"We felt ready, even though we were weren't ready, we were ready, we were as ready as we were going to be" – Exploring adoptive parents lived experience of agency supported adoption preparation using Interpretative Phenomenological analysis.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology

The University of Sheffield

Faculty of Social Sciences

Department of Education

June 2020

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Acknowledgements

It is with profound appreciation that I thank the tutors on the Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Sheffield, especially my research supervisor Dr Sahaja Davies and my pastoral tutor Dr Anthony Williams. You have all influenced my journey over the past three years that have led toward the completion of my thesis. I would also like to thank my colleagues who have supported my placement over the last two years. Your belief in my abilities have kept me afloat when I have been at a low ebb.

To my family, especially Chris, Daisy and mum, thank you for the support, you have been wonderful, you have kept me going, fed and watered me when needed, and given me the space I have needed, even when we were all locked down together.

One further group of beautiful individuals also deserve a thanks. To those who understand the pressure and stress of completing this doctorate, my peers.

Chapter 1: Abstract

In the UK as of 31st March 2019 there were 78,150 looked after children. The number of children who were adopted between April 1st 2018 and March 31st 2019 was 3,570 (Department for Education, 2019). Research suggests that one in five placements are disrupted (Wright (2009; Rushton (2003)

Research into looked after children has shown an increased prevalence of mental ill-health and Adverse Childhood Experiences (Department of Health/Department for Education, 2017) and these can impact enormously on learning, behaviour and health (Hughes, Lowey, Quigg, & Bellis, 2016). In addition, these children are impacted by numerous caregiver transitions (Fisher, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that adults are adequately prepared to become adoptive parents. Statutory guidance on Adoption (DfE, 2013) is not explicit about what 'Adoption Preparation' should entail, and as a result the adoption agency or local authority can be flexible in what is delivered to adopters.

This thesis seeks to explore the lived experiences of three adoptive parents, who were supported by their agency to become adoptive parents and aims to uncover their lived experience. Participants were recruited across two LA's in the North of England. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was utilised as the methodology.

Analysis generated three superordinate themes, a feeling of being nurtured, being in a position of knowing and the intense emotional nature of the process. Super-ordinate themes for a feeling of being nurtured explored the depths of the social work support experienced by the adopters, interactions with others who understand, and the sudden intensity of the transition to parenthood. Superordinate themes for being in a position of knowing explored the need to understand their child, their feeling probed and checked upon, and the uncomfortable feelings

of rejection. Superordinate themes for the intense emotional nature of the process explored feeling emotionally overwhelmed, and developing and protecting our family.

This analysis formulated a greater understanding of the lived experience of the adopters and promoted recommendations for educational psychology practice and future research. Recommendation for further research includes understanding the lived experiences of adopters specifically in relation to emotional well-being prior, during and post adoption, and the experiences of adopters and foster carers during transition into adoptive care.

Implications for professional practice includes an increase in collaborative working between social work professional and EPs, which includes consultation opportunities to adoptive parents, and a training offer.

Chapter 2: Introduction

2.1: Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore the lived experiences of three adoptive parents, who were supported by their agency to become adoptive parents and aims to uncover their lived experience. The needs of looked after children are well documented in literature, and it is recognised that these needs do not simply disappear once they become adopted (Gore Langton, 2017).

There is a great deal of research that explores adoptive parents' experiences of adoption preparation which covers consideration for wider family, links with foster carers, the specificity of the training and how they experience their social worker. However, there is lack of literature that delves deeply into the lived experiences of adoptive parents with regard to their adoption preparation.

There are large numbers of children adopted each year, and the guidance on how to prepare the adults who adopt them is not in statute, and therefore what guidance there is remains open to the interpretation of those delivering it.

My experience of working with adoptive parents, suggests that many have experienced difficulty understanding how best to develop positive relationships and manage behaviour.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will allow me to suggest ways forward to improve the experiences for both adoptive parents and the children in their care.

2.2: Definitions

What is adoption?

'First4Adoption' is a national information service for people interested in adopting a child in England. Within their glossary of terms on their website, they define adoption as

'...Adoption is a legal procedure in which the parental responsibility for a child is transferred from their birth parent or other person with parental responsibility to their adopter ... When an adoption order is made in respect of a child, the child becomes a full member of their new family, usually takes the family name, and assumes the same rights and privileges as if they had been born to the adoptive family' (2019).

What is Adoption Preparation?

Within the context of this research 'Adoption Preparation' will be understood as the process that an adoptive parent goes through, with the support of their adoption agency, prior to becoming an adoptive parent. This includes group training sessions with other potential adoptive parents, discussions with social workers, which includes assessments and any preparation prior to the child being placed with them.

What is a looked after child?

A looked after child is 'a child who is looked after by a local authority', either in residential accommodation, such as a children's home, or in foster care (The Children's Act, 1989)

2.3: Structure of thesis

Chapter 3 begins by introducing the legislation linked to adoption and considers how adoption has evolved since it began in the 1920's, through to the current situation. I also consider some literature on the impact of a looked after child, and offer a critical literature review for research that considers adoption preparation, looking into adoptive parent's satisfaction with the process, research that frames the process as more of an assessment, and more generally how

this process is experienced by adoptive parents. I conclude this section with my research questions.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology of this study. Initially sharing my positionality as a researcher, followed by the ontological and epistemological stance. My research design covers my methodological choice, and the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, along with a critical assessment, ethical considerations, and reflection on quality within IPA research. The procedural aspect of the methodology covers recruitment of participants, use of a reflective diary, data collection, transcription and analysis.

Chapter 5 outlines the results for each superordinate theme and then discusses these findings against previous literature and introduces new literature that is specific to the findings.

Chapter 6 considers aspects of quality in research and whether these have been met by the research. It concludes this research by considering any recommendations for future research, limitations of the research and any implications for educational psychology practice.

During the preparation phase, data collection and analysis aspects of my research I kept a reflective diary.

Relevance of 'Adoption preparation' to Educational Psychology

My experience of working alongside adoptive parents suggests that many have experienced difficulty understanding how best to develop positive relationships and manage the behaviour of their children. This led me to become interested in how prospective parents of adopted children are prepared to care for a child who has potentially endured some adverse childhood experiences. I feel that there is a role for Educational Psychology to support this process of understanding looked after children, especially those who present with a special educational

need. I feel that the knowledge we have with regard to child development and interpersonal relationships could be utilised positively to support awareness and understanding within this homogenous group.

Chapter 3: Literature review

3.1: Chapter Introduction

This chapter will explore the pertinent current research exploring 'Adoption preparation' in the UK. There is a plethora of research in the USA and across Europe, however as research in this field is intrinsically linked to government guidance, a decision was made not to include it.

In this chapter I will initially present some guidance around adoption legislation and specific information regarding the history of adoption in the UK from the 1920s to the current day. This chapter will also highlight current UK statistics on adoption and consider research on the impact of being a after looked child. This will be succeeded by current academic literature on adoption preparation, which is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The research will be presented in sections to allow the reader to develop an understanding of the themes within current literature. The chapter will conclude by justifying the value of this research project and presenting my research questions.

3.2: Context

In order to have an understanding of adoption preparation I feel that it is relevant to understand the context in which adoption preparation is placed. This includes understanding the legislation that underpins adoption, the history of adoption and the current situation for looked after children in the UK.

3.2.1: History of Adoption in the UK

In order to understand where we are today, I feel that it is useful to consider the history of adoption in the UK. Full adoption was introduced into England and Wales by the Adoption of

Children Act 1926, when the voluntary agencies canvassed for a law to give legal status to child adoption *'in the best interests of the child'* (p.144). This meant that adoption would have to abide by certain rules which made the selling of children more difficult. At this time many children would be relinquished at birth due to the stigma attached to illegitimate children being born out of matrimony. The 1960s and 1970s saw the liberalisation of contraception and abortion, which reduced the number of unwanted pregnancies, along with an increase in the number of unmarried mothers, which was supported by a reduction of shame at being an unmarried mother, and the birth of welfare system for single parents. These factors together impacted on the numbers of babies available for adoption. Adoption was modernised by the Adoption Act 1976, this included the need for one of two requirements to be met. Either one of the parents was required to consent to the adoption six weeks after birth, or the child had succumbed to serious neglect or abuse. This Act also introduced the concept of applying to be an adoptive parent via an adoption agency (Mignot, 2017). The landscape of adoption has changed, and this was reflected in the year 2000 within the key messages from the prime minister's review of adoption.

The shifts in adoption trends need to be widely recognised and acknowledged; adoption of children from care in the 21st century is less about providing homes for relinquished babies and more concerned with providing secure, permanent relationships for some of society's most vulnerable children (PIU, 2000. p.5)

This was further endorsed by Rushton within his review of adoption research. He suggests that *'pre-placement preparation have not always kept pace with changes in the population of children to be placed'* (2003.p11). The current Adoption and Children Act 2002, now stipulates that courts may decide on adoption, and takes into account the wishes and feelings of the child concerned (Mignot, 2017).

3.2.2: Adoption legislation

The importance of family life to a child cannot be overstated. It is the fundamental right of every child to belong to a family; this principle underpins the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which the United Kingdom ratified in 1991. Where children cannot live with their birth parents for whatever reason, society has a duty to provide them with a stable, safe and loving alternative family (Department for Education, 2013, p.7)

The law states that a couple or one person can make an application for an adoption order for an individual under the age of 18 years. Further conditions include that at least one of the couple is domiciled in a part of the British Islands, and that both of the couple, or the single applicant have been habitually resident in a part of the British Islands for a period of not less than one year ending with the date of the application. Furthermore, the adoption agency will also complete an assessment of suitability to ensure that the adults are appropriate to become adoptive parents. Part of this includes police checks on the adult members of the family to ascertain any previous convictions. The applicant will also be required to provide three references and consent to a full medical examination (Adoption and Children's Act, 2002).

It is the duty of the local authority to look after any child. The Children's Act 1989 defines a looked after child as 'a child who is looked after by a local authority is a reference to a child who is (a)in their care; or (b)provided with accommodation by the authority in the exercise of any functions for a continuous period of more than 24 hours.

3.2.3: Current situation in the UK

In the UK as of 31st March 2019 there were 78,150 looked after children, which is a figure that has increased by over 5000 since 2017 (72,670 looked after children). The number of children

who were adopted between April 1st 2018 and March 31st 2019 was 3,570. Children become looked after for a variety of reasons, of these 78,150 children, 49,570 were looked after due to neglect and abuse, with a further 11,310 being looked after due to family dysfunction. (Department for Education, 2019). Therefore, in one year 3,570 children were placed for adoption. I feel that it is relevant here to consider what we know of these children, and how this may impact on how we need to prepare adoptive parents to care for them.

In order to expand the data on looked after children foster carers complete a questionnaire that considers any behavioural concerns. The (SDQ) strengths and difficulties questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) is a short behavioural screening questionnaire, and this screener is completed on all looked after children annually. The primary purpose is to give social workers and health professionals information about a child's wellbeing. A score of 0 to 13 is considered normal, 14 to 16 is borderline, and 17 to 40 is a cause for concern. For the current statistical year (2018-2019) those children between 5 and 16 years old indicated that over half were classed outside of normal range, with 12% borderline and 39% cause for concern (Department for Education, 2019). What this information provides in relation to adoption preparation is that a large number of these children, and their adoptive parents, may require support regards behavioural issues. I feel that this is a poignant fact and failure to recognise these potential additional issues may impact on the continuation and stability of placements.

