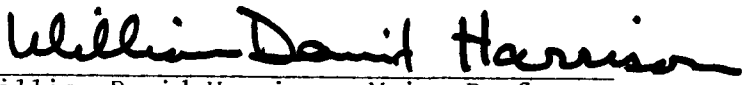
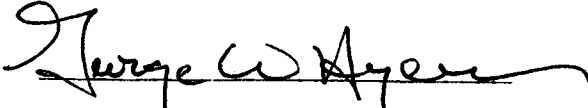


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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Janice S. Burleson entitled "Foster Parent Perceptions of Role Discrepancies in the Foster Parent-Social Worker Relationship." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Social Work.


William David Harrison, Major Professor

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FOSTER PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE DISCREPANCIES IN
THE FOSTER PARENT-SOCIAL WORKER RELATIONSHIP

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science in Social Work
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Janice S. Burleson

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine sources of potential problems in the foster parent-social worker relationship. Concepts developed by role theorists were applied to the social work practice-foster care literature to form the rationale for the study. The general purposes of the study were to examine foster parents' perceptions of the roles in foster care practice and the extent and areas of discrepancy between perceptions of actual and ideal role performances.

A forty-nine item role prescription inventory was issued to 282 foster parents. The role inventory was designed to elicit perceptions of responsibility for both actual and ideal role performance. Data were analyzed in three ways: a frequency distribution of percentages of respondents reporting discrepancies between real and ideal role perceptions, McNemar Test for Significance of Changes and the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs-Signed Ranks Test.

These foster parents perceived discrepancies between real and ideal role performance in every aspect of foster care practice examined. The way responses changed from reports of real to ideal role performance consistently expressed a need for increased shared responsibility between foster parents and social workers. The study examined the areas of foster care practice in which foster parents would ideally reduce or increase the degree of their own responsibility.

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CHAPTER I

PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

The Problem

America's foster care system is subject to widespread criticism on many counts. The needs of children in foster care are not being met despite the existence of a body of knowledge and theory about the goals and methods of foster care practice. Many problems center around the agency perspective towards biological and foster parents. The current social service system lacks adequate resources to strengthen existing families and prevent the need for foster care placements. Insufficient social work emphasis on reconstructive services for the biological family limits the extent of the foster child's contact with his or her birth parents. This is an obstruction of one of the child's foremost needs, a sense of continuity in life (Radinsky, 1963).

The widening abyss between traditional modes of foster care service provision and the changing needs of the social community creates additional problems. The durability of the foster care system is doubtful with the retention of the current view of the foster family as the main ingredient of service delivery. The social work relationship with foster parents is in extreme need of reassessment and revision. The approach to foster parents has historically been "exploitative and paternalistic" (Fanshel, 1970, p. 228). Foster parents have been isolated from larger concerns of the child welfare

system such as planning, education and legislation. Though a framework of collegiality is preferable, an element of subordination has characterized the fosterparent relationship to the social worker (Fanshel, 1970). In spite of the prevailing trend towards collegiality, social workers have been reluctant to grant foster parents more responsibility in foster care practice (George, 1970).

Foster parents often remain in their demanding, unique position without developing a clear understanding of the rights and restrictions of their role. The roles of the social worker and the agency are equally unclear to foster parents (Kennedy, 1970). Foster parents have reported their perceptions of inadequate pre-placement preparation and their dissatisfaction with the amount and kinds of social worker activity (Ambinder and Sargent, 1965).

The absence of a thorough diagnostic base for deciding upon the most appropriate type of placement contributes to the larger problem of inappropriate placement choices for the child (Stone, 1970). Successful placements are often hindered by insufficient evaluation of foster parent abilities in relation to the needs of the foster child (Fanshel, 1970).

Research has indicated that the policy of temporary foster care is less of an actuality than is desirable. The numbers of children in foster care placements are exorbitant and steadily increasing. In 1965, 287,000 children were living in foster care placements. In 1975, that figure had risen to 364,000. A study of the Massachusetts foster care system indicated that more than half of the children in foster care were amidst a placement of between

four and eight years duration (Derdeyn, 1977). Shapiro's longitudinal examination of New York's foster care system exhibited that one-third of the children in placement had remained within the system for twice as long as was originally intended (Shapiro, 1976). Another source noted that a large percentage of children in foster care will remain in placement for the duration of their minority (Pare, 1977).

Administrative disabilities such as lack of funding, shortage of adequately trained staff and frequent personnel turnover contribute to the myriad of existing problems in the foster care system (Kadushin, 1974). Lacking federal policy legislation, agencies operate under confused objectives (Stein, Gambrill and Wiltse, 1974). An insufficient number of foster homes and faltering methods of foster parent recruitment and training add to the system difficulties.

Misunderstandings about agency values and purposes arise from the problems of the current foster care system. A continuing struggle between the child's parents and those who assume responsibility for the child often emerges in the process of placement. The struggle includes conflict between the interests of the parents, the child and those responsible for the temporary care of the child. Foster care involves a high degree of emotional investment and the interaction of a diversity of human interests. It is understandable that a significant number of conflicts would arise in a field of practice such as this. Lack of understanding gives birth to

confusion among all facets of the foster care system and replaces what should be a working alliance with struggles and conflict.

The problem which motivates this study is the existence of conflict in the working relationship of foster parents and foster care social workers. This difficulty has been identified by social workers and by the social work literature in the field of foster care services. Orlin (1977) describes unique problems in foster family care practice that result as the "roles and relationships created by placement give the participants different and often incompatible perspectives" (p. 769). The differing perspectives become a source of conflict and a deterrent to the theoretical view that the social worker, the agency, the foster parents and the foster child's birth parents are united in a working alliance to achieve a common end.

Background of the Problem

Prior to the late 19th Century development of the New York Children's Aid Society, infanticide, child-selling and indenture were used as solutions to the problem of inordinate numbers of uncared for, destitute children. These methods were rooted in the ideology of the Elizabethan Poor Laws. Less objectionable methods included the use of relatives and of churches to board and provide for the children (Kadushin, 1974). Alarmed by the increasing numbers of abandoned children, society became concerned that their numbers would be the rise of the lower class, an increase of the ranks of the immoral and unworthy, a disintegration of society (Langsam, 1964).

Children were jailed and confined to correctional institutions. The methods employed exhibited a greater concern for the stability of the social order than for the needs of the suffering children. The "placing-out" system of the New York Children's Aid Society, pioneered by Charles Loring Brace, contributed by awakening the recognition of the relentless pain of children and providing a form of substitute care. Regardless, there was an inherent bartering of child labor in exchange for the child's sustenance and an emphasis on morality as deliverance from want and evil (Hutchinson, 1972).

A shift in concerns began with the social and economic effects of the Industrial Revolution and rising economic stability. The rights of the child began to be viewed within a legal, and more humanitarian, context. The development of the Boston Children's Aid Society contributed to a more comprehensive view of the needs of children. In 1909, the 1st White House Conference on Children convened and construed the use of the foster family, rather than penal or institutional measures, as the most appropriate alternative when biological parents could not fulfill obligations to their offspring. The declaration included the concept that the foster family is a temporary intervention which will protect, nurture, and enhance the development of the child while the home of the birth parents is restored to safe, benevolent and socially acceptable conditions (Kadushin, 1974).

Foster family care is provided when there is evidence of pathology in family relationships to the extent that a child's emotional and physical maturation is extremely thwarted or when there is evidence of the breakdown of a particular family system. A large number of foster children come from lower income families. The social and economic pressures of poverty often contribute to the environmental strains which lead to the need for foster care. Conditions underlying the need for foster care placement include the emotional or physical illness of a parent, emotional and physical neglect and abuse and exploitation of a child (CWLA, 1975). The parents' inability to deal with the child's own emotional problems is less frequently a basis for foster care placement (Mech, 1970). The deprivation parents have experienced, their own immaturity and the resulting parental and marital instability are other factors which contribute to the disorganization of a family (Radinsky, 1970).

Parents exercise their own volition in caring for their children until a facet of the community perceives that a child's emotional and physical welfare is endangered. Alternative arrangements must be made when parents lack the capacity to provide nurturance, safety, stability and guidance so necessary to a child's development and progression to a secure, mature adulthood. The parents themselves often conclude that their child's needs could best be met in alternative living arrangements.

As a child is placed into a temporary foster care arrangement, the government and the social service agency assume parental

responsibility for the child. The agency and the caseworker become a parental force in the child's life. This role implies that the foster care system make a responsible, conscientious emotional commitment to provide richness in continuity and stability in the child's life.

Theoretically, foster care services require the integration of the parts of the foster care practice system into a partnership which strives to attain a common end. The foster child, the biological parents, the foster parents, the social worker and the agency are the elements which make up this partnership. As the agency seeks to involve all components and recognizes the value of each in the process of placement, it increases the chances of reducing misunderstandings and conflict and generating a teamwork effect of promoting healthy life.

The agency's central position in the foster care system is of significance. The agency need retain a philosophy conducive to shared decision-making between the components of the system, to flexibility and willingness to readapt administrative structures when service evaluation indicates the need. Clarity in the definition of roles and the limitations of the roles of foster parent, biological parent and social worker is necessary. A concerted, persistent effort to identify weaknesses in policy and program operation and to seek to remedy imperfections in foster care management is required.

Through the foster care worker, the agency seeks to reduce the problems that are socially or personally destructive to the

biological family and the foster child. The intended role of the foster care worker is to facilitate the child's integration into the foster family and to alleviate the social or psychological problems which led to placement. The role of the worker includes the striving to develop adjustment to the roles required of the child, the biological parents and the foster parents. Ethical responsibility requires emphasis on systematic review of foster care placements and permanency planning for the child.

If the child in the foster family placement is the most vulnerable member of the system, the relationship developed with the foster parents is perhaps the most critical and open to misinterpretation. The role of foster parents holds many uncertainties and ambiguities. As a bridge to the child's future, the relationship between the foster care worker and the foster parents is of ultimate importance.

Implications of the Problem

The social worker's relationship with foster parents is a primary tool in the social work treatment process in foster family care. The foster child's future to a large extent depends upon committed, cooperative relationships, upon communication which remains open, receptive and conducive to problem-solving. The relationship must be based upon mutual understanding, reciprocity in sharing of information about the child, and shared planning and decision-making.

