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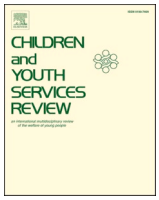

'Not under my roof': foster parents' perceptions on dealing with worldview differences☆

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ABSTRACT

Despite the foster child's right to compatibility in worldview, culture, language, and ethnicity, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, many out-of-home placed children live in *trans*-worldview foster care. Due to a shortage of foster parents, many children face worldview differences between their birth and foster families. This study includes both religious and secular worldviews, as well as personal and organised worldviews on existential questions. Previous research predominantly focused on ethnic and cultural identity, with limited attention given to religion and worldview. It is important for foster children to develop their identity by becoming familiar with their birth family's worldview. Strong co-parenting relationships, that recognise the role of the birth parent, support the child's identity and placement stability.

This qualitative study investigates how foster parents perceive worldview differences in co-parenting relationships. It aims to distinguish characteristics of successful and problematic collaborations, based on foster parents' experiences and attitudes.

The analysis of 25 in-depth interviews indicates that co-parenting relationships can become complicated when birth parents are not well-informed during the matching process, prior to consenting to placement. In such cases, crucial worldview differences may remain unaddressed or may be beyond the birth parents' imagination. Overcoming differences-within-worldviews can be as challenging as differences-between-worldviews. Strong worldview beliefs held by foster parents do not necessarily lead to tensions when foster parents maintain good co-parenting relationships and include the birth parents in the child's life. However, when foster parents hold strong worldview beliefs and attempt to replace birth parents, tensions may arise.

1. Introduction

In 2013, a diplomatic row between the Netherlands and Turkey arose, because of the out-of-home placement of a Dutch-Turkish boy in a lesbian foster family. This became known as the 'Yunus case'. The boy's birth parents were supported in their objections by the Turkish president, who claimed that 'Muslim children should grow up in Muslim families' and not be given away to non-Muslim families (Kouwenhoven, 2013). According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by both the Netherlands and Turkey, Yunus should preferably have been placed in a foster family whose worldview is more similar to that of his birth family. Although not all Muslim children are placed with non-Muslim families, as in the Yunus care, many Dutch children reside in *trans*-religious or *trans*-ethnic foster care (Van Bergen et al., 2022). It is often not possible to find a foster family that matches the foster child's worldview (Day & Bellaart, 2015; Chowdhury, 2021). Previous research predominantly focused on ethnic and cultural identity development, with limited attention given to religion and worldview (Collins & Scott, 2019; Hodge, 2022).

In the Netherlands, increasing numbers of children live in foster care. Government legislation prioritizes family-based settings for out-of-home placements, as is the case in other countries in the Western World (Fernandez & Barth, 2010; Konijn et al., 2019; Day & Bellaart, 2015). In 2019, nearly 24,000 children in out-of-home care resided in foster care settings, of whom 52% lived in non-kinship foster families. Due to a shortage of foster parents, the matching process, already complex, is under pressure (Zeijlmans et al., 2017; Pleegzorg Nederland, 2020; Howell-Moroney, 2014; Haysom et al., 2020), increasing the likelihood of transcultural, transracial, and *trans*-religious placements.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states

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that out-of-home children are entitled to compatibility in language, religion, culture, and ethnicity and freedom of religion (Van der Zon, 2020), with the matching process taking these factors into consideration (UN, 1990, Article 20.3). Furthermore, article 14 recognise children's right to adopt the religion of their choice, consistent with their evolving capacities, while Article 30 enshrines the right of children from minority religions to practice their faith. All countries except the USA have ratified the CRC, which stipulates that foster children should be placed in families reflecting their birth family's worldview or be allowed to explore their cultural and religious background (De Baat et al., 2015; Bruning & Van der Zon, 2013). Furthermore, the CRC ensures children's right to care that promotes their safety, health, identity, and development (Articles 3, 6, 8.2), and regular contact with parents unless contrary to their best interests (Article 9.3). These rights may sometimes be in conflict with the daily life of the foster child.

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children elaborate on these principles, setting out foster parent requirements such as ensuring safety, cooperating with the child's family (unless contrary to the child's best interests), and undergoing training. Foster parents must possess the necessary skills to meet the child's needs. While emphasising the rights of children and their birth families, the Guidelines also highlight the importance of supporting, recognising, and involving foster parents. Similarly, foster parents have a right to organise their daily lives according to their worldview and the also the right to freedom of religion (Hodge, 2022).

Addressing a foster child's roots in their upbringing requires effort and specific skills from both foster parents and foster care workers (Van de Koot et al., 2023). These skills include cultural sensitivity, cultural receptiveness, empathy, 'manoeuvring between and monitoring all interests', and 'inquisitiveness to discover what is essential for the other' (Day et al., 2018; Van de Koot-Dees et al., 2023). Research on identity formation in transracial and transreligious placements highlights the potential for religious tensions in these situations (Bartelink et al., 2024; Degener et al., 2021; Van Bergen et al., 2022). Foster parents must navigate worldview diversity in daily life, as their own beliefs may conflict with those of the child or the birth family regarding practices such as initiation rituals or norms about sexuality. However, little is known about when foster parents perceive worldview differences as problematic, how they resolve possible conflicts, and what is helpful in establishing good co-parenting relationships when worldview differences occur.

How do foster parents deal with the worldview differences with the foster child's birth family they encounter in daily life? In this qualitative research, based on 25 in-depth interviews with foster parents, we investigate how foster parents perceive their approach to managing worldview differences in co-parenting relationships. This research aims to distinguish the characteristics of successful and problematic collaboration on dealing with worldview differences, based on the foster parents' experiences, perceptions and attitudes.

1.1. Collaboration between parents and foster parents

Foster care placements are susceptible to instability, often resulting in breakdown (Konijn et al., 2019; Leloux-Opmeer et al., 2017). Conflict between birth parents and foster parents is one of the risk factors for breakdown (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018) or even for some foster parents to discontinue foster parenting permanently (Abrahamse et al., 2013). Strong co-parenting relationships between foster parents and birth parents, along with the foster parents' willingness to collaborate are pivotal for the child's identity development in particular, and the stability of the placement in general (Konijn, et al., 2019; Hedin, 2015; Van Holen et al., 2019).

However, birth parents are often not very positive about their relationship with foster parents (Bengtsson & Karmsteen, 2021; Höjer, 2009; Järvinen & Luckow, 2020). They often perceive the relationship as unequal, and experience a sense of disempowerment and increasing marginalisation over time (Said Salem & De Wilde, 2021; Höjer, 2009). Conversely, positive relationships involve open and welcoming foster parents, who recognise the significance of birth parents in the foster children's lives (Bengtsson & Karmsteen, 2021; Chateauneuf, Turcotte & Drapeau, 2019; Hedin, 2015; Höjer, 2009). Still, even in positive collaborations, characterized by empathy and warmth, some asymmetry is visible (Van de Koot-Dees & Young Sliedrecht, 2023).

The relationship between professional foster parents and birth parents can be seen as a 'co-parenting relationship' (Hedin, 2015; Järvinen & Luckow, 2020). De Baat and others (2015) note that similarity in ethnicity, culture or religion can make it easier for parents to accept a placement, but not much is known about how foster parents perceive *trans*-worldview collaborations.