Similarly, educational attainment for looked after children is also monitored. The data gathered indicates that the educational attainment of a looked after child is much lower than the general UK population, especially in English and Maths. Over fifty five percent of looked after children had a special educational need (29% at SEN support; 26.5% SEN with an EHC or statement), compared to 14.6% of all children. The most common category of registration for looked after children is social, emotional and mental health (38.5% of those with a statement or EHC plan and 46.3% of those with SEN support), compared to all children (12.8% of those with a

statement or EHC plan and 17.5% of those with SEN support). (Department for Education, 2018). Therefore, it is possible that adopting a child may require close contact with school staff for the length of their education.

3.2.4: Impact of being a looked after child

As previously mentioned, a child is classed as looked after if they have been in the care of the local authority for a period longer than 24 hours. The reasons that children become looked after is most commonly due to neglect and abuse (Department for Education, 2019). Research into adopted children suggests that neglect and numerous caregiver transitions can adversely impact on the development of the child (Fisher, 2015). The impact of being neglected or subject to abuse is frequently referred to as Adverse Childhood experiences, which can be described as *'potentially traumatic events that can have negative lasting effects on health and well-being'* (Boullier & Blair, 2018. p.132). Research by Shonkoff & Garner (2012) concluded that the costs of adverse childhood experiences are enormous on learning, behaviour and health. Hughes, Lowey, Quigg, & Bellis (2016) used results from the English national household survey, which utilised the Short Warwick Mental Health Well-being Scale and looked at nine adverse childhood experiences. They concluded that there was a strong relationship between childhood adversity and mental well-being in later life as an adult, highlighting the long-term effects of childhood maltreatment. A meta-analysis into ACEs highlighted the risk for the next generation as having issues with violence, mental ill-health and substance use, and that multiple ACEs are a major risk factor (Hughes, Bellis, Hardcastle, Sethi, Butchart, Mikton, Jones & Dunne, 2017). Infants with insecure or disorganised attachment issues are at an inflated risk of having to contend with a range of emotional and behavioural problems as they develop (Department of Health/Department for Education (2017). Studies have shown links between

mental ill-health and Adverse Childhood Experiences, and that mental health needs are much more prevalent among looked after children (Department of Health/Department for Education, 2017), 45% of looked after children aged 5-17 were assessed as having a mental disorder; 37% had clinically significant conduct disorders; 12% were assessed as having emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression and 7% were rated as hyperactive (Meltzer, Gatward, Corbin, Goodman, & Ford, 2003). Reflecting on this research it should be considered that such research studies rely on self-reporting retrospective questionnaires (Kelly-Irving & Delpierre, 2019). In addition, there is little consideration for adults who present with positive outcomes who experienced multiple ACEs.

The green paper Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision Department of Health/Department for Education (2017) also highlighted the lack of evidence about prevalence of mental health problems in adopted children, but points to the similarities in early life experiences of looked after and adopted. Children who enter the care system have already undergone adverse experiences in the home environment prior to any issues that may have occurred as part of placements (Anthony, Paine, & Shelton, 2019; Sempik, Ward, & Darker, 2008). It is indicated that beyond placement these children need a highly trained workforce in order to address these needs (Sempik et al, 2008). Children often remain in emotionally abusive households for a substantial time. This is due to the difficulties associated with detecting, investigating and responding to emotional abuse (Glaser & Prior, 1997), and emotional abuse may have also occurred alongside other categories of abuse. Children who experience psychological components of abuse may have more intense or longer-lasting problems which could result in difficulties in settling with their new families (Dance, Rushton, & Quinton, 2002).

Therefore, taking into consideration the research around looked after children there is potential for these children to succumb to poor outcomes linked to their environmental factors. It is important to ensure that adopters are adequately prepared for the potential challenges they may face in the future, thus good quality adoption preparation is paramount.

Research around adoption preparation tends to offer idiographic information that is specific to each participant in the form of quotes. Research participants share very different experiences, and therefore, any one research study could report both positive and negative experiences from adoptive parents about different aspects of their experiences.

The research will be presented in themes that develop an argument towards the research questions.

3.3: Support systems

The literature below highlights various support systems during the adoption preparation process, this includes the role carried out by social work staff and wider social care individuals, such as foster carers. In addition, the research also highlighted the role for Educational Psychologists.

3.3.1: Role of the social worker

The social worker has a main role in supporting prospective adopters to become adoptive parents. Research has stressed the importance of developing positive relationships between the parents and the social worker Kanuik (1992), and furthermore, in a research study in middle childhood it was found that the social worker led the majority of the sessions and rarely was

there a role for psychologist, child psychiatrist or teacher (Quinton, Rushton, Dance & Mayes, 1998). Although both research findings stated here are over twenty years old they still remain valid. Findings of more recent research highlights the role of the social worker, with few mentions of other professionals.

Research has highlighted some negatives of the adoptive parents' experience of the social worker. One study suggests that adopters felt they were incompetent (Dance and Farmer, 2014) this was in relation to being careless with paperwork. Furthermore, in later research it is highlighted that one third of children's files contained factual inaccuracies, and this was information that was passed to potential adopters (Farmer & Dance, 2016; Quinton et al, 1998). A report published by the DfE, 2014 stated that 20% of the sample of adoptive parents felt that the support from the social worker was inadequate, with their feelings of being overlooked and them being pressured to move forwards. This research was large scale and contained data covering an eleven-year period on every adopted child in England. The large data set also included some limitations, such as missing data. This occurred because local authorities are not required to collate the data on adopted children (Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings, 2014).

Although in comparison, often within the same research, there are equal reports that the group sessions that were led by social workers were well received by the adoptive parents, and that adopters were pleased with the service they received from the social worker (Dance and Farmer, 2014; Farmer & Dance, 2016). This highlights how each individual experiences the phenomena in a different way.

Other adopters described feeling supported all the time and describing the social worker as outstanding (Selwyn et al, 2014) but that they tolerated the home assessment because it was required, and that ultimately, they did not feel prepared. This is difficult to quantify because every social worker is different, as is their level of experience, and inexperienced staff may

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impact on how well adoption preparation was delivered (Parker, 1999; Rushton & Monck, 2009). Research into intercounty adoption reported a higher level of satisfaction than dissatisfaction, although this split was 41% and 19%. The dissatisfied adopters discussed jumping through hoops and an emphasis on the negative aspects of becoming a parent (Hoffman, 2013). I feel that this indicates a real spread of views across the literature.

Specifically on the group sessions 42% found the group preparation sessions useful, and those parents who were dissatisfied had previous childcare experience, one participant stated *'the course was a total waste of time and the person running it was useless'* (p.95) with an emphasis on negatives aspects of adopting a child rather than the positives (Quinton et al, 1998). Other positives included attachment training being well received, however this was on a theory level rather than considering and trying to understand the impact of several prematurely ended relationships that the child had experienced (Meakings, Ottaway, Coffey, Palmer, Doughty, & Shelton, 2018), and nearly a third of adoptive parents wanted help to address emotional and behavioural well-being concerns for their child.

A study by Dance & Farmer (2014) used second-hand data from a previous study that they had conducted (Farmer, Dance, Beecham, Bonin & Ouwejan, 2010). The data set used focused on 27 families across 10 local authorities who took part in face to face interviews about their experiences of applying, being prepared for and becoming an adoptive parent.

The descriptions given by the parents about this period showed that the majority had found it a primarily positive experience, but that it was at best 'mixed' or at worst 'difficult' for two-fifths (11 of 26 families, 42%). Even among those who were positive, there were lots of phrases like 'intense', 'difficult' and 'emotional', but these were countered with words such as

'confirming', 'interesting' and 'rewarding'. With the other two groups there was more mention of frustrations and upset.

Two interview schedules were used here, one shortly after the match with the child and the second one after 6 months. Interviews were a mix of open and closed questions. The first interview posed questions about the adopters' expectations, experiences and views about the adoption process. Some of the data was analysed quantitatively, with more in depth information being analysed qualitatively to explore the range of experiences in the early stages of the journey, through to adoptive parenthood and to draw on key narratives, themes and messages with relevance to practice. The study reported differences in how the preparation and assessment stage was experienced by individuals, with most finding it positive. The data suggested that although positive was an over-arching phrase used, it came along with intense, difficult and emotional, along with confirming, interesting and rewarding.

There was an overall feel that they had learned a lot from the sessions, they also highlighted the negative impact on their physical and emotional health. Role play sessions were something that the participants seemed to dislike, along with a focus on the 'horror stories' which I can only presume means worst case scenario information that is shared with the prospective adopters. They highlighted that participants had an idea of what type of child they wanted to adopt or would feel unable to manage and was some discussion around how their preferences were stretched, and whether or not what is available at the time becomes more poignant.

Many participants initially wanted a small child, and many did not wish to adopt a child with a disability or behavioural issues. One factor within this study that may have implications for the validity and reliability of the data, is that the parents reported that they had learned a lot, but this was prior to the placement of any children. Had the question been repeated six months into placements, with parents who had no prior experience of parenting an adopted child, the

data may offer more of a real-life insight into how useful the preparation stages were. Another difficulty that needs consideration is what 'learning a lot' means, there is no explicit information, therefore unless learning a lot correlates with being prepared to care for a child who has previously suffered abuse or neglect then the value is unclear.

Rushton & Monck (2009) used randomised control trials for two different interventions (CBT, or psycho-social education) prior to adopting a child, specifically a child who exhibited some behavioural issues (as assessed by the SDQ). They interviewed adoptive parents about their preparation which included the content and quality of their preparation, their satisfaction, suitability, specific nature of the training, their expectations once the child arrived in their home, and how applicable the training was. They questioned whether it was possible to deliver a service to adoptive parents that is both general enough to meet the needs of adopted children generally, whilst also being specific enough to the child being placed. The overall quantitative data indicated that most parents (90%) said the preparation had helped them understand the likely problems of looked after children. The richer qualitative data produced comments with regards to the perceived quality of the social worker, and that "nothing was held back" (p.7). further comments were suggestive of checking to see what they felt they could manage as an adoptive parent 'what would you do if….? scenarios, as well as making them consider basic physiological needs and more complex psychological aspects of adopting a child. The adopters felt that anger, attachment issues, child development, and relationships with peers were inadequately covered. It may have been that these were discussed, but not to the level that the parents needed (Rushton & Monck (2009). The value of this study lies in the recency of the adoptions, and the specific group of children placed. This may be indicative that it is less generalisable, however, I feel that many of the comments from parents are applicable to the general population where the adopted child is not identified as having significant problems. The limitations of the interventions for most of the adopters was that although their

understanding was enhanced, they did not feel prepared or trained to cope with the challenge that their child presented. Whilst Dance & Farmer's research (2014) reported that they were satisfied with the service, it needs to be appreciated that their experience of preparation was assessed prior to children being placed. Rushton & Monck's (2009) study highlights that parents may feel that they have an increased awareness about how to parent a child, but a more telling picture emerges when initial benefits of the preparation are compared with adopters' experiences and reflections after the child has been placed with them.

The individual sessions between social workers and prospective adopters probed into the expectations and what they felt that they could or could not cope with, which indicates a process of checking rather than preparation (Quinton et al, 1998).

