of need comes from two sources, the attempt to depict a realistic description of the children, and the laws that serve as the basis for the training. From this perspective, the creators of the PS-MAPP curriculum walk a fine line. On one hand, the training should not discourage the participants from becoming a foster parent, but, on the other hand, it should not mislead the participants

about the nature of the foster parenting job. Unintentionally, I assume, the authors have struck this balance by idealizing foster parents and not idealizing the children. The portrayal of the children as needy is an attempt to be realistic about what the foster parenting job entails. But the materials miss an opportunity to be realistic about the strengths of the children as well.

Secondly, the materials portray the children as needy because of the laws on which the material are based. In the handout titled "A Brief Summary of Child Welfare Laws Important to Foster Parents" (Handout 6) given to attendees in the first meeting the basic needs of a child are described. The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act and the Adoption and Safe Families Act highlight three needs of children, the need for nurturance, protection, and permanence. I will analyze the way in which these three needs are elaborated upon in the training materials and illustrate the conflicts and gaps created by the focus on need.

Nurturance Complicated by a Variety of Attachments

The portrayal of the foster child as needing nurturance is described through emphasizing the concept of attachment. In the fourth meeting the participants are given a handout titled "The Cycle of Need: Attachment" (Handout 4).
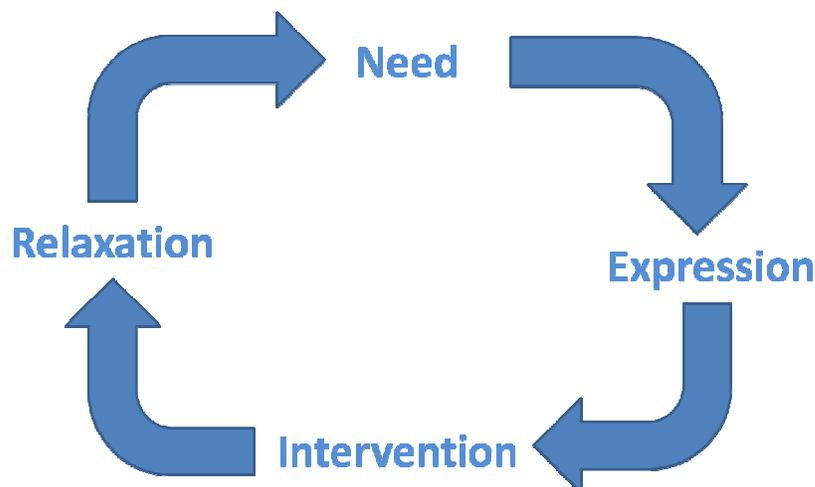
FIGURE 1 - The Cycle of Need: Attachment

The figure illustrates the idea that meeting the needs of children builds attachment

between caregiver and child. A child expresses her needs, the caregiver responds, and the

child relaxes – this cycle, according to the materials, creates a sense of attachment.

Helping the child meet her daily needs serves to fulfill her larger need for nurturance.

According to the training materials, the essence of nurturance is secure attachments. But

meeting the need for attachment is complicated. As described in a handout titled

"Attachment," (and repeated many times throughout the training) the child first needs to

be attached to her birth family (Meeting 4 Handout 3). Simultaneously, the handout

asserts that the child needs to recover from the separation from her birth family and

attach to the foster family. Next, the handout describes how a child must reattach to the

birth family if reunification occurs or attach to an adoptive family, *or* if the child ages out

of the system she must attach to people who can help her be an adult. To summarize, a

foster child needs to maintain an attachment to her birth family while separated from

them, meanwhile attaching to a foster family then possibly reattach to the birth family

(from which it is statistically likely she will be separated again) or, perhaps, attach to an

adoptive family, or, perhaps move into adulthood without the foundation of a family of

origin – What I am pointing out here is that there *is* no summary about the child's need

for attachment. The process is complex and tragic even in the most simple of cases. The

training material emphasizes that every foster child has had his or her need for nurturance

disrupted and is experiencing grief.

Downplaying the Need for Protection

The foster child's need for nurturance from the birth family relates to the central

conflict of the foster care system; although the children need nurturance from the birth

family, they also need protection from them. All foster children have suffered some kind

of abuse or neglect. Glaringly, the PS-MAPP materials have little information on abuse

or neglect or how abuse or neglect might affect the children. In the second meeting, the

participants are given a handout titled "Impact of Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse,

Emotional Maltreatment and Neglect on a Child's Development" (Handout 8) that

outlines possible symptoms of abuse. This is the only handout in the current version that

addresses impacts of abuse. This gap in information about abuse and neglect seems

connected to the authors' emphasis on shaping a positive view of the birth parents. The

child's need for protection is downplayed in deference to his need for nurturance which

creates a gap in the training about the nature of abuse and its effects on children. Again,

this gap may be at least partially filled in the interactions in the meetings but when

addressing children's behavior and relationship with the birth family, more information

would be helpful to a foster family.

Pleasure rather than Permanence

The third essential need of a child according to the training materials (along with

the need for nurturance and protection) is that of permanence. The participants are given

a definition of this need in the first meeting. "Permanence is the assurance of a family for

a child intended to last a lifetime. Permanence assures a child a family where he will be

safe and nurtured" (Meeting 1 Handout 7 Page 7). This definition of permanence could

be considered idealistic. No family, even the most healthy family, is permanent; death,

divorce, and even marriage and childbirth, change the nature of a family. Furthermore,

the materials idealize the foster care system by avoiding information and anecdotes about

the sad reality that permanence is not a realistic goal for many of the children in the foster

care system[10]. A 2001 study of children in treatment foster care found that about 25%

will experience a disruption in their care and move placements (Smith 202). According to

records kept by the Pima County Juvenile Court, about fifteen percent of children who

reunify with their birth parents will return to Child Protective Services. The same records

show that from May 2011 to August 2011, a three month span, thirty-nine adopted

children in Pima County returned to Child Protective Services; leaving Child Protective

Services does not mean that permanency is achieved. But while meeting the children's

need for permanence is not a realistic goal in many situations, all three of the foster

families that I interviewed had made a profound insight: while they could not give the

child hope for the future, they could give a child a past and a present.

---

[10] Although permanence is a central goal for Child Protective Services, data on foster children
beyond their time in the system is difficult to find. Statistics are easy to access on the age, race, sex,
duration of care, etc. But I found very little information even after hours of searching for statistics on what
happens to foster children a year or five years after they leave the system. My only source of information
came from a contact at Aviva who attends the Pima County Juvenile Court.

Rather than providing permanence, they have a lived philosophy of pleasure in the present. "And that's what we do, you know, that's what we do" Angie mused when she reflected on the diversions that she and her husband create for their foster children. "We were prepared on Labor Day [the day her foster son expected to return to his birth family]. Let's go here! Let's go out to pizza! We played games and stuff like that. So by the time we got home he was too tired to worry about it and it's time to go to bed." Angie told me that she and her husband focus on today and tomorrow, "that's our future" she smiled.

Holly reflected on the ways that she and Seth try to put a positive spin on the challenges of being in foster care. Then she shrugged and explained that often they just have to acknowledge that the child is in a difficult place.

"You're right. You're having a bad day," she will tell the child. Then they try to revise the child's present situation. "Let's just go to the park," one of them suggests.

The foster parents whom I interviewed arrived on their own to this insight about the children's need for pleasure. It is not addressed in the training materials. To these foster parents, the insight that momentary happiness is valuable might seem mundane. But in creating a pleasurable present for their foster children, they create a positive past for that child. For better or worse, our past selves are our future companions. And by creating joy in the present for their children, even brief moments of reprieve from the incredible anxiety that the children must feel on a continual basis, the foster parents give the children a valuable gift. As all of the foster parents I interviewed explained, they can give the children a past from which they can draw strength for the future. The children will be able to look back and reflect on a healthy family life. Hopefully they will be able

to recreate that experience themselves. But even if they do not recreate a healthy family, they will have moments of happiness as small treasures in the landscape of their memory.

Suggestions for Greater Cohesion in the Characterization of Children

In summary, the tendency of the PS-MAPP materials to focus on the child as needy could be revised by extending the strength/needs lens to the children as well. Secondly, filling in the gap in information about abuse could be helpful to foster parents. And finally, idealizing the foster parents and foster care system results in an unrealistic emphasis on permanency. This emphasis creates a gap in the training where participants *could* be taught that they have the capacity to fulfill the children's need for happiness and the ability to construct a past that will become a source of strength for the children.

A Balanced Characterization of the Birth Parent

The characterization of the birth parents in the training materials is the most balanced portrayal out of the descriptions of the four major actors. In *Human Communication as Narratio*n, Fisher describes how character comes into question when people act erratically. "If these [actional] tendencies contradict one another, change significantly, or alter in 'strange' ways, the result is a questioning of character (47). Failing to provide for the basic needs of one's children or hurting children could fairly be considered strange. So birth parents in the CPS system by the very fact of being in the system can be assumed to be of questionable character. The training materials are realistic about the fact that birth parents often continue to make what appear to be strange decisions. Cohesion between the portrayal of the birth parents in the materials and the

subsequent experiences of the foster parents combined with tools for reflection help generate compassionate for the birth parents on the part of the trainees.

The materials utilize the "strength and needs" lens to neither idealize nor demonize the parents. In the second meeting the participants are given a handout about creating an alliance with the birth parents. "The parents obviously have needs or their child would not have been placed in care" the participants read (Meeting 2 Handout 4 Page 1). But the handout goes on to explain that the parent has strengths too; "when we recognize a parent's strengths . . . we will have a positive place to begin talking and working with that person." In order to build a foundation for a positive relationship between foster and birth parents, the materials characterize birth parents as hurting and difficult.

The birth parents' pain, as explained in the PS-MAPP materials, comes from both their past and their separation from their children. The materials explain that the parents may have experienced abuse (Meeting 2 Handout 4 Page 2). Many examples are given of parents struggling with addiction to drugs or alcohol. Giving the participants insight into the difficult past that the birth parents may have experienced provides a basis for the foster parents to have compassion when the birth parents act in destructive ways. Secondly, the materials explain that the parents feel embarrassment and pain from being separated from their children (Meeting 9 Handout 6 Page 2). Understanding the fact that the parent most likely has a troubled past and likely experiences pain from separation helps the foster parent cope with the difficult behaviors the birth parents might exhibit.

The materials build compassion in the foster parents by emphasizing the need that children have for their birth parents. But the materials make it clear that the relationship

between these two will not be easy. In the case examples, the materials show that the birth parents may struggle with drugs and alcohol, be unrealistic, and may not respect boundaries. But the foster parent is expected to help them in any way possible and to respect the connection that the children have to their birth parents.

The training is certainly not the sole source of the compassion the foster families I interviewed expressed for the birth parents. But the fact that the materials describe the behaviors of the birth parents realistically and then work to contextualize those behaviors encourages the compassion these foster parents have for people in general. This compassion sets up a coherent narrative for foster parents to employ when talking to the children. They are prepared to neither have unrealistic expectations or to demonize the birth parents.

Case Manager without Character

Considering the important role that the case manager has in the foster care system, the PS-MAPP training materials pay little attention to him or her. "The Go-To Guide for DCYF[11] Resource Parents" handed out during the training, describes some of the case manager responsibilities such as to oversee the "safety, permanency and well-being of the child and to promote the achievement of the permanency goal" (13). The case manager portrayed in the training material is not characterized in the way that the foster parent, the child, and the birth parents are characterized. The main information provided about the case manager is the job description and foster parents are left to expect the case worker to do the job as described. What is left out, though, is the fact that the job expectations are not realistic even if a case worker is assigned two or three cases, yet most case workers

---

[11] Department of Children Youth and Families

have many cases to handle at once. Foster parents quickly learn that case workers are overworked but they have not been taught to view them with any complexity. The following example illustrates how the lack of characterization creates difficulty for foster parents.

The frustration expressed by the people I interviewed was not towards the children or the birth parents, but towards the social workers. Kay's beautiful house was strangely empty when she answered the door, no noise and no clutter. I had not considered that part of fostering, the emptiness after children leave. Kay had been a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) before becoming a foster parent. She was single, friendly, and perhaps in her early forties. When she had the opportunity to buy a lovely house with four bedrooms, she took it as a sign from God that this was the time to become a foster parent. She and her parents decorated the rooms in cheerful bright colors and she went through the PS-MAPP training process. She feels that the biggest challenge as a foster parent is the confusion. She explained that sometimes she felt like the only member of the "team." The situation with the three children for whom she had most recently cared was one example of how the case manager had left gaps for her to fill. The three siblings had been in two other places before coming to her house. Although the older child vaguely understood that they were staying at Kay's house and the youngest child was too young to understand, the six year old was especially confused.

"Are we coming back here?" he would ask whenever they left. Only after two or three weeks did he trust that they would return to her house. Although the judge had stated that the children should be separated from their mother for a month or less, a recording error had delayed their reunification. Because the mother was a refugee from

Africa, she experienced difficulty understanding what was being asked of her. So, even with her full time job, Kay had tried to attend court hearings and take the time to explain everything to the mother – a task that should be part of the case worker's job. Then one day Kay took the children to daycare before going to work.

"See you tonight after your visit with [your] mom" she told them. Hours later she got a call informing her that the children would stay with their mother from that day on. All of the children's belongings were at Kay's house. She gathered up their belongings and took them to the mother's house so that she could say goodbye. This abrupt transition was difficult for both her and the children and Kay felt as if the case manager should have done a better job smoothing the process.

The PS-MAPP training materials encourage the foster parent to work to ease the transitions. The handouts in Meeting 7 suggest activities such as talking to the child about specific plans and finding a way to celebrate the time that the child had with the foster family. But if the case manager does not come through on his or her job, the foster parent's job is made impossible.

Disjunctures between what is expected from the case manager and what happens creates frustration. If the training materials presented a balanced characterization of case workers, this would reduce the frustration that foster parents feel and better equip them to do their job. Furthermore, this frustration is likely sensed (if not explicitly expressed to) foster children who significantly rely on case workers. Extending the strength/needs lens to include the case manager would encourage foster parents to accept the limitations of individual social workers. Mistakes that case workers make can put foster parents in situations that are potentially dangerous. Seth described one situation in which Holly was

asked to meet a case worker at the home of a child to transition him into their home. The case worker did not show up and did not answer the phone. By then it was evening but, concerned about the safety of the child, Holly knocked on the door. The grandmother refused to hand over the child. After repeated attempts to find the case worker and after contacting the night worker, Holly finally returned home.

In recounting the story, Seth and Holly seemed most concerned with the safety of the child. "We never found out what happened to him," they said. But it was clear that Holly had been put in a compromised situation. Proper training about what to realistically expect from case workers could potentially prevent situations such as the one in which Holly found herself.

"Training should prepare you for workers who do the job, who don't, and who can't," Seth explained. They recommended including specific strategies for working with case mangers because they had particularly suffered from a gap of information about social workers. At the very beginning of the interview when I asked if there were any challenges that the training materials leave out, Seth jumped at the opportunity to tell me that they need more information about how to work with case managers.

Seth described how the birth mother of one little girl in their care was not making the changes necessary to get her daughter back. But when a new social worker took on the case, the worker made plans to return the child to the mother. Seth and Holly were familiar with the mother and knew that the reunification would be harmful to the child. But despite their efforts, the child was returned to her mother. Only two days later she was back in Seth and Holly's home. The transition to and from her birth mother's home was as traumatic for the child as Seth and Holly had expected. They obviously had

agonized over how they could have avoided this difficult experience for their child. And at the time of the interview they were dealing with behavioral and emotional issues that could have been avoided by better handling of the case.