1.2. The use of the concept 'worldview'

The Netherlands is one of the most secularized countries in Europe (De Hart et al., 2022). In recent years, there has been a significant and ongoing increase in Christian disaffiliation. The most recent figures indicate that 57.5% of the population identify as non-believers (agnostics or atheists), 31.9% as Christians, 4.6% as Muslims, and 6.2% as adherents of other religions (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS), 2022). Although Christianity is no longer predominant, it represents a significant minority. The primary adherents of traditional religious faith are concentrated in the orthodox Reformed Bible Belt, among communities of Christian migrants, and among Muslims. In the Netherlands, younger generations of affiliated Christians seem to be more committed to a Christian lifestyle compared to previous generations (De Hart & Van Houwelingen, 2018; Vermeer & Scheepers, 2021; Exalto & Bertram-Troost, 2019). A growing number of people consider themselves 'unaffiliated spirituals', who for example seek their authentic core in practices such as meditation or witchcraft (De Hart et al., 2022; De Hart, 2013).

Van der Kooij and colleagues state that nowadays more people are inclined to construct their own personal worldview, which may be inspired by organised worldviews, but not necessarily so (Van der Kooij et al., 2015, p. 348). For this reason, in this study the concept of worldview is more appropriate than the term 'religion', as it has a wider reach. This study includes religious and secular worldviews, personal and organised worldviews.

Therefore, the use of the concept of worldview prevails over the concept of religion. Van der Kooij et al. (2017) distinguish three characteristics of worldviews: 1) they comprise both religious and secular views, 2) a distinction between organised and personal worldviews is helpful, 3) existential questions are necessary in order to speak of a worldview (Van der Kooij et al., 2017). Organised worldview is defined as 'a more or less coherent and established system that has developed over time with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals or dogmas. An organised worldview has a group of believers who adhere to this view on life (Van der Kooij et al., 2013, p. 212). Personal worldviews are also included in this study, based on the foster parents' self-descriptions.

Although previous investigations often overlooked the identity development of foster children with regard to religion and worldview, in mainly focusing on ethnic and cultural identity development, these aspects should not be treated separately (Collins & Scott, 2019; Hodge, 2022). Hodge notes that even when individuals consider religion to be most important to their identity, it remains affected by other identity dimensions (Hodge, 2022).

1.3. Dealing with worldview differences in collaboration

In addition to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there are indications that foster children benefit from growing up in homes that reflect or respect the culture, religion, and ethnicity of their birth family. If birth parents can accept the foster placement, for

example because of similarity in culture or religion, this may contribute to successful foster placements (De Baat et al., 2015; Van de Koot & Noordegraaf, 2018; Hedin, 2015). Nevertheless, it has not been proven that ethnic similarity leads to more successful placements (De Baat et al., 2015; Ter Meulen et al., 2014; Sinclair et al., 2005). However, birth parents indicate that it is difficult to collaborate with foster parents who are not familiar with their faith (Singer et al., 2014; Miedema & De Roos, 2002).

Matching on religion, culture and ethnicity is encouraged in the Dutch Foster Care Workers Handbook, as long as other rights and requirements, such as safety and parenting skills, are not at stake and religious practices do not clash with fundamental rights (Breg et al., 2014; Aartsen). Therefore, in response to the 'Yunus' case, Day and Bellaart conducted an exploratory study into greater diversity of cultures and religions in recruitment and matching in foster care. In particular, they found a shortage of Muslim foster parents (Day & Bellaart, 2015). Conversely, Christian foster parents appear to be overrepresented (see also 2.2, Van de Koot-Dees et al., 2023), which aligns with the traditional involvement of Christians and major Christian organisations in social work, motivated by their faith in caring for the vulnerable and practising hospitality (Bakker et al., 2006; Bass, 2019). For reasons of privacy, no data are available on the religious background of Dutch foster parents (Day & Bellaart, 2015; Cheruvallil-Contractor et al., 2022).

The Netherlands has a long tradition of equally funding faith-based and state schools, as well as religiously motivated and secular social care organisations (Exalto & Bertram-Troost, 2019; Bakker et al., 2006). However, these achievements are now being contested due to the establishment of Muslim schools, concerns about the teaching of anti-democratic values, and the aforementioned secularization (Exalto & Bertram-Troost, 2019). On the one hand this so-called 'pillarization' has been appreciated as an emancipatory model for minority groups, but on the other hand, the current concerns about anti-democratic values in Muslim schools (even called 'Taliban on clogs') also affects the equal funding of (Orthodox) Christian educational and care organisations, (Exalto & Bertram-Troost, 2019).

As previously mentioned, because of the shortage of foster parents, *trans*-worldview foster placements are inevitable. Moreover, extended searches for an ideal match can result in prolonged waiting periods to receive care for Muslim children (Cheruvallil-Contractor et al., 2022). During the matching process, other similarities between the birth family and the foster family can lead to a suitable match and, as much as possible, with the consent of all persons involved (Breg et al., 2020; Van de Koot-Dees et al., 2023).

1.4. Worldview and identity formation

There is ample evidence that parents exert the greatest influence on the religious identity development of children and youth (Bengtson et al., 2013; Bertram-Troost, 2016; Hood et al., 2009; Smith & Adamczyk, 2021). In line with this, the religious practices of foster parents highly impact the identity formation of foster children in their daily lives (Bartelink et al., 2024). Previous research indicates that a positive identity is important for vulnerable children (Neagu & Sebba, 2019; Noble-Carr et al., 2014), while foster care can negatively impact the identity of the child (Degener et al., 2020; Kools, 1997). Religious involvement can motivate and support foster parents in sustaining their task (Buehler et al., 2006; Henderson & Scannapieco, 2006; Howell-Moroney, 2014; Rhodes et al., 2006; Shklarski, 2019), but may also be meaningful for the foster child's wellbeing (Bangert, 2014; Holden & Williamson, 2014; Scales et al., 2014). Particularly in adolescence, identity formation is crucial (Crocetti, 2018).

Both 'commitment' and 'exploration' are seen as important features of identity development (De Bruin-Wassinkmaat et al., 2020; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Erik Marcia (1966) identified four identity statuses: 'diffusion (low in exploration and low on commitment), foreclosure (little exploration, but strong commitments), moratorium (high on exploration, but no stable commitments as yet), and achievement (high on commitment after a period of extensive exploring)' (Klimstra et al., 2010, p. 150; Marcia, 1966). Fostered youngsters run the risk of foreclosure, and often lack the opportunity for moratorium, in not being able to explore identity without expecting social, economic or emotional consequences (Kools, 1997; Hendricks et al., 2024).

Moreover, Bartelink et al. (2024) highlight the asymmetry in religious childrearing practices between birth parents and conservative Protestant foster parents. Birth parents have significantly fewer opportunities to introduce their worldview to their children, whereas Christian foster parents, often unaware of this imbalance, immerse foster children in their Christian faith practices. Muslim children can experience identity confusion in non-Muslim foster families, when their needs and wishes are not taken into account; and they may even face discrimination (Pitcher & Jaffar, 2018). When Muslim children reject Islam during their time in foster care, for instance due to maltreatment in the birth family, this does not necessarily indicate a permanent rejection of Islam (Cheruvallil-Contractor et al., 2021). De Ruyter (2013) argues that all parents may care for and educate their child in accordance with their values and standards, but should not influence the child in such a way that it cannot develop its own identity, a perspective aligned with the freedom of religion also afforded to foster children (Van der Zon, 2020).

2. Method

2.1. Design

The data collection consists of 25 in-depth interviews with experienced foster parents. Because of the explorative character of this study and the complexity of fostering children with a different worldview background, a qualitative research design is preferable (Robson & McCartan, 2017; Mortelmans, 2009).