The current social work literature regarding foster family care indicates numerous problems in the practice field. Among the

identified problems are lack of clarity in role responsibilities and conflictual relationships between members of the foster family care system (Fanshel, 1966; George, 1970; McCoy, 1962; Orlin, 1977). Though there are many theoretical implications of the proper role, the exact nature of the foster parent role is not specific and at times conflicts with the foster parents' basic role as parents. The prevailing view of good foster care practice, with its emphasis on mutual participation and cooperation, presents ambiguities and conflicts in the fosterparent role (George, 1970). Conflict in the working relationship of social workers and foster parents is in many ways antithetical and destructive to the goals of foster family care service.

Foster parents have terminated their agency relationships as a result of poor communication and lack of role clarity (Jones, 1975). One of the significant difficulties in the foster care system is a shortage of foster homes. Recruitment and retention of qualified foster parents can only be enhanced by specific directions regarding the demands, expectations, limitations and rewards of the role.

The uncertainty about the role of foster parent has an adverse effect on both the self-concept of the foster parent and the foster parent's relationship with the child (Maluccio, 1973). Foster parents need to feel respected for their labors and contributions. A sense of self-respect, the conveyance of respect from others and the resulting committed foster parenting are most unlikely with conflict in the social work relationship. To clarify the

relationships and expectations among foster parents and social workers is to reduce the arena of conflict and thereby increase the ground for respect, mutual consideration and cooperation.

The confusions of poorly defined roles and relationships diffuse the interests of all members of the foster care system. As social workers and foster parents emphasize their individual problems, estrangement and non-cooperativeness increases. Focus on the problems between foster parents and social workers reduces the time and quality of the time invested in ameliorating the foster child's spectrum of problems, in planning for and actualizing a permanent placement for the child. The numbers of foster children and the length of foster placements continue to be on the increase. Foster parent-social worker problems must be resolved so that more efforts can be directed towards finding permanent placements for the foster child.

The lack of specificity and understanding of the roles in foster family care and the conflict between members are parts of the larger deficiencies of the foster care system. An understanding of the areas of conflict, the insufficiencies and ambiguities which thwart the basic purpose of foster care placement is necessary for improved quality of the foster care system.

The Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to examine the elements of the relationship between foster parents and social workers in an

effort to identify to what extent the roles of each were understood and accepted.

There were several general theoretical propositions underlying the study. The clarity in understanding of the behaviors belonging to each role was thought to be a critical factor in the role perceptions of foster parents and social workers. It was assumed that conflict does exist between foster parents and social workers and that foster parents and social workers would perceive their roles differently. It was expected that foster parents would report a discrepancy between what they perceive to be their responsibilities in the actual and ideal states of role performance, that the discrepancy would include a desire for greater mutual involvement than what is perceived to be the actual case.

The intent of the study was to examine the extent to which there are discrepancies in foster parents' perceptions of their real and ideal roles.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Various problems in the current state of foster care services were noted in the previous chapter. Many of these problems center around the relationship between foster parents and social workers. It became evident that the concept of role was of immense importance in the development of an approach to examine this relationship. The focus of this study is on the foster parent perceptions of their role. Concepts developed by social and organizational role theorists presented ideas germane to an understanding of the social worker-foster parent relationships. Theoretical concepts of role are employed as a guide to the study of this relationship. This chapter includes discussion of the foster care practice literature and role concepts pertinent to the study of foster parent-social worker relationship.

Foster care theorists generally agree that foster family care is to be viewed as a system of elements which includes the agency, the social worker, the foster parents, the foster child and his or her birth parents. These are to be considered a working alliance, a partnership in which each member has specific roles and responsibilities in the foster family service process (Charnley, 1961; Kline and Overstreet, 1972, CWLA, 1975; Stein, Gambrill and Wiltse, 1978). Communication and shared participation are crucial to good foster care practice. Ideally, the roles and inter-relationships of each

participant should be clarified and explicitly defined from the onset of the working relationship. With clearly defined roles, the working relationship is enhanced by a recognition of mutual interdependence and by a common striving for the goal of permanent placement for the child (Charnley, 1961).

Role Phenomena and the Foster Parent-Social Worker Relationship

In spite of a solid theory base, there is much evidence in the foster care literature which suggests that the roles of social workers and foster parents are ill-defined.

The roles of foster parents and social workers are enormously complex. The fulfillment of role expectations is contingent upon continuous clarification of the tasks prescribed to be a part of each role. The role of foster parent carries with it many elements of confusion. The social worker's role includes the responsibility to define the expectations of the foster parent role, to explain the agency's goals and methods in foster care practice (Gedankin, 1966). Garrett (1970) identifies the right to clarity in definition of role responsibilities as a principle right of foster parents.

Various definitions have been ascribed to the concept of role. A role is most commonly considered as "the set of prescriptions which defines the expected behaviors of a person occupying a particular position" (Thomas and Biddle, 1966, p. 29). A position or status involves numerous inter-related roles. Merton (1957; p. 369) uses the term role set to describe this basic characteristic of positions. He defines a role set as "that complement of role

relationships which persons have by virtue of occupying a particular social status."

Roles exist so that the needs of a social system can be met. The needs of a system include the inner needs of the members and the external demands of the system. Foster parents and social workers are complementary members of a particular role set. Because the social worker-foster parent relationship is not isolated from interaction with other members of the foster care system, the relationship must be viewed within the context of the larger organization. Prescriptive behaviors for their roles have been identified by the foster care literature.

It has been stressed that communication is crucial to an effective foster parent-social worker relationship. Communication between members of a role set is a process centering around the expectations for behaviors of the role partners. Ambinder, Fireman, Sargent and Wineman (1962, p. 34) define role perceptions as "the performer's image of his own role or that of another participant," role expectations as "the behaviors expected of the performer" and role reciprocity as "the interdependence between roles in the system, functionally linking one to another." Conflict in the role set can be evaluated by examination of these role dynamics and communication between role partners. Each member of a particular role set has expectations regarding the way in which his or her role and the role of the partner ought to be fulfilled. Along with this perception of an ideal role performance, role partners have perceptions of the way

in which the role is actually being fulfilled. Incongruency between the expected and actual performance may generate conflict for role members. Conflict is likely to occur when a member's ideal role perceptions are different from his actual role performance (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal, 1964). When the role dynamics, such as conflicting expectations and perceptions, prevent needs from being met, conflicts leading to a breakdown of a system are anticipated (Ambinder, et al., 1962).

Expectations for role performance are in part determined by the organizational position, the interpersonal patterns and extent of mutual dependence of role partners. A person's adjustment to a role is contingent upon the clarity with which the role is defined. A role member will have severe difficulty fulfilling expectations with only ambiguous definitions of responsibilities (Kahn, et al., 1964).

Potential Sources of Role Problems in the Foster Parent-Social Worker Relationship

The application of concepts derived from role theory to problems identified in the foster care literature suggests that an element causing conflict between social workers and foster parents is the internal conflict and ambiguity present in the manner in which the roles are defined. Galaway (1976) indicates that lack of clarity in definition of role expectations for social workers and foster parents is a source of conflict. The agency has the responsibility to develop clear, consistent policies and to convey a clear sense of

the expectations of the roles of foster parents, birth parents and social workers (Kline and Overstreet, 1972). Clarity in role understanding is to some extent dependent upon the agency's provisions of opportunities to learn about roles (Cottrell, 1942; Wolins, 1963). Despite this, foster parents receive few opportunities to learn about their roles (George, 1970). Sources of confusion in role understanding have been cited as due to poor agency specification of services, policies, and expectations (Kline and Overstreet, 1972).

With the absence of a clearly specified role, foster parents have difficulty differentiating the attributes of their role from that of the foster child's birth parents (Ambinder, et al., 1962; Holman, 1975; McCoy, 1962; Maas and Engler, 1959; Wolins, 1963). George (1970), seeing the success of foster care placement partly contingent upon cooperation, found situations of conflict with the basic role of parent. The role of temporary parent is most difficult to assume. Foster parents must place their own needs as parents secondary to the external demands of the organizational relationship. The foster parent, as a substitute parent, is required to make only a short-term investment in a child and to accept only limited responsibility for the child. The foster parent is required to share the child and the parental responsibilities with the agency and the birth parents (McCoy, 1962).

A conception of the foster parent role as birth parent is a source of disturbance in the foster care process as it is indicative

of a wish to exclude external participation in the foster child's development (Holman, 1975). Negative feelings may be exhibited in the working relationship. Foster parents with this notion view social work intervention as an infringement on their relationship with the foster child (Ambinder, et al., 1962). Competition for the child's affection and an unwillingness or inability to adapt to the agency demands may be a source of further conflict in the foster parent-social worker relationship (Kline and Overstreet, 1972). The self perception of the foster parenting role as most resembling birth parent has generally been opposite of the social worker perception of that role (Jones, 1975).

Hampson and Tavormina (1980) recently examined the rewards and problems of foster parents as reported by thirty-five foster parents in interviews. Many of these foster parents expressed frustrations regarding child-rearing problems. Of particular concern were the emotional and behavioral problems of the child. Dissatisfaction with the social worker relationship to the foster parent was the most frequently heard complaint. These foster parents expressed an inability to communicate with the caseworker and frustration with limited caseworker involvement.

The complementarity of the foster parent-social worker roles suggests potential problems. Merton (1957) suggests that the different values, beliefs and principles of role partners leads to potential disturbances in the role set. By virtue of their positions, foster parents and social workers come to their relationship

with different values and beliefs regarding their roles. In the working relationship, each participant acts upon an individually derived source of authority with the conviction that he or she has the most legitimate knowledge of the foster child's present and future needs (Orlin, 1977). As their complementary relationship creates different perspectives, it is indicated that disturbance in the foster parent-social worker relationship, i.e. conflict, will arise due to misinterpretations of or discrepancies in role expectations.

The distribution of power among role partners is an additional factor which may effect the stability of the role set (Merton, 1957). Power is an issue to be considered in the foster parent-social worker relationship. The foster parent status within the structure of the agency remains ambiguous. Although the trend is towards greater shared participation, the foster parent-social worker relationship retains an imbalance of authority.

Viewing the role of foster parents as ambiguously defined, Kadushin (1974) states that social workers and foster parents have conflicting perceptions of the responsibilities each is to assume. The foster parents' own needs as parents present additional problems. The shared participation inherent in foster care practice theory can add to the difficulty in foster parent role specificity (McCoy, 1962). The mutual interdependence of foster care role members creates a conflict of need and interest for foster parents (Gedankin, 1966).

The foster parent relationship to the social worker has at varying times been specified as client, colleague and supervisee. This confusion about foster parent status remains. The social worker functions on occasion as an advisor, a counselor, a teacher and a source of emotional support for the foster parents. These functions of the social worker influence a foster parent view of the social worker as a parental figure, oriented towards the child and without interest in the foster parent (Kadushin, 1974).