"We've had a lot of issues [working with case workers]," Seth explained. Some of the issues were "as simple as we can't get them to return phone calls from weeks to months on end to completely disagreeing with what's going on." He felt that in the training it was assumed that workers would be good at their job. But even the workers who are good at their job are overloaded and do not always see everything that a foster parent sees. He described how he and Holly have learned what he called "tricks" for getting social workers to respond to their concerns, to get cell phone numbers and to call at certain times.

A case manger is a central figure in the foster care experience. But little information about them is provided in the training which results in the assumption that the workers will fulfill their duties. Frustration could be mitigated, and perhaps dangerous situations avoided, by characterizing case workers with more complexity, extending the strength/needs lens to include them, and discussing ways to manage when case workers cannot or do not fulfill their responsibilities.

Conclusion

Overall, the PS-MAPP training material is an effective curriculum. My interviewees largely expressed satisfaction with their training experience. In a study conducted in Kansas in 2000, 90% of the people who went through the PS-MAPP training felt that it had successfully prepared them for working with foster children

(Grimm 21). The curriculum facilitates reflection in the participants, builds compassion towards the birth families, and creates an outline of the foster parenting responsibilities. The focus of the PS-MAPP training is, rightly, giving participants a clear understanding of foster parenting and helping them decide if the job is appropriate for themselves and their family.

PS-MAPP curriculum's central strength is the skillful way that it manages to encourage reflection in the participants. However, the reflection focuses on individual and family strengths and needs. Just as individuals have strengths and needs, each team around each child has its own strengths and needs. Currently, the idealistic portrayal teamwork sets up the foster parents for frustration. In order to make the difficulties inherent in foster parenting less frustrating, the curriculum could extend the strength/needs lens to include all the actors on the team – children, social workers, lawyers, judges, therapists, etc. For a foster child, family becomes an amorphous entity. Their safety and well-being are provided by a changing cast of actors. While participants are taught to reflect on their own selves as foster parents, there is also merit to teaching them to reflect on the entire set of actors around the child and that team's strengths and needs in terms of providing for the child.

Secondly, the training leader for CFCA, Pat Alkola brought the physicality of the materials to my attention. She stated that it is unnecessary for the participants to have the bulk of 562 pages. I will go a step further and argue that the physical message of the materials contradicts the stated purpose of the training. The participants are given a heavy door-stop of a binder when they begin the training. While the participants are told that the training is a "mutual selection" process in which the agency and the participants mutually

decide if foster parenting is an appropriate choice for the participants, this huge binder

sends a different message. The big block of information conveys that in order to be a

foster parent, all of this material needs to be understood. The materials could easily be

divided into two binders, one binder for reference during meetings (that would stay with

the agency) and a small binder with a few necessary handouts for participants to take

home. The reduction in paperwork would send a more coherent message about the

purpose of the PS-MAPP training.

As mentioned in the introduction, people come to foster parenting from a wide

spectrum of backgrounds. But it is not uncommon for religious narratives to play a part in

the decision to become a foster parent and for these narratives to play an important part in

the subsequent understanding of that role. For agencies such as CFCA, religious

metanarratives are central to how the training is conducted. Pat Alkola explained how the

group prays before each session and showed me handouts of Bible verses used to

supplement the information in the training manual. Using these techniques, she works to

align the roles the participants are considering with Christian narratives. And this is

important. Without this hermeneutical work, religious participants may see the roles of

fostering in any number of ways in relation to their faith. But integrating and aligning

religious narratives with the materials provides cohesion for the participants and

encourages them to further reflect on the significance of their work.

Analyzing the PS-MAPP materials through the lens of narrative cohesion gives

insight on how language around the foster care experience could lend itself to more

consistent narratives. It also gives insight into the question that many critics (such as

Kirkwood, Stroud, and McClure) following Fisher have asked; in Kirkwoods words, how

can rhetors "acquaint people with new and unsuspected possibilities of being and acting in the world"? (31). The PS-MAPP materials provide an approach that, while not novel, has not been identified within the context of this question. The approach is simply to give an audience an analytical lens. Narratives that are different or seem strange are often disregarded because the audience has no context through which to understand them. The PS-MAPP materials give the participants an analytical lens (the strength/needs continuum) through which they view the narratives, the characters, and themselves. This approach is particularly helpful in situations such as this one in which presenting an idealized version of a narrative or character can encourage people to consider new possibilities. The analytical lens gives an audience a method through which they can approach new narratives.

In the chapter on case workers I identified disjunctures between the training and the case manager's experiences. I demonstrated ways in which the narratives introduced to case workers could be made more cohesive to their experiences. In order to make the experience less traumatic for children, I suggested employing the metaphor of a journey and engaging a greater variety of narratives. In this chapter I showed spaces where a lack of coherence may create confusion for foster children – most markedly in the clash between the metaphor of foster "parent" and the role of ally to birth parents that foster parents are expected to fill. I gave suggestions for making the language introduced to foster parents more accurate to their and the child's experiences.

Although these suggestions may ease some of the confusion in the foster care experience, they cannot make it easy. The transitions and lack of agency experienced by children in foster care make it an inherently difficult experience that, like other

experiences in life, can only fully make sense in retrospect. The question is, *how* will it make sense to a child? Will it be a tragedy, a quest, or a mystery? The question I ask at this point is how the foster care experience can be narrated in retrospect in order to help the child have hope for the future. I use Aviva's Life Book program to address this question. But in order to show the challenge of narrating the foster care experience in a constructive way, I first give an example of a Life Book narrative.

IV. PROLOGUE: AN EXAMPLE OF A LIFE BOOK NARRATIVE

This narrative was created by combining several Life Book narratives and changing identifying facts. Narratives such as these are created by Aviva volunteers who research a child's case files, speak with significant people in the child's life, and often meet the child. The narrative is interwoven with photos, documents, and memorabilia to create a detailed scrapbook. In many ways, this example is a typical story: the birth mother has a difficult life; drugs are part of the situation; the child goes through several placements; the adoption placement does not go smoothly. This example has various strengths and weaknesses, but it serves illustrate the way in which many Life Books are narrated.

Late one afternoon, 7:28 PM to be exact, on August 23, 2000 at Tucson Medical Center in Arizona, a wonderful thing happened. A baby girl was born. She weighed 8 lb and 2 oz and was 21 inches long. Her birth mother, Brandi, was so happy. She looked at her baby's tiny toes and tiny fingers and kissed the top of her head.

Her birth mother gave her daughter the name Sierra Ruth.

Sierra was Brandi's first baby. Having her was probably one of the best things that had happened to her. Before Sierra arrived, Brandi had a hard life.

Brandi life had been difficult from the very beginning. Three months before she was born on September 28, 1975, Brandi's father died of a heart attack. She was the youngest after five brothers and two sisters, Stephanie, Albert, Lisa, Terry, James, Tim, and Daniel.

Families are meant to love each other, and to keep each other safe. But a lot of people hurt Brandi. In a 2003 exam, Brandi explained that her mother had physically abused her. She also said that when she was about six years old, three of her neighbors had abused her; one even held a gun to her head. Then, when she was between seven and nine years old, she was assaulted by two cousins.

Brandi grew up to be about five feet, eight inches tall. She was described as heavyset with blonde hair and blue eyes. After finishing high school, she went on to train as a dental hygienist. But, unfortunately, she was suspended from college for smoking and fighting.

Sierra's father, Thomas, also had a difficult life. In fact Thomas was in prison when Sierra was born. Not much is known about Thomas. He might have been born in New Mexico. He was released from prison three years after Sierra was born but no one has heard from him since then.

Being a parent is a very very big job. It is, in fact, the biggest and most important job in the world. It involves loving someone forever, no matter what happens.

Love is hard work. It means that a parent gives a child the right kind of food and enough food. It means that a parent provides clothes and shelter. It means that a parent protects a child from things that might hurt him or her. It means that a parent is patient, kind, and generous.

Fortunately, Brandi had some help in being a parent. For three years she lived with her mother, Sierra's grandmother, as well as her sister Stephanie and her brother Tim. Stephanie's two children, Diego, who was fifteen when Sierra was born, and Michael, who was fourteen when she was born, also lived in the house. All these people helped feed Brandi's little baby and loved to hold her. Her sense of humor began to show; Sierra loved to make people laugh. Unfortunately, Sierra's family would also get angry sometimes. The police were called several times because of fighting in the house. All of a sudden, on July 13, 2004, Sierra's grandmother died from a heart attack. No one knew quite what to do.

Not long after her mother died, on August 31, 2004, another wonderful thing happened. Brandi had a baby boy. She named this baby Nathan. Now Sierra was a big sister.

At this point, Brandi, Sierra, and Nathan were living in an apartment on Blacklidge Street.

One day in June of 2005, when Sierra was only five years old and Nathan was almost ten months old, a neighbor noticed that they were all alone in the apartment. It was a hot

summer day and the air conditioning was not on, so the apartment was very very hot.

Sierra said that she was hungry and that she did not know where to find her mother. The

neighbor called the police.

That afternoon, the police examined Sierra and Nathan and found a big bruise on her

back and a burn mark on her arm. They figured out that Brandi had hurt her.

After finding Brandi, an investigator talked to her about hurting Sierra.

"It was Sierra's fault." Brandi said.

Brandi told the investigator that Sierra had kicked and hit her. This was probably true.

Children get angry and they kick and hit things. But no matter what a child does, a parent

should never hurt their child. It is a parent's job to teach their children helpful ways to

deal with anger. Brandi had never learned how to deal with her own anger, *and* she didn't

even know she had done something wrong by hurting Sierra.

CPS is the part of the government that steps in when parents are not doing their job. If a

parent neglects their children or if they hurt them, then CPS tries to help their family and

to make sure that the children are taken care of in the right way.

After finding out that Sierra had been left all by herself, CPS began to provide help to the

family. Brandi went to classes to learn how to be a good parent. She went to counseling

and anger management classes. A parent aide started coming to their house to help them

change the way they acted towards their children.

Sometimes the family had fun together. One day the parent aide wrote down a note about Brandi tickling Sierra and calling her "my little sweet potato." She wrote about Nathan learning to walk.

But things seemed to get worse. Brandi often missed her classes and counseling sessions. Then one day in September of 2005 the parent aide came to their house. She was very worried about what she found. Little Nathan, who had just turned one, was crying in a bedroom. There was a dent in the kitchen cupboard and Brandi's hand was bruised. She said that baby Nathan was in the bedroom because he was disobedient. The apartment was dirty with beer cans and cigarette butts on the floor where little Nathan might pick them up and eat them. Obviously, Brandi was not doing her job as a mother.

Later that month, on a Saturday, Sierra was playing outside. A breeze blew and the sun was warm. It was a lovely day, and she decided that she wanted to go to the park. Because she could not find her mother, she decided to go by herself. Sierra's decision to go to the park showed that she was adventurous and brave. But a five year old is too young to cross busy streets without help and parents must *always* watch their children.

That day, as Sierra was crossing Blacklidge Street, a driver was talking on the phone while driving. She looked up to see a little girl right in front of her and put on the brakes as quickly as she could. Sierra, who is very quick, tried to jump out of the way. But the

car ran over Sierra's left foot. The same neighbor who had called the police when Sierra

had been left in the apartment heard the accident and called the ambulance.

The accident was not Sierra's fault. Sierra was only a little girl and she wanted to do what

every little child loves to do – play!

Sierra had to spend a night at the University Medical Center because her foot was broken

so badly.

Because Brandi not kept her children safe, Sierra's case worker, Maria, had to tell her

that Nathan and Sierra could no longer live in her home. Brandi was very angry. She was

angry because even though she did not do her job a parent, she loved them. She wanted to

be a good mother. Maria explained that if they attended visits, went to parenting classes,

and participated in counseling, the children would return to their home.

When Sierra got out of the hospital, she joined Nathan at Splash House. Her house

parents were Carmen and Jeff. Carmen spent a lot of time with Sierra while her foot was

healing. She said that even when Sierra was in so much pain, she could still make other

people laugh. Carmen and Jeff loved having Nathan and Sierra at the Splash House.

Because she was not used to having rules, sometimes Sierra would get angry and throw

things. But Carmen and Jeff taught Sierra better ways to act when she felt angry – how to

take deep breaths and to find a quiet place. They taught her to express her anger in helpful ways.

Throughout the next year, Brandi continued to miss her classes and counseling. But sometimes she visited Sierra and Nathan. Once they all went to Peter Piper Pizza together and played games. But often Brandi missed visits. In January of 2007, she was arrested for selling drugs in her apartment. Even though Brandi wanted to be a good mother, she was not able to make the decisions she needed to make to take care of her children.

In May of 2007, a court hearing was held to consider Sierra and Nathan's case. Because Brandi had often missed visits with her children, did not attend counseling, and had been selling drugs, it was recommended that Sierra and Nathan be adopted. The court had tried to contact Sierra's father but had received no response.

"Sierra and Nathan are very special children" Maria wrote, "who have a lot of potential. They are very smart and want to be something great in life. These children need a safe and stable environment."

The following August, Brandi's parental rights were severed, which means that she could no longer make legal decisions for her children. It also meant that Sierra and Nathan could be adopted by a family or a person who would care for them.

At Splash House, Sierra made choices that helped her to get along with others. She made friends. She kept her room clean. She was polite and well behaved. "Sierra grew so much in the time we were her house parents!" Carmen said, "I can remember the day when I saw her lift her hand to hit another child, but then caught herself and walked away instead. I was so proud of her. She always got over her anger quickly and she can make anyone smile."

Carmen and Jeff, the house parents at Splash House saw that Sierra and Nathan were great people; they started to think about adopting them. But because house parents need to take care of a lot of children, it can be difficult to adopt children, so despite the fact that Jim and Carmen wanted to adopt Nathan and Sierra, it didn't work out.

In the spring of 2008, a group of Splash children went to California. When Tommy and Nicole met Sierra and Nathan, they realized that both of them were fabulous people and they immediately decided that they would like to adopt them. Tommy and Nicole didn't realize what a huge decision they had made.

Sometimes it is wise to make big decisions slowly. Fortunately, Sierra and Nathan went to California to visit Tommy and Nicole in October of 2008 before the adoption was made final. This was fortunate because Tommy and Nicole realized that adopting children was a very big job. They had not been married very long and they didn't have any experience raising children. So after the visit they made the decision not to adopt Sierra and Nathan. Even though the fact that the adoption didn't go through was difficult,

it was probably a good decision in the long run both for Tommy and Nicole *and* for Sierra and Nathan.

So Sierra and Nathan returned to Splash House. They liked some parts of living there, but other parts were difficult. They weren't sure what would happen next.

When Joe and Theresa asked Sierra and Nathan if they wanted to be adopted, they both said, "Yes!" Joe and Theresa had been house parents at Splash. Both Sierra and Nathan thought living with them would be great. Also, Sierra's best friend, Kristine, was already going through the adoption process with them.

Joe and Theresa love children. Sierra and Nathan were joining a very big family! The family includes: Charles, Erica, Rachel, JC, Angela, and Kristine.

So at the beginning of 2009, Sierra and Nathan moved in with Theresa and Joe. Their new parents want to love Sierra and Nathan and to care for them. They want to help Sierra and Nathan live happy and helpful lives.

A lot of people have made decisions that have affected Sierra. Some have hurt her and others have helped her.

Meanwhile, Sierra has made a lot of decisions. She's made decisions to be a friend to her brother, to be good to her friends, to collect rocks, to work hard in school, and to play soccer.

As she gets older, she will have even bigger decisions to make. Will she go to college? Will she help people in need? How will she use the money she earns?

People wonder, what will Sierra's life be like?

And no one knows the answer to that question. But in the past ten years she has made the best of many difficult situations. As her life continues, it is obvious she will make decisions that will help her and the people around her.