2.2. Characteristics of participants

The group of respondents (n = 31) consists of 25 foster families. Some foster families are in transition towards becoming professional foster parents in a family style group care setting. The inclusion criteria were: 1) at least two years' experience of being a foster parent, 2) having full-time and long-term foster care arrangements 3) having experienced differences in worldview with a foster child's birth family, 4) non-kinship foster care. First, respondents were recruited from three public organisations for foster care by a general invitation in newsletters and Facebook groups. Second, respondents were approached by organisational key figures to achieve more diversity in worldview backgrounds of both foster parents and foster children, but also to recruit more male foster parents, same-sex couples, and single foster parents. Of the 25 respondents, 23 foster families are supported by a public, non-denominational foster care organisation. Foster care workers in these organisations estimate that at least 50% of their foster families have a Christian affiliation. For privacy reasons, religion is not recorded by the organisations for administrative purposes.

In this research, 13 of the 25 foster families define themselves as Christian, whereas four foster parents mention their 'Christian background', but do not define their worldview as Christian (see Table 1). These worldviews concern the foster parents' self-definitions. Their partners often don't have a Christian background. All participants declare they hold a worldview, with four respondents defined as non-religious but 'open to any worldview'. One foster parent calls himself an atheist, whereas his spouse describes herself as being influenced by her Christian background. There is one same sex couple (lesbian), and two foster parents are single. Women are overrepresented in the interviews, as we conducted interviews with 7 males and 24 females. Table 2 shows that foster parents are almost equally spread across years

Table 1
Worldview affiliation of foster families.

	Foster families
Christian	14
Christian background	3
Non-religious	5
Muslim	1
Atheist- Christian background	1
Humanist	1
Total:	*25*

Table 2
Years of foster parenting.

Years of foster parenting:	Number foster parents:
2—5	7
5—10	5
10—20	7
>20 years	6

of experience categories.

2.3. Differences between foster parents and foster child's birth family

Both birth parents and foster parents differ in worldview affiliation and background. In many cases the birth father is absent from the child's life and often likewise his religion or worldview. Table 3 presents the worldview categories that foster parents in this study say they have encountered in accommodating foster children. These are ways in which foster parents defined the worldviews of the foster children, which do not necessarily correspond with how the birth families themselves would have defined them.

2.4. Interview procedure

The 25 interviews were held by the main researcher, or under the supervision of the main researcher. The interview guide was developed by the main researcher and comprises these themes: 1) general information, 2) open questions as to what differences in worldview and religion foster parents deal with, 3) (not) recognising differences based on previous research) 4) how foster parents deal with differences, 5) what foster parents need when dealing with differences. All researchers received training in using the interview guide and asking in-depth questions. The interviews can be described as semi-structured (Baarda et al., 2021).

The interviews were originally intended to be held at the foster parents' homes. Because of lockdown restrictions all interviews were initially cancelled in March 2020. From the end of March 2020, we conducted four interviews by using Microsoft Teams. After positively evaluating the quality of those interviews, and given the delicate nature of the subject, we decided to continue online interviewing during the Summer of 2020. The interviews lasted 67 to 95 min; respondents were open to questioning, and the atmosphere was good. In three cases the connection was not stable enough, so during the interview the participants switched to another medium. As a token of appreciation, all participants received a gift voucher. All participants gave their consent for this study, using the Institute's 'informed consent form'.

2.5. Ethical considerations

All transcripts were anonymised before being uploaded into Atlas-ti. Some foster parents are nonetheless identifiable by specific characteristics, especially if they belong to a small, specific minority and, have (had) foster children in their home who belonged to a particular minority. For this reason, we chose to include individual quotes in the results section, but not to discuss complete portrait stories, to avoid making them recognisable to their relatives and acquaintances.

2.6. Data analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were analysed with the Atlas-ti software (Friese, 2019). We conducted the analysis, using the method of 'inductive coding,' in three phases: open, axial and selective coding (Baarda et al., 2021; Boeije & Bleijenbergh, 2019). The process of inductive coding is illustrated in Fig. 1. The first step in analysing the data was open coding, which means line-by-line coding of the data, while staying close to the foster parent's utterances. This step led to a set of 104 codes, including all possible worldview differences that were mentioned by the foster parents (20 codes). Second, in the 'axial coding' phase, three main categories (code families, in terms of Atlas-ti) were identified, each consisting of 8 to 27 codes: 1) (no) prior clear agreements, 2) experiences of worldview differences, including tensions and conflicts 3) ways of dealing with differences. In the third and last phase of selective coding, the axial codes were selected and merged in the light of the research questions and previous research. This phase of selective coding shows some similarities to the process of thematic analysis, in relating the findings to previous research (Clarke & Brown, 2018). The process of inductive coding was conducted by the first author.

On three occasions, the coding lists, and selected quotations, were discussed in the research group, including the second author, to obtain 'intersubjective replicability' (Van IJzendoorn & Miedema, 2025), an important feature in the trustworthiness and transparency of qualitative research (Baarda et al., 2021; Van IJzendoorn & Miedema 2025; Robson & McCartan, 2016). The second author was in charge of the Atlas-ti project bundle, which contains all anonymized transcripts, quotations, codes and code groups, and was able to correct and complete the codes.

At two stages, the coding scheme and analysis were reviewed and commented on by an accompanying committee comprising experts from academia and foster care organisations, as well as foster care workers – a process referred to as peer debriefing (Mortelmans, 2009). This study is part of a larger research project in which foster care workers (see: Van de Koot-Dees et al., 2023) and former foster children were interviewed about their experiences with worldview differences. These perspectives were taken into account during the critical analysis of the interviews with foster parents, which took place in regular meetings of the research team and accompanying committee, with the aim of doing justice to the

Table 3
Worldview affiliation of birth parents.

Variety of birth family's worldviews:
Sect (with a Christian orientation)
Muslim
Non-religious
Gypsy
Anthroposophical
Christian
Hindu
Jewish
Wicca

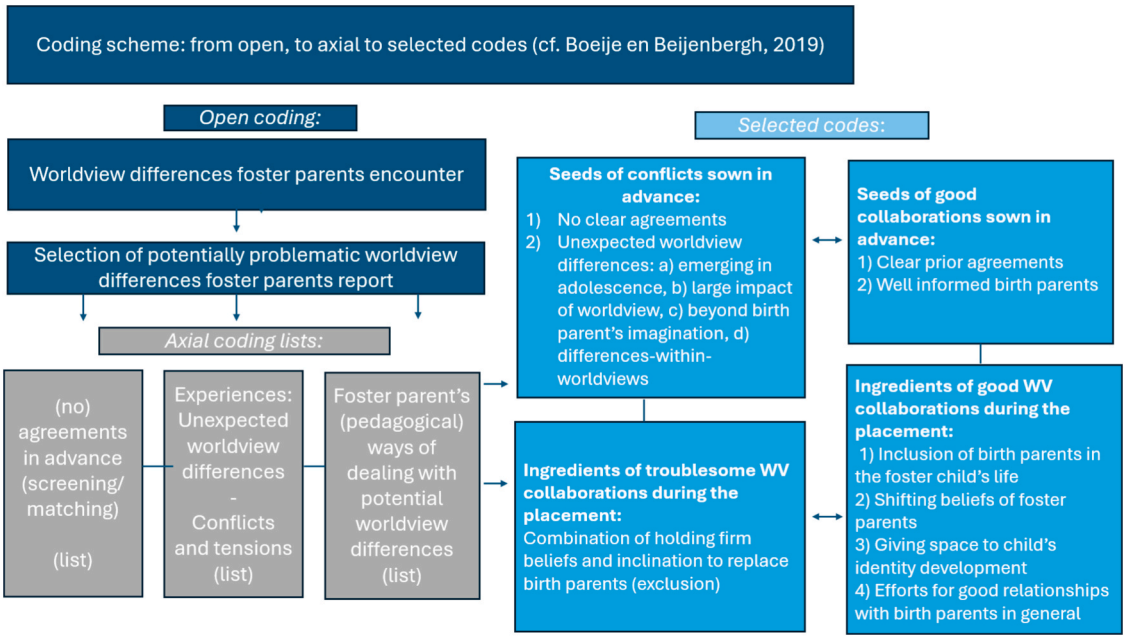

Fig. 1. Process of inductive coding: from open to selected codes (cf. Boeije en Bleijenbergh, 2019).

complexity and multiplicity of voices present in the data.