Adoption UK is a national membership organisation for prospective adopters and adoptive parents, providing information, advice, support and training. With a membership of 5,000 families. In 2010 they conducted some research with their members 'Waiting to be parents: adopters' experiences of being recruited'. The questionnaire was carried out between October and December 2010, via an online survey. In total, 179 responses were received. Of those who responded, 82 percent had been through the adoption process since the beginning of the year 2000. The survey highlighted a great deal of good practice among local authority and voluntary adoption agencies at this time, and although this should be properly acknowledged, it must be considered that the recollection of parents may be impacted on due to the effects of recency, and for instance if a smaller sample had been considered for those parents who had been through the process in the last 2 years it may add to the validity of the research findings. In general terms, around two-thirds, of adoption agencies are providing a good or reasonable service to prospective adopters, however one of the conclusions made was in reference to a disproportionate focus on procedures and checks at the expense of effective preparation and long-term support. (Adoption UK, 2010).

Research illustrates the complexity of the parenting task that adopters have to embrace when caring for their child. They suggest that support needs of adoptive parents are not anticipated by the social worker before placement commences (Meakings et al 2018). This research utilised a mixed method approach using questions and interviews, and used thematic analysis for the qualitative information, however as with much of the research in this field it does not delve deeply into the actual lived experiences of the adoptive parents. Further research highlighted that aside from feeling ill prepared due to what was being provided by the adoption agency, about one in five parents revealed that they had downplayed their own difficulties or had not been very honest because they did not want to jeopardise their chances of being approved. The difficulties that the parents downplayed included that their marriages were under strain, that they were struggling to come to terms with a recent miscarriage, or omitted information about current fertility treatment whilst being assessed as prospective adopters (Selwyn et al, 2014).

Research reports differences across how people experienced levels of information, this ranged from not being aware of the physical medical needs of the child and a lack of information about mental health issues with the birth parents. In addition, there were differences across what information was available about the background information of the child, and emotional and behavioural information. This lack of information did not impact on the parent's ability to develop positive feelings towards the child (Quinton, Rushton, Dance & Mayes, 1998). Research in 2014 identified that two-thirds of their sample felt that they had not received all the information about the child prior to placement. In addition, when information was shared, the adopters were not supported to understand the information's significance (Selwyn et al, 2014). Overall feelings of readiness were reported as 74% having few concerns, 26% having concerns, which included not feeling an immediate connection with the child, but an overwhelming urge to be a parent compelling them to proceed and continue despite their concerns. (Selwyn et al, 2014).

Here, within the literature it seems that although research spans over different decades similarities in findings remain. In addition, a depth of understanding of lived experiences is also lacking within the research.

3.3.2: Role of others in the wider circle of social care

Throughout research meeting up with others who have been through the same process as perceived by the adopters has been highlighted. Many adopters viewed it as a worthwhile and welcomed the opportunity, they felt it helpful to hear input from adoptive parents as part of the adoption preparation course (Parker, 1999; Quinton et al, 1998; Turkington & Taylor, 2009)

Equally foster carer input came through the research. Adopters talked about the supportive nature of foster carers (Parker, 1999), more current research highlighted that 61% found the foster carer welcoming and friendly, and they shared information about the children's history in more detail which was helpful, as well as sharing information regards routines and liked foods etc. However, 30% reported that they found the foster carer to be obstructive (Selwyn et al, 2014). These types of mixed findings occur throughout the literature, however they lack the understanding of the details. It would have been interesting to have understood the reasons for the foster carer being obstructive. Advice regards ongoing contact with foster carers post placement was discussed, as some of these children have had lengthy placement with foster carers prior to being placed for adoption. Research suggests that parents were advised around having a *'clean break'* from foster carers which meant no contact at all (Meakings et al 2018. p.68)

Research reports high numbers of adoptive parents being linked to more than one child before they were matched to the child they adopted. They felt frequently let down, but also able to say no when given further details, pictures, information, or just when things didn't feel right. They

sometimes described how they felt emotionally invested when only at the linking phase. Concerns were also raised by adopters' regards being matched with a child but not having met them. One parent spoke about the benefit of seeing a video of the child interacting with the foster carer and felt that was beneficial (Selwyn et al, 2014). Poor matches were linked to feelings of being rushed (Farmer & Dance, 2016). Good quality information is key for successful matching, along with children's information being clear and honest and not minimised. Where this did not happen and preferences were stretched placements were vulnerable to disruption (Farmer & Dance, 2016). Although data on disruptions in not necessarily accurate as highlighted through the DfE report in 2014 (Selwyn et al, 2014).

3.3.3: Role of the Education Psychologist

Research tended to be focused on reporting the role of the social worker rather than any other professional. However, there was limited literature in this field.

> *'There is an increasing recognition that the needs of children who leave care into adoption or special guardianship do not disappear when their permanency orders are granted'* (Gore Langton, 2017. p.27).

Gore Langton (2017) considers the concept of a 'happy ending', and she considers research of increasing evidence that the impact of early life trauma remains high. This is an important premise from which to start, as the research discussed in the previous section is indicative of a level of unmet need in adopted children. Her review of the literature highlights the similarities between stable foster care placements and adoptive placements, and considers outcomes regards learning, SEN, exclusions and SEMH needs. She highlights the key issues that are raised by adoptive parents in relation to education as a misconception of modern adoption, which includes a misunderstanding of why children are in care, and how quickly they should

recover from the trauma they experienced. There is also a lack of understanding about attachment. It seems that this research is suggesting there is an underused role that could support this cohort of children within the education and wider systems for the benefit of adopted children. Gore Langton highlights that Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to offer services with regard to adopted children highlighting the core roles of the EP as training, consultation, assessment, intervention and research. She concludes that

> '*EPs can support adoptive families directly by providing training and consultation about children's education and emotional needs, and offering direct therapeutic interventions to build parents' capacity to respond to their children*' (p.28).

Further research highlights a role for EPs and suggests that consultation sessions are a good way to support adoptive and foster parents. It is reported that there was an increase in carer feelings of confidence and a decrease in their concerns. The adoptive and foster parents conveyed issues such as behavioural concerns, educational issues and social emotional and mental health concerns. The qualitative information relayed their positive experience of the sessions, with one comment standing out above all others 'Although we have been fostering for 36 years we can still learn' (Osborne & Alfano, 2011.p.406). This quote indicates the value of the knowledge and skills of the Educational Psychologist in supporting children in adoptive and foster care. It should be noted that although the feedback was positive the adoptive and foster parents were not afforded the opportunity of time to reflect upon the session as their feedback was taken as the session ended. It is therefore unknown if the advice given was applicable in practice.

3.4: Content

The literature below highlights how the training and preparation content were received by adoptive parents. There is also consideration given to the content of adoption preparation and the requirements of its use.

3.4.1: General nature of training

Research has highlighted that adopters feel lacking in background information regarding the child they adopted (Selwyn et al, 2014). However, this may have been due to the timescales of this study as the participants may have adopted a child over ten years ago and recollections may be unclear. The Maudsley Adoption and Fostering agency reported that adopters found the training too global, with too little emphasis on parenting skills (Quinton et al, 1998), and Parker (1999) highlighted the need for preparation that was bespoke to the child, differing in content, length and depth dependant on their needs.

Rushton & Monck (2009) conducted research that was specific, with their target group utilising adoptive parents who had adopted a child with 'serious difficulties', as measured via the SDQ (Goodman, 1997). They were interested in whether the preparations were salient to the individual child placed. They questioned parents about their expectations of becoming an adoptive parent. As with other research studies there were differences in what was reported. Some parents had expected difficulties, and the reality was even more difficult than they had anticipated. Other parents felt they had all the information they needed, feeling well prepared, however the reality was a stark contrast. 65% of the adopters fed back that they felt the courses had not developed the parenting skills they would need to care for a child. This lack of information does not support the adopters to feel prepared to parent a child, however the nature

of the lacking information does not offer the details of the lived experience which would be useful to consider.

An imperative need that was highlighted was the specificness of the information. Adopters want as much accurate information as possible in order to be able to be prepared for the child arriving, and this information should be bespoke (Parker 1999). Parents could be further supported by having information in both verbal and written form, as this helps them to absorb the information better and will allow them to return to the information at a later date (Parker 1999; Quinton et al, 1998). Research suggests that ultimately some parents wanted a manual of how to care for these children and felt that more support in the early stages would have been better than them giving up on the child. There were also concerns as to whether the child was normal. They felt that this could be supported by having someone to talk and to be reassured about whether what they were experiencing was normal (Meakings et al, 2018). The literature presented here spans over decades with more recent literature uncovering similarities which potentially indicates an absence of reflection on the current literature for those who are preparing parents to adopt children.

3.4.2: Content of Adoption Preparation

'little is known about the typical content, methods, and quality of the preparation and training on offer in the UK' (Rushton & Monck, 2009.p.4)

Although the term 'Adoption Preparation' is used frequently in research and published documents, what 'adoption preparation means remains unclear. One research study considered the lack of clarity for adoption preparation and highlighted that the details are left to the discretion of the agencies and, not surprisingly, each different agency delivers a different

balance of advice, information, training and psychological exploration (Rushton & Monck, 2009).

One explanation may be that it is due to the lack of mandatory guidance. Guidance about preparation, as set out in the Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005), was mostly concerned with information-providing about the nature of the adoption process and the legal procedures, and only brief mention is made of the skills necessary to be an adoptive parent. This issue was not resolved when updated statutory guidance was produced in 2013. As far back as the year 2000 within the prime minister review of adoption it was highlighted that effective preparation of adoptive parents has a strong influence on the stability of adoptive placements and highlighted the good practice of the catholic children society who had merged assessment and preparation which included meeting other adopters (PIU, 2000). However, this seems to have had little impact on securing any type of clarity for adoption agencies. The government produced updated Statutory Guidance in 2013 'Adoption: statutory guidance - Statutory guidance for local authorities and adoption agencies' (Department for Education, 2013) this replaced the 2005 Adoption Agencies Regulations. The updated regulations includes guidance on the whole adoption process from decisions to place a child for adoption through to post adoption counselling. Chapter three is dedicated to 'Preparing, assessing and approving prospective adopters', although the guidance is not explicit about what that entails, with four mentions of 'adoption preparation', the document also references skills, and training as necessary only a few times, which includes training being advised if the adopter and adoptee have different cultural backgrounds. The following statement from the guidance highlights the ambiguity of the guidance

'*All prospective adopters will need some form of adoption preparation. The agency will need to decide its form and substance, arranging preparation that takes into account the prospective adopter's circumstances*' Department for Education, 2013. p.68).

Delivering adoption preparation

Coram BAAF produce a document 'Preparing to adopt – England' (Dibben, Fursland, & Probert, 2014). It is marketed online as

'*... a well-established and highly respected training resource which enables agencies to offer relevant, high quality and comprehensive preparation for people who wish to adopt*'.

The training pack is designed for social workers and trainers who plan and deliver adoption preparation courses in England. The nine module pack covers :-

  i)   What is adoption?

  ii) The children needing adoption

  iii) The adoption process

  iv) Children's development and attachment

  v)   The needs of children affected by neglect and abuse

  vi) Becoming a parent through adoption

  vii) Linking, matching and introductions

  viii) Telling, contact and social networking

  ix) Life as an adoptive family – learning to live together

There is no requirement that this is used, as it is not a statutory document, therefore is it up to the adoption agency/ local authority how to develop the training package, and even if the adoption agency does purchase the package they can interpret how the training is delivered.