Suggesting a team approach in foster care services, Garrett (1970) indicates that foster parents have a right to be involved in decisions regarding the foster child. Foster parents have extensive knowledge of the foster child's day-to-day behaviors and needs. Given a more active role, foster parents can make immense contributions to the planning of successful, appropriate foster care placements.

It is difficult to define the source of social worker reluctance to involve foster parents to a greater extent. Whether the resistance emerges from reluctance to forego certain aspects of the conventional social work role, from a perception of foster parent inability or from a belief that certain tasks truly are not part of the foster parent role, foster parent involvement is clearly limited (George, 1970).

Foster parents have only recently begun to be considered agency staff, a role which more clearly coincides with the view of foster parents as colleagues. As knowledge of the need for shared

input into foster care services increases, foster parents are becoming more involved in defining their own roles. Foster parent associations and more extensive foster parent involvement in contracting and planning are examples of this trend (Kadushin, 1974).

Fanshel (1970) advocates the strengthening of the career aspect of the foster parent role by involving them in broader child welfare concerns. He suggests providing opportunities for experienced foster parents to advance to higher positions, where they could serve as supervisors and advisors to other foster parents. However, the career aspect of foster parenthood creates further conflicts for some foster parents. The proposition that they receive a salary for their services contradicts the altruistic values of many foster parents. Thus, many reject the idea of being considered agency staff.

Foster parents frequently accept a child for placement without clear knowledge of the intended placement duration. The lack of sufficient knowledge generates a framework of ambiguity in their relationship with the child and the foster care program. This lack of role clarity should be of great concern to social work practitioner as it has been linked to termination of the foster parent role (Jones, 1975). Galaway (1976) suggests that one way to reduce the ambiguity of the foster parent role is to include foster parents in placement planning. His approach to placement contracting includes a series of steps which involves all participants in the clarification of role expectations and responsibilities on an individual case basis.

Situations of unresolved role problems can lead to a sense of futility in role performance, hostility, severe reduction in communication and the disruption of trust and supportive, participative relationships (Kahn, et al., 1964). The projected consequence of unresolved role problems bear a serious threat to the foster parent-social worker relationship. This working relationship requires open, receptive communication structures, freedom for mutual cooperation, shared participation and a concerted effort towards expedient permanent placement for the foster child. Foster parents are thwarted in this goal without an explicit conception of the way in which they are to contribute. Without resolutions of the conflicts and ambiguities present in the foster parent role, the partners in the foster care system are likely to become further polarized. Foster parents are likely to withdraw further from participation with the social worker and the agency, thus only intensifying the conflicts. The development of distrust will remain a barrier to the goals of foster care. Effective, secure temporary placements for foster children will only be inhibited, as will the goal of healthy maturation within a permanent care placement.

Kahn, et al. (1964, p. 278) state that "a thorough investigation into all the role expectations held at a given moment by all the members of the role set should yield an indication of the potential in the situation for conflict." The entire configuration of expectations and pressures should be examined in attempting to understand the conflict and the routes towards improvement. The potential

degree of ambiguity can be examined by considering the pertinent information available to the role partners. The notion of agreement on role expectations is implicit in the shared responsibility for foster children. Shared expectations of role execution determine to a large extent the way foster parents perceive and act upon their role expectations.

This study examined the roles of foster parents and social workers by an investigation of foster parent perceptions of role expectations and responsibilities. With the consequences of role problems in mind, attention was directed towards the extent of clarity in role definitions and expectations and towards the discrepancy between foster parents perceptions of their actual and ideal roles.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study was primarily exploratory-descriptive in nature, drawing upon survey data to test hypotheses. Any findings generalized to the larger populations of social workers and foster parents should be done with caution.

The study was designed to use certain data from a larger project which researched the relationship of foster parents and social workers. The larger project was the Foster Care Improvement Project and was done in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Human Services and Dr. David Harrison, Assistant Professor at the University of Tennessee Graduate School of Social Work, Knoxville Branch. Administrative personnel in the Department of Human Services had identified the existence of problematic relationships between foster parents and social workers. The Foster Care Improvement Project sought to identify areas and sources of conflict related to issues of role responsibilities.

Sources of Data and Procedures for Gathering Data

The population chosen for the project consisted of the 282 persons occupying the role of foster parent and the 18 persons occupying the role of foster care social worker in the Knox County office of the Tennessee Department of Human Services. This portion of the

study uses only foster parent data. Participation in the study was voluntary.

The data were collected by anonymous paper and pencil questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered to the social workers by the researchers in September, 1979. Questionnaires were administered to the foster parents by mail out process in August, 1979. The anonymity of the questionnaire responses was protected.

Prior to the administration of the questionnaires to the project participants, the measurement instruments were pretested. Several current and past foster parents and several social workers previously and currently participating in the field of foster family care but not presently employed by the Knox County Department of Human Services completed the instrument and were interviewed.

Of the 282 questionnaires issued to foster parents, 135 were returned. Twenty of those were returned after the process of data analysis began. These were excluded from use in the study analysis as it was determined the additional responses would not make a significant difference in the results. The questionnaires administered to the 18 social workers were completed but are not a concern of this study.

Questions and Hypotheses

The central purposes of the study were 1) to examine the views foster parents have of their roles, 2) to examine the clarity of role responsibilities, 3) to examine whether or not foster parents perceive

discrepancies between their perceptions of actual and ideal role performance and 4) to examine the areas in which there are discrepancies between perceived real and ideal role performance.

The research questions posed to guide the descriptive portions of the study were as follows:

- 1) What responsibilities do foster parents perceive to be a part of their role and of the social worker role?
- 2) To what extent is there a discrepancy between foster parents' perceptions of role responsibilities in the actual (real) state of foster care practice and in that perceived to be ideal role performance?
- 3) In what areas of foster care practice do foster parents perceive discrepancy between what they see as the real and ideal role performance?
- 4) Are the discrepancies between foster parent perceptions of real and ideal role performance statistically significant?
- 5) How do foster parents' perceptions of role responsibilities change from reports of real to reports of ideal role performance?
- 6) Are there patterns in foster parent perceptions of role discrepancies which suggest specific needs?

- 7) To what extent do foster parents agree on the responsibilities perceived to be a part of their role as foster parents?

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the hypotheses were generated in two phases. At the onset of the study, there was one primary hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: There are discrepancies between foster parent perceptions of real and ideal role responsibilities.

Following the initial analysis of the above hypothesis, a second hypothesis was formed.

Hypothesis 2: Discrepancies between foster parents' perceptions of real and ideal role performance will be towards the ideal of increased shared participation between foster parents and social workers.

After the testing of Hypothesis 2 was a purely exploratory phase of the study. The data were further analyzed to explore and refine the nature of the changes between foster parent perceptions of real and ideal role performance.

Definition of Terms

Real Role Perceptions are the foster parents' reported views of who (Foster Parent, Social Worker, Both foster parent and social worker or Neither) actually has responsibility for each of the items on the role inventory.

Ideal Role Perceptions are the foster parents' reported views of who ideally should have responsibility for each of the items on the role inventory.

Role Discrepancies exist when there is an incongruity between what a person perceives to be the responsibilities and expectations of his or her role in actual and ideal role performance.

Role discrepancy is operationally defined as a difference between foster parents' reported perceptions of real and ideal role performance on an item on the role inventory.

Description of the Research Instrument

The portion of the research instrument used to gather foster parent and social worker perceptions of their roles was a role inventory which was developed in the research process. The inventory consisted of 49 prescriptive role statements drawn from a combination of theoretical viewpoints of foster family care-social work practice. The inventory was designed to collect information regarding foster parent and social worker perceptions of who is to assume responsibility for a particular duty in foster care service, discrepancies between assumption of responsibility in the actual state of role performance and in the ideal perceptions of role performance.

The respondents were requested to define whether a particular role statement is perceived as a responsibility 1) of the Foster Parent, 2) of the Social Worker, 3) to be Shared Equally or 4) of Neither the foster parent or the social worker. On each item an

opinion was sought for both real and ideal role performances. Respondents were also asked to state how strongly they felt about a particular role prescription, from 1) not at all, to 2) somewhat to 3) very. A sample role inventory is presented in Appendix A.

Discussion of the Basic Statistical Method

The first hypothesis was tested in two ways. The percentage of discrepancy between the real and ideal role performances as reported by foster parents was obtained for each of the 49 role inventory items. The percentage of discrepancy was obtained by adding the numerical shift in marginal categorical responses (Foster Parent, Social Worker, Shared Equally, Neither) on a cross-tabulation chart in the reported perceptions of real and ideal role performance and then dividing the number of changes into the total number of respondents for each particular item. A table of the percentage of discrepancy of responses between real and ideal role perceptions for all 49 role inventory items is presented in Appendix B.

The McNemar Test for Significance of Changes was used as a statistical validation of the real-ideal role discrepancies obtained by the use of the cross-tabulation chart. It was also used to determine whether the discrepancies reported were changes in a particular direction, here, towards an increase in the Shared Equally response category in ideal role perceptions.

The McNemar Test is generally suited for before and after research designs in which an attempt is made to determine the effect of an experimental variable on a sample. If a significant change

has taken place from one time period to the next, it can be assumed that the variable was a possible cause of change.

With the use of McNemar in data analysis, two-by-two tables are constructed so that the number of respondents who change from one observation to the next can be determined. The table also reveals whether the change is in a particular direction. Primary assumptions underlying the McNemar Test include that the samples are related in some meaningful way. Ideally, each person serves as his or her own control in the before and after design (Champion, 1970).

Although this study is not an experimental study, the McNemar test is suited for analysis of the data. Responses were elicited from the same population of foster parents on two sections of the questionnaire items, real and ideal role perceptions. The questionnaire items for foster parents' responses to real and ideal role perceptions were identical. The McNemar analysis allows for an evaluation of the number of "changed" responses between real and ideal role perceptions and of the way in which the responses changed from one section to the next.

The two-by-two tables constructed in the McNemar analysis indicate the number of foster parents who responded that a role prescription was a responsibility of either the Foster Parent or the Social Worker in real role perceptions and changed to report that that the role prescription should be Shared Equally in ideal role perceptions. The tables also indicate the number of foster parents who stated a role prescription was a responsibility Shared Equally

in perceptions of real role performance and changed to Foster Parent or Social Worker in ideal role perceptions.

After the number of changed responses is determined, a χ^2 value is calculated for the purpose of determining the probability that the change in responses is greater than would occur by chance.