In summary, measures to enhance the validity of the study included a) searching for negative cases (Mortelmans, 2009), b) triangulation by simultaneously conducting research on this topic among foster care workers (Van de Koot-Dees et al., 2023) and adult foster children, c) peer debriefing, and d) theoretical sampling in the recruitment of respondents (Baarda et al., 2021).

3. Results

In 3.1 we describe the variety of worldview differences, that may lead to tension or conflict. In 3.2 and 3.3 we elaborate on the seeds of conflict sown in advance, but also the seeds of good collaboration sown in advance. However, we found there were more seeds of conflict than of good collaboration. Sections 3.4 and 3.5 examine ingredients of problematic and good collaborations on worldview differences during placements.

3.1. The variety of worldview differences in foster family life

The first step was to analyse the worldview differences with birth families that foster parents experience and mention in raising foster children. Fig. 2 illustrates the variety in worldview differences, some of which are explicitly religious. It also highlights that worldview differences encompass broader, non-religious elements. Not all differences necessarily lead to tension or conflict. The most frequently noted differences appeared in 17 to 44 fragments of the interview transcripts, while less frequently mentioned differences included medication (7

Fig. 2. Differences in worldview and religion.

fragments) and values concerning the future and society (7 fragments).

Foster parents report that birth parents often express concerns about worship attendance, initiation rituals (baptism or circumcision of foster children), bodily care and appearance. For some, it is painful when their child's appearance differs from their own, such as wearing 'strange' or 'posh' clothes, or having a different hairstyle. Birth parents may place more importance on physical appearance than foster parents realize. For example, a foster girl attending an orthodox Protestant school is expected to wear skirts or dresses, but her foster parents regularly allow trousers, respecting her birth mother's preference. The foster parents themselves report conflict; for example, when birth parents request circumcision for a boy; when foster children have symbols like Buddha or good luck charms; or when birth parents hold political preferences or discriminatory views they abhor.

It is important to note that some differences may evoke negative feelings in foster parents but not necessarily in birth parents, such as differences concerning decency in language and behaviour. Foster parents may object to cursing or vulgar language, while birth parents may not. In one case a foster parent reports setting boundaries:

> 'The parents are cursing a lot. Well, we are quite used to it, because both boys have Tourette's syndrome. But at a certain point we said: please, when you visit the children, will you try not to curse?' (D16: 78).

A foster mother reports that a father wants his son to obtain a good education for a prosperous life with a large house and luxurious holidays, emphasizing performance and saving for education. The foster mother comments:

> 'I think that is different for us. We are living only a short time on this earth. Our life will be more beautiful in heaven. We think it is important for the child to be happy now. I mean: what really matters in life?' (D1: 1019).

In these cases, foster parents cope with worldview differences by discussing them with the birth parents or dismissing them as minor irritations.

3.2. Seeds of conflict sown in advance

This section describes essential elements of dealing with worldview differences. Many involve two sides of the same coin, which are presented in 3.3 and 3.4. For example, foster parents holding firm beliefs may clash with the child and their birth parents, but their views can also shift or alter during the placement. When worldview is not discussed in the matching arrangement, birth parents may be unpleasantly surprised, for instance if they cannot celebrate their child's birthday on a Sunday. Conversely, when birth parents are aware of the implications of the foster family's worldview, they may accept or appreciate church visits and the family's values. During the matching process, sometimes specific arrangements are made to take religion into account.

3.2.1. No clear agreements in the matching process

Christian foster parents sometimes want a foster child to be baptised, but this is usually postponed until the child is old enough to decide, or the birth parents explicitly agree. In one case, even when the child requested baptism, the foster parent insisted on waiting until adolescence and discussing it with the birth parents. It seems to be a 'rule of thumb' that initiation rituals require birth parent consent and attendance.

Conflicts over baptism can arise early in placements, sometimes leading to severe issues between foster and birth parents. Occasionally these conflicts cannot be resolved. In one case a foster parent, a pastor in a conservative Christian church, made repeated efforts to baptize their foster children. In one instance the judge prohibited this, while in another the father was successful in putting pressure on a young Muslim mother (see also 3.4.1):

> 'The child started saying "I want to be baptised". But the mother was very upset and said: "I want him to be circumcised, but not baptised". We explained that we thought circumcision was mutilation and not appropriate. But then we shouldn't talk about baptism either. Two years ago, when he wanted to be baptised, his mother made a lot of fuss, and did not want it. Then we said "okay, then it's off the table". We asked her one more time, just to be sure. And she said, "yes fine, but on one condition, I want to be at the service". So, we said "yes, that's good', because we very much want that as well". So, she attended the service, veiled' (D11: 125).

This foster father is content with the baptism, but also reflects on whether it is appropriate to place a Muslim child in a conservative Protestant family:

> 'Um yes when we look back, I think the matching, should be done a little bit more carefully. So, in retrospect I think placing a Muslim child with a [conservative church] pastor is a bit of a thing. Yes then, in all fairness, I wonder: was that wise huh? (D11:307).

Birth parents sometimes disagree on initiation rituals, as seen in one case where the mother wanted baptism and the father circumcision, leading the judge to prohibit both. For the foster parents, who preferred a Christian blessing, it was clear that initiation rituals were not possible. In another case, after having denied baptism, birth parents permitted a blessing in their absence. They were not enthusiastic but did not formally object. In all other cases, birth parents attended initiation rituals. As foster children reach adolescence, conflicts about churchgoing may arise. In these conflicts the foster child often feels supported by their birth parents, intensifying tensions. A foster parent of teenage girls reports about a breakdown within three weeks, caused by a misunderstanding with the birth father about churchgoing. The foster mother said she was even threatened by the father. Since then, she allows adolescents to choose for themselves, provided their parents have agreed, and clear arrangements have been made in advance.

A foster parent reports a laborious collaboration with a Jewish mother, due to being part of a same-sex foster couple. Some birth parents even prefer religious foster families to avoid same-sex placements. However, even religious foster homes may not always match traditional expectations. For instance, a religious foster couple surprised the birth parents because they lived apart, while a single Christian foster mother faced objections from some birth parents about her relational status. When tensions arise, the foster parents can be confronted with these objections, sometimes in a discriminatory manner.

3.2.2. Unexpected worldview differences

In this section we describe the unexpected worldview differences that may arise during foster care placements. We discovered four areas of worldview differences that lead to tension in the collaboration between foster parents and birth parents (see Table 4).