There are currently 343 separate local authorities in England (Gov.uk, 2019) and an additional 45 voluntary adoption agencies registered with Ofsted (First4adotpion, 2020 all of which will support adoptive parents prior to them adopting a child. This is potentially 388 variations on how adoptive parents are prepared. Within Rushton's review of research on adoption it highlighted that that models of preparation vary considerably (2003).

3.5: Emotional considerations

The literature below highlights how the adoption preparation included considerations for wider family, contact with birth family, the transition to receiving a child, and how this was an emotional journey. This section concludes with literature on adoption disruption.

3.5.1: Family unit

Developing a family and adopting more than one child is part of the preparation for some adopters. An adoptive parent reflected, *"what you fail to realise is there are three children who come instantly and that's not how families are made"* (Dance & Farmer, 2014 p.109). The introductions of the children they were going to adopt is emotionally charged (Parker, 1999). This research by Parker from 'Adoption Now' was published last century, however the relevance of his findings remains current. Children already living in the home need to be adequately prepared for new children joining the family (Quinton et al, 1998). There are

differences across research studies for how this was dealt with. One study reported that this was insufficiently dealt with ((Dance & Farmer, 2014). However, a study in the same year concluded that a small number of participants felt that the preparation for other children in the household was good (Selwyn et al, 2014). The detail with regard to the lived experience of the participants across these studies is lacking, it would be useful to understand what was good or insufficient about their experiences and how adoption preparation could be better supported in the future.

Dealing with wider family issues highlighted that new adoptive parents were advised to stay at home to promote the attachment with their new child, but this was ignored by the majority of the sample, and they spoke about extended family having gone through this journey with them for many years (Meakings et al, 2018). This research offered great insight by sharing the narratives of the participants involved with regard to 'battening down the hatches' (p.66)

Contact with birth parents was discussed through some of the research Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings (2014). It identified the benefit of the children having face to face contact with birth parents post adoption and identified that it is helpful for the children to have more information, know siblings and know people who they look similar to. However, they also felt that this could also have implications that were negative and conflicting for the child, but that this awareness of birth family would reduce the chance of fantasist understandings of biological family (Turkington & Taylor, 2009). The adopters themselves did not highlight any benefit to themselves as parents but felt that the issue of the family triangle needed to be considered as part of the preparation (Turkington & Taylor, 2009). This research by Turkington & Taylor, (2009) used a small sample. This is the case for the majority of the studies where qualitative methods utilise idiographic information, that is specific to each participant, thus reducing the opportunity to generalise the findings.

3.5.2: Length of time from application to adoption of a child

Another factor that arose from the research was the length of time it took adopters to have a child placed with them. This factor is two-fold because there is the length of the journey to adopt from application to placement, and the length of the transition period. Many reported the whole process as taking too long (Dance and Farmer, 2014; Adoption UK, 2010; Quinton et al, 1998) although it should be considered that some of this research is outdated with regard to government guidance, and that timescales and delays are a key thread within the DfE guidance which was updated in 2013. However, more emphasis was placed on the latter stages being rushed, the pace of the transitional periods were too rushed for some (Parker, 1999), *"we indicated our desire to adopt [just over two years ago] and it took until [just four months ago] to get to [approval] panel and then literally a handful of weeks after ratification, up pops [our son]"* (Dance and Farmer, 2014.p107). A DfE research study highlighted the failings of transitions that varied between a week and 14 days, and commented on poor planning regards accommodation, distance of travel when doing introductions, poor timings around Christmas, birthday and social worker being on annual leave (Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings (2014). Furthermore, one finding was highlighted that foster carers needs were prioritised rather than those of the adopter (ibid). Research suggests that the rushed nature of the transitions can impact on poor matching decisions being made (Farmer & Dance, 2016). Furthermore, it is suggested that there had been an over recruitment of adopters who had wanted a young child. This resulted in adopters being encouraged by social workers to consider the foster to adopt route, however this would not meet the needs of adopters as they would run a high risk of the child being returned to birth parents if the permanence order was not granted (Rogers, 2018).

3.5.3: Emotional considerations

Research postulates that parenting an adopted child is emotionally challenging (Howe,1988) and that behavioural problems with this cohort of children is common practice (Howe,1997). This research from last century is corroborated by more recent findings that consider adoption disruption (Wright, 2009; Selwyn et al, 2014). These difficulties could be due to children experiencing intense or longer-lasting emotional or psychological components of abuse and these types of experiences may result in difficulties in settling with their new families (Dance et al, 2002). Research suggests that considering difficulties faced by adoptive parents from different paradigms such as psychoanalytic/ attachment perspective could be useful (Briggs & Webb, 2004).

Adopters need to be helped to achieve a level of confidence in their ability to parent a child with significant needs (Tasker & Wood, 2016). They utilise the concept of 'unsafe uncertainty' (Mason, 1993) which describes a level of anxiety about an ability to parent a child. Another factor to consider is their awareness of the conflicting scripts that children have for their caregivers, and the attributes that they associate with a parenting role (Tasker & Wood, 2016). In the past the children may have experienced negative attributes within the parenting they received which has moulded their internal working model, and view of the world. Equally the parent may hold a level of fanaticism about parenting a troubled child and of being a saviour, which could be in contrast to the expectations of extended family members who wanted the continuation of their current family script. They conclude that social workers need to support adoptive parents to move from safe uncertainty to safe enough uncertainty (Tasker & Wood, 2016).

3.5.4: Adoption disruption

As we have already identified, looked after children have likely experienced adverse early experiences and this indicates a need for a highly prepared adult to be able to support the adopted child through their lifetime. We need to get the adoption preparation right for these parents, to reduce and minimise any further impact on the child and reduce the chance of adoption disruption. Wright (2009) reviewed the available literature on the reality of adoptive placements. This was in response to a suggested increase in adoption targets after the Prime minister's review (PIU, 2000) concluded that outcomes for children are improved when adopted. She queried that although adoption works for some children, she considered data from a number of sources and concluded that one in five placements are disrupted and also posited that just because placements are not disrupted that this does not correlate with successful placements. This figure of one in five was also supported by Rushton (2003) who estimated that 20% of placements are unsuccessful. Wright highlights that the data on disruption rates is not nationally recognised, and that no current data is available. She highlighted a variety of factors that lead to disruption which included increased levels of stress, unhappiness, aggression, destructiveness and overactivity, within a study by Rushton and Dance (2002), and non-compliance, aggression and criminal behaviours (Howe, 1997). She makes reference to the childhood experience of these children prior to being placed for adoption (Quinton & O'Brien 2000). Her solution to adoption disruption was that support needs to be given by adoption-aware social workers who understand the key issues facing adoptive parents and the differing needs of adoptive children. She posits that this would enable adoptive parents to be better placed to care for these children, and proposes this should be offered during the preparation, as after the adoption order is complete the child is no longer classed as looked after, hence the reason for the lack of research in this area. Burnell (2003; cited in Wright, 2009) suggests that specific support should be available to adopted parents once the child is

placed, and that this should include respite and opportunities to recharge so that they can parent their child effectively, along with encouragement from the social worker at times of need and celebrations when appropriate.

The Department for Education commissioned research into Adoption. 'Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption' (Selwyn et al, 2014). The research highlighted that there was a lack of UK research into adoption disruption post 1990. It considered the number of adoptions that had disrupted post order and explored the experiences of adoptive families where relationships were fractured. Part of the research required the adoptive parents to answer questions about the quality of the social work preparation. Interestingly 65% of parents whose child had left home thought that the preparation had been inadequate, in comparison to only 20% of parents whose child still lived at home. The study used data that covered an eleven-year period, and therefore there has been changes in legislation and guidance documentation over this time. This did, however, allow for some recognition from adopters that should they adopt in the current climate that more up to date training would be provided.

3.6: Chapter summary/Justification for the research study

The needs of looked after children are well documented in literature, and it is recognised that these needs do not simply disappear once they become adopted. There are large numbers of children adopted each year, and the guidance on how to prepare the adults who adopt them is not in statute, and therefore what guidance there is remains open to the interpretation of those delivering it. These children have likely experienced adverse early life experiences, and this indicates a need for a highly prepared adult to be able to support the adopted child through their

lifetime. We need to get the adoption preparation right for these parents, to reduce and minimise any further impact on the child and reduce the chance of adoption disruption.

There is a great deal of research that explores adoptive parents' experiences of adoption preparation which covers consideration for wider family, links with foster carers, the specificity of the training and how they experience their social worker. However, there is lack of literature that delves deeply into the lived experiences of adoptive parents with regard to their adoption preparation. I feel that this insight could support the development of guidance that considers the needs of the adopters and addresses the gaps in their knowledge. I feel that this could be highly relevant to Educational Psychology practice as we are well placed to offer services within the core roles which includes training, consultation, and research (Gore Langton, 2017), and are well received by foster carers and adopters (Osborne & Alfano, 2011).

To achieve this, the research aims to explore this question:

1) What is the experience of adoption preparation of three adoptive parents?

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1.1: Chapter Introduction

In the first subsection of the chapter I will outline the reasons for my selected methodological approach and discuss the reasons why I rejected other methodologies. I will outline the history of phenomenology, offer some critical assessment of IPA and outline the ethical considerations I had prior to beginning the research. I will conclude the subsection by considering the importance of quality in research.

The second subsection will outline the procedural aspects of the research. I will outline how participants were recruited, along with the criteria for the sample. I will also outline interview transcription through to the process used to analyse the data.

4.1.2: Positionality

Major & Savin-Baden (2010) suggest highlighting your stance via a positioning statement is good practice as it establishes the role of the researcher in the research process whilst acknowledging any potential bias.

I recognise that my role as the researcher is interpretative within this process. In order to be transparent (Yardley, 2000) within this research I feel it is necessary to highlight my life and working experiences. It is my belief that this transparency will allow the reader to understand the context for my choice of methodology, and why I have chosen to explore the lived experiences of adoptive parents.

I grew up in a working-class household in a town in the north of England, but as a teenager my life experiences were not straightforward, my older sibling was unwell, and in society today I may have been classed as a young carer. I realise now as an adult that other individuals also experienced the illness of my sibling. This significant event was viewed from several different

perspectives of a mother, father, sibling, and grandparent, and I understand that there were differences in their experiences. I feel that this has led me to appreciate and be interested in the idiographic qualities of life, it has influenced what interests me about people, and how I practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. I endeavour to understand individuals lived experiences, and view issues from their perspective.

Alongside my personal life experiences, my career has also influenced my research interests. Over the last fifteen years I have worked with children and their families and at times have supported foster and adoptive parents, and the children involved. I have no personal links with the adoptive community which places me as an outsider in relation to this research.

4.1.3: Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology is the study of what exists, it is concerned with the nature of the world, and what constitutes reality.

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, what knowledge is and how we can attain it (Willig, 2008).