In this analysis, the Foster Parent and Social Worker response categories were assigned a value of 1 and the Shared Equally category responses were assigned a value of 2. Two-by-two tables were constructed and McNemar values were calculated.

After the analyses of percentages of discrepancy of respondents and the McNemar data, it appeared that further exploration of the foster parent responses of role discrepancies would provide important information. Perhaps, it was thought, there was an underlying dimension of degree of responsibility desired by the foster parent: complete, shared or none.

The data were analyzed to evaluate on which items the shift towards the Shared Equally category in ideal role performance came from the Foster Parent Category in real role performance and those items on which the increase came from the Social Worker Category in real role perceptions.

The Wilcoxon Matched Pairs-Signed Ranks test was used to further analyze and refine the data. Wilcoxon is suited for research designs in which a difference in direction and magnitude of changes are indicated. Changes are ranked in positive or negative directions of difference in terms of the absolute size.

In this analysis, the dimension ranked was the degree of perceived responsibility for a role item, ranking from total responsibility of the foster parent, to shared participation, to total responsibility of the social worker. It was designed to evaluate the degree of responsibility foster parents perceive they actually have and should ideally have, as well as the degree of shift in responsibility reported between real and ideal role perceptions. The Foster Parent category was assigned a value of one, the Shared Equally category a value of two and the Social Worker category a value of three. The Neither category was deleted. A negative rank score was obtained if a response changed from the Foster Parent category in real role perceptions in the direction of Shared Equally or Social Worker in the ideal role perceptions. A positive rank score was obtained if a response changed in the direction of the Social Worker category in real role perceptions towards the Shared Equally or Foster Parent categories in ideal role perceptions.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This portion of the report is aimed at viewing foster parent perceptions of role responsibilities in both real and ideal role performances and identifying areas of discrepancy between foster parent perceptions of the real and ideal roles.

Identification of Role Responsibilities: Ideal Role Perceptions

The initial question which guided the study was what responsibilities do foster parents ideally perceive to be a part of their role, the role of social workers or roles that should be shared equally between foster parents and social workers?

The responding foster parents identified six role items as being primarily a Foster Parent responsibility in their perceptions of ideal role performance. This was determined by viewing those role items on which 55% or above of the foster parents stated the item was ideally a Foster Parent responsibility. Fifty-five percent was chosen rather arbitrarily because it was a clear majority and was a natural break point in the data. Table 1 indicates these items from the role inventory and the percentage of foster parents that responded it should be a Foster Parent responsibility.

Foster parents identified six role items as being primarily a responsibility of the Social Worker. These items included 55% or above response in the Social Worker category in ideal role perceptions. Table 2 indicates these items from the role inventory

TABLE 1

Role Items Identified as Foster Parent Responsibilities--Ideal

Item #	Role Description	Percentage Response in Foster Parent Category--Ideal
35	Taking care of the day to day needs of the child	93.3%
48	Organizing most of the child's activities	79.0%
40	Acting as a teacher to the child	68.9%
77	Helping the foster parents' own children understand the foster care situation	68.3%
41	Having final authority to make decisions about discipline	59.8%
39	Deciding about the child's religious training	56.9%

TABLE 2
Role Items Identified as Social Worker Responsibilities--Ideal

Item #	Role Description	Percentage Response in Social Worker Category--Ideal
56	Working with the birth parents of foster children	84.1%
50	Helping birth parents face reality	82.1%
46	Arranging visits with birth parents	81.6%
70	Having appropriate contact with birth parents	78.4%
82	Handling calls from birth parents	65.7%
47	Arranging special services the child may need	55.2%

and the percentage of foster parents who responded it should be a Social Worker responsibility. As can be seen, the largest percentage of foster parents feel that matters involving the child's birth parents are Social Worker responsibilities.

Foster parents identified 23 role items as responsibilities ideally to be Shared Equally between foster parents and social workers. These items included a 55% or above response in the Shared Equally category in ideal role perceptions. Table 3 indicates these items from the role inventory and the percentage of foster parents who responded that the item should be a responsibility that is Shared Equally. These items will be further discussed in the final section of the report.

Role Discrepancies

The second question guiding the study was: to what extent is there a discrepancy between foster parents' perceptions of real and ideal role responsibilities?

The third question guiding the study was: in what areas of foster care practice do foster parents perceive discrepancy between what they see as the real and ideal role performances?

Percentages of Discrepancy

Initial data analysis reveals that there is a discrepancy between what foster parents perceive to be the real and ideal status of role performance. The first method of analysis was evaluation of the percentage of respondents who gave different responses for

TABLE 3

Role Items Identified as Responsibilities
to be Shared Equally--Ideal

Item #	Role Description	Percentage Response in Shared Equally Category--Ideal
51	Helping the foster child understand why he/she is in the foster home	82.1%
76	Being frank and honest about child	81.4%
65	Feeling that one's decisions will be respected	77.6%
80	Participating in planning conferences about a child	77.0%
66	Accepting birth parents as important to child	76.0%
69	Understanding the duties of the Foster Care Review Board	75.0%
72	Helping the child overcome previous harmful experiences	75.0%
44	Being tolerant of values other than one's own	74.7%
74	Dealing with children whose behavior is a problem	74.0%
78	Being able to cope with frustration	71.0%
64	Knowing when to get outside help concerning a child	70.6%
43	Actively working on public relations to promote positive image of foster parenthood	69.9%
52	Knowing who makes what decisions about the child	68.9%

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Item #	Role Description	Percentage Response in Shared Equally Category--Ideal
61	Being involved in foster parent organizations	66.3%
55	Helping the child cope with feelings involved in being away from original home	70.1%
67	Developing a plan for each child	63.7%
38	Acting as an advisor to child	63.1%
63	Transporting child to appointments	58.4%
75	Making decisions about child's future	57.1%
71	Refraining from discussing child's background among friends	56.6%
45	Trying to influence agency policy in interest of foster parents	56.3%
68	Having authority to make certain important decisions about child	56.0%
81	Re-evaluating how placement is going at least every six months	55.0%

the real and ideal categories. (See methodology section for method of calculation.) Such discrepancies were reported to some degree on each of the 49 role inventory items. The percentage of discrepancy ranged from 32.60% of respondents on Item #69, Understanding the duties of the Foster Care Review Board, to 3.93% of respondents on Item #57, Being a psychological counselor or therapist for the child.

A table of percentages of discrepancy of response between real and ideal role performance for all 49 items of the role inventory is presented in Appendix A. Table 4 indicates the ten role items on which foster parents reported the highest discrepancies between perceptions of real and ideal role performance.

A careful analysis of the specific distribution of foster parent responses (refer to Table 5) reveals a noteworthy pattern. Those role items which foster parents perceived to be ideally either primarily a Foster Parent or Social Worker role, i.e., those with a relatively high number of responses on one or the other of these categories, and relatively low on the Shared Equally category) were among the items of lowest discrepancy between real and ideal role performance. Conversely, items which tended to be answered as ideally Shared Equally were more likely to be seen as being performed in reality by either the Social Worker or the Foster Parent.

As can be seen, the Shared Equally category is considerably greater for the ideal than for the real role perceptions on each of the ten highest discrepancy items. Further analysis of responses to

TABLE 4
Role Items with Highest Percentage of Respondents Reporting A
Discrepancy Between Real and Ideal Roles

Item #	Role Description	Percentage Reporting Discrepancy
69	Understanding duties of the Foster Care Review Board	32.60%
72	Helping child overcome harmful experiences	24.03%
66	Accepting birth parents as important to child	24.03%
67	Developing a plan for each child	23.52%
80	Participating in planning conferences about child	23.00%
81	Re-evaluating placement at least every 6 months	21.00%
68	Having authority for important decisions for child	21.00%
63	Transporting child to appointments	20.79%
64	Knowing when to get outside help for the child	20.58%
52	Knowing who makes what decisions about a child	20.38%

TABLE 5

Number of Responses and Percentages--Foster Parent
Perceptions in Real and Ideal Role Performance

Item #	Foster Parent	Social Worker	Shared Equally	Neither
69	Real--12(13%) Ideal-- 5(5.4%)	37(40.2%) 17(18.5%)	39(42.4%) 69(75.0%)	4(4.3%) 1(1.1%)
72	Real--48(46.2%) Ideal--26(25.0%)	2(1.9%) 0(0.0%)	53(51.2%) 78(75.0%)	
66	Real--16(15.4%) Ideal-- 7(6.7%)	25(24.0%) 13(12.5%)	54(51.9%) 79(76.0%)	8(7.7%) 5(4.8%)
67	Real--21(20.6%) Ideal--11(10.8%)	35(34.3%) 24(23.5%)	41(40.2%) 65(63.7%)	5(4.9%) 2(2.0%)
80	Real-- 2(2.0%) Ideal-- 3(3.0%)	45(45.0%) 19(19.0%)	50(50.0%) 77(77.0%)	2(2.0%) 1(1.0%)
81	Real-- 3(3.0%) Ideal-- 1(1.0%)	59(59.0%) 42(42.0%)	34(34.0%) 55(55.0%)	4(4.0%) 2(2.0%)
68	Real--30(30.0%) Ideal--31(31.0%)	33(33.0%) 12(12.0%)	36(36.0%) 56(56.0%)	1(1.0%) 1(1.0%)
63	Real--30(29.7%) Ideal--19(18.8%)	33(32.7%) 23(22.8%)	38(37.6%) 59(58.4%)	
64	Real--37(36.3%) Ideal--20(19.6%)	14(13.7%) 10 (9.8%)	51(50.0%) 72(70.6%)	
52	Real--19(18.4%) Ideal--16(15.5%)	31(30.1%) 15(14.6%)	50(48.5%) 71(68.9%)	3(2.9%) 1(1.0%)

the full inventory revealed that the Shared Equally category was greater in percentage response for ideal than for real role perceptions on 48 of the 49 role inventory items. No change was reported on Item #57, Being a psychological counselor or therapist for the child. On this item, the responses in the Social Worker and Foster Parent categories were approximately equal; the largest percentage of foster parents (36.3%) felt that this is a responsibility of neither the Foster Parent nor the Social Worker.

Ten of the 11 items with the largest increase in the Shared Equally category were those evaluated as having the highest overall discrepancy between perceived real and ideal role performances. The eleventh, #55, Helping the child cope with feelings involved in being away from the original home, was #31 on the discrepancy list. This seems to indicate that those role responsibilities which foster parents perceive to be less congruent with their ideal perceptions of the way in which the role should be fulfilled are those in which they advocate greater mutual participation among foster parents and social workers.