3.2.2.1. Conflicts on worldview emerging in adolescence. A foster child's age can also play a role in relation to religious matters. Worldview differences are less problematic for younger children than for adolescents, except for initiation rituals such as baptism and circumcision. According to foster parents, younger children adapt easily to practices like praying,

Table 4
Unexpected worldview differences during the foster care arrangement.

Unexpected worldview differences		
1	Emerging in adolescence	Foster children exploring their birth family's worldview
2	Large impact of the worldview	Foster parents or birth parents surprised by the practical impact of worldview
3	Beyond birth parent's imagination	Foster parents or birth parents are disappointed when discovering large worldview differences after the 'perfect match' on worldview

churchgoing or singing Christian nursery rhymes. 'Children up to ten years quickly go with the flow', a foster parent states (D10: 158). 'They want to be part of our family and our rituals', another foster parent states (D3:202).

Adolescents, however, may question religious beliefs or refuse to participate in religious activities, sometimes with support from their birth parents, leading to tensions between foster and birth parents. A foster parent tells us about a fourteen-year-old girl:

> 'Since she was a baby, her Moroccan culture had never been an issue for her, but from the moment she moved in with us, it was a hot topic for her: not eating pork and focussing on Islam' (D10:101).

These foster parents were quite taken aback by this change in adolescence.

3.2.2.2. Large impact of the worldview. Some foster parents underestimate the impact of the birth parent's worldview. For example, one foster family was asked during the matching process to read only from a specific 400-year-old Bible translation and avoid showing images of Jesus. Over time, they resented this promise and felt later they had been too accommodating. Another foster parent couple was expected to follow Jewish food laws, and ensure the boy had Hasidic side curls. Similarly, one foster parent regretted making promises to restrict reading materials, like Donald Duck, as it conflicted with their convictions and were difficult to keep. When the birth parents became aware that their son had once read the magazine, they were furious, and the conflict escalated. The situation was difficult, because the foster parents' own children were reading Donald Duck magazines, while the foster child was not permitted to do so. A Muslim foster mother was expected to let foster children fast during Ramadan. The foster mother did not agree in this matter, because she believed the children were too young for this. The birth parents were very disappointed, but the foster mother insisted.

3.2.2.3. Beyond the birth parents' imagination. Worldview differences can be beyond the birth parent's field of vision or even beyond their imagination. In some Christian foster families young children may be taught Christian songs at school, in church or at home. They sing at bedtime or after dinner or just listen to Spotify playlists. A foster parent says that her Muslim foster children are taught to sing Psalms at school:

> 'We don't sing the Psalms at home with them. They learn them at school. I just don't want, … well, suppose their parents visit us, and they start singing Psalms. A Muslim singing Psalms … It feels a bit… well, I don't know' (D7: 295).

With regard to Bible reading, a foster parent reports the same reluctance, because she is not sure whether the birth parents realized the importance of religion in the foster family when they said they appreciated 'values and norms' during the matching process. According to the foster parent these birth parents were happy their child was placed in a Christian foster family, because the foster parents did not form a same-sex couple. They did not ask any further about their Christian lifestyle.

However, foster parents may feel uncomfortable, because they assume that the birth parents do not realize that their children are receiving a thorough Christian education. Seven Christian foster parents wonder whether the birth parents are sufficiently informed about their Christian lifestyle. A foster mother looks back: 'We said again: Does the mother understand that we offer a Christian upbringing, and won't she have problems with it later on? But the birth mother said it's not a problem for her. It very difficult for her to put herself in the shoes of others, to empathize. That's part of her problem, actually' (D4: 21).

Some birth parents have mental disabilities, which adds to the difficulties involved. They cannot imagine how a foster family's religion is practised. They may have different conceptions of this, which may be either exaggerated or inadequate. Where the above-mentioned foster mother felt uncomfortable, another foster parent says she does not want to make the situation 'more complex than necessary' and shares little information about their Christian practices or mitigates them. It cannot be a surprise that birth parents feel angry when they discover, for example, afterwards that Sunday rest means they cannot celebrate birthdays on Sundays.

3.2.2.4. Differences-within-religion. At first glance, the most striking differences in the collaboration are those between worldviews. Most conflicts occur where there are differences between worldviews. For example, having a Muslim foster child in a Christian foster family can give rise to *'differences-between-worldviews'*. A closer look reveals that compatibility in worldview does not always prevent conflict, and also *'differences-within-worldview'* can be problematic. In one case, a conservative Christian foster family was highly criticized by conservative Christian birth parents, because the foster family attended a baptism ceremony in a liberal church. Initially the birth parents were content with how their churches matched. Ultimately, this placement ended in breakdown, because the birth parents were disappointed with several religious practices in the foster family that they did not expect in advance. Another foster family was more lenient than previously expected towards a teenage foster girl regarding clothes and make-up, in permitting crop tops, which led to conflict with the birth parents.

A Muslim foster mother does not wear a headscarf, while a birth mother wanted her daughter to wear one, which led to discussions. This foster mother reports that she regularly has disagreements with Muslim birth parents from, for example, the Moroccan culture or other cultural minorities. During the interview she sometimes wonders whether her opinions on chastity and gender are religiously or culturally motivated.

These birth parents are even more disappointed when foster parents, with whom they share a worldview, behave differently than expected. These conflicts can be just as difficult to overcome as differences between worldviews and may also put the stability of a placement at risk.

3.3. Seeds of good collaboration sown in advance

3.3.1. Clear prior agreements

Some differences are addressed during the matching process. In one case of an Orthodox Protestant foster family, a Christian school is conditional for a placement, while the orthodox Protestant foster parents are more flexible. Birth parents may prefer specific (Steiner) schools or religious activities, such as attending Koran classes or celebrating holidays like Christmas or Pesach at home. In some cases, placements were cancelled due to objections to pets, such as dogs or cats, seen as unclean or not compatible with Voodoo-rituals.

When birth parents agree to religious practices like attending worship services, foster parents report no conflicts. In most cases younger non-Christian children attend church services with the foster family, because they cannot be left at home alone. In some cases, foster parents adjust their church attendance to accommodate the foster child, even choosing a more child-friendly church. Some conservative families have restrictions on Sunday activities, which may not be understood by the birth family. A highly conservative foster family attends church twice on a Sunday, which allows one of the foster parents to stay at home with the foster child. Foster parents vary in their willingness to facilitate religious practices, with some involving relatives of the foster child in these activities.

In some cases, foster care organisations provide clear guidelines. For example, from the start of the placement it was clear to the Orthodox Christian foster parents and the Muslim birth parents that the child 'would grow up with two religions' (D1:22), including circumcision and participation in Muslim practices while attending a Christian school and church. The collaboration with the birth mother is very good, according to the foster mother, who says:

> 'We are taking care of the most precious thing they have. […] And they accepted that. I think that's so outstanding of them. Then I think

'well……. I don't know how I would be in their shoes! What it would be like for me if my child were placed out of home? But yes, well, that shows that if people are warm, or if people click with you as a parent, that makes all the difference. (D1:414).

Sometimes a foster placement is prevented by objections of the foster parents or the birth parents. The reason may be that 'it doesn't click' between the birth family and the foster family. However, prejudices, which may even be discriminatory, can play a role. A foster parent reports that they do not welcome Muslim children:

'We stated beforehand that we did not want to raise Islamic children. That has to do with the fact that we would come into conflict with ourselves and that is because we know that an Islamist is generally not tolerant' (D14:77).