IV. CONSTRUCTING HOPE THROUGH RECONSTRUCTING TIME

Thanks, Robert Frost
by David Ray

Do you have hope for the future?
someone asked Robert Frost, toward the end.
Yes, and even for the past, he replied,
that it will turn out to have been all right
for what it was, something we can accept,
mistakes made by the selves we had to be,
not able to be, perhaps, what we wished,
or what looking back half the time it seems
we could so easily have been, or ought...
The future, yes, and even for the past,
that it will become something we can bear.
And I too, and my children, so I hope,
will recall as not too heavy the tug
of those albatrosses I sadly placed
upon their tender necks. Hope for the past,
yes, old Frost, your words provide that courage,
and it brings strange peace that itself passes
into past, easier to bear because
you said it, rather casually, as snow
went on falling in Vermont years ago.

In the previous chapters I have analyzed the narratives about foster care presented to children by social workers and foster parents. I have made recommendations to help make the experience less traumatic. In this chapter I examine ways in which the foster care experience can be documented for individual children to encourage hope for the future. This chapter is about persuasion through narrative, about rhetorical devices used to encourage children with traumatic pasts to view their life stories through a lens of hope.

Aviva Children's Services began developing the Life Book project in 1994 for children who have been severed from their birth families. Life Book writers, most of whom are volunteers, research a child's story through reading case files, talking to people

who know the child, and getting to know the child when appropriate. Using this information, the writers put a Life Book together that consists of a narrative, photos, graphics, and letters. According to the *Life Book Workbook* created by Aviva, the purpose of a Life Book is to "break the cycle of abuse and provide hope for the future." Although all the elements of the book contribute to this objective, it is primarily achieved through the narrative that is used to explain the child's life in a coherent and positive way.

Political scientists Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler note that there is an important distinction between being *un*informed and *mis*informed (Corrections 304). Because they lack the stable presence of a reliable parent, foster children are often *un*informed about the basic details of their lives such as the details of the day they were born, the health history of their birth families, the chronology of when they lived in certain places. Life Books work to provide information children may have never received. To the extent possible, the books provide information on the background of the birth parents, details about the day they were born, and photos of events like a first Christmas. The books document information that may have been lost to a child, like the year a toddler spent with the Gomez family and the fact that she loved carrots during this time. An important part of the book is simply providing facts that may have disappeared in the chaos of a child's CPS experiences.

Furthermore, the books work to correct *mis*information, harmful or untrue narratives a child may believe about her life. The lack of reliable parents contributes to foster children being misinformed about their lives: birth parents may tell children that they are unmanageable or peers may tell foster children that their birth parents did not want them. Even without misinformation, research shows that children generally assume

the blame for abuse: trauma expert Judith Lewis Herman describes the typical response to

childhood abuse:

> When it is impossible to avoid the reality of the abuse, the child must construct some system of meaning that justifies it. Inevitably the child concludes that her innate badness is the cause. The child seizes upon this explanation early and clings to it tenaciously, for it enables her to preserve a sense of meaning, hope, and power. If she is bad, then her parents are good. If she is bad, then she can try to be good. If, somehow, she has brought this fate upon herself, then somehow she has the power to change it (103).

The primary persuasive intent of the books is to reorient a child's narrative so that she is

not to blame for parental abuse or other negative experiences she may have had in the

system. For example, a child may believe that she was removed from the Johnson family

because she hit the dog, when, in fact, the Johnsons had to leave Arizona because of

employment issues. Even in situations where children act inappropriately (for example,

misbehaviors in school, temper tantrums, hoarding food, etc), the books contextualize

that behavior to show that it is understandable within the context of the child's

experiences. Life Books serve to help a child to remember and understand her own life

story through a lens that removes blame from the child and focuses on the strengths of the

child.

A Life Book is a helpful tool, but the program coordinators and most of the

writers understand that it is only part of a healing process. Children who have been

abused, neglected, and have lost their birth parents have undergone profound and deeply

scarring trauma. The Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency (ARC) framework,

developed by the Trauma Center at the Justice Resource Institute for treating traumatized

children and adolescents, illustrates the complexity of the healing process. The

therapeutic framework focuses on developing the "core domains" which are affected by

what they call the "complex trauma" of childhood abuse and neglect (Arvidson et. al. 35). According to this framework, an abused and neglected child often suffers to some degree with deficits in the development of attachment, in the ability to self-regulate, and in foundational developmental competencies. As psychiatrist and neuroscientist Bruce Perry points out, the myth of childhood resiliency is misguided; childhood abuse and neglect fundamentally change a child's brain and response system (6, 28 – 30). Certainly, it is possible for a child to recover from a traumatic past, but the healing process is complex. Presenting a child's life story through a lens of hope will not suffice. But, at the same time, a Life Book can contribute to healing in a way that therapy or even a solid adoptive family cannot contribute.

The primary goal of this chapter is to develop a rhetoric of hope for abused and neglected children based on hope theory, narrative theory, and the Life Book project itself. In doing so, I aim to both learn from and to help improve the Life Book project. Throughout the previous chapters I have shown how Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm is a helpful tool to uncover ways in which Child Protective Services could convey more coherent and hopeful messages to children within the system. In this chapter, I show the limits of the narrative paradigm in this context and make suggestions for expanding the narrative paradigm to compensate for these limitations. Finally, I use my findings from hope theory and narrative theory to make suggestions for the Life Book training manual. In order to answer the broad question of the dissertation, in this chapter I ask the following more specific questions.

- What does it mean to construct a hopeful narrative in this situation?

- How does Aviva's Life Book Program train writers to create hopeful narratives out of a foster child's life experience? What are the key elements for creating hope?

- How are the Life Book narratives actually constructed to encourage hope for the future? What significant similarities, which contribute to this purpose, do the books share with one another?

- What changes can be made to the training materials to more fully prepare writers for their task?

Context of Aviva's Life Book Project

In 1978, a local Tucson newspaper ran a series of stories exposing serious inadequacies in the CPS system. In response to the media coverage, a group of volunteers coalesced to help fill in the gaps for children in the CPS system by providing mentors, tutors, and social worker assistants. This group evolved into what is now Aviva Children's Services. At the time the group formed, social workers were asked to create Life Books for the children under their care. But with their already overwhelming responsibilities, social workers rarely or never took on the job of creating Life Books. In 1994, Aviva began the Life Book project so that at least some of the children in CPS care would receive a book. But staff at Aviva quickly discovered that a Life Book was too complicated for a volunteer to do without guidance. In 1996 a Life Book coordinator position was created and Cindy Lingel, who had been an administrative assistant for Aviva, moved into the position. With the help of an Americorps volunteer, Cindy developed a workbook to support volunteers in researching, writing, and creating the

books. The Life Book Project evolved through various grants, donations, and volunteer efforts. In 2011, the program resulted in the creation of 24 books. Currently Aviva is actively recruiting volunteers for the Life Book Program in response to a local adoption agency that, seeing the value of the books for children, has requested Life Books for all of their children waiting to be adopted.

Aviva is not alone in creating Life Books. Social workers have long valued Life Books as tools for helping foster children make sense of their experiences (King 2). The Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the US Children's Bureau and the Administration for Children and Families, currently contains materials encouraging case workers for foster children to create Life Books. However, creating a Life Book is an unrealistic expectation for social workers. Overworked case managers struggle to fit in monthly visits of an hour or two with all the children under their care; expecting a case manager to add a task that takes approximately 80 to 120 hours of work (the time Aviva staff estimate a single book takes to create) is ridiculous. Life Books have, however, become common projects for adoptive parents (King 2). Parents of international adoptees in particular use them as tools to help explain a child's birth story, familiarize a child with his country of origin, and answer questions about adoption as they arise. Several published books offer assistance to adoptive parents who want to create a Life Book. A small Life Book industry exists online: some websites offer to put a Life Book together for a fee and other websites offer fill-in-the blank Life Books for free or for a small fee. Counselors also use Life Books for therapeutic purposes with foster or adopted children. Typically, counselors ask the child to create the book themselves and use the book to discuss the child's life story (Zoler 21).

Despite a plentitude of published materials on the creation of Life Books[12] (see, for example, Accinelli, Mooney, O'Malley, and Probst), little academic work exists on them. In 2006, Tracy Marschall presented a paper at the *Midwest Biennial Social Work Education Conference* encouraging social workers to "revive" the practice of making a Life Book. And in 2008, Barbara King presented a paper on the role of Life Books in constructing cultural identity for Guatemalan adoptees at the *National Communication Association 94th Annual Convention*. Other than these conference presentations, Life Books have received scant attention from academia.

The findings in this study pertain particularly to Aviva's project. Aviva's project is uncommon in that it targets children with a past traumatic enough for them to be legally severed from their birth parents – as opposed adopted children who have been relinquished at birth. The writers in this project are people with no prior connection to the children and with no investment in their future – as opposed to adoptive parents or the children themselves. But the findings are not exclusive to Aviva's Life Book Project and, in fact, could pertain to any Life Book written for any child; all children have in some way been wronged by those who love them and all children deserve hope for the future.

Methodology

My involvement with Aviva's Life Book preceded my research on the foster care system. As explained in the first chapter, I became a Life Book writer in 2000 when a friend and I began the program together. Although the first book I wrote was fairly straightforward, the subsequent cases were more complex. After completing one book, I

---

[12] In these materials, Life Books are referred to in several ways – Life Books (as used by Aviva), lifebooks, and LifeBooks.

wrote two books for siblings who were likely to age out of the system without the support of an adoptive or birth family. Then a friend of mine who is a teacher suggested that I write a Life Book for one of her students. Unknowingly I entered into a story that, according to Cindy Lingel, Aviva's Life Book coordinator, is one of the most tragic they have encountered. The experience of crafting this child's life experiences in a way that would convey hope for the future was a particular challenge. After finishing this boy's book, I completed another book for his brother. I have written a total of five Life Books.

For this research, I reviewed copies of twenty completed Life Books in the Aviva office. After reading ten books, the stories began to repeat themselves. Each case, even for siblings, is radically different. But the way in which the details are narrated in the Life Books is similar across cases. Aviva is a busy place; as I read the books I casually talked to people in the office – volunteers, the Life Book coordinator, staff, and a mother with a Life Book for her adopted son. No formal interviews were done for this study as the information I needed was gathered from my prior knowledge of the program, these casual discussions, and my previous involvement with Aviva. I asked Cindy Lingel to review the details about Aviva and the Life Book Program included in this chapter to ensure accuracy.

As I reviewed the written Life Books, I took notes on the construction of the narratives in the books. I noted the way in which the narrative began, how the plot was constructed, and the conclusion of the narrative. I also noted any unusual narrative technique, when otherwise common elements were missing from a book, and when the book deviated in other ways from the others. I used my notes to compare the books to one another to produce my analysis.

I next reviewed the training materials, which were revised by Cindy Lingel and Lora Rivera (a Life Book writer with Aviva) early in 2012 and consist of three-ringed binder titled *Life Book Project*[13] along with a flash drive. The flash drive contains PDFs of two sample books, templates to help create some pages, and other materials such as suggested questions to discuss with the child and a contact log to keep track of people contacted about the project. The three-ringed binder is slim, under 40 pages, and intended to help volunteers move through this complex project.

The training and the workbook are only part of the process. Another vital part involves Cindy Lingel, Aviva's Life Book coordinator. Cindy helps to train the writers, match cases with volunteers, mentor writers through the process, edit each narrative, and then she approves every book before it is given to the child. Cindy is just past sixty with smile lines and styled grey hair. She has a memory better than anyone else I know; recently, when discussing a book I wrote more than ten years ago, she remembered that CPS had dropped the boy's case in New Mexico because of a lack of Spanish speakers – something I had totally forgotten. She expresses sincere and generous appreciation and admiration for all that each volunteer does. Her warmth lights up the entire program in an inexplicable way.

What does it mean to construct a hopeful narrative?

A Linear Definition of Hope

In order to answer the question of how a narrative of hope can be constructed out of tragic material, I will define hope within this context and explore narrative in relation

---

[13] Cindy Lingel generally refers to the binder as the workbook. The material also refers to itself as the workbook, for example, "This workbook is your guide to . . ."

to that definition. Finally, I will argue that a narrative of hope involves a balance of narrative probability and narrative desirability.

Although religious and philosophical fields certainly provide the bulk of theory on hope, in this context the field of psychology provides the most helpful starting place. C.R. Synder is viewed as the authority on a psychological perspective on hope (Rand and Cheavens). In his *Handbook of Hope*, Synder explains that hope hinges on a desire for a goal that falls somewhere on a continuum of the completely possible (and therefore does not need hope to attain) and the totally impossible (and not worthy of effort) ("Hypothesis" 9). This continuum is helpful in the context of Life Books; foster children often hold out hope for impossible goals, such as changing past events, single-handedly overcoming a parent's addiction through their own efforts, or reuniting with parents after severance. Part of establishing hope in a Life Book involves demonstrating reasonable goals to the child. Central to creating and maintaining hope is the selection of goals.

According to Synder, another component of hope involves being able to envision "pathways" to those goals. Because obstacles invariably fall in the path of obtaining a goal, a hopeful person must be able to imagine alternate "routes" to a goal *and* have the motivation to move toward that goal ("Hypothesis" 10). Put together, Synder defines hope as "the sum of perceived capabilities to produce routes to desired goals, along with the perceived motivation to use those routes" ("Hypothesis" 8). Synder's work is categorized under the framework of positive psychology and depends on an individualistic, future-oriented worldview. The framework particularly values agency, or personal motivation. But although the definition hinges on a fairly strong understanding of individuality, Synder unpacks the theory to show the importance of community and

attachment. He explains that central to developing and maintaining motivation are strong attachments to stable caregivers ("Genesis" 43). Children who lack stable, positive caregivers lack the opportunity to develop appropriate goals and lack the support needed to remain motivated to pursue goals. So part of creating hope is providing the necessary support to sustain the process of setting goals and moving towards those goals. Ultimately, Synder's theory rests on the value of personal agency undergirded by attachment.

Narrative as a Hopeful Form

A strong connection exists between the nature of hope and the narrative form. Although not every narrative has a happy ending, the form itself creates a forward movement. A comprehensive discussion of the definition of narrative is not appropriate here (for some helpful discussions see Herman, Ryan, and Rudrum), but for the purposes of this discussion I begin with philosopher David Rudrum's observation that almost every established definition of narrative involves "the representation of events or sequence of events" (196). This focus on representation is influenced by Aristotle's emphasis in *Poetics* on imitation, or *mimesis*, as central to the narrative poems of his day. In other words, narrative is not just about what events are selected for representation, but also about *how* those events are represented.

In the context of the Life Books, the narrative is written to persuade by arguing for a certain version of the past. If the Life Books were written as a simple timeline, they would work to fill the gap of information that foster children experience. But they do more than that; they are structured to persuade children that the past was not their fault

and that there is hope for the future. A rhetorical use of narrative is hardly exclusive to

this situation, but what is striking about the Life Book narratives is the fact that the

audience of the books and the main character of the books are one and the same.

Furthermore, the author of the narrative is a stranger to the audience/main character; the

task of using narrative rhetorically is particularly delicate in this situation where the raw

material for the narrative is the audience's own life. In this context, Vikto Shklovikii's

widely used distinction between the fabula (the thing being told) and sjuzhet (how the

fabula is told) is helpful (David Herman 13). For example, the story of removing a child

from a foster care placement to a therapeutic home (the fabula) can be told in two ways.

Narrative One

> After a long day at work, Sarah microwaved a quick dinner and put it on the table. She then called her three foster children to eat. Patrick, a seven year old, had arrived the previous day after chasing another family's cat with a fork. Because the other family had two small babies, the case manager decided to place Patrick in a family with older children.
>
> "It's time to eat!" She called, went to the living room, and turned off the Planet Earth video the children were watching.
>
> As soon as she turned off the video, Patrick went into a rage.
>
> "TURN IT ON! TURN IT ON!" He screamed. He started hitting the couch and before Sarah knew what was happening, he flew at her, sinking his teeth into her forearm. Even before the pain registered, Sarah knew that Patrick was more than she could handle.