The first hypothesis of the study was: There are discrepancies between foster parents' perceptions of real and ideal role performance.

The analysis of data indicates discrepancies do exist between foster parents' perceptions of real and ideal role performance. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported by an analysis of the frequency distribution of foster parents' perceptions of role performance.

McNemar Test Results: Increased Shared Participation

Two research questions guided this section of the study:

How do foster parents' perceptions of role responsibilities change from reports of real to reports of ideal role performance?

Are the discrepancies between foster parents' perceptions of real and ideal role performance statistically significant?

The theoretical framework for the study suggests that the role responsibilities of foster parents in the present state of foster care practice would be incongruent with the foster parents' conceptions of the way in which they should fulfill responsibilities in the foster care system. The literature suggests a need for explicitly defined roles which more clearly coincide with foster parents' perceptions of their role obligations. The data analysis based upon percentage of discrepancy of respondents between real and ideal performance indicated that these foster parents perceive discrepancies in their conceptions of how foster care roles are to be fulfilled.

The theoretical material suggests as well that the current trend in foster care practice is towards a reduction of the imbalance of authority between foster parents and social workers and towards a greater level of shared participation in the diverse aspects of foster care practice. The data regarding percentage discrepancy also indicates that foster parents perceive a greater degree of shared participation between foster parents and social workers to be a more ideal state of role performance.

The statistical results of the McNemar analysis are shown in Table 6. As can be seen, 44 of the 49 role inventory items indicated role discrepancies with a statistically significant shift towards an increase in the Shared Equally category ($\alpha = .05$). Twenty-five of the role items had a statistical significance of less than .001. The 10 items of highest discrepancy of responses between real and ideal role perceptions were included in this group of items with a significance value less than .001.

Those items on which the X^2 values are listed as "binomial" are those items on which the number of changes between real and ideal role perceptions was less than 10. The computer program automatically calculated this more exact probability in such situations.

There was no significant change on four of the role inventory items. These included #35, Taking care of the day to day needs of the child; #46, Arranging birth parent visits; #57, Being a psychological counselor or therapist for the child and #70, Having appropriate contact with birth parents.

Nineteen of the items with a significance of at least .001 were those items ideally viewed as a role responsibility primarily to be Shared Equally between the foster parents and the social workers.

Table 7 indicates the number of changes from Foster Parent or Social Worker in real role perceptions to Shared Equally in ideal role perceptions and the number of changes from Shared Equally in real perceptions to Foster Parent or Social Worker in ideal perceptions for

TABLE 6
Results of McNemar Test

Item #	Role Description	Chi Square Value Z	P Value
#69	Understanding FCRB	22.321	.000
#72	Helping child overcome harmful experiences	22.042	.000
#55	Help child cope with feelings	20.346	.000
#80	Participating-planning	19.531	.000
#63	Transporting to appointments	17.391	.000
#64	When to get outside help	17.391	.000
#78	Cope with frustration	17.053	.000
#81	Reevaluating placement	17.053	.000
#67	Developing plan--child	16.000	.000
#66	Accepting birth parents	15.750	.000
#43	Public relations--positive foster parent image	15.429	.000
#73	Tolerating behavior of opposing values	15.059	.000
#52	Knowing who decides what	14.087	.000
#68	Authority to make decisions	13.885	.000
#42	Expert on children	12.500	.000
#74	Dealing with problem behavior	12.190	.000
#38	Advisor to child	12.000	.0005

TABLE 6 (Continued)

Item #	Role Description	Chi Square	
		Value Z	P Value
#49	Evaluating foster parent	11.529	.0005
#34	Arranging medical appointments	11.281	.0005
#53	Model--responsible adult	10.563	.0005
#71	Confidentiality of child	10.563	.0005
#44	Tolerating other values	9.333	.001
#45	Influence policy--foster parent interest	9.333	.001
#58	Evaluating social workers	Binomial	.001
#75	Decisions--child's future	9.333	.001
#62	Protecting foster child	9.091	.0015
#60	Training new foster parents	8.643	.0015
#61	Involved in foster parent organizations	8.450	.002
#77	Helping foster parents' own children understand	7.692	.003
#51	Helping foster child understand	7.579	.003
#59	Using FCRB--good service	6.750	.0045
#76	Frank and honest about child	6.750	.0045
#39	Deciding--child's religion	6.722	.005
#40	Teacher to child	6.667	.005
#54	Encouraging FC-BP contact	6.667	.005

TABLE 6 (Continued)

Item #	Role Description	Chi Square Value Z	P Value
#37	Child care knowledge	6.261	.006
#65	Decisions respected	5.818	.008
#36	Help child's identity development	5.786	.008
#79	Preplacement visits	Binomial	.008
#82	Handling BP calls	5.786	.008
#47	Arranging special services	5.500	.008
#48	Organizing activities	4.267	.018
#56	Working with birth parents	Binomial	.035
#50	Helping birth parents-- reality	Binomial	.035
#41	Final discipline decisions	2.722	.0495
#70	Appropriate birth parent contact	2.083	.0745
#46	Arranging birth parent visits	Binomial	.090
#57	Counselor or therapist	Binomial	.363

BP = birth parents

FC = foster child

TABLE 7

Changes in Role Perceptions

Role Item #	# Changes From FP or SW Real to Shared Equally Ideal	# Changes From Shared Equally Real to FP or SW Ideal	# Responses
69	27	1	87
72	24	0	103
55	25	1	105
80	29	3	95
63	22	1	101
64	22	1	102
78	19	0	99
81	19	0	95
67	23	2	97
66	25	3	95
43	20	1	97
73	17	0	89
52	21	2	100
68	23	3	99
42	17	1	73
74	19	2	102
34	26	6	105
38	23	4	103
49	16	1	96

TABLE 7 (Continued)

Role Item #	# Changes From FP or SW Real to Shared Equally Ideal	# Changes From Shared Equally Real to FP or SW Ideal	# Responses
53	15	1	104
71	15	1	95
44	18	3	98
45	14	1	91
58	10	0	51
75	18	3	95

the 25 items with a significance of .001 or less. Those foster parents who responded in the Neither category in either real or ideal role perceptions were deleted from this analysis.

As can be observed, the number of changes from either the Foster Parent or the Social Worker category in real role perceptions to the Shared Equally category in ideal role perceptions is significantly greater on these items than is the number of changes from Shared Equally.

Analysis of the McNemar data confirms that foster parents perceive discrepancies in real and ideal role performance and provides statistical support for the first hypothesis. Those items on which there was the greatest discrepancy between real and ideal role performance also tended to indicate the greatest shift towards the Shared Equally category in ideal role perceptions.

The principle question guiding the use of the McNemar Test refers to the way in which foster parents' responses change between their reported perceptions of real and ideal role performance. Data analysis indicates that the reported discrepancies between real and ideal role perceptions changed in the direction of increased shared participation between foster parents and social workers. Thus, the second hypothesis is supported.

Another question guiding this portion of the report concerns the areas of foster care practice in which foster parents perceive discrepancies between real and ideal role perceptions. The analysis of discrepancy indicated that these foster parents perceive some

discrepancy in every area of foster care practice evaluated in the study. The results of the McNemar analysis also indicate that foster parents perceive discrepancies in a number of areas of foster care practice.

Those items significant in the McNemar analysis of increased shared participation include areas such as working directly with the foster child and his or her emotional or behavioral problems, professional relationships, and evaluation of foster parents, the placement and the social worker. Also included in the discrepancy items are administrative and decision-making matters, the needs of the foster child and the foster parents and seeing the importance of the birth parents.

Wilcoxon Analysis: Changes in the Degree of Foster Parent Responsibility from Real to Ideal Role Perceptions

The seventh question guiding the research study was: are there patterns in foster parent perceptions of role discrepancies which suggest specific needs? This portion of the report is aimed at further exploration and discussion of the results of the role discrepancy analysis.

Further examination of the data suggested that the increase in the Shared Equally Category in ideal role perceptions did not indicate that these foster parents wish for a greater amount of their own responsibility in all areas of foster care practice.

The changes reported on the 10 highest discrepancy items indicated that the increase in the Shared Equally category in

perceptions of ideal role performance came from a shift from the number of responses in the Foster Parent category in real role perceptions on some role inventory items and from a shift in the number of responses in the Social Worker category on other items.

On Items #80, Participating in planning conferences about a child; #81, Re-evaluating how a placement is going at least every six months; #68 Having the authority to make certain important decisions about a child and #52, Knowing who makes what decisions about a child, the increase in the Shared Equally category in the ideal role perceptions came from a reduction in the Social Worker category in real role performance. These items relate to administrative matters such as decision-making and planning about the foster child. The responses seemed to indicate that the greatest percentages of these foster parents desire to have greater input and participation in planning and decision-making matters than they perceive they actually have.

On Items #72, Helping the child to overcome previous harmful experiences and #64, Knowing when to get outside help concerning a child, the increase in the Shared Equally category in the ideal role performance came largely from a decrease in the Foster Parent category in the real role perceptions. These items suggest that the foster parents are struggling with the difficult tasks of recognizing the child's problems, coping with and aiding the child in his or her

emotional difficulties. Also inferred is that these foster parents are dissatisfied with social worker activity in these areas and desire greater social worker involvement.

The Wilcoxon Matched Pairs-Signed Ranks test was used as a statistical guide to further explore the patterns of shift in response categories on role discrepancy items.

The Wilcoxon analysis was set up to find those items on which there was a significant change towards foster parents' assumption of greater exclusive responsibility between perceptions of real and ideal role performance.

In effect, the analysis asked whether the foster parent or social worker side of the scale was reduced more in reaching a state of equal sharing. In this method of analysis, data were recorded and ranked on a single dimension of degree of responsibility. A Foster Parent response showed a preference for full foster parent responsibility. A Shared Equally response indicated some foster parent responsibility and some social worker responsibility. A Social Worker response indicated virtually no foster parent responsibility. The shifts from real to ideal which were in the direction of the Foster Parent category were assigned positive ranks. Each shift in response from real to ideal role perceptions was then coded as increasing or decreasing by one or two ranks or remaining the same.

Those items on which there was a greater number of positive ranks in the comparison of real and ideal role performance would

indicate those role responsibilities on which foster parents as a group perceive a decreased amount of social worker responsibility in arriving at mutual participation to be desirable. These items would indicate areas in which an increase in foster parent responsibility is seen as a more ideal state of role performance.