Due to the ontological and epistemological standpoint I am drawn towards uncovering something in depth. In order to fulfil the requirement for detail, qualitative investigation methods will be utilised in order to provide rich in-depth data to be analysed. This will allow the reader an insight into the experience of the participants involved. The ontological and epistemological view of this research is phenomenology. The ontological standpoint of phenomenology is outside of social constructionism and positivism. It regards phenomena as something that exists within the field of experience. This will be explored later in the chapter when discussing phenomenology and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

4.1.4: Methodological Choice

My choice of methodology is driven by my ontological and epistemological stance. This stance moves me towards an idiographic qualitative methodology as I felt motivated to represent and interpret the experiences of the adults involved in the adoption preparation process. It was therefore important to get as close to their experiences as possible.

After considering the information within my literature review, I felt there was a lack of in-depth qualitative studies. Along with a reasonable weight of information taken from nomothetic methods to research adoptive parent's experience of adoption preparation (Selwyn et al, 2014; Dance & Farmer, 2014). These quantitative studies, like many others, were largely concerned with numerical data, and associations based upon statistical analyses (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). However, the opportunity for rich descriptive accounts of the phenomenon (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2014) were missed. This led me towards choosing a qualitative methodology and rejecting any mixed methods or purely quantitative methodologies.

According to Smith, Flowers & Larkin, (2009) there are four main approaches to qualitative research, these are phenomenology, grounded theory, discourse analysis and narrative analysis. Grounded theory is an approach that can be defined as having four features: *'minimal preconceptions about the issue under study, simultaneous data collection and analysis, using various interpretations for data, and aiming at constructing middle range theories as the outcome of the research'* (Flick, 2018. pg 3). Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) draws themes and subsequent theory from qualitative data, it uses an iterative approach for data collection that is systematic, repetitive, and recursive (Bryman, 2016; Smith et al, 2009), and it places an emphasis on the way that ideas emerge from the researcher's immersion in the situation (Thomas, 2017). I felt that Grounded theory was an appealing option due to the systematic approach, and that it would also enable the exploration of the phenomena as *'seen through participants'eyes'* (Hardy & Majors, 2017. p.17). However, the purpose of this

research was not focused on constructing theory which moved me towards a phenomenological methodology.

Discourse analysis is an approach that emphasises and analyses the social use of language, (Bryman, 2016; Thomas 2017), for me as the researcher the focus on language did not meet with my requirements as I hoped to access the autobiographical memories of the participants (Willig, 2008). With discourse analysis like narrative, it focused on the language used rather than the authentic experience of the participant (ibid).

Whilst narrative analysis elicits the voice of the storyteller, (Bryman, 2016) according to narrative theory (Murray, 1999) we are born into a storied world, and narrative in its classic form has a beginning, middle and an end. In considering using a narrative approach I felt that this would offer their stories and their voices. However, I didn't feel that they held the focus on lived experience which I had hoped to capture.

This therefore led me towards a phenomenological methodology.

4.1.5: Phenomenology

'Phenomenology is the study of human experience, and the way in which things are perceived as they appear to consciousness' (Langdridge, 2007. p.10).

Many theorists have added to the field of phenomenology and taken the ideas in a range of different directions. These are documented below:-

Franz Brentano (1838-1917) was a philosopher, not a phenomenologist, a student of Aristotle, and the influence that inspired Edmund Husserl to develop the idea of 'intentionality'. Intentionality is a concept that Brentano reformulated from Aristotle (Moran, 2000).

Phenomenology was proclaimed by Edmund Husserl at the turn of the 20th Century as an alternative way to practice philosophy. This radical movement was a shift from the abstract metaphysical to the concrete world of lived experience. It held links with Neo Kantianism and Husserl's version of phenomenology became a form of transcendental idealism. Husserl's thinking was inspired by his students, and, as long as they were studying the '*experience of the matter themselves'* there were no restrictions on what could be examined (Moran, 2000.p.xiii).

Intentionality is a key feature of consciousness, it refers to the fact that *'when we are conscious, it is always to be conscious of something. There is always an object of consciousness… the intentionality correlation leads to a focus on the experience of things in their appearing, and the way in which they appear to us as we focus our attention on them in our consciousness*' (Langdridge, 2007. p.13).

Husserl introduced the concept of Epoché. Epoché is the Greek term that Husserl used to describe the process of bracketing off our preconceptions about things we are investigating. It was felt that this way of practising would support a critical understanding of the person's lived experiences (Langdridge, 2007. p.17.). The idea of bracketing does not suggest that we forget, and/or make vanish what our preconceptions are (Smith et al, 2009).

Martin Heidegger was a student of Husserl however his ideas were very different in that they stripped away the Kantian and Cartesian transcendental elements and revisited earlier existential ways to comprehend the phenomena of human existence. Heidegger discussed the 'Daisen' which translates as 'being-with'. Heidegger published his ground-breaking book *'Being and Time'* in 1927 which documented his findings*,* within the text he also described 'Daisen' further.

'Daisen is essentially being with ... Even Daisen's being alone is being in the world. The other can be missing only in and for being with. Being alone is a deficient mode of being with; its very possibility is proof of this' (Heidegger, 1927/1962.p.156-157).

Heidegger's existential ontological stance further explored 'being', in that 'being' in the world makes knowledge possible

'A being can be uncovered, whether by perception or some other mode of access, only if being of this being is already disclosed – only if I already understand it. Only then can I ask whether it is actual or not and embark on some procedure to establish the actuality of the being' (Pietersma, 2000.p.89).

In more simple terms Daisen is absorbed and entrenched in the world of things and relationships. Smith et al (2009) suggest that Daisen's experience '*is understood to be an in-relation-to phenomena'*(p.29) with the individual being able to offer a unique subjective position on their relationship and involvement with the particular phenomena in question.

Heidegger set in motion the beginnings of hermeneutics and the existential emphasis on phenomenology. Within this he questioned the possibility of any knowledge outside of interpretative viewpoint. This view was grounded in a view where human beings are thrown into a world of relationships, language and things, hence in the lived world. He viewed the person in context and wrote about 'intersubjectivity' which relates to our relationship with the world which allows us to communicate with, and make sense of each other (Smith et al, 2009).

Heidegger's move back towards an original form of phenomenology is linked in part to hermeneutics. Phenomenology is made up of two Greek terms '*phainomenon*', meaning 'to show oneself', and '*logos*' which Heidegger translated as 'discourse'. Heidegger's view was that a *'proper model for seeking meaning is the interpretation of a text and for this reason Heidegger links phenomenology with hermeneutics'* (Moran, 2000.p229). This questioned the

concept of Epoché, or bracketing off our preconceptions, as previously written about by Husserl. Instead he understood phenomenology to be intersubjective where human beings interact and shape their world through experiences within the world of objects which includes other human beings, thus constituting our reality (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

4.1.6: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

There are three major theoretical underpinnings of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, these are Phenomenology, which I have already discussed, and Hermeneutics and Idiography.

'IPA aims to capture and explore the meanings that participants assign to their experiences' (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005.p. 20).

IPA emerged onto the scene towards the end of the millennium within health psychology. *'Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology'* was Johnathon Smith pioneering 1996 paper. It was published in *Psychology & Health* and since this time IPA has emerged across clinical, counselling psychology and educational psychology, with the focus being on *'people engaging with the world'* (Smith et al, 2009.p.5). In his 1996 paper Smith explained the two important hallmarks of IPA as Phenomenology and Symbolic Interactionism. He wrote

> '*Symbolic Interactionism argues that the meanings individual ascribed to events should be the central concern of the social scientist but also that those meanings are only obtained through the process of interpretation. It also considers that meanings occur in, and as a result of, social interactions*' (p.263).

With this in mind it is clear that IPA adheres to a more existential view of phenomenology (Oxley, 2016) and aligns more closely with Heidegger's interpretation of phenomenology. When defining IPA, Smith talked about gaining an 'insider perspective', and understanding the

participants view of the world 'step into the participants' shoes', through attempting to make sense of the sense that the participants are making of their own experiences (moving between emic and etic perspectives). The added value of the researcher here is the outsider perspective and insight that the participant themselves is possibly unable to access (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA accepts that it is an impossibility to gain direct access to the participant's experience. It recognises the role of the researcher, and the interactions that need to occur, and accepts the interpretative nature of the process (Willig, 2008). Interpretative phenomenology does not separate descriptive factors from interpretive factors instead it argues that all description constitutes a form of interpretation (Willig, 2008).

Research that utilises IPA as a methodology focuses on how people perceive an experience, and what that experience means for them. Therefore, there is not a predetermined hypothesis to support or refute, but rather a general question to explore (Langdridge, 2007).

Why IPA and not another type of phenomenological research?

I chose to use IPA because I'm a novice researcher and have not utilised a phenomenological approach previously. Having a step by step systematic approach to follow, such is the guidance set by Smith et al (2009) made this inductive approach appealing. Furthermore, IPA supports the strict time constraints for completing my thesis as a doctorate level student.

4.1.7: Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation. Initially designed for biblical texts which then expanded to other historical texts in an attempt to give more authority to these texts. There are three important hermeneutic theorists these are Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer.

Hermeneutic theorists are concerned with whether we can uncover intentions or original meanings of the author; what are methods and purposes of interpretation itself; and whether there is a relationship between the context at the time the text was produced and the context of the time when the text was interpreted.

Schleiermacher felt that interpretation was a craft that uses various skills including intuition. He felt that interpretation involved grammatical and psychological interpretation with the psychological aspect looking at the individuality of the author. Schleiermacher believed that if the researcher had completed a comprehensive detailed holistic analysis then they could end up with "an understanding of the utterer better than he understands himself" (Schleiermacher, 1988.p.226). Schleiermacher felt that the interpretive analyst could offer something that the author was not able to, which was a perspective that added value (Smith Flowers & Larkin, 2009)

Heidegger's literary works *Being and Time* wrote about phenomenon showing or appearing and coming forth from somewhere where it had not been previously present which is explained in this quote.

> *'Manifestly it is something that proximally and for the most part does not show itself at all; it is something that lies hidden in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does not show itself but at the same time it is something that belongs to what this shows itself and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground'* (Heidegger, 1962/1927. p.59).

The relevance here for IPA is that the interpretive aspect brings into the forefront that which is latent (Smith Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In Moran's works he understands this as

'Phenomenology is seeking after a meaning which is perhaps hidden by the entities mode of appearing. In that case the proper model for seeking meaning is the interpretation of the text and for this reason Heidegger links phenomenology with hermeneutics. How things appear or are covered must be explicitly studied. The things themselves always present themselves in a manner which is at the same time self-concealing' (p.229)

Within Gadamer's primary work 'Truth and Method' (1990/1960) Gadamer like other theorists was concerned with analysing historical texts. He builds upon Heidegger's concept of fore-structure and the relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted (Smith et al, 2009). Gadamer explained a process of going back and forth, and once immersed in the data the interpreter engages in a dialogue between something old (a fore-understanding) and something new (the text). In this essence the interpreter always brings something to the text, and the text always brings something new to the interpreter.

Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices (Gadamer, 1960/1990.p.271).

Double Hermeneutic

This complex sense making process is how knowledge is gained in IPA. It can be characterised in two steps. Initially the participant makes sense of their own experiences, this is followed by the researcher interpreting the sense they (the participant) has made. This process is often described in terms of a double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Within IPA it is a goal to "try step into the participants' shoes", through attempting to make sense of the sense that they

(the participants) are making of their own experiences (moving between emic and etic perspectives). The added value of the researcher here is the outsider perspective and insight that the participant themselves is possibly unable to access (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

A reflection here is that the knowledge gained as part of the research are not interpretations directly from the participants, they are the sense I have made as the researcher from the sense they made as the participants.