Narrative Two

> When a man arrived at after-school care with a badge, Patrick picked up his backpack and followed him to a car. The man explained that he would take Patrick to his visit. He was nice enough, asking about Patrick's day, but Patrick could hardly breathe; finally he would see his mother. Maybe today was the day she would take him home.
>
> They sat silently in the small office waiting for Patrick's mother. She had fifteen minutes to show up. Then ten. Five. Patrick watched the door breathlessly. The man looked at his watch.
>
> "Sorry, buddy," the man said. "We can't wait any longer."
>
> "She's coming," Patrick responded. "I know she is."

> They waited a few more minutes, but soon they were back in the car. Patrick did not recognize the house where they stopped. Then he remembered, he no longer lived with June and Santiago. He dropped his backpack near the front door and joined the other two children at the television. As his foster mother, Sarah, microwaved dinner, she realized that she had barely had time to talk to Patrick – she didn't even know what he like to eat. She hoped to have time talk with him before bedtime. She put the food on the table, and, without warning the children, turned off the television.
>
> Patrick looked at her and for a moment, he could not remember who she was. When a great wave of anger overtook him, he had no resistance in him. He hated being here. He hated this lady in front of him. He hated his mom. He wanted his mom. Screaming at the top of his voice, he lunged at the lady in front of him. He wanted his mom.

As the two narratives above illustrate, the different narratives that can be told about the same events depend on what the narrator values. The difference, Hayden White claims, between historical annals and narrative historical accounts, is the attachment to meaning or to some sort of *moral* structure (18). When everyday life represented with a structure marked by a beginning, middle, and end, as Aristotle argues is necessary for a narrative, a sense of meaning is imposed on the events of life, and that meaning hinges on either a movement towards or away from a certain value or "good." Although both of the above narratives could be totally accurate, what the narrator wants to emphasize – the "good" of being an obedient child or the "good" of being understood – changes the nature of the story. In the Life Book situation, the writer works to structure the child's past according to values that will encourage hope. But as narrative life studies, a field in psychology, reveals, this task is not easy when the events of the child's life include abuse and neglect.

Psychologist Dan McAdams, the central figure in narrative life studies, claims that adults often recount their life according to one of two narrative structures, redemption or contamination. In their article "Narrating Life's Turning Points:

Redemption and Contamination" McAdams and Philip Bowman describe the redemption narrative as "a progressive understanding of self – the self as growing, moving forward, making progress over time" (5). Contamination narratives involve "decline or stagnation in the plot, as characters fall backward, lose ground, or circle over the same ground again and again" (McAdams and Bowman 6). A clear connection exists between Synder's definition of hope as "the sum of perceived capabilities to produce routes to desired goals, along with the perceived motivation to use those routes" and McAdams' definition of a redemption narrative. Hope is projecting a redemption narrative into the future, or, put another way, the redemption narrative is narrating the past through a lens of goals and pathways.

Interestingly, the values that Synder identifies as central to developing hope are similar to the "motivations" McAdams identifies as themes in the life narratives he analyzes. Synder locates attachment as the foundation for developing a sense of agency in life ("Genesis" 31). While attachment and agency are not goals in themselves, they undergird the process of creating goals and pathways to those goals. Attachment and agency are similar to the "motivations" of intimacy and power that McAdams claims underlie most life narratives (*Power* 62). Redemption narratives move toward intimacy and power and contamination narratives move away from these themes. What I want to suggest is that part of providing hope for foster children involves narrating a child's past as a movement toward love and agency; in order to create hope for the future, Life Book writers must highlight the fragments of love and agency amid the neglect and abuse that the child experienced.

But the idea of hope as a story of redemption has limits in the context of a foster child's life. In his book, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, McAdams describes the plot line of a typical redemption story. First person is blessed or favored in some way but sees that other people are not as fortunate and develops beliefs around social action; next there are setbacks and conflicts between the person's need for intimacy and need for power, but the protagonist grows as a person to meet these challenges; and finally the protagonist expects to leave behind a better world (11). A foster child begins life without the "Garden of Eden" with which a typical redemption story begins, and, thus, the second step, experiencing conflicts between his or her need for love and for power is impossible; most likely, the child has experienced insufficient love *and* little power. The experience of a foster child more readily lends itself to the contamination narrative. McAdams explains that the contamination narrative begins with injury, neglect, or abuse, develops as a cycle of problems or of stagnation, and ends with a narrow focus on the self (*Redemptive* 220). What can be done to persuasively reframe the experiences of a child when those experiences so obviously lend themselves to the creation of a contamination narrative?

One avenue to approach this issue is to understand contamination narratives within the context of tragedy. If the author, audience, and main character are all one and the same, a tragedy has no redemptive value; the cycle continues with no outside perspective to bring insight to the situation. But according to Aristotle's analysis in *Poetics*, a well-crafted tragedy can enlighten an audience. As James Phelan points out, Aristotle's main concern in *Poetics* is rhetorical, how tragedy can have a positive emotional effect on the audience (207). Through introducing a new perspective, that of

the writer, and through appropriate narrative techniques the materials of a contamination narrative can become a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense, an "imitation of an action that arouses pity and fear and leads to the purgation of these emotions" (Phelan 207). Tragedy, if well-crafted, can be a starting place for a new perspective on life. McAdams offers examples of people who, after some awakening experience, rewrite their life narratives from contamination to redemption; typically they "salvage a good self from the past" and create a meaningful purpose for their own future (*Redemptive* 233). This emphasis on original goodness and a meaningful purpose is helpful in envisioning a narrative of hope. But in this context, when a person is constructing a narrative *for* another person, several considerations need to be taken into account. First, the narrative must be as accurate as possible to the experiences of the child. Secondly, the narrative should be desirable or attractive to the child. I will demonstrate how a narrative of hope balances narrative probability with narrative desirability.

Narratives of Hope and Narrative Desirability

Walter Fisher argues for the human tendency to constantly evaluate the narratives that are told to them. He calls this process narrative rationality. It consists of two criteria, probability (coherence) and fidelity (truthfulness and reliability) (*Human Communication as Narration* 47). Narrative probability, or coherence, is how the story "hangs together" and consists of three elements, argumentative or structural coherence, material coherence, and characterological coherence (47). Narrative fidelity is related to how the story relates to social reality and "whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives" (5). Of the two, narrative fidelity has gotten the most

attention from critics; *how*, critics ask, *considering the criteria of narrative fidelity, can we come to believe new, strange, or unfamiliar narratives*? William Kirkwood explores the limits that narrative fidelity places on "possibility" and then expands the concept of fidelity to create possibilities so that "rhetors can acquaint people with new and unsuspected possibilities of being and acting in the world" (31). Scott Stroud builds on Kirkwood's research, asking how and why ancient Indian texts can become relevant for a contemporary Western audience. He suggests the existence of "multivalent narratives," which combine conflicting values within one narrative and thereby "expose audiences to new values and ideas while not alienating them through extreme novelty" (370). Most recently, Kevin McClure expands the concept of identification to account for acceptance of new narratives. What none of these theories directly address is the issue of desire.

In considering how children can be persuaded to believe new narratives about their past, narratives that do not necessarily correspond to what they have previously been told, I want to point out that people often persist in their adherence to beliefs despite being presented with contrary evidence. In their article "When Corrections Fail" political scientists Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler document that presenting misinformed people with accurate facts is not enough to change a person's beliefs and, in fact, can even increase their misperceptions (303). Stroud's theory of multivalent narratives is a helpful starting place to consider the way in which the Life Books persuade children to have hope for the future. The books can be considered multivalent in several ways; for example, they honor a child's love for his or her parents and, at the same time, point out the flaws of the parent. This multivalence is the basis of their desirability, for the appeal of narratives beyond the familiar and the comfortable.

Before expanding on the concept of narrative desirability, I want to illustrate it through an experience I had reading the picture book *I Can Hear the Sun,* written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco, to a group of nine and ten year olds. The children listened quietly to the story of a boy, Fondo, who appears daily at a small park feeding and befriending geese on a lake. On each beautifully illustrated page the children identified the homeless people and the park worker, Stephanie, who befriends the boy. When the book revealed that Fondo lives in a settlement-house for children without parents, several of the listeners nodded and said, "I knew it!" They hoped Stephanie would adopt the boy. She does not. The children listened with credulity as the book describes the evening Stephanie and her friends watch Fondo stretch his arms and fly away with the geese that live in Lake Merritt. The book concludes by explaining that the people who watched would not tell what had happened,

> After all, who would believe such a thing? The settlement-house people, good people, looked for him for a while, then put his name on a long list in a thick dusty file somewhere.
>
> But I know this is a true story because, you see, I know Stephanie Michele. I see her almost every time I walk around Lake Merritt. She still works right there at the science center and bird sanctuary.
>
> You'll know her when you see her; she'll always be with the geese. She's the one looking at the sky and listening.

When I finished reading the book, the children were quiet. Rebecca looked at me, "Is it a true story?" she asked. The others waited for my answer. I did not address her question directly. The children know that people do not fly. But so much of the narrative – the fraternity of the unwanted, the luminosity of nature, and the kindness of Stephanie – was desirable, that we could almost believe what we knew was not possible. Fisher uses

the criteria of coherence and fidelity to assess the rationality of a story but I propose that there is a narrative credibility that moves beyond rationality. Credibility is achieved, at least partly, through the desirability of a narrative. Because the Life Books narratives are, in many ways, actually working against the audience's experience, they must be constructed in a way that is desirable. While remaining as consistent to facts as possible, they must be beautiful and appealing to the audience and tap into fundamental desires of the children. The Life Book narratives gain their persuasive power from remaining as true as possible to the facts of the child's life while appealing to the child's desire for love and power. What is particularly interesting, however, is that in appealing to the child's desire for love and power, the hope that the books encourage is, in some ways, distinctive to this context.

A Particular Type of Hope in Aviva's *Life Book Workbook*

Creating a Life Book is time and energy intensive; it involves sorting through up to several feet of records, talking to numerous people, and trying to make sense of a situation in which a child has been harmed and abandoned by those who should love her most of all. Finishing a book is a difficult and time-consuming job. In order to prevent writers from getting stuck, the workbook attempts to simplify the project. The workbook breaks the project into nine steps: Getting Started, Meet the Case Worker, Touch Base with Contacts, Handling the Research, Additional Contacts, Meet the Life Book Child, Write the First Draft, Edit and Create, and, finally, Revise, Resubmit, Print, Assemble. Although only pages 25 – 29, titled "Write the First Draft," directly address how to compose the narrative, other sections influence the construction of the book.

Limits of the "Rules, Robbery, Rescue" Framework

The section titled "Write the First Draft" instructs writers to focus the narrative on the child while taking blame away from the child. The narrative framework comes from therapist Jan Hindman's schema of "Rules, Robbery, Rescue" (Aviva 25). The workbook suggests beginning a Life Book with "a story about the child's birth and how wonderful it was" then presenting "rules" for how a child should be treated (25). When a parent or caretaker breaks these rules, he or she "robs" a child of innocence and safety (26). Then, in order for the child to feel "cared for and valued," Hindman recommends that the child be told that other people tried to "rescue" him or her from abuse (27). This schema is simple in that it necessarily divides its characters into those who obey the rules and those who do not, the innocent and the guilty, the victims and the perpetrators; it provides a framework for removing guilt from a child.

This perpetrator/victim dichotomy is helpful in the sense that it lifts all wrongdoing from the child. Mahmood Mamdani explains how a similar schema was used at the end of apartheid in South Africa. Ultimately, Mamdani sees the schema as a failure because of the complexity of determining which individuals were perpetrators and which individuals were victims under apartheid. Similarly in the context of the Life Books, the schema identifies the parents as the perpetrators in that they disobeyed the rules and disrespected the children's rights; therefore the children are the victims. Hindman's narrative assumes children to be separate entities from their parents while, even after severance, children and parents are intimately connected through biology. If parents are assigned blame, children feel some guilt through association; exoneration does not

necessarily free a child if the parent is guilty. Hindman's narrative assumes a radical

individuality which children do not necessarily experience. Secondly, children who have

been abused by their parents often see the ways in which their parents are victims as well

as perpetrators: they see their parents physically abused; they listen to government

workers disrespect their parents; they hear of employers firing their parents. Although

Hindman's narrative is a helpful tool for shaping the narrative, it alone falls short of

providing hope for the children. Furthermore, the narrative is not particularly desirable

for a foster child as it positions the child as a powerless person robbed by her parents and

rescued by strangers.

A Healing Persona

Yet Hindman's narrative is only a general guide for the writers; other parts of the

workbook help mitigate the problems inherent in the schema. Most importantly, the

workbook guides writers in creating a particular type of persona as author. The section

"Getting Started" outlines the rationale for a Life Book and presents what becomes the

general ethos of the books. In a page titled "From Truth to Empowerment" the workbook

explains that a Life Book is a sensitive, accurate, truthful, and balanced "account of a

child's life from birth to his/her present circumstances" (6). The page unpacks each of

these adjectives, explaining the importance of stating the facts of the case, not

exaggerating or minimizing the abuse, and illustrating the "intrinsic worth [of the child]

regardless of the abuse" (7). According to the workbook, the goal of presenting the book

in a sensitive, accurate, truthful, and balanced way, is "empowerment to make one's own

choices about the future and to not repeat the past" (7). But I argue that the authorial

persona encouraged by the workbook makes the "Rules, Robbery, Rescue" narrative appealing because it appeals to a child's desire for love.

Few people in a foster child's life know the details of a child's past. Teachers often know that a child is in the foster care system, but seldom know the details of the case. Foster parents are given only limited information on a child's past. Case workers have access to records but few have the time to thoroughly study each case assigned to them. Furthermore, the cultural narratives around family and childhood that Rosalyn Collings Eves argues are vital to personal memory, do not generally include experiences typical of foster children. As a result, even if a foster child is surrounded by loving people, she can feel as if these people do not truly know her. By encouraging sensitive, accurate, truthful, and balanced authorial persona, the Life Books create the sense in a child that someone (a stranger) knows the details of her life and still admires her. As well as contributing to narrative credibility by appealing to a child's desire for love, this lens on a child's past can instill a certain type of hope that is somewhat different from the hope as defined by Synder and can be used to develop a rhetoric of hope for abused and neglected children.

Synder's definition depends on a linear understanding of time. It involves, to some degree, living in the future. Furthermore, by focusing on the future, what gets in the way of the envisioned future becomes a "barrier" to be circumvented (*Hypothesis* 11). For people who were abused and neglected as children, basic competencies such as literacy, the ability to interact socially, and moderation of emotions can be continual issues throughout their life. While it can still be important to set reasonable goals for the future, traumatized children need the ability to deal with what Synder calls "barriers" in

life. A view of the present and past as something other than a roadblock to the future can

be vital to creating a good life and to ending the cycle of abuse. In the Christian tradition,

hope has as much to do with the past and the present as with the future. In *Theology of*

Hope, theologian Jürgen Moltmann discusses hope as taking the perspective of a loving

God. This perspective involves accepting both the joys and the challenges of life.

Moltmann describes this perspective as "a love that is more than *philia*, love to the

existent and the like – namely, *agape*, love to the non-existent, love to the unlike, the

unworthy, the worthless, to the lost, the transient, and the dead" (32). Both Moltmann and

Synder understand a positive future as part of hope. But where Synder views difficulties

as roadblocks to hope, Moltmann views them as part of the "open possibility" of hope

(32). While the Life Book workbook suggests that while using the "rules, robbery,

rescue" framework, writers also take a stance toward the child's story that is similar to

the stance Moltmann suggests is central to hope. So while birth parents are, in some

sense, the antagonists in the narrative, both they and the children are described by an

empathetic narrator.