Those items on which there was a greater number of negative ranks would indicate the role areas in which the foster parents as a group perceive a decrease in the amount of foster parent responsibility and an increase in social worker responsibility in arriving at shared participation to be more ideal. This analysis then would indicate areas of foster care responsibilities in which foster parents want to become more involved as well as areas in which they perceive their responsibilities need to be decreased, or aided to a greater extent by the social workers.

The results of the Wilcoxon analysis indicated 24 items on which the change in the degree of foster parent responsibility between perceptions of real and ideal role performance was statistically significant. An .05 level of confidence was assigned in this analysis. These 24 items from the role inventory, the assigned Z score from the Wilcoxon test, and significance values are presented in Table 8.

Seven of the 10 highest discrepancy items were significant in the Wilcoxon analysis. The three discrepancy items which did not have a significant difference in the change of foster parent responsibility were #66, Accepting the birth parents as important to the

TABLE 8

Results of Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test

Item #	Role Description	Z Value	1-Tailed P Value
80	Part. in planning conference	-4.127	.000
72	Helping child overcome past	-3.571	.000
68	Authority for certain decisions	-3.393	.0005
61	Involvement in FP organizations	-3.285	.0005
54	Encouraging BP-FC contact	-2.864	.002
78	Able to cope with frustration	-2.800	.0025
81	Periodic re-evaluation	-2.800	.0025
40	Acting as child's teacher	-2.689	.005
37	Knowledge of child care	-2.571	.005
36	Helping child's identity development	-2.556	.0055
79	Preplacement visits	-2.521	.006
74	Behavior problem--child	-2.485	.0065
77	Helping FP children understand	-2.417	.008
53	Modeling responsible adulthood	-2.414	.008
34	Arranging medical appointments	-2.407	.008
52	Knowing who decides what	-2.372	.009
55	Help child cope with feelings	-2.270	.016
73	Tolerating behavior of opposing values	-2.156	.0155

TABLE 8 (Continued)

Item #	Role Description	Z Value	1-Tailed P Value
64	Knowing when to get outside help	-2.019	.0265
82	Handling BP calls	-1.846	.0375
38	Acting as child's advisor	-1.753	.040
69	Understanding FCRB duties	-1.676	.047
56	Working with birth parents	-1.645	.050

FP = foster parent

BP = birth parents

child; #63, Transporting the child to appointments; and #67, Developing a plan for each child. Each of these items was considered to be a role responsibility which ideally should be Shared Equally between the foster parent and the social worker. However, the changes in percentage of responses between real and ideal role perceptions appeared to be the result of equal shifts from the Social Worker and Foster Parent categories to the Shared Equally category.

On these items, the number of negative and positive ranks assigned in the Wilcoxon analysis were approximately equal as well. The number of positive ranks was slightly higher on #66 and #67. It would seem that #67, Developing a plan for each child, would have been a role item on which the foster parents might have wished to reduce the degree of social worker responsibility and increase the foster parent responsibility. The fact that this was not the case may stem from the notion that both do in actuality develop individually derived plans for the child even though these plans may not be mutually agreed upon.

All of the items significant according to the Wilcoxon analysis were significant in the McNemar analysis.

Table 9 presents the 13 role items on which the number of negative ranks was greater than the number of positive ranks, indicating the role items on which foster parents report a need for greater social worker involvement in the sharing of role responsibilities.

Those role items on which the increase in the Shared Equally category in ideal role perceptions came principally from a reduction

TABLE 9
Wilcoxon Results--Role Items on Which Degree of Foster Parent Responsibility Decreased

Item #	Role Description	Negative Positive Ranks	Ranks	N	Percentage Shared Equally on Ideal
72	Helping the child overcome past	22	2	103	75.0%
61	Involvement in Foster Parent Organizations	19	2	95	66.3%
78	Being able to cope with frustration	17	3	99	71.0%
40	Acting as teacher to child	14	2	98	25.2%
37	Good knowledge re: caring for children	19	5	101	51.0%
36	Helping child's identity development	13	2	104	50.5%
74	Dealing with child behavior problems	17	4	102	74.0%
77	Helping foster parent's children understand	12	2	99	28.8%

TABLE 9 (Continued)

Item #	Role Description	Negative Positive Ranks	Ranks	N	Percentage Shared Equally on Ideal
53	Modeling responsible adulthood	15	2	104	52.9%
55	Help child cope with feelings	21	6	105	70.1%
73	Tolerating behavior opposing values	14	4	89	49.5%
64	Knowing when to get outside help	18	8	102	70.6%
58	Acting as child's advisor	20	8	103	63.1%

of the Foster Parent category fall within three broad areas of foster care practice.

Nine of the items are aspects of foster care practice relating to working with the foster child, to role relationships regarding direct influence upon the foster child and his or her adjustment and development in the foster care situation.

Two items regard specific foster parent needs: involvement in foster parent organizations and helping the foster parents' own children understand the foster care situation. The latter item was not perceived as a role responsibility which should ideally be Shared Equally.

Two items are aspects of foster care practice regarding professional relationships: being able to cope with frustration and tolerating behavior opposing one's own values and wishes. This would seem to indicate that foster parents need help in coping with an inordinate amount of frustration. Also indicated is that foster parents would enlist more guidance and support from the social worker in understanding and working with behavior in conflict with their own standards and behaviors.

Table 10 presents the 11 role items on which the number of positive ranks was greater than the number of negative ranks, indicating those role items on which the foster parents, as a group, report a need for a greater amount of their own involvement in the sharing of role responsibilities.

TABLE 10

Wilcoxon Results--Role Items on Which Degree of Foster Parent Responsibility Increased

Item #	Role Description	Negative Ranks	Positive Ranks	N	Percentage Shared Equally on Ideal
80	Participating in planning conferences	3	30	97	77.0%
68	Authority for certain important decisions	4	24	99	56.0%
54	Encouraging birth parent contact	2	15	90	37.3%
81	Periodic placement re-evaluation	2	18	95	55.0%
79	Using preplacement visits	0	8	80	52.6%
34	Arranging medical appointments	12	27	105	48.6%
52	Knowing who decides what	5	18	100	68.9%
59	Using FCRB for good service	2	11	83	42.3%
82	Handling birth parent calls	5	12	99	22.2%

TABLE 10 (Continued)

Item #	Role Description	Negative Ranks	Positive Ranks	N	Percentage Shared Equally on Ideal
69	Understanding duties of FCRB	8	23	87	75.0%
56	Working with birth parents	2	9	106	12.1%

Five of these items were among the 10 highest discrepancy items. All were significant in the McNemar analysis.

Three of these role items relate to involvement with the foster child's birth parents. None of these were among those role items designated as role responsibilities primarily to be Shared Equally between foster parents and social workers. However, the results tend to indicate to some extent that these foster parents are willing to assume more involvement in sustaining contact with birth parents and including them in the ongoing foster care situation.

The remaining eight items relate to administrative, planning and decision-making aspects of foster care practice. The item with the highest Z value, Participating in planning conferences, was the fifth highest discrepancy item and among those role responsibilities indicated as primarily to be Shared Equally. Of importance is the foster parent perception of the need to reduce the degree of social worker responsibility for this role item and include foster parents to a greater extent.

Two items concern having knowledge and authority about decision-making processes. Both items concerning use of the Foster Care Review Board were significant in this analysis, indicating that these foster parents would ideally become more involved in this function. These foster parents seem to perceive greater responsibility in using preplacement visits and re-evaluating the placement to be more ideal.

That Item #34, Arranging medical appointments for the child, was significant in this analysis indicates that this is a duty in

which the foster parents perceive greater responsibility for themselves to be more desirable, possibly due to timing and convenience of appointments as well as the wish to have more knowledge regarding the child's medical needs.

These needs seem to indicate that the foster parents who participated in this study perceive they are not granted as much responsibility in administrative and decision-making placement matters as they would deem appropriate. The results suggest that the foster parents do perceive their ideal role in the placement process to be more of a collegial nature and that they wish to become involved in the broader concerns of the foster care placement.

Foster Parent Agreement on Role Responsibilities

A final question guiding the research study was: to what extent do foster parents agree on the responsibilities perceived to be a part of their role as foster parents?

On 35 of the 49 role items, the foster parents had 55% or above agreement regarding who should ideally be responsible for the duties. These 35 include items in which the modal response was Social Worker, Foster Parent or Shared Equally. The largest number of items with 55% or above agreement in response were in the Shared Equally category in ideal role perceptions.

Table 11 presents those items with less cohesiveness in ideal role perceptions and the number of responses and percentages in each category.

TABLE 11

Responses and Percentages--Foster Parent
Perceptions of Real and Ideal Role Performance

Item #	Role Description			
	Foster Parent	Social Worker	Shared Equally	Neither
34	Arranging medical appointments			
	Real--31(29.5)	43(41.0)	31(29.5)	
	Ideal--31(29.5)	23(21.9)	51(48.6)	
36	Helping the child develop her/his identity			
	Real--60(57.1)	1(1.0)	43(41.0)	
	Ideal--49(46.7)	3(2.9)	53(50.5)	3(2.9)
37	Having a good knowledge of how to care for children			
	Real--63(60.6)	1(1.0)	40(38.5)	
	Ideal--46(44.2)	2(1.9)	53(51.0)	
42	Being an expert about children			
	Real--24(25.0)	16(16.7)	34(35.4)	21(21.9)
	Ideal--13(13.5)	12(12.5)	52(54.2)	19(19.8)
49	Evaluating how well foster parents are doing as foster parents			
	Real-- 7(6.6)	65(61.3)	26(24.5)	8(7.5)
	Ideal-- 1(.9)	56(52.8)	43(40.6)	6(5.7)
53	Being a model of responsible adulthood for the child			
	Real--58(55.8)	5(4.8)	41(39.4)	
	Ideal--45(43.3)	4(3.8)	55(52.9)	
54	Encouraging contact between birth parents and the foster child			
	Real-- 3(2.9)	63(61.8)	26(25.5)	9(8.8)
	Ideal-- 6(5.9)	50(49.0)	38(37.3)	8(7.8)
57	Being a psychological counselor or therapist for the child			
	Real--12(11.8)	24(23.5)	28(27.5)	34(35.3)
	Ideal--10(9.8)	27(26.5)	28(27.5)	37(36.3)
58	Evaluating how well social workers are doing their jobs			
	Real--24(23.1)	10(9.6)	18(17.3)	51(49.0)
	Ideal--26(25.0)	3(2.9)	37(35.6)	38(36.5)

TABLE 11 (Continued)

Item #	Role Description	Foster	Social	Shared	Neither
		Parent	Worker	Equally	
59	Making use of the FCRB to insure good service to the child				
	Real--9(9.3)	48(49.5)	27(27.8)	11(11.3)	
	Ideal--9(9.3)	40(41.2)	41(42.3)	7(7.2)	
60	Training new foster parent				
	Real--7(6.9)	35(34.3)	33(32.4)	24(23.5)	
	Ideal--3(2.9)	33(32.4)	47(46.1)	19(18.6)	
62	Protecting the foster child from the agency				
	Real--20(23.0)	14(16.1)	16(18.4)	36(41.4)	
	Ideal-- 7(8.0)	12(13.8)	27(31.0)	41(47.1)	
73	Tolerating behavior which opposes one's own values and wishes				
	Real--52(51.5)	4(4.0)	33(32.7)	12(11.9)	
	Ideal--39(38.6)	1(1.0)	50(49.5)	11(10.9)	
79	Using preplacement visits to the foster home to prepare the child and the foster family				
	Real--	45(46.4)	38(39.2)	14(14.4)	
	Ideal--	36(37.1)	51(52.6)	9(9.3)	

The responses on Items 36, 37, 42 and 53 indicate considerable variability concerning particular responsibilities in the relationship with the child. These items generally concern the influence of adults on the foster child. The responses on these items may be due to the foster parent conception that they are the major day-to-day influence on the child and therefore have more responsibility in these areas. There is variability concerning evaluation procedures, training new foster parents and using the Foster Care Review Board.