4.1.8: Idiography

IPA supports an idiographic approach and covers two factors; the specificness of the population being researched, and the commitment to the particular. To address the first factor, IPA generally utilises a small purposive sample size of generally between 3 and 6 participants. This leads into the second factor which is the commitment to the particular. The individual in these cases offers a unique perspective of their experience and involvement with the phenomena in question (Smith et al, 2009; Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995). IPA supports aspects of convergence and divergence across the sample; that is what is similar across the population and what is different.

Idiographic approaches are in contrast to the majority of psychological research which can be described as nomothetic, whereby the data and sampling allows the researcher to make generalisable claims that could impact upon a specific population. Nomothetic approaches tend to use large numbers, as this helps to support their claims. One of its limitations is the reverse, that in fact it loses sight of the individual information. IPA could thus be understood to be non-generalisable (Smith et al, 2009), however Harré (1979), argued that idiography proposes a different way of regarding the generalisations by uncovering them with caution and within the particular (particular population).

4.1.9: Critical Assessment of IPA

IPA purely as a qualitative methodology has general critique (Langdridge, 2007), the diverse nature of these methodologies utilises a range of techniques and judgements, although as Yardley points out these are in fact a strength of the methods we employ (Yardley, 2000), and due to these concerns various guidelines for considering quality in research have been developed (see section 4.1.11 Quality in Research).

Specifically, for IPA Willig (2008) offers a detailed critique highlighting three factors; the role of language, suitability of accounts and description versus interpretation. As previously discussed, IPA works with text, and transcripts, these are generally from semi-structured interviews, as is the case with this research. IPA is concerned with lived experience, in relation to a particular phenomenon (Smith et al, 2009). Therefore, if language is the medium used by the participants to depict their experiences it relies on the representational validity of the language. It could be argued that the same event could be described in a manner of different ways and therefore the question is 'Does language construct rather than describe a reality?'. Does an interview transcript only tell us what they have said about the phenomenon, rather than it being about the experience itself, or where the experience of the phenomena originated (Willig, 2008).

Experience is a key factor of all phenomenological approaches, ... and understanding experience and the way in which a person perceives the world they inhabit (Langdridge, 2007.p.14). Those participants who struggle to articulate their experiences in a sophisticated manner using language could be excluded from this type of research (Langdridge, 2007; Willig, 2008).

IPA focuses on perceptions, and it also argues that all description constitutes a form of interpretation (Willig, 2008). As previously discussed IPA is about gaining an 'insider perspective', and understanding the participants' view of the world 'step into the participants' shoes', moving between emic and etic perspectives.

Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) argue that the researcher adds value here as the outsider perspective and has insight that the participant themselves is possibly unable to access. However, a concern may be that the added value may be a misinterpretation by the researcher. In order to address this, as the researcher, I remain transparent that the knowledge gained is the sense I have made as the researcher. Which has derived from the sense the participants have made, making it second order sense making (Smith et al, 2009). This links in with Ricoeur's (1970) hermeneutics of suspicion, which sheds light on the phenomena using perspectives from outside of the self.

IPA is idiographic, it looks to consider the particular, the detail, however, as part of the process of IPA there is guidance that suggests the analysis should be pointing to both convergence and divergence (Smith, 2011), and this is a portion of what makes a good research project. Although this is somewhat confusing because on one hand we are promoting the idiographic nature of IPA (divergence), whilst on the other we are hoping to make generalised claims about the small population of the research (convergence) (Smith et al, 2009).

Research suggests that *'IPA can be easy to do badly, and difficult to do well'* (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.103) this may be due to guidance from different text that describe the analytical process. The balance between using probing questions and following the interview schedule requires substantial skill, which may be beyond the novice researcher. They may not have developed the confidence and experience to work flexibly within the interview process, therefore they tend to follow the schedule (Eatough& Smith, 2008). Furthermore, low levels

of supervision can lead to simply descriptive outcomes, rather than interpretative and analytical (ibid). Concerns were also highlighted regards the descriptive rather than interpretative nature of phenomenology (Willig, 2007; Langdridge, 2007; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

4.1.10: Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted in April 2019 via the University of Sheffield's School of Education. In order to write this application guidance was taken from the British Psychological Societies Code of Human Research ethics (BPS, 2014), and as such this research adheres to these four principles:-

- Respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals and communities.

- Scientific integrity.

- Social responsibility.

- Maximising benefit and minimising harm.

All four potential participants were given an information sheet (appendix B), to allow them to make an informed decision regards taking part in the research. All participants who wanted to take part then contacted me directly, and a consent form (appendix C) was completed prior to the interview taking place.

Phenomenology is the study of human experience, and the way in which things are perceived as they appear to consciousness (Langdridge, 2007. p.10), therefore the aim of the interview was to connect with the lived experiences of the participants. The information from the literature review had led me to consider that the interview may be emotive for some of the participants. It was therefore my decision that in order for individuals to be able to freely talk, their audio files would be deleted once transcribed and I, as the interviewer, would be the only individual who could identify them. All interviews were completed at the convenience of the participant, and in a place where they felt comfortable. All participants were given the option

to cease the interview and withdraw at any time, this was extended to cover a period of two weeks after the interview had finished to allow them time to reflect on whether they wanted their information used as part of the research. Other ethical considerations included participants being linked to external agencies post interview should they require any additional support, and all audio files were deleted once transcribed to ensure the anonymity of the participants. My full ethical application is detailed within appendix A.

4.1.11: Quality in Research

'It is absolutely vital that qualitative research is conducted in a systematic and rigorous manner' (Langdridge, 2007.p.80). Over the last few decades several criteria for evaluating qualitative research have emerged, namely, Lincoln & Guba (1985), Yardley (2000), and Smith (2011). I have considered the latter two for the purposes of this research.

Yardley (2000) stated four criteria with several different ways in which these could be met. I will highlight each one and outline how I feel that this research has met the criteria.

- Sensitivity to context

The criteria focuses on being critically aware of the understandings developed by previous research in the field and also those who used similar methodologies. The criteria also promotes the awareness of the context in which the research takes place which includes considerations for socio economic, cultural and historical context and how they may influence the sense making processes. It also considers the relationship between the researcher and the participant and the subsequent power dynamic or imbalance that may be present due to the perceived expert role of the researcher (Yardley, 2008).

Prior to deciding upon a specific methodology, I previewed literature in the field of AP and considered gaps in the literature (see literature review). This in turn led me towards an in depth

analytical qualitative methodology such as phenomenology. The sampling method was explicitly chosen is it allowed me access to participants who could offer a perspective that clearly linked to the research question, and the time frame in which they had adopted was critical to this to ensure recency of their information. In addition, I had also considered the methodology and the philosophical underpinnings of the qualitative approach at length. I also used Langdridge's (2007) reflexive questions throughout this process (see appendix G).

- Commitment and rigour

Commitment highlights the need for immersion within the topic and the development of the skills needed to analyse the data collected. Rigour highlights the need for data and the subsequent analysis to be adequate, this includes the ability of the sample to provide the information. Rigour is also linked to interpretation which may include several levels of analysis, which is a factor of IPA.

Qualitative research needs to be conducted systematically, this reduces the potential for researcher's subjectivity to be projected on to the research, and also opens up the possibility of unearthing phenomena that could remain hidden (Langdridge, 2007).

The topic that I chose to research has been of interest to me for several years, this is due to my experiences of working with children and families since 2001. I feel committed to this research topic, and the methodology. I am committed to the highlighting the voice of adoptive parents in a detailed manner that goes beyond description. I feel that these detailed interpretative lived experiences are absent from current literature.

As this was a methodology that I had not previously used I read in depth about the historical aspects and the philosophy of this approach, (Langdridge, 2007; Moran, 2000; Pietersma, 2000; Sokolowski, 2000). It was also advantageous to utilise the stepped guidance provided by Smith et al (2009).

Criteria specific to 'good' IPA research has been developed by Jonathon Smith (2011). In his paper he highlights that:-

- The paper should have a clear focus.

- The paper will have strong data.

- The paper should be rigorous.

- Sufficient space must be given to the elaboration of each theme.

- The analysis should be interpretative not just descriptive.

- The analysis should be pointing to both convergence and divergence.

- The paper needs to be carefully written.

I will consider these criteria as part of Chapter 6.

- Transparency and coherence

The criteria encourage clarity and cogency within the written document and the argument that the researcher is trying to make. It is about constructing a version of reality (Bruner, 1991). The quality (clear and transparent) of how the paper is written adds value and can make it meaningful and persuasive to the reader. Further transparency can be added if it is clear how the analysis was conducted (availability of transcriptions, and exerts from the data set), which would enable another researcher to conduct a similar analysis.

I kept a research diary and have included excerpts from this in my results and discussion, part of this included Langdridge's (2007) reflexive questions. The transcripts were made available to my supervisor and discussions with my supervisor throughout the process have supported me to develop my academic writing skills. This will ensure that my final write up has clarity and is accessible to the reader.

- Impact and importance

An important part of any research is its future utility.

> *"The ultimate value of a piece of research can only be assessed in relation to the objectives of the analysis, the applications it was intended for, and the community for whom the findings were deemed relevant".* (Yardley, 2000. p.10)

It is my view that considering and reporting on the voices of the adults involved in adoption preparation will be interesting to the adoption community, Educational Psychology practice and Clinical psychology practice. It is my hope that further idiographic research in this field can be conducted to open up discussions and further unravel the phenomena of being an adoptive parent.

4.2: Procedure

4.2.1: Participants

I applied an opportunistic purposive sampling strategy in order to achieve a homogeneous sample. This non-random technique was utilised to ensure that adoptive parents were represented. The homogeneity of this sample will be due to all being adoptive parents who received some preparation from the adoption agency/ local authority prior to having a child placed with them. My rationale for this is that adoptive parents have a unique, and important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample must be ensured (Mason 2002; Trost 1986, as cited in Robinson, 2014). The sample allowed me access to the phenomenon of being an adoptive parent (Smith et al 2009, p.49). The criteria for taking part was solely that they had adopted a child within the time frame of between six months ago and no more than five years ago. The reason for this as criteria was based around a critique of previous research by Dance & Farmer (2014) where participants had been interviewed about the usefulness of their adoption preparation prior to the child actually being placed with in their care.

Participants were accessed initially through links with the Educational Psychology service within the LA. Information sheets were shared with school SENCOs to pass to prospective participants. Only three participants contacted me via the information on the information sheet, and one of these was the pilot interview, and this information was not utilised in the main body of the research. In order to extend the sample size by one participant a potential participant was approached via links through the University of Sheffield. I had been made aware that this individual had recently adopted a child. All potential participants were provided with an information sheet about the research and had the opportunity to contact the researcher for further information.

The research took place in the North of England across more than one LA. All four participants who offered to take part were interviewed, one of these formed the pilot (see table 1). Two of the participants were supported by the same LA. All participants had adopted children within the time frame of between six months ago and no more than five years ago. Both genders were represented across the sample, and all participants had adopted alongside another adult. The information from the pilot participant was not used as part of the main analysis. However, this interview did influence the development of the schedule for the subsequent three interviews, allowing it to become more refined and support the sense making process.