　　　　Central to a rhetoric of hope for abused and neglected children is the creation of a

persona who views the past, present, and future through a compassionate lens. In his

essay on the subject, Kevin Hughes defines hope as "the longing itself for the deeper

reality of love that is beyond all loves, for the beauty that lies beneath, before, behind,

above, and within" (124). In other words, hope is seeing the pleasures and difficulties of

the past, present, and future with empathy for the child. This perspective is similar to the

one taken in the "healing relationship," marked by empathy, truth-telling, and insight that

Judith Herman claims is necessary for healing from trauma (135). A foster mother with

whom I spoke emphasized the "kindness" of the book. The fact that the book was written

by someone who was not affiliated with CPS or with the adoptive family and who viewed

the story with kindness was central to her adopted son's acceptance of the book's

narrative. In other words, the narrative and the perspective of the book were believable

because the author had no personal investment in the child's future. Hindman's

framework as told through a lens of compassion appeals to the desire of a child to be

loved. Another desire, the desire for agency, is fulfilled through a transference of

authorship from the writer to the child.

Agency through the Authorial Position

The workbook suggests including children in the creation of the Life Book as

much as possible. Children who have been through, or who are in, the CPS system are

not always able to participate in the writing of a Life Book. The adoptive mother of one

book I wrote felt that her son had already had too many people come in and out of his life

and preferred that I not meet her child. But many children are excited about the prospect

of a book written about them and want to participate. Step Six in the workbook is to meet

the child (Aviva 24). One way to do this is to simply accompany a case worker on her

monthly visit to the child (Aviva 24). The workbook suggests having a conversation with

the child about his current experiences and interests, *not* the trauma he has undergone

(Aviva 24). The flash drive accompanying the workbook contains a list of recommended

questions to ask. This simple meeting can shape the book by influencing what colors are

used, which photos are included, and what themes are emphasized. Also, the child can

literally participate in the creation of the book by filling out the "Foster Club

Worksheets" provided on the flash drive. These worksheets have, for example, a sheet to fill out about "The Day I Entered Foster Care," a sheet in which the child can describe her friends, and another asking for "Star Facts" or simple facts about the child.

Through inviting the child's participation, the narratives appeal to his desire for agency. All children come into life with little power; most parents help children gradually accept more and more responsibility for their lives. But for children who grow up in CPS, the lack of agency inherent in childhood is particularly difficult – no matter how much a child wants to return to her parents, the issue is not in her hands; and even small decisions such as if she can cut her hair are painfully complex for a child in CPS. Many foster children take control of their lives through resistance to the power structures around them. But the Life Books invite the children to a position of agency through giving them authorial power.

In a sense, the Life Book narratives simultaneously take agency (for the past) from the children and give agency (for the future) to the children; they remove blame from children while providing them with the sense that they are the authors of their future. This balance between taking and giving agency is met by including the child in the creation of the book and then presenting the end of the book as the beginning of a new narrative of which the child is the author. In his article "Narrative and the Real World," David Carr claims that "we are constantly striving, with more or less success, to occupy the storyteller's position with respect to our own lives" (16). The position of storyteller is particularly difficult for foster children because, although children often take on blame for abuse, they have had no power to change the pattern of abuse. The process

of creating the Life Book illustrates to the child that although they could not change their parent's behavior, they can shape the way in which the abuse or neglect is narrated.

Although Hindman's framework ends with "rescue," the workbook gives suggestions for alternative endings that put authorial power into the child's hands. The workbook brings up the fact that the "rescue" may not be permanent – that even adoptions do not always last (Aviva 27). Rather than focusing on the rescue, the workbook recommends focusing on the "inherent strengths and abilities they [children] possess" (Aviva 27). So although the child needed help to overcome the "robbery," the story of abuse is over. In some sense this can be understood as constructing the parent's part as a tragic subplot to the story. But learning about the tragedy of the past equips the child with a certain power; the child now possesses knowledge his parents did not possess. The tragedy as outlined in the Life Book workbook can empower a child intellectually and emotionally by providing him with new information and through the very form of tragedy itself. Aristotle deems tragedy more important than epic and comedy because of the role it can play in shaping an audience's emotions through catharsis. According to Malcolm Heath, catharsis in this context involves putting "right something that is wrong within us" by balancing our emotions (xxxix). This intellectual and emotional empowerment is supplemented with an emphasis on the child's strengths and abilities as highlighted by the writer.

The workbook suggests a main plot with an important subplot. One plot is a triumph of a child over adversity and the subplot is the tragedy of the parents losing their children. The entire narrative is told through a lens of compassion that continues from the past, to the present, and into the future. The workbook suggests situating the present as

the beginning of a narrative of redemption. After emphasizing the child's strengths and abilities, the author "may even want to call this part of the book [the end] "The Beginning" to hint that this is just the beginning of the journey through life!" (Aviva 27). Life Books as presented through this workbook, suggest a reconfiguration of time. Hope is partly in the future, *and* inherent in the past and the present. Furthermore, the child has experienced the end of a tragic subplot and is in an authorial position at the beginning of a new narrative.

The Life Books do not specify the nature of the new narrative. While healing from child abuse is markedly different from recovery from alcohol or drug addiction, recovery narratives offer an alternative to the redemption and contamination narrative forms. The American Psychological Association summarizes the twelve step recovery narrative as follows:

- admitting that one cannot control one's addiction or compulsion;
- recognizing a higher power that can give strength;
- examining past errors with the help of a sponsor (experienced member);
- making amends for these errors;
- learning to live a new life with a new code of behavior;
- helping others who suffer from the same addictions or compulsions (962).

The recovery narrative can be considered a version of a redemption narrative (a narrative which moves from a place of privilege, to belief in societal action, to setbacks, to growth, and finally to positive action). But the recovery narrative differs in key ways. Translated into the context of abuse or neglect, a recovery narrative could proceed as follows:

- acknowledging that the abuse and/or neglect was not his or her fault;
- recognizing a higher power that can give strength;
- examining, with the help of a loving person, the ways in which the abuse and/or neglect has caused emotional, spiritual, and physical damage;
- forgiving the person who has caused hurt;
- learning to live with a code of behavior that is different from that of the parents;
- helping others who suffer from similar pasts.

Ideally, Life Books set up a child at the beginning of this recovery narrative. But the Life

Books cannot take a child through the entire narrative; as explained previously, the

person who has suffered trauma "must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery"

(Judith Herman 133). Most importantly in this context, the recovery narrative begins with

letting go or giving up. The tragic subplot that the Life Books create sets up the child to

recognize that they were not the central characters in the early tragedy of their own lives.

But just as the recovery narrative asks the addict to take responsibility for his or her own

life, the Life Books ask the child to take the position of storyteller through inviting him or

her into the creation of the book.

Letters of Affirmation

Although the workbook suggests including the child in writing the book, other

people also contribute to the book, adding to the appeal for a child's desire for love. The

section labeled "What to Include in Your Life Book" encourages the writers to include

letters of affirmation from people who have been important in the child's life (Aviva 8).

By filling the book with letters and other contributions from people in the child's life, the

child can experience the fact that even though a person may not always look at him

through a compassionate perspective, this perspective is one which the person can take.

For example, a teacher may experience frustration with Maria's behavior and Maria may

not necessarily see the teacher as a compassionate person. But when the teacher is asked

to write a letter for Maria's Life Book, at the moment of writing the letter the teacher will

likely take a compassionate view of Maria and her behavior. The letters "should include

simple stories about the child and encouragements for the future" (Aviva 15). In this way, the letters help contribute to hope for both the past and the future.

Without consistent parents, children may feel that they lack a responsive audience for whom they can be the storytellers of their own lives. As Life Book writer Lora Rivera pointed out to me, the books work against the myth of the nuclear family as the only system within which a child can be raised; the letters of affirmation demonstrate that a child's family may be a complicated but loving system of people. The letters of affirmation create the sense that although the parents may not be an attentive audience, the child does have an audience for their life. These letters of affirmation serve the same purpose in the narrative as the "higher power" serves in recovery narratives. The Life Books invite the children to seek help from the people who care for them, even though these sources of support are not the nuclear family.

Four Suggestions for the *Life Book Workbook*

In the previous section, I have shown how the Life Book workbook trains writers to replace narratives of blame with narratives of hope through remaining accurate to the facts of a child's life and appealing to the child's desire for love and agency. I have shown how hope is presented in the workbook as a way of viewing the past, present, and future through a lens of compassion. Furthermore, the workbook suggests situating the child in an authorial position at the end of a tragedy and at the beginning of a new narrative. The insights gleaned from the workbook are transferable to other texts written for children recovering from the trauma of abuse and neglect.

In this section, I analyze the ways in which the books are actually written and make four suggestions for better preparing writers for their task. In analyzing the Life Books, I focus on how the elements of the workbook discussed in the previous section play out in the actual books: the Rules, Robbery, Rescue framework, the lens of compassion, the positioning of the child as author, and the letters of affirmation. One of the strengths of this Life Book program is that it allows for creativity on the part of the author. The uniqueness of each book makes them special. Although some books are more thorough and persuasive than others, it would be unhelpful to suggest a cookie-cutter approach to the books. I simply make four suggestions to revise the workbook to help better achieve the goals set out in the program.

Before analyzing the books, I will describe them more fully. All of the books are thick three-ringed binders with attractive fabric covers made especially for each child by Cindy. One, for example, is covered in blue fabric with a picture of Lightning McQueen from the movie *Cars* and another, with a light brown cover, is titled in a scroll-like setting *The Life and Times of Manuel Rodriguez.* The pages of the books are inserted into plastic page protectors in the three-ringed binder. Three of the twenty-five books had all of the narrative in several pages of text at the front of the books. The other twenty-two books had the text interspersed throughout the book along with birth certificates, photos, letters of affirmation, the child's artwork, class photos, and other memorabilia; the workbook recommends interspersing the narrative throughout the book. All of the books had several letters of affirmation from people such as therapists, social workers, teachers, birth family members, foster family members, and judges. A typical letter may look something like this:

Dear Jessica,
I remember how cute you were when you first moved into our home at the age of five. You were pretty sad and confused at first and I spent many hours holding and rocking you. But soon you began to adjust to our family. You were always full of surprises. I'll never forget the day I found you in the back yard trying to give Pickles a bath! Your arms were all scratched but you were determined to get that cat clean! We miss having you in our home but remember that you will always be part of our family. Please call us at any time. We always love to hear from you.
Love,
Your foster mom, Karen

These letters are usually at the end of the book with some sprinkled throughout the narrative (for example, the letter above may be inserted into the section before or after Jessica moved into Karen's home). Visually, the books are colorful and appealing.

Revision of the Rules, Robbery, Rescue Framework

All of the Life Books I analyzed revise the Rules, Robbery, Rescue framework to account for the desire of a child for parental love. Most of the books used the framework to explain the fact that abusing and neglecting a child is wrong and that the child is not to be blamed for what he suffered. But the books also revised the framework in significant ways by not entirely removing the blame of the "robbery" from the parent but distributing the blame to other sources. Most books describe the abuse and neglect as, in some sense, a choice. But many authors also emphasize the love of the parents for the child and explain that they could not provide for the child because of a lack of knowledge (due to growing up in an abusive family), an affliction (such as mental illness or additions), or a combination of these two factors. One book even contains a page asking, "Who is the bad guy?" The author answers by explaining addiction and mental illness. By modifying the Rules, Robbery, Rescue framework by explaining some of the reasons behind the abuse

and neglect, the books honor the fact that the child has been wronged while simultaneously appealing to the child's need for parental love.

My first recommendation for the workbook is to incorporate suggestions for using the Rules, Robbery, Rescue framework without situating the parent as the antagonist. The workbook largely does a thorough job of explaining the framework, but it does not address the issue of a child's desire for parental love. The actual books, however, *do* address this issue. A few small revisions to the workbook could make suggestions about how to modify the framework to account for the child's desire for parental love while not encouraging false hope on the part of the child.

Compassion and the Past

Without exception, the tone of the Life Books I reviewed was tender, compassionate, and kind. None of them seemed judgmental towards the parents, children, or CPS. One of the most effective ways of showing compassion toward the parents was the inclusion of a brief personal history of each. Without exception, the parents had difficult lives and reading the details of their pasts made their actions more understandable, although not excusable. The inclusion of the birth parents' history is not part of the workbook and could easily be inserted.

As much as the tone and narrative structure of the books contributed to a sense of compassion toward the children, the inclusion of detailed anecdotes and close-up photos also added to this sense. One book contained a story, copied from a parent aide's notes, about a little boy running in circles around an apartment building, his mother greeting him with mock surprise and a hug each time he appeared around the corner. These

detailed anecdotes add concreteness to the assertion that the parents loved the child.

Furthermore, just as many books contain "up-close" details of a child's life, some also

contained "up-close" images. In Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead*, the narrator speaks

of the power of the human face:

> Now that I am about to leave this world, I realize that there is nothing
> more astonishing than a human face . . . It has something to do with
> incarnation. You feel your obligation to a child when you have seen it and
> held it. Any human face has a claim on you because you can't help but
> understand the singularity of it, the courage and loneliness of it. But this is
> truest of the face of an infant. (66)

Perhaps because the only people we see up close are the people we love, these images

have a moving effect. Images of themselves as small children or infants are particularly

powerful in generating compassion for their past selves.

Secondly, I suggest that the Life Book Workbook encourage the inclusion of

detailed anecdotes and close-up photos. The workbook does certainly encourage Life

Book writers to collect and take photos of the children. But the authors could enlarge and

crop photos to show a close facial view of a photo taken when the child was an infant and

be encouraged to take close-ups of the children when possible. Also, the workbook

suggests collecting details and anecdotes, but could be more specific about where to find

these details in records. Close-up photos and detailed anecdotes add concreteness and a

sense of attention to the books.

The Difficulty of Positioning the Child as Author

Although the workbook encourages the writers to include the child in writing the

Life Books, many of the books did not especially feel inclusive. The level of the child's

involvement is a difficult aspect to analyze as the writer may include elements that are

special to the child but do not necessarily stand out to me as an outsider – for example, if a child loves cats, a writer may include a number of cats in the book but, as an outside reader, I may not notice this detail.

Next, I suggest that the workbook more thoroughly explain ways to place the child in an authorial position. Several of the books brought creative approaches to including the children. On the child's request, one book was written in first person with many details from the child's memory. This approach could be unwelcome without an invitation from the child. But another approach could be easily replicated. After recounting a particularly important event, the author would acknowledge that she could not know everything the child remembers from that time. So the subsequent page would be blank with the heading, "Here is a place to record your memories and feelings from this time." This seems like an appropriate way to invite the child to participate in the book when he felt ready to do so. Several books also included pages at the end for children to record future experiences but it seemed particularly powerful to invite children to participate in the construction of their past.

The endings of the books varied quite a bit. Most concluded with letters of affirmation. I would suggest covering the conclusion of the books more thoroughly to position the children as loved and in control of their future. Perhaps the books could also acknowledge that just as the child has overcome many difficulties in the past, the future will contain challenges as well as happiness.

A Missing Letter of Affirmation

Knowing the challenge of getting letters of affirmation for Life Books, I was impressed at the number of letters included in many of the books. They came from birth parents, biological uncles, judges, therapists, and foster parents. Most were short, detailed, and touching and created a sense that the child is surrounded by caring people, even if he has been severed from his parents.