The foster parents were in greater agreement in perceptions of real role responsibilities on 19 items of the role inventory and in ideal perceptions on 30 items. The items on which foster parents had greater agreement on real role performance than on how the roles should ideally be carried out tended to be those items of lowest discrepancy.

Foster parents had a more cohesive view of role responsibilities in what they perceive to be the ideal state of role performance on 9 of the 10 highest discrepancy items and on 21 of the 25 items of highest significance in the McNemar analysis.

On #81, Re-evaluating how the placement is going at least every six months, the foster parents were in greater agreement in perceptions of real role performance.

The remaining three role discrepancy items on which the foster parents were more cohesive in their views of real role responsibilities were #49, Evaluating how well foster parents are doing;

#75, Evaluating how well social workers are doing and #53, Being a model of responsible adulthood for the child.

The data suggest that the roles on which foster parents have greater agreement of ideal performance are those items of greatest discrepancy between real and ideal role performances. It appears that role responsibilities concerning evaluation matters are not well clarified for these foster parents. There seemed to be no other patterns among the items with greater agreement in real or ideal role perceptions.

The responses suggest that foster parents as a group have a clearer conception of their ideal roles than might originally have been assumed.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Restatement of the Problem

The central purposes of the study were to examine the following: 1) foster parents' perceptions of their roles 2) whether or not foster parents perceive discrepancies between their perceptions of actual and ideal role performance and 3) the areas of foster care practice in which there are discrepancies between perceived real and ideal role performance.

Summary of Procedures Used

The subjects of this study were foster parents. The study was concerned with the responses of 115 foster parents on a 49-item role prescription inventory.

The data obtained were analyzed using three techniques. Percentages of discrepancy were obtained to determine the percentage of respondents who changed between real and ideal role perceptions. The McNemar Test was used as a statistical validation of discrepancies and to determine whether the responses among the discrepancies changed in any particular direction. The Wilcoxon test was used to determine the degree of change in foster parents' assumption of responsibility between real and ideal role performance.

Principal Findings

The data support the hypothesis that foster parents perceive discrepancies between the ways the roles in the foster care system are actually fulfilled and the ways the roles should ideally be carried out.

The second hypothesis generated in the course of the study is supported as well. The hypothesis stated that foster parents' reports of discrepancies would indicate that increased levels of shared participation in role performance would be perceived as a more ideal state of functioning in foster care practice.

The third portion of the study revealed the areas of role performance in which foster parents as a group perceive a reduction of the amount of their responsibility to be more ideal and the areas in which they perceive assumption of a greater amount of foster parent responsibility to be more ideal.

Conclusions and Discussion

The prevailing view of good foster care practice emphasizes mutual participation and cooperation between foster parents and social workers. The importance of a collegial relationship is stressed. The foster care literature indicated that a collegial relationship is more of an actuality in theory than in practice.

The data reveal that the foster parents who participated in this study see responsibilities ideally being in line with the theoretical notion of shared participation. The largest number of role items were designated as responsibilities which should be Shared Equally between foster parents and social workers.

The items the foster parents designated as responsibilities which should ideally be Shared Equally involve diverse aspects of foster care practice. Among these role items are those which concern direct influence upon and involvement with the foster child. These foster parents see the importance of shared involvement in dealing with the emotional and behavioral problems the foster child may experience during placement. In their view, both the foster parent and social worker will ideally become advisors to the child, helping the foster child understand and adjust to the foster family placement. The foster parent and social worker will become associates in approaching the child's problems.

Most of the role prescriptions concerning birth parents were not seen as responsibilities which should be Shared Equally. However, these foster parents seem to realize the importance of sharing in acceptance of the importance the birth parents have for the foster child.

The foster parent view of the necessity for mutual cooperation extends to placement planning and case management issues. These foster parents see that there should be equal sharing in the degrees of knowledge, authority and involvement in making decisions and planning for the foster child. Included as well in the shared responsibilities are evaluation and review concerns, particularly the use of the Foster Care Review Board.

In addition, the foster parents believe that concern for the foster parent position must be Shared Equally. Advocacy for foster

parents is seen as a concern in which both the fosterparent and the social worker should be actively involved. This includes participation in the formulation of agency policy, in development of a positive public image of the foster parent role and involvement in foster parent organizations.

Responsibilities concerning professional relations are among the areas in which mutual participation is stressed. These foster parents see the importance of honest, reciprocal communication about the foster child. In their view, foster parents and social workers must be mutually tolerant of value, opinion and behavioral differences. They see that amounts of frustration should be balanced and that both should respect the confidentiality of the foster child's situation.

The theoretical base of the study implied that foster parents generally assume their positions without clear knowledge of the responsibilities they are expected to assume. The essence of their relationship to the foster child, the birth parents, the social worker and the agency was seen as equally unclear. It was indicated that the expectations of the foster parent role would often be incompatible with foster parents' own perceptions of how the role should be fulfilled. Also implied was that there will be incongruities in the actual and preferred ways that roles are fulfilled.

The study confirms that the role responsibilities of foster parents and social workers in the present mode of foster care practice are incongruent with foster parent conceptions of the ways in

which the roles should ideally be fulfilled. The foster parents reported some discrepancies between real and ideal role perceptions on all but one of the 49 prescriptive role statements. Incongruities were recognized in every facet of foster care practice examined in the study.

The percentage of responses in the Shared Equally category was higher for the ideal than for the real role perceptions on all of the role items. Forty-four of the 49 role statements were statistically significant in the shifts towards greater shared participation in ideal role performance. The items with the greatest increases in response in the Shared Equally category were those items on which foster parents reported the greatest real-ideal discrepancies.

It can be inferred that the foster parents, viewed as a group, see the roles in foster care services as involving mutual participation and cooperation. The discrepancies the foster parents reported between perceptions of real and ideal role performance were consistent in the expression of the need to increase shared responsibility in role performance. The results confirm that the notion of shared participation is much more of an actuality in theory than in practice.

One underlying assumption of the study was that the foster parent role lacks clarity. The results of this study indicate that the ideal role of foster parents is more clearly defined than would have originally been assumed. This is inferred from the large

percentage in agreement of response on role items designated as primarily Foster Parent, Social Worker or Shared Equally responsibilities. The areas of foster care practice which seem least well clarified for the foster parents are placement and performance evaluation issues and responsibility for foster parent training.

The role prescriptions on which foster parents were in greatest agreement in perceptions of ideal role performance were also those on which the greatest discrepancies were reported. Given the projected consequences of unresolved role problems, this has particular relevance for the foster parent-social worker relationship. The gap between foster parents' perceptions of their ideal involvement in foster care service and of their actual involvement will probably have adverse effects on the foster parents' abilities to provide care and help. A productive, effective relationship with the foster child will most likely be deterred by the responses to their role limitations. Of great importance is the notion that these incongruities might well produce conflict in the working relationship with social workers.

It is possible that the agency has defined an acceptable role for the foster parents studied. If this is the case, the results indicate that the expectation for performance and the policies conveyed to the foster parents are inconsistent with the way in which the foster parent role is actually fulfilled. This study has not taken into account the social worker perceptions of the roles in foster care practice. Therefore, it is not known whether the social

workers' views of role expectations coincide or conflict with the views of the foster parents. Social workers may have very different conceptions of the foster parent role. Opposing perspectives would then only increase the strain that foster parents experience.

The data suggests that this group of foster parents perceives imbalances of authority and responsibility in their relationship with social workers. Their ideal views of foster care practice suggest that they would seek to reduce these imbalances.

There seemed to be an indication of dissatisfaction with the degree of social worker responsibility in some areas of foster care practice. There appeared to be dissatisfaction with the amounts of foster parent responsibility in other areas.

Many of the role prescriptions on which these foster parents indicated a need for a reduced amount of foster parent responsibility concern direct involvement with the foster child. It might be inferred from the data that these are areas of role obligations in which these foster parents are dissatisfied with the amount and kind of social worker activity.

The child in the foster care placement has a need for nurturance and stability many times beyond that of another child. The stresses of normal childhood development in themselves are difficult to master. When foster care placement is threatened and then actualized, the resulting changes may aggrandize the child's emotional and developmental crises. The foster child often lives in a constant state of insecurity. Facets of guilt, depression and other

psychological adversities are expected reactions to separation from birth parents and placement in foster family care. The child's emotional reactions are often manifested in problematic behaviors. Coping with and alleviating these problems become enormous, complex responsibilities for those involved with the child. Without adequate support and knowledge of child rearing techniques, foster parents are thwarted in their ability to deal with these problems.

The foster parents studied feel that they have too much isolated responsibility for dealing with these particular matters. Their responses indicate they would increase the social worker participation in acting as teachers, advisors and role models for the child. In a similar vein, the foster parents feel that they are expected to have greater knowledge of how to manage the emotional problems of the child than they have. They feel that the social worker should participate more directly and frequently in assessing the child's needs and seeking remediation of the difficulties the child experiences.

It might be inferred that foster parents are frustrated with the limited knowledge and skills they have for dealing with the emotional and behavioral problems of foster children. The foster parents indicate a need for greater social worker involvement, both in increasing the foster parent understanding of the child and developing their capabilities in dealing with the child.