Also, foster parents report that they were chosen as foster family by Gypsy or Muslim birth parents, because they were 'not a same-sex family'. These (non) matches can be seen as 'clear', but the considerations are not purely positive.

3.3.2. Well informed birth parents

When birth parents are well informed, they are aware of the foster family's worldview habits and lifestyle choices. A foster parent explained to birth parents that they attend Sunday Church services, but they did not expect teenagers to join them. She told the birth parents that they pray before eating, and expected the child to respect this, by remaining silent, but not to join in the prayers (D5:10). The foster parent promised the birth parents not to serve pork. Another foster parent explicitly asked Muslim birth parents if they agreed to having their child hear Bible stories. There are several examples of foster parents informing birth parents about the implications of their worldview:

And, well, we have also said that we are believers, so we go to church and that's where they will go in future – and Sunday school and everything that goes with it of course. Church clubs and all. And actually, they accepted that. Yes, we think that's very nice actually, yes, that it has been accepted. They may not be Christian, but they are good. It has been approved, so to speak (D18:64).

When birth parents agree with the placement, it does not mean that their worldview is taken into account by the foster parents. To be well informed does not always imply reciprocity or symmetry in the worldview identity formation of the child.

3.4. Contributing factors to problematic or ambivalent collaborations on worldviews

3.4.1. Combination of holding firm worldview beliefs and inclination to substitute birth parents (Exclusion of birth parents in the child's life)

Some foster parents have robust convictions and practices with regard to worldview, which may be non-negotiable, while at the same time having an inclination to substitute the birth parents in general. Table 5 shows the differences between foster parents holding firm beliefs and their inclination to 1) substitute the birth parents or conversely, 2) include the birth parents in the child's life.

Table 5
Two modes of holding firm worldview convictions in attitude towards the birth family.

[and]	Inclination to substitute birth parents	Inclination to include birth parents
Foster parents holding firm worldview convictions	- Exclusion of birth parents. - Exploring legal and ethical boundaries. - Conflicts and tensions on worldview and other matters, regularly resulting in breakdown.	- Dilemmas for foster parents, reflection. - Manoeuvring worldview differences, 'give and take'. - Ongoing conversations with the child and birth parents.

The worldview of foster parents shapes their childrearing practices and is often what motivates them to be a foster family. Their worldview, often religious, can help them with perseverance, love and inspiration in foster parenting and facing difficulties. It is central to welcoming a child, with foster children expected to participate in religious practices like prayers, church attendance, and singing hymns. These foster parents are not inclined to facilitate other religious practices, for example, arranging Bible or Koran classes for a foster child. In some cases, there is little room for negotiation on matters like school choice and baptism. A foster parent explains:

'We want to take the child into consideration, but not the parents and their conditions. That may sound harsh, but otherwise we are denying who we are' (D14: 79).

This 'yes, but' attitude reflects the foster parents' inclination to exclude the birth parents and their worldview preferences. The combination of strict worldview beliefs and the tendency to substitute the birth parents makes it difficult for foster children to explore their own identities. An evangelical Christian single foster mother has a conservative opinion about sexual activity by teenage girls:

'No, in my house a boy cannot sleep in their room. (…) I always say 'some are welcome to sleep here, but not in the same room. (…) Then she [foster child] says: "But I can do it elsewhere". Then I said: well, do it elsewhere, but not under my roof. Here, under my roof, you live by my rules' (D5: 295).

Nevertheless, she offers the girls contraception, for safety, as all foster parents report doing. On the other hand, a birth parent facilitates her daughter sleeping with her boyfriend during visits. Children sometimes bring symbols into the foster home, but the Christian foster mother is clear about some: 'Dreamcatchers and Buddha statues, they're not coming in. Those spiritual powers, I don't want to have them under my roof' (P5:795). Despite experiencing breakdowns due to her religion, this foster mother has grown more aware of the need to include and respect birth parents (see 3.5.2). However, for some foster parents, their worldview, such as churchgoing and initiation rituals, are non-negotiable. One foster parent reports that no concrete agreements on'child dedication ceremony' were made, a common alternative for child baptism in Evangelical churches. Although the birth parents did not appreciate the 'child dedication', they insisted:

'No, not in the sense of what was or was not allowed. They could have been a bit clearer about that as far as I'm concerned. On the other hand: should they? But at one point we dedicated the children in church. And yes, that is different from baptism. So that was, well, allowed is a big word, but tolerated. And yes, we did consult the parents about it. They were not all in favour of it. And the communication with both parents was not very good. And then we said that we wanted it anyway. And so, we went ahead. The parents allowed this, because of the fact that we have been together for so many years. And yes, they know us. But they are not in favour (D16:39).

In 3.2.1 we described the case of the pastor in a conservative Christian church, who insisted on baptizing the child of Muslim mother, a teenager when she gave birth, despite her preference for circumcision. Two years later, the pastor, whose views on baptism were non-negotiable, arranged with the guardian for the mother's permission, securing her consent on the condition she could attend the service:

'Um, well look, I studied theology myself and also the major religions. I know quite a bit about what is on offer and, you also very much know how you want to raise your child. With that guardian from [youth welfare organisation] we then had quite a good discussion about baptism. And the good thing was that he said: yes, from my personal situation I wholeheartedly support it. That [the foster child] also 'gets a place in the garden of the covenant' [Dutch reformed saying']. So, I will cooperate with you in every way. But,

there are others as well, and they are neutral about it. If the parents allow it, it's fine and if not, don't insist. Well, that's basically how we stood there too' (D11:32).

It is remarkable that the foster father continued to ask a young birth mother from a minority religion to allow her child to be baptized. While he expressed a desire to respect her choice, he acknowledged that she likely preferred circumcision. The foster father felt supported by the guardian, who shared his worldview. However, the birth mother may have felt pressured into agreeing to the baptism, even though she attended the service. This raises the question of who supported the birth mother and her child in this situation. It seems the foster parent sees the foster child as his own child, and the mother was marginalized by the foster father and the guardian.

Another foster mother reports that she prefers to have the birth parents at a distance, when she explains the legal situation:

'No, that all goes via the court, under supervision, and I personally like that a lot. And then yes, it's all a bit easier and in the beginning, you can be a bit more distant towards the parents. […] In the beginning, we always have secret placements. So, I think that's always wonderful for the children: that the parents don't know exactly where you live and that they don't just walk by' (D25:9).

It is not only Christian or Muslim foster parents who emphasise their own worldview, but liberal or eco-oriented foster parents can equally do so. For example, eco-oriented foster parents insisted their foster child cycle to school, despite her preference for taking the bus. This led to conflict when they discovered a huge number of bus tickets, because the child secretly went by bus. In the end the girl, who had grown up in city beforehand, had to cycle to school and was forbidden to go by bus. Adolescents may rebel against, or secretly defy the foster parents' worldview. However, strong worldview beliefs do not always lead to conflict. When foster parents acknowledge that the child belongs to both them and their birth family, they may create more space for the child's identity development (see 3.5).

3.5. Contributing factors to good collaboration on worldviews

3.5.1. Inclusion of birth parents' worldview in the foster child's life/efforts for good relationships with birth parents in general

In the interviews, most foster parents first address dietary restrictions, such as Kosher or Halal, especially when welcoming Muslim foster children. These agreements are often made during the matching process and are relatively easy for foster parents to implement. However, some foster parents follow these rules more loosely, either through ignorance (e.g. gelatine containing pork) or doubts about the birth parents' adherence to their own rules, such as when birth parents allow their child to eat pork at McDonalds.