Several of the books also included letters from the Life Book writers. The workbook does not suggest including a letter from the author, but Cindy does recommend this. As a Life Book writer, I only once included a letter to the child. *Why would she want to hear from me?* I wondered. But in reading the books, I realized that, in some sense, the books are a bit strange. If a child keeps the books for years, as anecdotal evidence suggest they do, at some point the child must wonder: *Where did this book come from? Why did this person write this book? Where did he or she get this information?* Including a letter from the writer could answer these questions.

My final recommendation is that the Life Book Workbook suggest a letter from the writer to the child. This letter could account for any erroneous information mistakenly included. In a letter to the child one author wrote, "I tried to be as accurate as possible in writing this book, but it is possible I made some mistakes." The letter from the Life Book writer could further affirm the fact that the child is worthy of love despite all of the challenges of her life. The writer could acknowledge the challenges and rewards of writing and encourage the child to consider taking on the task herself in the future.

In summary, I make the following recommendations for the workbook:

- Revise the Rules, Robbery, Rescue framework to account for the desire children have for the love of their parents. Suggest framing the antagonist as the forces, such as mental illness or drugs, which caused the neglect or abuse.

- Encourage more detailed anecdotes and close-up photographs.

- Illustrate ways in which the Life Book writer can position the child as author. These techniques include placing blank pages throughout the book encouraging the child to record his or her memories of various times and ending the book with the beginning of a new narrative.

- Include a letter from the Life Book writer to the child.

A Rhetoric of Hope

This analysis of the Life Book project can inform other situations involving healing from trauma. A rhetoric of hope first involves redefining hope itself. Hope, in the context of Aviva's Life Book project, is more than setting goals for the future and seeing pathways to these goals. Because the past is part of the future, hope necessarily involves viewing the past through a lens of compassion. Contrary to what McAdams seems to suggest, hope can be more than reframing a negative even into a positive event; it can involve accepting the tragedy of the past as painful and even wrong. Most importantly, hope involves situating a child at the beginning of a new story as an author who is not in control of all that happens, but is in control of how what happens is structured into a narrative.

After experiencing trauma, hope can be encouraged through the following key moves:

1. Remaining as close to the recorded facts as possible. As Fisher suggests, narrative fidelity is necessary to maintaining narrative credibility. These facts may be desirable or less than desirable for the child. In the example of Sierra's Life Book narrative in the prelude to this chapter, the author might include a copy of a birth certificate, mug shots of parents, school photos, and copies of hospital records.

2. Appealing to the audience's desire for love and agency. In addition to remaining consistent with the facts, the Life Book writers appeal to the child's desire for love and agency. As many theorists have illustrated, replacing misinformation is complicated. Narratives of hope must be made appealing. The author of the narrative in the prelude may want to include detailed anecdotes of how her birth mother cared for her and letters from teachers and foster parents. To appeal to Sierra's desire for agency, the author could emphasize the consequences of choices Sierra has made.

3. Creating a compassionate authorial presence. Central to appealing to the desire for love is a compassionate authorial presence who explains the facts with kindness.

4. Developing a source of strength for the audience. Healing is never achieved independently. Whether it is the higher power that is part of the twelve step recovery narrative or letters of affirmation by people in the person's life, the audience needs to know that he or she has support. If, in the case of Sierra, the child comes from a religious tradition, the letters of affirmation could be supplemented with affirmation of a supportive higher power.

5. Transferring authorship to the audience. When possible, involving the child in the creation of the narrative could potentially be a healing experience. Sierra's narrative could be supplemented with pages inviting Sierra to record memories of various times in her life. The end of the narrative could explicitly invite Sierra to continue writing her own story.

6. Placing the audience/author at the beginning of a recovery narrative. Children may not be ready to forgive or to help others who have suffered. But the writer could suggest possibilities for the future. For example, a teacher who wrote a letter of affirmation for one of the books I wrote said, "You are very smart. Maybe someday you will be a lawyer and help other children who have had experiences like yours." When I gave the child his book, he lit up when he read the teacher's letter. The children who receive the Life Books are often not far down the path of recovery. But the authors of the books can give glimpses of a healed life.

These Life Books are powerful. One cannot remain unmoved from the experience of reading twenty books; these are the stories of children's lives. A photo, obviously from police files, of four year old boy with sandy blond hair, blue eyes, and a bruise across the side of his face. A long, complicated story ending with adoption at the age of fifteen; a letter from the adoptive father, *I am so proud of you and no matter what, I'm here for you*. A photo of two siblings, after enduring one placement after another together, hugging each other at their last visit. The books are deeply sad.

"I used to think that, if I just loved him enough, he would be okay," said one adoptive mother as she talked to me about her son's Life Book. She went on to explain that she has come to realize that, in some ways, her son will never be okay. But she did not end there. The inclusion of this troubled boy into her family has been a story of joy for her, her husband, and her birth children. She has come to accept the place where her son is now. Her adopted son may not ever be able to function independently, but whatever happens along the way will be okay for their entire family. This mother's hope, a particular way of seeing the present, is different than Synder's hope but, perhaps the best hope possible not only for foster children but for all people who have experienced deep tragedies in life.

V. RHETORICAL LISTENING THROUGH NARRATIVE INQUIRY

In the 1970s and 1980s, Bormann and Fisher's theories, based on the idea that humans are essentially "storytelling animals" attracted conversation and debate. But what was a radical claim thirty years ago has morphed into a commonplace. Narrative appears throughout the academic world in journals in various fields from bioethics to economics. In more popular conversation, influences such as Ira Glass's storytelling in the non-fiction radio show *This American Life* and Joseph Campbell's work on myth have normalized the concept of narrative as foundational to identity and consciousness. Narrative as central to both knowledge and identity is generally accepted in academic and popular culture.

But some voices have spoken against this privileging of narrative. Philosopher Galen Strawson argues that people have many different ways of conceptualizing their own self and their place in the world – narrative is only one of these ways. If narrative is not central to knowledge and identity, it is not useful as an analytical frame. Pekka Tammi's article "Against Narrative ('A Boring Story')," concludes that narrative is too limited of a frame to use to analyze the events of life outside of fiction. Their points are valid. Prior to the late twentieth century narrative had been neglected as a form of analysis and although the concept has been useful, it has its limits. The question is, in what situations and in what ways is narrative a helpful tool of analysis?

In this chapter I demonstrate how narrative is especially useful in situations of cultural intersection and show how Bormann and Fisher can advance narrative inquiry. I

then return to the original questions of this dissertation to reflect on how the lens of

narrative can make the foster care experience less traumatic for children.

Narrative in Contact Zones

Narrative inquiry as a mode of analysis first flourished in the field of TESOL

(Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). As TESOL educator Jill Sinclair

Bell explains, a "key way of coming to understand the assumptions held by learners from

other cultures is to examine their stories and become aware of the underlying

assumptions that they embody" (207). For teachers and students working in between and

across cultures, narrative inquiry was quickly embraced as a helpful analytical tool. As a

Peace Corps volunteer in South Africa, my struggle to learn Siswati, the language of the

area in which I lived, was not just a matter of learning the words; I had to learn the stories

behind them.

"You fly." A little girl said to me as she helped me carry a loaf of bread home,

"how?" I knew that in Siswati "to fly" could also mean "to joke around," but I still could

not guess what she was asking – to my knowledge, at that moment we were not flying or

joking. I did not know the narrative context for her words. Once, when traveling on a

public taxi bus with my host mother, a stranger asked her where she had found her white

friend. "The world is wide," she responded. The man nodded in understanding. I nodded

too – knowing I did not understand. To this day, along with what were many other

enigmas of Swazi culture to me, I still do not know what "you fly" and "the world is

wide" meant or implied in that context. I had learned Spanish before learning Siswati.

But I knew more of the contextualizing narratives behind Spanish than I did behind

Siswati. Learning a language that was so completely foreign made me more sharply aware of how words and phrases must be understood within their cultural contexts.

Likewise, the narratives and metaphors I used in South Africa were often met with confusion or laughter. Once, while sitting on the porch watching a storm with twin six-year olds, I remarked in Siswati that the trees danced in the wind. Bongani and Nokubonga howled with laughter *the trees are dancing*, what a hilarious image. They laughed and danced around the porch. This was a new way of looking at the trees; as Richard Vatz contends, "situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds them or creates them" (159). But cross-cultural situations are not exclusive to the TESOL classroom and the method that has proved helpful in TESOL research can be applied to other seemingly dissimilar situations.

Many neighborhoods, workplaces, and even families can be identified as what Mary L. Pratt describes in her now classic article as a contact zone – a space where, "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (34). As a foreigner, I created a contact zone in South Africa by my very presence there. New language, new metaphors and narratives brought by foreigners give new perspectives on situations, and, Vatz argues, *create* new rhetorical situations. When CPS becomes involved in a family the interaction of a case worker creates new rhetorical situations for that family and that intersection can be identified as a contact zone. New language, new metaphors are introduced to a family's experience. For example, a father may have primarily understood his life through his need for drugs, but when a case worker becomes involved, a new perspective and a new narrator is introduced to his life. This narrator focuses the family's story on the needs of the child. When and if a child is removed from his birth family and

moves to a foster family, the child's presence creates a new contact zone with new

rhetorical possibilities in the life of the foster family. The concept of narrative is

particularly useful in a contact zone; when others say or do things that do not make sense,

a lens of narrative can give participants the patience to attempt to clarify the confusion.

Narrative inquiry is not the best tool to analyze every situation. But narrative

inquiry is a particularly useful lens for understanding contact zones such as those created

through CPS. In his book *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective*

Communication, Wayne Booth explains that all good communication depends on

listening (54). Contact zones require a sort of listening that is more complex than the

listening required in other rhetorical situations. In her book on the subject, Krista

Ratcliffe defines rhetorical listening as "a trope for interpretive invention . . . a stance of

openness that a person may choose to assume in cross-cultural exchanges" (1). She

describes how in order be open in cross-cultural exchanges, one must assume a place of

"non-identification" that "provide a place of pause, a place of reflection, a place that

invites people to admit that gaps exist" (73). This "stance of openness" and non-

identification is certainly ideal for cross-cultural exchanges, but one that is difficult to

achieve in actual situations. In order to take an open stance, one must feel safe to ask

questions and to communicate freely. What neither Ratcliffe nor Booth address is the

tremendous emotion generated through encountering foreign or strange narratives.

Encountering foreign narratives, particularly about one's own self, can be

infuriating. As Jim Corder points out in "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,"

encountering new narratives usually feels insulting or painful and often results in anger.

Far from being merely intellectually interesting, contact zones can, at times, be deeply

insulting. In her article, Pratt explains that contact zones often involve "rage, incomprehension, and pain" (39). In the entirely black township where I lived in South Africa, narratives about my race and gender were socially isolating: small children occasionally cried in fear when they saw me; men continually asked me to marry them (sometimes "just for the weekend?"); and people continually asked me for money. I longed to talk to someone who saw me as human. Cultivating rhetorical listening takes continual, patient endurance in some contact zones. Foster care is a place of intense emotion. Birth parents want their children. Children want to be loved. Case workers want a break. Judges want people to follow their case plans. In this contact zone of particularly intense emotion, taking the stance that Krista Ratcliffe describes as necessary to rhetorical listening can seem impossible. Narrative inquiry can be a useful resource for discovering ways to maintain the stance of openness necessary for rhetorical listening. As educational researchers Cathy Coulter and Mary Lee Smith point out, narrative research includes emotional element of experience (578). Whereas Booth and Ratcliffe largely ignore the challenges emotion brings to listening, narrative research includes methodological tools to encompass emotion as part of the rhetorical situation.

Furthermore, narrative inquiry provides tools for locating the narrative disjunctures that lead to anger and pain. Narrative disjunctures, when managed well, are opportunities for learning; as Pratt points out, contact zones can also be places of "revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom" (39). By locating and addressing narrative disjunctures, steps can be taken to reduce the difficult emotions created in some contact zones and to increase the level of mutual understanding. Reflecting on the theories of Bormann and Fisher can give fresh insight into how the tool of narrative can

be used to analyze contact zones. In this section I point out some observations from this project that can be useful for reducing the frustration inherent in contact zones.

Value of Bormann and Fisher to Narrative Inquiry

In cross-cultural situations, narrative inquiry can be helpful for understanding assumptions that others are not necessarily aware they hold (Bell 209). Bormann's theory of symbolic convergence and method of fantasy theme analysis gives researchers the tools and permission to use non-narratives texts to uncover fantasies, or "creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need" (*Force* 5). As both G.P. Mohrmann and Joshua Gunn point out, fantasies cannot necessarily be relied upon to point to motives. But while fantasies do not necessarily answer the question "why," they can answer the question "what if?" Fantasy theme analysis is a useful tool for conceptualizing how people imagine things should be. Although there may be a disconnect between these fantasies and experience, the ideals revealed through language are powerful forces that can cause frustration or motivate action. As my analysis of the CORE training materials illustrates, characterization is particularly important in contact zones. Expectations of character profoundly influence interactions. Identifying fantasies in contact zones is particularly useful for finding spaces where characterizations are inadequate; using this analysis, language can be modified to more realistically characterize the participants in a contact zone and thereby reduce frustration. While Bormann provides the tools for identifying fantasies in a contact zones, a better understanding of their effect on interactions requires a theory of narrative cohesion as influenced by Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm.

Introduction into a contact zone is often preceded by formal training. Foster parents in Arizona have the PS-MAPP training. Peace Corps volunteers have a three-month orientation in country. Cultural exchange programs such as AFS Intercultural Programs and Rotary Youth Exchange have orientations for outbound students. The training that precedes interaction in a contact zone influences the ways in which the characters, settings, and conflicts will be interpreted by participants. Walter Fisher's narrative rationality is an attempt to understand how people evaluate the stories they encounter. Central to this rationality is the concept of coherence.

Walter Fisher's narrative rationality involves examining a story for its internal textual coherence (probability) and external coherence (fidelity). These two categories must be melded together when narrative rationality is combined with fantasy theme analysis. Also, an understanding of metaphor's relationship to narrative helps to more fully expand the concept of narrative coherence. By melding the categories of probability and fidelity together and including an understanding of metaphor as part of narrative, narrative coherence can be a helpful tool for analyzing the language introduced in training to participants in a contact zone. By examining the fantasy themes of the training for coherence or lack of coherence with the participant's accounts of their experiences in the contact zone, fissures between the two can be found. Identifying these fissures can be the first step towards better preparing people for a contact zone.

Bormann and Fisher's contributions to narrative inquiry help identify the disjunctures between expectations and experience that can make contact zones frustrating. Through addressing these disjunctures, the language used to prepare people for contact zones can be made more accurate to what they will experience. In the next

section, I reiterate the disjunctures revealed by narrative inquiry into the foster care

system and expand on my suggestions for addressing those disjunctures.

Narrative Disjunctures in Foster Care

This dissertation is a quest to understand the narratives of the foster care situation

from the perspective of the children within that system. With this in mind, I would have

liked to include a chapter with interviews of children within the system. In terms of

gathering data for this project, I ideally could have talked to a number of children about

their experiences within the foster care system. But as several researchers note (see Bell;

Connelly and Clandinin), narrative studies are particularly sensitive in terms of

relationships. Listening to a child's stories about the foster care experience would require

intimate self-disclosure on the part of the child. Foster children already have too many

people coming in and out of their lives and they do not need the intrusion of a researcher

without an on-going commitment to a relationship. Because of the ethical issues involved

in talking to foster children about their own experiences, I use the language around them

to understand how the system is introduced to them. I now return to the original question

of the dissertation, bringing together my suggestions for the foster care system.