	Interviewee	Child	Length of time in care of adoptive parents	Other children in the household	Partners name
Pilot	Erica	Tommy (age 8)	4 years	1	Barbara
#2	Joyce	Billy (age 6)	4 years 6 months	0	Steve
#3	Mike	Max (age 2)	6 months	0	Jim
#4	Nancy	Lucas (age 6)	4 years	1	Jonathon

Table 1. Details of participant using pseudonyms with basic information shared by interviewees.

4.2.2: Reflective Diary

In order to record my thoughts pre and post interviews, I developed a reflective diary. This allowed me to capture my own thoughts uncensored, along with any initial sense that I made

of the interviews through the process. This process also supported my reflections for the pilot interview and subsequent change to the interview schedule.

4.2.3: Data collection

I had to consider the most suitable data collection method in order to allow the participants the opportunity to offer a rich account of their experience of adoption preparation, in order to answer the research questions.

I needed to consider what method best suited IPA as a methodology (Smith et al, 2009). There are several options to be considered that have been used for IPA research, such as postal questionnaires, email dialogue, focus groups and observational methods. All of these methods were disregarded. As the researcher I felt that the rapport with the participant could only be accommodated in a face to face scenario (Rapley, 2001). Rapley highlighted the role of the interviewer in that the 'data' is collaboratively produced (ibid). Semi-structured interviews are highlighted as a preferred method for IPA (Reid et al, 2005). In order to complete a thorough interview, a schedule needed to be compiled.

Interview schedule

I utilised the guidance from Smith et al (2009) to produce my initial interview schedule (see appendix E). This included three main questions and subsequent prompts. I had considered my interview schedule for some time, I was aware that I did not wish to influence or guide the tone of the interview in any way. I was torn between being valiant and using an unstructured approach or being slightly more measured using a semi-structured approach. After much deliberation for my first (pilot) interview I decided to use the main question and prompts only. The main question was "Can you tell me about how you were prepared for becoming an

adoptive parent?". My reasoning for this was because I wanted the interview to be as wholesome as possible and access the genuine, authentic world of the participant (Bryman, 2015). This moved me towards an unstructured interview rather than semi structured.

Reflections on pilot interview

After reading the transcript it was evident that the passive position I undertook as the researcher failed to gather the in-depth, rich detail about the participant's experience required to support the analysis and to consider the research questions. This took me back to the initial interview schedule, and I reconsidered what would be useful. I still wanted to have elements of the unstructured interview, which Palmer, (1928) suggests 'assumes the appearance of a natural interesting conversation, but to the proficient interviewer it is always a controlled conversation which he guides and bends to the service of his research interest' (p.171). However, as a novice researcher I required more structure. Discussions with my research supervisor with regard to my pilot interview supported me to develop my ideas further and therefore amend my initial interview schedule to include specific issues to cover across the subsequent interviews. This shifted my thoughts back to a semi-structured approach. I also reflected that I needed to delve much deeper into the phenomena being studied and in order to do this I considered the guidance of (Smith et al, 2009) who suggest descriptive, narrative, structural, contrast, evaluative, circular, comparative, prompts and probes, and avoided over-empathic, manipulative, leading and closed questioning. Semi-structured interviewing would allow me to capture what had lacked in my unstructured interview and allow me to engage in a conversation, be flexible, reactive and investigate with further questioning what my participants were sharing about the phenomena in question (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Positive reflections upon the pilot

interview included the usefulness of the prompts in obtain a little more detail, my ability to place my interviewee at ease, and how paraphrasing worked well.

Subsequent interviews

With a revised interview schedule (see appendix F) I felt more in tune with my technique as a researcher. I felt more confident about my prompts, and the issues that I hoped to cover through the course of the interview. I took some notes so that I could delve deeper into comments that the participants made at a later stage in the interview process as I was conscious that I did not want to impulsively curtail their recollections of the phenomena in question. I felt that having a list of issues and prompts that was more comprehensive relaxed me as an interviewer and the interviews seemed to flow more effectively.

During the interviews the interaction with the double hermeneutic began. As the interviewer my questions and prompts supported the interviewee to make sense of their experiences, which lead to further questions and prompts and my own second level sense making.

4.2.4: Transcription

All interviews were recorded on two separate dictaphones, one to act as back up in case one failed. I transcribed each interview verbatim as soon as possible after the interview had taken place. My chosen method of analysis required a semantic record of the interview, which included all words spoken by the interviewee, along with all those spoken by myself as the researcher. In addition to this, I included any non-verbal utterances such as laughter, as these additions will form part of my sense making during the analysis. My transcription process was guided by Smith et al, (2009) All transcripts were recorded to enable a line by line examination of the text.

4.2.5: IPA Analysis Procedure

The analysis procedure follows Smith et al, (2009) six step framework. I will outline each stage in turn.

Step 1 – Reading and re reading: the step entailed immersing myself in the original data. I listened to the audio files whilst transcribing verbatim, then listened once more whilst reading to ensure the transcripts were accurate. Throughout this process I made reflections, which I recorded in my research diary.

Step 2 – Initial noting: this was an onerous aspect of the process, and I started many times to find a system that worked for me as the researcher, and it was closely linked with step 1 of the process as re reading occurred frequently. The ideal is to produce a comprehensive set of notes and comments on the interview, the guidance suggests that this should go in a wide margin. The comments are separated into

- descriptive comments; these are about taking things at face value, the things that matter to the participant
- linguistic comments; these are about the use of pronouns, pauses, laughter, repetition, tone, fluency and metaphor, and finally
- conceptual comments; these are more interpretative, and interrogative, and a move away from the explicit claims of the participant

I began this process using the margins but didn't feel that this worked for me, and therefore I amended my technique and recorded descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments on a large sheet of A1 paper, I followed this by revising these comments and handwriting them in the margins.

Steps 1 and 2 were focused on looking beyond the words to consider the sense the participant had made, and the second order sense making (Smith et al, 2009) that I had made as the researcher. I feel here is where it differs from Thematic analysis. For example, when Nancy is discussing whether her son has settled and recalling how this progressed over time (lines 241-246). The second order sense I made here was that she was trying to work out if they were a family yet.

Step 3 – Developing emergent themes: this is about reorganising the data, looking for patterns and connections between the data. The whole becomes a set of parts, fragmenting it and then the set of parts becomes new whole, this reduces the amount of data, but remains true to the original transcript.

I used these initial notes to develop a list of emergent themes from the first transcript.

Step 4 – Searching for connections across emergent themes: this is about drawing together the emergent themes, putting like with like 'abstraction', or considering the opposites 'polarization'

Throughout this process the text was interrogated, reading and re reading and questioning the sense I had made of the sense the participant themselves had made, utilising the 'double hermeneutic' I feel here that I went beyond the words of the transcripts and into a deeper level of interpretative meaning.

Step 5 – Moving to the next case: It is important to treat each case individually to maintain the idiographic nature of IPA, bracketing off what I had already learned from the first transcript.

Therefore, I then repeated the process for the remaining two transcripts, after each one re-considering the emergent themes in light of new information, and adding additional themes where needed.

Step 6 – Looking for patterns across cases:

In order to consider what connections there were across the cases, I laid out all of my materials; I had forty-eight separate emergent themes across the three separate cases. I then moved around colour coded post it notes and the forty-eight emergent themes were worked into eight subordinate themes under three superordinate themes. Through the process of analysing the transcripts I engaged with a critical friend who considered the sense I had made of the sense the participants had made. This process was extremely time consuming and several versions of the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes were considered over several weeks prior to a final decision being made with regard to the structure. As I have explained I did not complete the analysis of the transcripts in the margins. I initially made handwritten notes on large pieces of paper, and then transferred these onto printed copies of the transcripts, samples of these can be found in appendix H. However, I did amalgamate all relevant quotes under the superordinate and subordinate themes (appendix I). I have included an example of some quotes from the interviews along with the analysis and the emergent themes (see table 2).

All these below are from the Superordinate theme – A feeling of being nurtured – The depths of the social work support experienced.

She made us think about what we wanted, and what we could manage and what we couldn't manage and what our priorities were and that was really, really helpful. I don't know if all social workers do that, kind of go into that much details and explore it in that much depth but erm I felt that she really kind of understood us as a family and what we wanted and she had that in	Understanding limitations and expectations of the family Feeling of being invested in as a family Was this because she had a good relationship with the social worker. Made us think differently?

mind the whole time which was helpful which was really good. Nancy 62-69	
the social worker Laura was really, really good and she just listened and asked questions, it just flowed I think, and when we got to the end of stage 2 before we went to panel we got the PAR, and actually reading that you could see that she had listened, and she hadn't recorded anything she had just written notes down but the conversation was there, and she got this view of us. Mike 71-76	Felt listened to Heard SOCIAL WORKER LISTENED AND WAS INTERESTED IN ME
I remember her (social worker) saying things like obviously, but it was silly things that they wanted us to do, we had a telly that was a bit bigger than that one (pointed at TV) and we had to get rid of it, you know things like this because we didn't want his (child's) social worker to think we sat and watched telly all day. Joyce 136-140	Having a big tv was not okay? Felt judged? Are they missing the point – the SW. This was not supportive, and didn't feel supportive JUDGED PULLED UP ON THINGS THAT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE

Table 2 – Example of reflections and emergent themes

4.2.6: Chapter Summary

To conclude, I made a conscious choice to utilise IPA as it fits with my ontological and epistemological beliefs. It allowed me to explore the lived experiences of the adoptive parents providing rich information for analysis. It allows the opportunity of the voice of the participant

whilst benefitting from the double hermeneutic, whereby myself as the researcher makes sense of the sense the participant is trying to make (Smith et al, 2009.p3). I have considered quality guidelines in relation to the research and have been transparent about the procedures have I gone through to analyse the interview transcripts.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion of findings

5.1: Introduction

In this chapter I will outline my results and discussion based upon the information gained from the participants interviews. This will allow this research question to be explored:

1) What is the experience of adoption preparation of three adoptive parents?

I will begin this chapter by introducing the reader to the superordinate and subordinate themes and indicate levels of convergence and divergence within each theme. Following this I will consider the results of each superordinate theme, one subordinate theme at a time, detailing quotes from the participants and my interpretations of the findings. Each superordinate theme will have its own bespoke discussion section where the relevant academic literature will be considered. I am aware that the most common way to present a thesis is by having two sections; one for results; and a following chapter for discussion. However, I feel to add clarity and coherence I have chosen to present my findings in a way that presents results and discussion for each subordinate theme in turn.

Homogeneity of the sample

As referred to within my methodology, I applied an opportunistic purposive sampling strategy to obtain a homogeneous sample. Their similarities are present since all three are adoptive parents, and that they all received some preparation from the adoption agency/ local authority prior to having a child placed with them. The actual content of their preparation may have differed across adoption agencies and may have differed dependent upon when they were supported, as there is no explicit way to deliver this information and guidance. Joyce and Mike both accessed support from the same local authority approximately 4 years apart, Nancy accessed support through a different local authority.