Several foster families, motivated by environmental or religious reasons, follow a vegetarian diet, while the foster child may like to eat meat. According to some foster parents the child even smelled like a fryer after home visits: 'He only ate fried meat, and we are vegetarian. You know, after a few months he said: "I miss greasy food". That was pitiful. We said, sometimes you may eat fried meat' (D17: 9401). Later, as an adult, the boy invited them to a barbecue, offering vegetarian options. Conversely, a foster parent reports preparing only vegetarian meals due to the preferences of her foster teenagers (D5). For younger children placed out of home, the question of initiation rituals arises. A Christian foster mother explains: 'They said that he had to be circumcised. He's going to be raised with two faiths, that's OK with us' (P1: 245). Some foster parents prioritize facilitating birth parents' worldview practices, such as saying prayers in the child's mother tongue, visiting the birth country during holidays, or connecting the child with relatives for religious services when birth parents are unable to attend. A foster parent explains:

'These are the little things we can do for parents, so they can stay in control – very important' (D1: 358).

Another Christian foster family let their foster child engage in youth activities and friendships with the Brunstad Christian Church, a Christian sect. Simultaneously, they are troubled by the exclusiveness of the worldview, in not accepting other religions and demanding participation in leisure time activities. A non-Christian foster parent reports he attended several Church services with his foster son.

Moreover, these foster parents realize that a foster child is not their own child, and wish to invest in the child-birth-parent relationship. A foster parent explains:

'Well, a foster care worker said we are highly respectful of the children's parents. I think she's right. I really try to do justice to parents; we are trying to do so, with our whole family. It is just, it's their child, we only take care of them for a short period of time. It is absolutely not my child, let me say, so I can't decide for this child. That weighs heavily for me. We won't throw away all our rules, but we try to discern what really matters. What is important in faith and what are secondary issues? Sometimes you need to be more easy-going or just let it go' (D4: 188).

When foster parents realize the child is not theirs, it may reduce the differences or dilemmas, and they often speaking of 'letting things go'.

We also found also a Christian motivation to respect the birth family. Two evangelical-Christian foster families saw it as their Biblical duty to 'honour the parents of the child', and explicitly mention the birth parents' religion, in line with the Biblical commandment to 'Honour your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). A conservative reformed foster parent explains they had never considered baptizing the child, seeing the foster child as belonging to both the foster and birth families. One foster parent even stays at home with the foster child during church services, which is unusual in their religious community.

3.5.2. Shifting worldview beliefs of foster parents

Some foster parents have redefined their worldview during the process of raising children and now define their worldview as 'open'. Foster parents' beliefs and convictions may shift and alter. A foster mother describes how she was raised with objections to working and shopping on Sundays. She explains:

'I did gain a bit of freedom, to live a bit more freely, so to speak. This is all okay. Now God is not angry'. (D5:57).

When this foster mother reflects on her faith and her own faith journey, she concludes that welcoming foster children has changed her beliefs:

'You know, myself of course, I was also just brought up with a number of norms and values and you naturally adopt those in your own child-rearing and so when you raise your own children, then you do so in the way you're used to. But because you are raising children who already have a lot of life's journey and are different in that respect, you become much more reflective in your beliefs as well. And that doesn't have to be wrong at all. (D5:57).

Other foster parents also share the experience that, from welcoming foster children, but also from experience with their own children they feel a need to reflect on what is essential in their worldview. A foster parent reports that her own child no longer wanted to attend church services.

Why am I doing it? Is it really that important that they only go to this church? Is it really that important that we might be on the computer every Sunday but not watching television? Is it really that important that we read the 'Statenvertaling' [old Bible Translations, DvdK], that they don't understand or that we might read a diary? And then at a certain point you start to look at things very differently (D14:5).

Later in the interview, it is revealed that their own children have had

a coming out:

> 'Look, our worldview has taken quite a toll on us – one son is gay now, our other son is transgender, that's not something we would have thought of 10 years ago' (D14:16).

The foster parents say they still find their children's choices difficult, but also that people do not choose their identity. Moreover, they are ashamed of the prejudices they themselves once had, and regret the loneliness their children face.

3.5.3. *Making room for the child's identity development*

Some foster parents stress the importance of providing the opportunity for foster children to develop their own worldview. While some may prefer to baptize their own children, they prefer foster children to make such decisions later in life. These parents are sensitive to the child's religious needs and do not want the child to get caught up in a loyalty conflict. Experienced foster parents (10–30 years' experience) often give adolescents more autonomy, having seen their own children choose their religious paths. A foster mother explains:

> 'You know, it is the same with every child. If you give a child autonomy, there will be a period when they're not attending church. That's part of adolescence. Everyone needs to develop at their own pace, like the Rumspringa, as the Amish say. I think for a foster child it's even more necessary, because they always feel that everyone decides for them' (D14: 198).

Foster parents may also adjust their stance based on the importance they attach to specific issues. A young evangelical foster mother, who welcomes teenage girls, lets them decide on practices like prayer or church attendance. She shares her faith but doesn't expect them to join her. Although she regrets that the girls now prefer working on Sundays, she allows it. Humour and self-mockery seem to mitigate the differences. She reported how the adolescents made jokes when she thanked God for his providence, after she cooked so much food that she could share it with the ambulance crew in their street during the Covid-pandemic. The foster mother: 'They probably also think: She's a bit too much, haha'(D5:127). When it comes to the subject of teenage girls having sex or the issue of dream catchers, this is the same foster mother who says 'Not under my roof'.

In adolescence, conflict can arise over clothing. 'She looks like a little slut', a humanist foster parent remarks (D17,494), though 'revealing clothing' is allowed. A Christian foster mother silently prays 'Oh Lord, cover the eyes of men' when she greets a scantily dressed teenage girl at breakfast, but does not forbid crop tops (D5:511). Opinions on tattoos and piercings vary, but these do not usually lead to conflict.

Foster parents often report that teenagers don't join prayers but remain respectfully silent. When asked about dinnertime prayers, one foster parent says, "They stay quiet, and wait till it's finished" (D5: 271).

3.5.4. *Manoeuvring between all positions*

Some foster parents try to manoeuvre between the identity positions of the foster child, the birth parents and themselves. When foster parents switch between all sides, they use phrases such as 'give and take', 'finding a middle course', 'being flexible', 'diluting things down' in order to maintain a good relationship with the child and their parents. A foster parent says:

> 'Yes, you take the child as a starting point, and focus on what they want; we can accommodate you, and respect you, but we also need to be ourselves – this is who we are, right?' (D6: 652).

Another foster mother would prefer to send the children to a Christian school in their neighbourhood, but not if the birth mother does not approve:

> 'But anyway, if mother really struggles with that, then I would be willing to reconsider. We can find a middle ground. Because for a child it would be just terrible to have to leave. We would not let that happen' (D4:32).

Also, the opposite can occur: a foster child attending a conservative Christian school, because of the preferences of her birth family. Her foster parents did not like that school, because they belonged to a more main-stream, liberal Christian church. They tried not to let the girl notice how ridiculous they thought some of the school rules were (wearing a skirt for girls, no nail polish allowed). This was not always easy, because the girl was also opposed to those rules but was also loyal to her parents, for example in removing her nail polish when meeting her parents.