The central dissonance of the foster care system can be located in the legal

framework that attempts to both protect children from their birth families and reunite

children with their birth families. This disjuncture in the legal goals of CPS can only be

resolved through a conversion of the birth parent from an irresponsible caregiver to a

responsible caregiver. But Child Protective Services (as the name implies) is primarily

about protecting children; the government does not provide Parental Transformation

Services. The narrative dissonance inherent in the law unfolds into contradictory metaphors and narratives for the children. Through my research, I uncovered two central sources of systematic narrative dissonance for the children: one source is a vacuity of metaphors and narratives to situate the children as the main characters in their own lives; the other source is the parental metaphors used to describe foster families.

The CORE training reflects laws that protect children through facilitating parental transformation. But the training does not provide narrative tools for the case manager to employ when describing foster care to children. Several of my interviewees felt that foster care was never really explained to children – that they had no adequate language with which to clarify the experience for the children. Several other interviewees explain foster care by telling a child that he or she must be kept safe because the parents "are sick right now" or because the parent needs to "do some work." Explanations such as these place the child in a secondary role; the birth parent, who is largely absent in the child's life at this point, is the central character in these narratives. While children in foster care do not have the ability to influence whether or not they return to their birth parents (that is in the hands of the birth parents), their actions make a significant impact on how the foster care experience will unfold. A child's behavior will determine the number and type of placements she will experience, whether or not she will be put on medication to regulate her behavior, and how many people will be involved in her case. Yet, the child is given no narrative authority. According to the stories used to describe the foster care experience, she is simply waiting for her parent to transform.

The dissonance between the narratives used to explain foster care (with the child in a passive position) and the reality of the child's experience (where he is a central

character) can lead to frustration and confusion for the child. The experience of the child moving from his birth family to a new family is in some ways similar to other cross-cultural experiences. Culture shock is a well-established phenomenon and for children, cross-cultural experiences can be particularly significant (see especially David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken's work on Third Culture Kids). Although moving from one home to another home is clearly a challenging experience for children, nothing in the CORE training or in my interviews suggests that children are given any metaphor or narrative help understand the challenges of cross-cultural experiences or to give them a sense of authority in their own lives.

Adding to the confusion of the foster care experience is the narrative dissonance created by the parental metaphors used for foster families. Children are told on one hand that their caregivers are their foster "mother" and foster "father," while being simultaneously told that their birth parents are working to heal or to make a safe home for them. The foster parents whom I interviewed made practical and sincere efforts to create relationships with birth parents: Kay went to court to help the birth mother understand the legal proceedings of the case; Angie invited the birth mother to her sons' soccer games; Holly and Seth contacted the birth mother so that they could give unified answers to the children's questions. While many children outside of CPS do have multiple parents, navigating the relationships between multiple parents is seldom easy. Using the metaphor of parent for foster caregivers creates unnecessary stress on the children in CPS. Furthermore, the metaphor suggesting that foster caregivers are filling in as parents contradicts the characterization of foster caregivers as supportive roles to birth parents in

their quest to regain custody of the children. Therefore, various and conflicting messages are given to children about the characters in the drama of foster care.

A few simple revisions to the language used in CPS by case managers and foster caregivers can significantly reduce the narrative fissures described above.

Recommendations to CPS for Increasing Narrative Coherence

The Journey Metaphor

In order to reduce the ambiguity around the foster care experience, I suggest that case managers and foster parents use the metaphor of a journey to describe the foster care experience for children. This metaphor gives case managers and foster families a construct that lends itself to narratives with the child as the central character. They can explain that foster care is hard and confusing for children, and that the journey will likely not make complete sense until it is over. Explaining the foster care experience as a journey does not solve the difficulties of foster care; it does not take away the pain, uncertainty, and loneliness of the experience. But it does give foster children a narrative scaffolding on which to structure the events they undergo. Furthermore, the journey metaphor positions the children with a realistic sense of agency; foster children have very little control in their own lives, but they do have influence in how event unfold. The metaphor allows for the fact that their actions make a difference in the outcome of the experience. Based on Judith Herman's theories of healing from trauma, foster children must eventually become the "author" of their own healing after safe relationships have been established. The journey metaphor does not place the responsibility for the past on

the children, but does lend them authority in navigating the future and position them to do the work necessary for healing.

Multiple and Multivalent Stories

Secondly, foster children should be supplied with stories about other children who have gone through similar experiences. Scott Stroud describes multivalent narratives as stories that "use seemingly contradictory value statements and structures to entice the auditor" (379). In the context of foster care, the stories must center on the survival of the child. Some of the stories may describe children returning to their birth parents, but they should also describe the challenges children experience when they do return to their family of origin. Another narrative may describe a child who decides to run away from a foster home and then illustrate the consequences of this decision. Stories such as these, which are multivalent in that they show the challenges and the positives of foster care, should be provided to case managers and foster caregivers in the form of a book. Adults in the child's life could then relate the stories to children as appropriate for their age and situation. The consistency of stories from various adults in the child's life could give a child a sense of presence along the metaphorical journey of foster care. If a child's case plan changes from reunification to severance, a case manager could remind him of how "Thomas" was severed from his birth parents but stayed close to his brother. In giving children a sense of presence, these stories could mitigate some of the anxiety that comes with the inherent uncertainty of foster care. The stories would show that the waiting is not forever, that time did move forward for the other foster children and that some resolution

took place. Stories of other people in similar situations can give children practice taking a stance of non-identification that is necessary for rhetorical listening

Psychologist Victor Nell explains that the power and pleasure of stories lies in their safety. We find relief, he explains, even in "the happy endings of formulaic fiction," or in a "hero's literal or figurative apotheosis, or in the reader's own quiet satisfaction at his or her personal survival" (23). Other people's stories are safe because they did not happen to us. When listening to other people's stories, the stance of non-identification is not difficult to take. Practicing non-identification when listening to other people's stories can teach a child to listen rhetorically to his or her own life. Ideally these stories would also give foster children a sense of agency through revealing ways that their own decisions and actions will influence the path of their lives.

Extended Family Metaphors for Foster Families

All of the characters in the metaphorical journey should be situated as helping the child along her way. The metaphors used to describe the foster caregivers should cohere with their official characterizations. Foster caregivers are trained to characterize themselves as having a dual role; on one hand they are responsible for the well-being of the children and on the other hand they are an ally for the birth parents. Using the metaphors of foster "aunt" and foster "uncle" as the official titles for foster caregivers more closely coheres to their roles in the child's life. Officially using the title "foster aunt" better conveys to the child the relationship between the foster caregiver and the birth mother. Most importantly, the extended family metaphors remove the implied competition between birth and foster families that is created by using parental metaphors

for foster caregivers. The metaphors of extended family lend themselves to more coherent representations of the foster care experience for the child.

Recommendations for CORE Training of Case Workers

CORE training is story poor. While case managers need to know the legal framework of CPS, they also need creativity and imagination to deal constructively with the complexity of their work. While it is important for future case managers to reflect on the ideal story of parents being transformed into responsible caregivers and reunited with their children, including a greater number and more complex stories in training will reduce some of the frustration of the work and help prepare them to engage creatively with their clients. In particular, birth parents need to be characterized in a multiple ways. Stories in which the birth parents are angry, irrational, and frustrated as well as cooperative would help case managers prepare for the reality of working with damaged families. A case worker should narratively experience a Team Decision Making meeting with parents high on meth before they have the experience in person. But through contextualizing the parent's attitudes and behaviors, the stories should also encourage compassion and hope in the future case managers. The stories should also more explicitly embody the contradiction created by CPS law. While reuniting children with their birth families is certainly the desired outcome of CPS intervention, case managers should feel successful even if a child is severed from her birth family. Incorporating a greater number of stories and a greater variety of stories into the CORE training will not take away the stress and the frustration of the job, but it will give trainees better tools *and* a greater capacity to imagine new tools to deal with the challenges of social work.

Recommendations for PS-MAPP Training for Foster Parents

The central strength of the PS-MAPP training lies in the skillful way in which the materials encourage reflection in the participants. Largely, the reflection is facilitated through giving participants a lens (the strengths/needs framework) through which they can view themselves and the multiple stories they encounter in the training. These stories could be more effective, though, if revised to include the following: stories of foster parents making mistakes and reflecting on these mistakes, more complex characterizations of foster children demonstrating strengths as well as neediness, and demonstrations that providing momentary pleasure for foster children is a worthy end in itself. Finally, the strength/needs framework should be extended to include the case manager as well as the entire team surrounding the child. Foster parents often have the most impact on a child's life; incorporating these revisions would give them more appropriate tools to successfully meet the needs of the children with whom they work.

Recommendations for Aviva's Life Book Project

Ideally foster care is a place for a child to heal from past abuse and neglect and, in doing so, to gain the ability to construct a positive future. Examining CPS through the lens of narrative reveals that until a child is either reunified with his birth parents, severed from his birth parents, or ages out of the system, hope is too much to ask. The child is still in the middle of what very well may be a tragedy, a tragedy of which they are not the author. Neuroscientist and psychotherapist Bruce Perry contends that the only way for healing to truly occur after trauma is through meeting a child's need for connection.

> What maltreated and traumatized children most need is a healthy community to buffer the pain, distress, and loss caused by their earlier trauma. What works to heal them is anything that increases the number and quality of a child's relationships. What helps is consistent, patient, repetitive loving care. (232)

Children who are in limbo, who do not know if they will reunify with their birth parents or if they will be severed from them, need patient, repetitive loving care. They need an attentive audience for the story of their life. And, in order to generate hope in the grey unknown of foster care, they need positive experiences, joy and pleasure in the present. These positive experiences can become narrative fodder for a new narrative of hope after resolution has taken place.

As I demonstrate in my analysis of Aviva's Life Book project, through the lens of narrative, hope is constructed by placing a child at the end of a tragedy and placing him in an authorial position at the beginning of a recovery story. Central to creating hope for foster children is a compassionate and truthful narrator.

Aviva's Life Book workbook could better reflect some of the ways in which the books generate hope. These include formalizing the inclusion of the birth parents' personal history, more fully inviting the child into the construction of the narrative, providing more encouragement to include a letter from the Life Book writer, and encouraging the writers to conclude the book by positioning the child at the beginning of a new narrative.

Constructing Hope through Rhetorical Listening and Cohesion

As explained previously, the stance of openness and non-identification necessary for rhetorical listening is difficult when embroiled in emotionally intense situations. And

CPS is emotionally difficult for everyone involved, especially for the children – the people with the least power in the situation and for whom the situation is most critical. When modified by Bormann and Fisher's theories, narrative inquiry supplies a creative framework through which a researcher can listen rhetorically to a situation on behalf of others. Certainly, as Pekka Tammi points out, the narrative frame may exclude important elements of experience; my research most likely missed important factors of the foster care experience. But despite the fact that narrative inquiry into the foster care system may exclude some important insights, the insights it provides still can provide tools to construct a more humane system for children.

The central questions this dissertation pursues are, how can the foster care experience be less confusing for children? What changes can be made so as to make the experience less traumatic and to cultivate hope in foster children? When the government steps into a child's life to protect him or her, certainly the child deserves food, shelter, and education – the child deserves to be safe. But as the American Academy of Pediatrics' report on toxic stress emphasizes, keeping a child safe also involves honoring his or her need for stable relationships. Analyzing the foster care system through Walter Fisher's theories reveals that children are given dissonant messages about the people in their life. If children do not have stable parents, Child Protective Services *must* give them coherent messages about who they are and about the people who are caring for them.

In his speech "The Ethics of Argument and Practical Wisdom," Walter Fisher explains that the narrative paradigm aims at "reconfiguring Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom (*phronesis*)" (1). Ethical communication, he claims, is based in practical wisdom. "At the heart of practical wisdom," Fisher claims, "is a kind of reflective

intelligence based on knowledge of what is right or righteous in a situation requiring

ethical response" (8). If any situation requires an ethical response, it is abused and

neglected children. Combined with fantasy theme analysis, the criterion of narrative

cohesion reveals simple steps through which the CPS system can be made less traumatic

and confusing for the children it is intended to protect. Acknowledging the agency that

children do in fact have and accurately characterizing the people in their lives are simple

steps to help children begin constructing hope for their own future.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CASE MANAGERS

These questions were used as a general guide for our conversation. I often varied the order of these questions and adapted them according to the flow of the conversation.

The Social Worker Experience

1. How long have you been a social worker?

2. How and why did you decide to become a social worker?

3. Describe your job for me. In other words, what does a social worker for foster children do?

4. How do you explain the foster care experience to children?

5. What keeps you going? Describe (without names) a particular case that encouraged you.

6. What is the most important or best part of this job?

7. What are the most challenging or stressful parts? Describe one situation that was particularly difficult.

8. What do you think are the biggest challenges for a foster child?

9. How can he or she overcome those challenges? What is your role in helping a child?

Social Worker Training

1. What did you feel was the focus of the training?

2. In training, what was the most important thing you learned about your role as a social worker?

3. What did you learn about foster children in general? Has this been true in your experience? About parents?

4. What challenges did the training prepare you for?

5. What challenges did the training leave out?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

These questions were used as a general guide for our conversation. I often varied the order of these questions and adapted them according to the flow of the conversation.

Foster Parent Training
1. In training, what was the most important thing you learned about your role as a foster parent?
2. What challenges did the training prepare you for?
3. What challenges did the training leave out?
4. What do you remember most about the training? What was surprising or particularly interesting about it?
5. What is the most helpful thing that you learned in training?
6. What was not helpful or misleading?

The Foster Parenting Experience
1. Why did you decide to become a foster parent (or foster parents)?
2. How long have you been a foster parent?
3. How many children (foster and other) do you have in your home now? Have you had in the past?
4. Do you have other children by birth or adoption? How is being a foster parent different than being a birth or adoptive parent?
5. What are the best parts of being a foster parent?
6. What are the most challenging parts?
7. What are some of the things you say to a child to help explain why they are in foster care?
8. Do you find that children want to talk about what will happen in the future? If so, how do you discuss that with a child?
9. Do you do anything to help the children remember you after they leave your home?
10. Describe the most important people in a foster child's life. What are their roles in that child's life?
11. What do you think are the biggest challenges for a foster child?
12. How can he or she overcome those challenges? What is your role in helping a child and how do you do it?
13. Term (Teamwork/attachment/permanence) seems key in the training. What does it mean to you? How does it play out as a foster parent?

WORKS CITED

Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.

Accinelli, Therese. *My Lifebook Journal: A Workbook for Children in Foster Care*. Oakland: Instant Help Books, 2008. Web. May 2012.

Adichie, Chimamanda. "The Danger of a Single Story." TEDGlobal. Filmed Jul 2009 Posted Oct 2009. Lecture. http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.hml

Aja. Personal Interview. 22 September 2011.

Angie. Personal Interview. 4 April 2011.

Antonovsky, Aaron. *Unraveling the Mystery of Health: How People Manage Stress and Stay Well*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987. Print.

Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Trans. George A. Kennedy. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991. Print.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. James Hutton. Scranton, PA: Norton, 1983. Print.

Arizona Department of Economic Security. "2011 Child Fatalities/Near Fatalities Information Releases." Web. February 2012. https://www.azdes.gov/main.aspx?menu=166&id=6198

Arizona PS-MAPP Training Team. *The Go-To Guide for DCYF Resource Parents*. PS-MAPP AZ-Edition. 2009. Print.

Arizona PS-MAPP Training Team. *PS-MAPP- Partnering for Safety and Permanence: Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting*. PS-MAPP AZ-Edition. 2009. Print.

Arizona State Legislature. "Title Eight – Children" Web. January 2012. <http://www.azleg.state.az.us/ArizonaRevisedStatutes.asp?Title=8>

Arvidson, Joshua, Kristine Kinniburgh, Kristin Howard, Joseph Spinazzola, Helen Strothers, Mary Evans, Barry Andres, Chantal Cohen, and Margaret E. Blaustein. "Treatment of Complex Trauma in Young Children: Developmental and Cultural Considerations in Application of the ARC Model." *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*. 4.1 (2011): 34 – 51. Web. March 2012.