These data point to the crucial need for an increase in pre-placement preparation, in differential placement and in continuing

foster parent education. The results suggest that the foster parents perceive they are inadequately prepared to deal with the special problems of the foster child, that these responsibilities are too great without an increase in social worker participation.

As noted in the previous chapters, the role of foster parent is difficult. Throughout the placement process foster parents need emotional support and aid in adjusting to the requirements of the role. The foster parent needs to feel respected. The foster parents studied seem to see the social worker as being isolated from foster parent needs. They expressed a need for greater social worker responsibility in advocacy for foster parents. The foster parents indicated a need for greater social worker involvement in helping them cope with frustrations. Ideally, social worker involvement in foster parent organizations would be increased.

The theoretical base of the study also implied that foster parents have traditionally been isolated from the larger concerns of foster care practice. Involvement of foster parents in administrative functions has been limited. The foster parents in this study reported role discrepancies in this area of foster care practice. The discrepancies reported suggest that foster parents perceive unacceptable limitations on their responsibility in administrative matters.

The largest number of items on which these foster parents would increase the degree of their responsibility concerned administrative and decision-making matters. These foster parents see

the obligations and responsibilities of their role as extending to participation in planning for the foster child. It is suggested that they prefer greater degrees of authority and knowledge pertaining to processes of decision-making.

The foster parents generally did not see their role as requiring responsibility in working with the birth parents of the foster child. In spite of this, the results of the study indicate that many foster parents perceive an increase in their responsibility for birth parent matters as desirable. They reported that increased foster parent responsibility in the shared participation to be more ideal in three aspects of birth parent involvement: in encouraging contact between the foster child and birth parents, in handling telephone calls from the birth parents and in working with the birth parents. That the foster parents would reduce the social worker responsibility and increase their own indicates a realization of the necessity for continued involvement with the birth parents. Also suggested is their desire for more comprehensive involvement in the foster care service process. The foster parents' view of their role is of a collegial nature. The results of the study suggest, as implied by the literature, the overwhelming need for a revision of the foster parent-social worker relationship.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is that the sampling plan employed provides only limited grounds for generalization of the

findings. The sample consisted of foster parents from only one agency foster care program. The views described for these foster parents may not be generalizable to other foster parent populations. In addition, the demographic characteristics of the participating foster parents were not analyzed in this study. Therefore, it is not known if these foster parents are truly representative of the views of the entire population of Knox County foster parents.

Other limitations concern the research instrument. Some foster parents did not respond to all role items. Some responded to perceptions of real role performance but did not complete the portion of the instrument intended for ideal role performance. These incomplete responses were deleted in data analysis; therefore, the response rate is not consistent for all of the role prescription items. This has further implications for the generalizability of the study. The role inventory may have lended to foster parents checking in like manner on both sections of role perceptions, particularly if they tended towards a socially desirable response set.

A further limitation of the study is that neither reliability nor validity of the research instrument have been tested. It cannot be certain that foster parents perceived the role items to have the same meanings as did the researchers. In addition, foster parent perceptions of role performance were self-reported. A method of direct observation of foster parent activity in role performance might indicate different levels of involvement.

Recommendations

This study has not considered the social worker perceptions of role performance or compared social worker and foster parent views of role performance. Conflict between foster parents and social workers was the motivating factor for the Foster Care Improvement Project. This study did not include a measure of perceived conflict in the relationship of foster parents and social workers. It is a concern of the larger project to examine any cause and effect relationship between perceived role discrepancies and perceived conflict. One recommendation for further research would be to examine the discrepancies between foster parent and social worker perceptions of role performance. The examination of discrepancies in ideal role performance could further illuminate the extent of clarity in the foster parent role.

A second basis for further research would be to refine the role prescription inventory for use with other populations of foster parents. Use with larger populations and random sampling is particularly indicated.

Another recommendation for future research concerns further exploration of the suggested foster parent desire to become more involved in administrative, case management matters. More specific evaluation of the type of involvement foster parents desire in placement planning and decision-making is needed,

The results of the study have implications for agency operation, improved foster care practice, training and staff development.

One recommendation is that the agency provide more opportunities for foster parents to become involved in administrative matters. The agency might well consider developing a method of placement planning such as is recommended by Galaway. A more professional status for foster parents, in which they are actively involved in management decisions and joint planning, is indicated.

A second recommendation for improved foster care practice concerns continuing training for foster parents. There is a need for more advanced knowledge regarding management of the foster child's problems. Examination of the specific aspects of child-rearing in which foster parents need training could serve as a basis for designing groups suited to foster parents' educational needs. The study also suggests the need for greater emphasis on more accurate matching of foster parent capability and foster child needs as well as for increased foster parent education beginning in the screening process. The foster parent perspective which was prevalent in this study provides the basis for the recommendation that social workers increase the amount of activity with foster parents in focusing on the child's needs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE ROLE INVENTORY

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS THAT?

This list covers some of the details involved in providing foster family care. Please answer the three questions to the right for each item. If none of the choices is completely accurate, check (✓) the one which is closest to your viewpoint. This is not a "test"--it is a chance for you to say how you see things and how you think that they should be.

	IN REALITY, WHO ACTUALLY HAS THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS?				WHO SHOULD IDEALLY HAVE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS?				HOW STRONGLY DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE?
	Foster Parent	Social Worker	Shared Equally	Neither is Responsible	Foster Parent	Social Worker	Shared Equally	Neither is Responsible	
34. Arranging medical appointments.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
35. Taking care of the day-to-day needs of the child.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
36. Helping the child develop her/his identity.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
37. Having a good knowledge of how to care for children.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
38. Acting as advisor to the child.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
39. Deciding about the child's religious training.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
40. Acting as teacher to the child.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
41. Having final authority to make decisions on discipline.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
42. Being an expert about children.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
43. Actively working on public relations to promote a positive image of foster parenthood.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
44. Being tolerant of values other than one's own.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
45. Trying to influence agency policy in the interest of foster parents.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
46. Arranging visits with the child's birth parents	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
47. Arranging special services the child may need.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
48. Organizing most of the child's activities.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

	IN REALITY, WHO ACTUALLY HAS THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS?				WHO SHOULD IDEALLY HAVE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS?				HOW STRONGLY DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE?		
	Foster Parent	Social Worker	Shared Equally	Neither Is Responsible	Foster Parent	Social Worker	Shared Equally	Neither Is Responsible	Not At All	Somewhat	Very
66. Accepting birth parents as important to the child.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
67. Developing a plan for each child.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
68. Having authority to make certain important decisions about the child.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
69. Understanding the duties of the Foster Care Review Board.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
70. Having appropriate contact with birth parents.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
71. Refraining from discussing children's backgrounds with friends.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
72. Helping the child overcome previous harmful experiences.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
73. Tolerating behavior which opposes one's own values and wishes.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
74. Dealing with children whose behavior is a problem.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
75. Making decisions about a child's future.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
76. Being frank and honest about a child.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
77. Helping foster parent's own children understand the foster care situation.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
78. Being able to cope with frustration.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
79. Using pre-placement visits to the foster home to prepare the child and foster family.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
80. Participating in planning conferences about a child.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
81. Re-evaluating how a placement is going at least every six months.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
82. Handling calls from birth parents.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

TABLE 12

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Discrepancy Between Foster Parents' Perceptions of Real and Ideal Role Performance

Item #	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Discrepancy	Role Description
69	32.60%	Understanding the duties of the F.C.R.B.
72	24.03%	Helping the child overcome previous harmful experiences
66	24.03%	Accepting birth parents as important to the child
67	23.52%	Developing a plan for each child
80	23.00%	Participating in planning conferences about a child
81	21.00%	Re-evaluating how a placement is going at least every six months
68	21.00%	Having authority to make certain important decisions for the child
63	20.79%	Transporting children to appointments
64	20.58%	Knowing when to get outside help concerning a child
52	20.38%	Knowing who makes what decisions about a child
42	19.27%	Being an expert on children
34	10.04%	Arranging medical appointments
78	19.00%	Being able to cope with frustration
38	18.44%	Acting as advisor to the child
43	18.44%	Actively working on public relations to promote a positive image of foster parenthood
62	18.39%	Protecting the foster child from the agency
74	17.30%	Dealing with children whose behavior is a problem
61	16.83%	Being involved in foster parent organizations
73	16.83%	Tolerating behavior which opposes one's own values and wishes
37	16.34%	Having a good knowledge of how to care for children
75	16.19%	Making decisions about a child's future
49	16.03%	Evaluating how well foster parents are doing as foster parents

TABLE 12 (Continued)

Item #	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Discrepancy	Role Description
39	15.68%	Deciding about the child's religious training
45	15.53%	Trying to influence agency policy in the interests of foster parents
58	15.38%	Evaluating how well social workers are doing
44	15.15%	Being tolerant of values other than one's own
71	15.15%	Refraining from discussing the child's background among friends
54	14.70%	Encouraging contact between birth parents and the foster child
59	14.43%	Making use of the Foster Care Review Board to insure good service
79	14.43%	Using pre-placement visits to the foster home to prepare the child and the foster family
55	14.01%	Helping the child cope with the feelings involved in being away from the original home
60	13.72%	Training new foster parents
53	13.46%	Being a model of responsible adulthood for the child
65	13.26%	Feeling that one's decisions will be respected
51	13.20%	Helping the foster child understand why he/she is in the foster home
76	11.76%	Being frank and honest about a child
40	11.65%	Acting as a teacher to the child
47	11.42%	Arranging special services the child may need
36	10.95%	Helping the child develop his/her identity
77	10.57%	Helping the foster parents' own children understand the foster care situation
82	10.10%	Handling calls from birth parents
48	8.57%	Organizing most of the child's activities
70	8.24%	Having appropriate contact with birth parents

TABLE 12 (Continued)

Item #	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Discrepancy	Role Description
41	7.84%	Having final authority to make decisions on discipline
35	6.73%	Taking care of the day to day needs of the child
56	6.54%	Working with the birth parents of the foster children
46	5.82%	Arranging visits with the child's birth parents
50	5.66%	Helping birth parents face reality
57	3.93%	Being a psychological counselor or therapist for a child

VITA

Janice Susan Burleson was born in Johnson City, Tennessee on October 6, 1953. She attended elementary schools in that city and was graduated from Science Hill High School in June 1971. The following July she entered East Tennessee State University, and in June 1975 she received a Bachelor of Social Welfare degree. She was employed briefly as a Social Service Specialist for the Tennessee Department of Public Health WIC Program and in November 1975 became employed with the Tennessee Department of Human Services. In the fall of 1978 she entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville Branch as a graduate student.