4. Discussion

Foster parents report encountering worldview differences in collaborating with birth families, particularly regarding church attendance and initiation rituals like baptism and circumcision. These differences often lead to conflict, especially when foster care organisations or legal guardians provide no clear guidelines. Some foster parents insist on baptizing the child or waiting until legal barriers are removed. This aligns with Bartelink et al. (2024), who suggest avoiding irreversible decisions for ethical reasons. We found in this research that for circumcision, the health implications are stronger when the child is older. Non-religious worldview differences can also be difficult for a foster child, such as the demands of an eco-oriented lifestyle, as we saw in the example of the child who was expected to cycle to school rather than take the bus. Furthermore, birth parents need to be well-informed about the foster family's worldview when consenting to a placement. Because worldview differences may overlap with reduced language skills and mental disabilities, birth parents may need more comprehensible information to grasp the worldview implications.

Worldview differences in *trans*-worldview placements seem easier to navigate when foster parents have established a strong co-parenting relationship. Worldview beliefs held by foster parents sometimes shift or are modified over time. A single foster mother showed that she was capable and willing to learn from her foster children who had endured so much in life. But, when foster parents hold strong, intransigent worldview beliefs and are inclined to substitute the birth parents, it can lead to conflict and breakdown, and potential alienation of the child from their birth family. In the latter situation we have not been able to observe the long-term effects. When a collaboration with the birth parents is not constructive, worldview differences will be also a problem. Conversely, when foster parents and birth parents maintain a good relationship, even substantial worldview differences can be resolved more smoothly. Previous research shows that this inclination to substitute birth parents is harmful for children (Samuels, 2009). In combination with firm worldview beliefs, whether religious or non-religious, substitution might be a predictor of problems for placement stability, but also for the identity formation of foster children in their life course.

We identify two approaches to dealing with strong worldview convictions: 1) strong convictions, while excluding and replacing the birth parents, 2) maintaining strong convictions while respecting – or even honouring – the birth parents and their religion. 'This child will grow up with two worldviews', as a foster mother stated. In Dutch Christianity, there is a traditional reluctance to baptize children from other families. This issue also arose during World War II when Christian couples hid Jewish children. Resistance instructions advised against baptizing these children, respecting their Jewish identity. Many couples complied, recognising the children were not "theirs" and that baptism was inappropriate for children of another religion. However, some couples, especially those without children, substituted the Jewish parents and religion, believing the children were now theirs (Evers, 1995; 1996). Similarly, in Roman Catholicism, Canon Law prohibits baptizing a child without parental consent, emphasizing the child's likely rejection of baptism later due to loyalty to their birth parents.

If identity development, including worldview and religious identity, is important for out-of-home placed children, then foster children should be supported in exploring their birth parents' worldview, their foster family's worldview or alternative worldviews. Foster parents who strongly emphasize their own worldview may struggle to support the foster child's exploration of their worldview roots, potentially overlooking the child's right to religious freedom and contact with their birth family.

In the ideal matching process, the foster parents' willingness and ability to let the foster child explore the birth family's worldview is evaluated in *trans*-worldview placements; additional support from foster care workers may be necessary for the foster child, foster family, and birth family. However, not all foster parents respect the birth family's worldview. In one case, a foster father and the guardian, both Christian, facilitated the baptism of a foster child, leaving the Muslim birth mother unsupported. This can be seen as marginalization of a birth mother. In the peer debriefing of our study, foster care workers expressed difficulty in believing that this practice still occurs.

An important skill for foster parents is navigating and negotiating between the identities and interests of the foster child, their birth parents, and also themselves. The distinction between 'differences-between-worldviews' and 'differences-within-worldview' can be helpful in not underestimating the differences-within-worldview. This result corresponds with prior findings where matching based on Islamic faith failed because children felt uneasy with the foster family's interpretation of Islam (Pitcher & Jaffar, 2018; Van Bergen et al., 2022). A foster parent saying 'Not under my roof' when a child brings a dreamcatcher may feel caught between the foster family's own worldview and the foster child's worldview. As a result, the foster child might feel that their birth family's worldview or values are not allowed to be expressed. At the same time, the foster family has the right to live in accordance with their own worldview, and establish boundaries in their own home.

In a triadic-pedagogic approach to professional foster care (Van de Koot-Dees et al., 2023), the child is not detached from the birth family's identity, while the foster parents do not have to deny their own identity, and the child's worldview identity development is fostered. A triadic-pedagogic approach to professional foster care (Van de Koot-Dees et al., 2023) seeks to balance these dynamics: the child remains connected to the birth family's identity, while foster parents uphold their own beliefs. The primary focus, however, is fostering the worldview identity development of the child.

4.1. Strengths and limitations

This study is based mainly on the foster parents' perspective. It does not include the children's or birth parents' views on worldview differences. Therefore, foster parents may rate their skills in dealing with worldview differences too positively and may underestimate the consequences of excluding the birth family's worldview for the child's identity formation. Notwithstanding the possibility of social desirability during the interviews, foster parents in this study clearly do reflect on the role of worldview differences, and *trans*-worldview placements, in the breakdowns they have experienced. Furthermore, the majority of the foster families in this study describe themselves as Christian or having a Christian background, while only 8 of the 26 foster parents reported having a Humanist, Muslim or atheist worldview. Foster care staff from non-denominational foster care organisations estimate that most foster parents in the Netherlands have a Christian background (Van de Koot-Dees et al., 2023), but for privacy reasons religions, this is not officially documented. Foster care organisations face difficulties in finding families from minority religions (Day & Bellaart, 2015). Still, it is important to include birth parents and foster children of minority worldviews in the research.

4.2. Implications for future research and practice

Our research focused on foster parents' experiences, but future studies should include (former) foster children and birth parents. It is particularly important to include Including care-leavers, as they can provide insights from a life-course perspective during a period of worldview exploration (Cheruvallil-Contractor et al., 2021). These findings suggest that if foster parents hold strong worldviews, this does not inherently cause tension if they collaborate well with the birth parents, avoid substituting them, and include the birth family and their worldview in the foster child's life. Further research among more foster parents, birth parents and foster children is needed to confirm these findings.

Matching arrangements should clarify the impact of the foster family's worldview, so that the birth parents understand its practical implications. Trans-worldview placements require discussions on how the birth parents' worldview can be incorporated into the child's life. Foster care workers must ensure that parents with special needs, such as those with intellectual disabilities, psychological challenges, minority worldviews, or language barriers, are well-informed when giving consent.

Foster care workers need to be trained in the attitude of 'multi-directed partiality', which means the foster care worker is not neutral or impartial, but is partial to everyone involved, especially the most vulnerable persons (Van der Meiden, 2019; Van de Koot-Dees et al., 2023). They should address unexpected worldview differences that can arise during the placement. Simple questions can help: 1) 'Do you have worldview practices that may be offensive or difficult for the children and/ or birth parents (during adolescence)?' 2) 'May there be worldview practices in which the foster child would participate that you might conceal from the birth parents, or exclude them from?' Even when worldviews seem to be aligned, monitoring the alignment in daily practice is crucial.

5. Conclusion

Good collaboration with birth families and providing opportunities to foster children to explore both worldviews are crucial for the identity development of children in *trans*-worldview placements. When arranging a consistent match on worldview is not possible, efforts should focus on strong co-parenting relationships between foster parents and birth parents, allowing the child to explore both worldviews without experiencing the stress of split loyalty.

This study was pa

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: [Danielle van de Koot-Dees reports financial support was provided by Dutch Research Council. If there are other authors, they declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper].

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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