Augustine. *Augustine: Confessions and Enchridion*. Albert C. Outler, Ed and Trans. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955. Print.

Austin, Jon. "Identity & Identity Formation." *Culture and Identity*. 2nd Edition. Ed. Jon Austin. Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education Australia, 2005. 7 – 15. Print.

Aviva Children's Services. *Life Book Project Workbook*. Tucson, AZ. 2012. Print.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Trans. Christine van Boheemen Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985. Print.

Bass, Sandra, Margie K. Shields and Richard E. Behrman. "Children, Families, and Foster Care: Analysis and Recommendations." *The Future of Children* 14.1 (Winter 2004): 4-29.   Web. April 2009.

Bell, Jill Sinclair. "Narrative Inquiry: More than Just Telling Stories." *TESOL Quarterly*. 36.2 (Summer 2002) 207 – 213. Web. June 2012.

Bennett, Lance and Murray Edelman. "Toward a New Political Narrative." *Journal of Communication*. 35.4 (Autumn 1985) 156 – 171. Web. January 2012.

Bitzer, Lloyd. "The Rhetorical Situation." Philosophy and Rhetoric. 1.1 (1968): 1 – 14. Web. December 2007.

Bone, Jane. "Exploring Trauma, Loss, and Healing: Spirituality, T Wh#riki, and Early Childhood Education." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 13.3 (2008): 265 – 276. Web. November 2009.

Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. Print.

Bormann, Ernest G. "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (December 1972): 396-407. Web. April 2006.

---. "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: Ten Years Later." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68.3 (1982): 288 – 305. Web. April 2006.

---. *The Force of Fantasy*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1985. Print.

---. "Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Communication Formulation," *Journal of Communication* 35 (Autumn 1985): 128-38. April 2006.

Bruner, Jerome. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990. Print.

Bruner, Jerome. *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2002. Print.

Capps, Lisa and Elinor Ochs. "Narrating the Self." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996): 19-43. March 2006.

Carr, David. "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity." *Memory, Identity, Community*. Ed. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K Hinchman. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997. 7 – 25. Print

Chandler, Michael, and Travis Proulx. "Changing Selves in Changing Worlds: Youth Suicide on the Fault-lines of Colliding Cultures." *Archives of Suicide Research Special Issue: Suicide Among Ingenious Peoples: The Research*. 10.2 (March 2006): 125-40. Web. March 2009.

Child Welfare Institute. "Implementation Guidebook: PS-MAPP Group Preparation and Selection Program." September 2002. Print.

Child Welfare Institute Trainer. Personal Interview. 21 March 2012.

Cobley, Paul. *Narrative*. New York: Routledge. 2001. Print.

Connelly, Michael and Jean Clandinin. "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry." *Educational Researcher*. 19.5 (1990): 2 – 14. June 2012.

Coulter, Cathy A and Mary Lee Smith. "The Construction Zone: Literary Elements in Narrative Research." *Educational Researcher*. 38.8 (2009): 577 – 590. June 2012.

Czarniawskam Barbara. "Narrating Organization Studies." *Narrative Inquiry*. 21.2 (2011): 337 – 344. June 2012.

Doyle, Joseph Jr. "Child Protection and Child Outcomes: Measuring the Effects of Foster Care." *The American Economic Review*. 97. 5 (Dec. 2007): 1583-1610. Web. September 2009.

Duffy, Margaret E. "Web of Hate: a fantasy theme analysis of the rhetorical vision of Hate groups online." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. 27. 3 (2003): 291 – 312. Web. March 2009.

Eves, Rosalyn Collings. "A Recipe for Remembrance: Memory and Identity in African-American Women's Cookbooks." *Rhetoric Review*. 24.3 (2005): 280 – 297. Web. April 2012.

Favez, Nicolas. "Elaboration and Regulation of Lived Emotion in Preschoolers' Autobiographical Narratives." *Narrative Inquiry*. 21.1 (2011): 1-23. March 2009.

Fisher, Walter. "The Ethics of Argument and Practical Wisdom." Conference Proceedings of the National Communication Association/ American Forensic Association (Alta Conference on Argumentation), University of Southern California, 1999. Web. April 2008.

---.   *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Columbia, South Carolina: U of South Carolina P, 1987. Print.

---.   "Narration, Knowledge, and the Possibility of Wisdom." *Rethinking Knowledge: Reflections across the Disciplines*. Ed. Robert E Goodman and Walter R. Fisher. Albany: State U of New York P, 1995. Print.

---.   "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument." *Communication Monographs*. 51.1 (1984): 1-22. Web. January 2007.

---.   "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration." *Communication Monographs*. 52.4 (1985): 347-367. Web. January 2007.

Farrell, Thomas. "Critical Models in the Analysis of Discourse." *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 44 (Fall 1980): 300 – 314. March 2012.

Fisher, Walter. *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1987. Print.

Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984. Print.

Garrett, Mary and Xiaosui Xiao. "The Rhetorical Situation Revisited." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. 23.2 (Spring 1993): 30 – 40. Online. February 2012.

Gopnik, Alison. *The Philosophical Baby*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. Print.

Greer, Clarke. "Media Literacy and Internet Discussion Lists: a fantasy theme analysis of online postings following the death of Peter Jennings." *Studies in Media and Information Literacy Education*. 8.2 (2008): 1 – 11. Web. February 2012.

Grimm, B. "Foster parent training: What the CFS reviews do and don't tell us." *Youth Law News*. April – June 2003. 1-29. Web. March 2012.

Gunn, Joshua. "Reconfiguring Fantasy: Imagination and Its Decline in U.S. Rhetorical Studies." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89.1 (2003): 41 – 59. Web. March 2012.

Heath, Malcolm. Introduction. *Poetics*. By Aristotle. New York: Penguin Books, 1996. vii – 1xx. Print.

Herman, David. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.

Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. London: Pandora. 1992. Print.

Hillman, James. *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*. New York: Warner Books, 1996. Print.

Hughes, Kevin. "The Crossing of Hope, or Apophatic Eschatology." *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition Amid Modernity and Postmodernity*. Ed. Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmens Publishing, 2004. 101 – 124. Print.

Kay. Personal Interview. 20 April 2011.

King, Barbara. "Constructing Cultural Identity through the Lifebooks of Guatemalan Adoptees." *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association 94th Annual Convention. San Diego, CA*. Nov 20, 2008. Web. October 2011.

Kirkwood, William G. "Narrative and the Rhetoric of Possibility.: *Communication Monographs* 59 (1992): 30-47. Web. November 2007.

Kools, Susan M. "Adolescent Identity Development in Foster Care" *Family Relations* 46.3 (July 1997): 263 – 271. Web. March 2009.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P. 1980. Print.

Laura. Personal Interview. 13 March 2012.

Mamdani, Mahmood. "Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa" *Diacritics* 32.3-4 (2002): 33-59. Web. January 2008.

Margolin, Uri. "Character." Ed. Herman, David. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.

Marschall, Tracy A. "Reviving the 'LifeBook': Using Social Constructionism to Celebrate and Understand Difference in HBSE." *Presentation made at the 2006 Midwest Biennial Social Work Education Conference. Ferris State University.* March 9-10, 2006. Web. May 2012.

Mary. Personal Interview. 7 October 2011.

Mason, Jan. "A Child's Standpoint: Needs in Out-of-Home Care." *Children & Society* 22 (2008): 358 – 369. Web. March 2009.

McAdams, Dan and Philip J Bowman. "Narrating Life's Turning Points: Redemption and Contamination." *Turns in the Road: Narrative Studies of Lives in Transition*. Ed. Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich. Washington D.C: American Psychological Association. 2001. 3 – 34. Print.

McAdams, Dan. *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story: Personological Inquires into Identity*. Homewood: Dorsey Press. 1985. Print.

McAdams, Dan. *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*. New York: Oxford UP. 2006. Print.

McClure, Kevin. "Resurrecting the Narrative Paradigm: Identification and the Case of Young Earth Creationism." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. 39:2 (2009): 189 – 211. Print.

McMillen, J. C., Scott, L. D., Zima, B. T., Ollie, M. T., Munson, M. R., & Spitznagel, E. "Use of mental health services among older youths in foster care." *Psychiatric Services* 55 (2004): 811-817. March 2009.

Mercer, K. "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and diversity in postmodern politics." Ed. J. Rutherford *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. London*: Lawrence & Wishart. 43 – 71. Print.

Mohrmann, G.P. "An Essay on Fantasy Theme Criticism." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982): 109 – 132. Web. November 2011.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. New York: Harper & Row. 1967. Print.

Moony, Jim. *The Complete Lifebook Workbook*. Aurora: Adoption Strategies Publishers, 1996. Print.

Munro, Jennifer. "On a First-Name Basis with my First Grader." *Brain, Child*. 13.2 (2012): 44 – 48. Print.

Nell, Victor. "Mythic Structures in Narrative: The Domestication of Immortality." *Narrative Impact*. Ed. Melanie Green, Jeffrey Strange, and Timothy Brock. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 2002. Print.

Nyhan, Brendan and Jason Reifler. "When Corrections Fail: the Persistence of Political Misperceptions." *Political Behavior*. 32.2 (2010) 303 – 330. Web. April 2012.

O'Malley, Beth. *Lifebooks: Creating a Treasure for the Adopted Child*. Winthrop: Adoption-Works Publishers. 2000. Print.

Orme, John G. and Cheryl Buehler. "Foster Family Characteristics and Behavioral and Emotional Problems of Foster Children: A Narrative Review." *Family Relations* 50. 1 (Jan. 2001): 3-15. Web. March 2009.

Page, Janis Teruggi and Duffy, Margaret E. "A Battle of Visions: Dueling visions of morality in U.S. political campaign TV ads." *Communication, Culture, and Critique.* 2.1 (March 2009): 110 – 135. Web. February 2012.

Polacco, Patricia. *I Can Hear the Sun*. New York: Philomel Books, 1996. Print.

Perry, Bruce. "Bonding and Attachment in Children: Consequences of Emotional Neglect in Childhood". Childtraumaacademy.org. 2001. Web. March 2012.

Perry, Bruce and Maia Szalavitz. *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook*. New York: Basic Books. 2006. Print

Phelan, James. "Rhetoric/Ethics." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Ed. David Herman. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. 203 – 216. Print.

Phillion, JoAnn. *Narrative Inquiry in a Multicultural Landscape*. Westport: Ablex Publishing. 2002. Print.

Pima County Juvenile Court. *Dependency after Adoption Information Charts*. May 2011 – August 2011. Web. February 2012.

Pima County Juvenile Court. *Dependency Petition Reactivation Breakdown – 2011*. Web. February 2012.

Pollock, David and Ruth Van Reken. *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Between Worlds*. Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing. 2009. Print.

Probst, Cindy. *Adoption Lifebook: A Bridge to your Child's Beginnings*. Boston: Boston Adoption Press, 2001. Print.

Ratcliffe, Krista. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2005. Print.

Rand, Kevin and Jennifer Cheavens. "Hope Theory." *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Ed. Shane J. Lopez and C.R. Synder. New York: Oxford UP. 2009. 323 – 333. Print.

Ray, David. *Music of Time: Selected and New Poems*. Omaha: Backwaters Press. 2006. Print.

Reinhart, Mary. "Arizona CPS Workers Face Heavy Caseload." *Arizona Republic*. 3 March 2012. Web. April 2012.

Roberts-Miller, Patricia. *Voices in the Wilderness: Public Discourse and the Paradox of Puritan Rhetoric*. Tuscaloosa and London: U of Alabama P, 1999. Print.

Robinson, Marilynne. *Gilead*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004. Print.

Roland, Robert. "On Limiting the Narrative Paradigm: Three Case Studies." *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 39 – 54. Web. November 2007.

Rudrum, David. "From Narrative Representation to Narrative Use." Narrative. 13:2 (2005): 195 – 204. Web. May 2012.

Ruth. Personal Interview. 26 March 2012.

Ryan, Marie-Laure, "Toward a Definition of Narrative" *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Ed. Herman, David, Ed. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.

Saeed, John. *Semantics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997. Print.

Seth and Holly. Personal Interview. 27 April 2011.

Sheehan, Richard D Johnson. "Metaphor as Hermeneutic." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. 29. 2 (1999): 47-64. Web. March 2006.

Shonkoff, Jack P and Andrew S Gardner. "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress." *Pediatrics* 129 (2012): 232 – 246. Web. March 2012.

Stites, Belva. PS-MAPP Training Supervisor for Arizona's Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Telephone Interview. August 18, 2011.

Strawson, Galan. "Against Narrativity." *Ratio*. XVII (December 2004): 428 – 452. Web. April 2012.

Stroud, Scott. "Multivalent Narratives: Extending the Narrative Paradigm with Insights From Ancient Indian Philosophical Texts." *Western Journal of Communication* 66.3 (Summer 2002): 369 – 393. Web. January 2009.

Stroud, Scott. "Narrative as Argument Indian Philosophy: The Astavakra Gita as Multivalent Narrative." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 37. 1 (2004): 42 – 71. Web. January 2012.

Smith, Dana K, Elizabeth Stormshak, Patricia Chamberlain, and Rachel Bridges Whatley. "Placement Disruption in Treatment Foster Care." *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*. 9.3 (2001): 200 – 205. Web. November 2011.

Somers, Margaret R. "The Narrative Construction of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach" *Theory and Society* 23.5 (October 1994): 605-649. Web. January 2008.

Synder, C.R."Genesis: The Birth and Growth of Hope." *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures, and Applications*. Ed. C.R. Synder. San Diego: Academic Press. 2000. 25 – 36. Print.

Synder, C.R."Hypothesis: There is Hope." *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures, and Applications*. Ed. C.R. Synder. San Diego: Academic Press. 2000. 3 – 21. Print.

Tammi, Pekka. "Against Narrative ('A Boring Story'). *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*. 4.2 (June 2006): 19 – 40. Web. June 2012.

Tammy. Personal Interview. 22 March 2012.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age.* Harvard: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.

---. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989. Print.

United States Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. *The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System Report.* June 2011. Web. February 2012. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report18.htm>

United States Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. *Child Welfare Information Gateway Factsheet* "Major Federal Legislation Concerned with Child Protection, Child Welfare, and Adoption." 2011. Web. January 2012. <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/otherpubs/majorfedlegis.cfm>

United States Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. *Child Welfare Information Gateway Factsheet* "Major Federal Legislation Index and Search." 2011. Web January 2012. <http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/federal/index.cfm?event=federalLegislation.showForm >

VandenBos, Gary R., ed. *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007. Print.

Vatz, Richard E. "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 6.3 (Summer 1973): 154 – 161. Web. February 2012.

Vultee, Fred. "Man-Child in the White House: The discursive construction of Barak Obama in reader comments at foxnews.net." *Journalism Studies*. 13.1 (2012): 54 – 70. Web. January 2012.

Warnick, Barbara. "The Narrative Paradigm, Another Story" *Quarterly Journal of Speech.* 73 (1987): 172 – 182. Web. November 2011.

Weaver, Richard. "Language is Sermonic." *The Rhetorical Tradition*. Ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.1351-1360. Print.

Webster, Scott. Personal Identity: Moving Beyond Essence. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 10:1 (2005): 5 – 16. Web. January 2012.

White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (Autumn 1980): 5-27. Web. January 2007.

Whiting, Jason and Robert E. Lee III. "Voices from the System: A Qualitative Study of Foster Children's Stories." *Family Review* 52.3 (July 2003): 288 – 295. Web. March 2009.

Zoler, Michael. "Don't Miss Underlying Adoption Grief." *Clinical Psychiatry News*. (Dec 2012): 20 – 21. Web. May 2012.