Superordinate and Subordinate Themes of Adoptive parents lived experience of adoption preparation

Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme
A feeling of being nurtured by the process	The depths of the social work support experienced
	Interactions with others who understand
	The sudden intensity of the transition to parenthood
Being in a position of knowing	A need to understand 'my child'
	Feeling probed and checked upon
	The uncomfortable feelings of rejection
The intense emotional nature of the process	Feeling emotionally overwhelmed
	Developing and protecting our family

Each superordinate theme was present across all three participants, and with the exception of 'The uncomfortable feelings of rejection' all participants were represented across the subordinate themes. Therefore, there are elements of both convergence and divergence across the sample. The comments that were grouped together to form the emergent themes often varied, for example, within 'the depths of the social work support experienced' some recollections detailed the support and guidance they received in a positive manner whilst other reflections were at the frustrations linked to this relationship. There was a level of individuality and unique nature across the three sub-ordinate themes, which supports the idiographic nature of Interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al, 2009). Where I have used quotations

from interviews, they include the pseudo name of the participant, along with the reference to the line number.

5.2.1: Super-ordinate Theme: A feeling of being nurtured by the process

Introduction to this super-ordinate theme

Nurture was a key theme across all three of the participants lived experience of adoption preparation. There were elements of face to face group sessions that all participants spoke about, but alongside this there is the interaction with the social worker and with other individuals who could relate to their current or upcoming situations. They spoke of how they felt contained, which is highlighted through their interactions with the social worker and foster carers, whilst also having frustrations connected to feeling unsupported at times by the social care profession. Time was a concept that all participants commented on as part of their lived experience. However, this was experienced in two different ways, either, the process as a whole being lengthy, or the feeling of being rushed and overwhelmed at the passing of time.

5.2.2: The depths of the social work support experienced

Analysis

My decision to label this theme 'The depths of the social work support experienced' came about due to the diversity across experiences for each participant, and the recognition that there was more than one social worker involved in the process, one being for the adopter whilst the other was for the child they planned to adopt. The theme encapsulates their ideal situation, as well as highlighting that this need was not always met.

Two of the participants emphasised that the social worker was imperative to the success of the process. They initially commented on the general nature of the social worker "*The social worker we got was lovely, really nice, and I think that probably made a difference... and it was quite relaxed*" (Nancy 20- 24). Nancy seemed to be implying that the interpersonal skills contributed to the relationships she developed with the social worker. Nancy also highlighted some real difficulties with practice but highlighted that the new social worker (as there was more than one) seemed to attempt to repair the damage made by the previous social worker.

> "*She was very sensitive and very supportive, and was quite gentle with us after that, she was kind of there was no pressure, she was erm, she would just be like, 'oh I'm wondering if this one might' erm and we did look at another profile in more detail*" (Nancy 326-331).

Mike was more specific naming actual qualities that he valued as part of his experience. His experience here indicates that he felt heard by someone.

> "*She just listened and asked questions, it just flowed I think, … you could see that she had listened, and she hadn't recorded anything she had just written notes down but the conversation was there, and she got this view of us.*" (Mike 72-76*)*

Although he did initially have concerns that were linked to the availability of a part time social worker.

> "*I was worried … in the beginning mainly because she was part time, that worried me, but she was the best … if anything happened to Max I would pick up the phone and call my social worker.*" (Mike 685-689)*;*

Again, that availability was highlighted, it was someone who Mike could go to and his anxiety would be contained "*We were able to then ask those questions and I would then ping her an*

email *'silly questions but…. Duh duh duh."* (Mike 130-132). I felt that the feeling of being nurtured by the process really came through these recollections.

This progressed to a more meaningful appreciation of the role completed by the social worker for aspects that were implicit to being prepared to adopt a child, and some recognition that it was a reciprocal process, where gains could be made by the adopted and the adoptee.

> *"She also helped us to think more clearly about what it was that we wanted in terms of adopting a child, what we were gonna get out of it, kind of what, I suppose where we were coming from, wanting an adopted child."* (Nancy 29-32).

> *"She made us think about what we wanted, and what we could manage and what we couldn't manage and what our priorities were and that was really, really helpful, I don't know if all social workers do that."* (Nancy 62-65).

It is suggested via the data that Nancy felt as though she was getting above and beyond a normal service at this time, as she questioned if this was what other social workers do. The nurturing nature of the process and how she felt contained by the social worker came through here. However, this could also be interpreted in light of other poor experience of social work practice *"Luckily we changed social workers and we had a really good social worker, erm, who again we felt got us and understood us as a family."* (Nancy 325-326). Mike highlighted how they were prepared for panel.

> *"She said you look at the paperwork …I will come and do some panel prep with you and do some questions I think they are gonna ask you and we will talk about what you are gonna say, and how you are going to answer them, so we did that."* (Mike 80-85).

It wasn't just about being prepared to get through the systems, it was also about practical advice. Mike reflected on the ideas the social worker shared with them with regards to transition.

"I think it might have come from our social worker because we were talking about how to introduce for younger children ... they suggested a butterfly talking book but we couldn't find it so we ended up buying a book for people with dementia where you can record your voice on each page. He still flicks through it now." (Mike 491-498)

and the use of objects and images *"And brown bear in the kitchen, brown bear with nanny, and then he physically had the bear... also big A4 pictures of me and Jim laminated ... put in his bedroom, ... in the kitchen all over."* (Mike 498 – 503).

It is indicated through the data that Mike felt safe and secure with the social worker, she knew the answers, and this gave him a level of feeling contained by her. This highlights that both Nancy and Mike encountered different depths of support through their experiences.

The depths of the social work support was highlighted by Nancy and Joyce who raised issues with the child's social worker. Nancy had previously reflected on issues with their social worker but was very specific and highlighted the child's social worker as an issue, *"Lucas's social worker was incompetent I would say, erm we had a whole heap of trouble with her"*. (Nancy 261), and this type of feeling was mirrored by Joyce who seemed to feel as though the child was dumped on them

"I remember our social worker being a lot more helpful... His was sort of like 'right you're taking one of our children, thanks see you later', and we've not seen any of them again since, but whereas ours have been really good." (Joyce 410-413).

A final element of this sub-ordinate theme delved into the depths of support experienced by the adopters and drew attention to the things that they felt were unnecessary or of little value in the real world. Both Joyce and Mike received comments from social workers about their homes. As Joyce shared this aspect of her lived experience, she seemed frustrated at the absurdity of having to purchase a smaller TV.

"*We had a telly that was a bit bigger than that one (pointed at TV) and we had to get rid of it, you know things like this because we didn't want his (child's) social worker to think we sat and watched telly all day…because it looked like it was the focal point of the room, the house, the room, and they didn't want his (child's) social worker to then come in and be like, so they just sit and watch telly all day, cos they have got a big telly.*" (Joyce 138-146).

When actually she didn't feel prepared, almost like she was suggesting they should have focused their time on more preparation rather than being picky about the diameter of her TV "*So it was weird things like that that we had to do, … and no actually we weren't really prepared.*" (Joyce 148-151). Mike was full of positives for the social worker, but these comments suggested to me that he felt offended.

"*The social worker came round it was like the house is very dark you're going to have to redecorate. I am very proud of our house we have worked so hard on it.*" (Mike 698-700).

Mike shared further about them linking it to "*Kids are scared of the dark.*" (701). Mike referred to the impact this process had on him after some flippant comment about the pond in the garden "*But you are jumping through hoops and sometimes feel like a performing seal!*" (Mike 714-716).

5.2.3: Interactions with others who understand

Analysis

All three of the participants reflected on the benefit of the relationships they were afforded with other adopters or foster carers. They were those 'others' who understood, and these 'others'

offered a level of nurture to the participants. The data suggests that the participants easily related to this group of people, as if there was a sense of similarity that they had with these people, which they did not have with the social workers. It is indicated that implicit in these accounts was a celebration of their contribution.

> *"They were brilliant, they gave us as much information as they could, erm, they were really supportive, sort of emotionally as well as practically, and they just in terms of, like his social worker should have coordinated it all, and actually she wasn't very good at doing that, erm, so for us or for me, I can't speak for Jonathon (husband), they were like, they couldn't have done any more really, than they did, so, erm, and I suppose they kind of saved the day as it were cos we'd had such a horrific time with the other social workers, hmm yeh."* (Nancy 267-275).

The wealth of the input and interactions from foster carers wasn't so strongly recognised by Joyce, she spoke more practically about how she experienced support, and how they understood the child *"We met foster parents, so we knew like his behaviour and how things were."* (Joyce 59-60). She focused more on the value she placed on the interactions with other adoptive parents. When asked to think of a time where she specifically thought back to part of the preparation, where she had been taught something that had really helped she responded with *"I go to other adopters for like, 'why is he doing this?'. I've got my step-sister, they have got an adopted child."* (Joyce 73-75). Joyce implied that she opted to use known adoptive parents over the systems in place designed to support them. The interpretation here links to the knowledge that Joyce's family members had adopted children previously that she chose to use family in the same way that many biological parents do for support and guidance. She had seen how they had managed family life with an adopted child, they understood her situation, and could offer the nurture she required.

Mike viewed the situation slightly differently and inferred that although he knew people who had adopted, it was beneficial to be able to make contact with individuals who had gone through exactly the same process, within the same local authority, so that he could understand that specific experience, and he placed those people as 'others who understood', *"Even though we knew adopters, it was actually an adopter that had been through the process that had been asked those questions."* (Mike 119-121).

Mike highlighted the transition process as paramount in their relationship with the foster carer. Mike appreciated the knowledge and the support the foster carer could offer him at this time.

> *"The whole introduction process was about learning his routine and we kept his routines and the things he ate and we made sure we had those things in the freezer… so erm the first time he was gonna have a nap here the foster carer was like, cos he's a bit funny about sleeping so we borrowed her sheet and brought some of his things to out in there so it felt familiar."* (Mike 454-462).

Both Mike and Nancy made reference within their recollection of events how they felt that they needed to support the foster carer's emotional needs when it came to them parting from this child that they had nurtured for such a long time.

> *"I think the original plan was for 9-10 days but the foster carer had an older daughter, and she would have had to have gone to school on the Friday, so there was consideration of her family and her saying goodbye, he was their first foster child and it had been a long placement as well so there was lot of his needs, our needs, their needs and that when planning meeting was important, and I think those last couple of days it was like let's just, we're ready, we can do this a bit longer."* (Mike 511-519).

These comments from Mike and Nancy indicated how much they both felt for the foster carer's emotional well-being. The interactions with others became a reciprocal process, they related to

one another, and it was important to Nancy and Mike to support these individuals as much as they had felt supported.

> *"She is going through the process of giving up a child that she has cared for, for 10 months."* (Mike 548-550)

> *"But, that I mean, he'd been with his foster carer since birth and he was just over two and for them it was really, really hard, really hard and we were very aware of that."* (Nancy 201-203).

5.2.4: The sudden intensity of the transition to parenthood

Analysis

Time was a factor for all three participants, although there were many layers to how time was experienced. There was a great emphasis placed on the latter stage of the process by both Mike and Nancy. With Nancy there was a sense of finality that she felt on the last visit to the foster carer as twice she said, "*Not going back*". Nancy articulated this with such entrenched feeling, and even laughed through her description of this, which eluded to the nerves she may have felt at this time. The sudden nature of the increased intensity of the process as soon as transition started, came across as an overwhelming jump into parenthood. The data implies that this was particularly nurturing due to the intensity, but held elements of nurture due to the support they received via social care and others who understood.

> *"Erm 10 days, we kind of more or less lived with them and then, yeh very quick visit, we had managed to make time to have a photograph in their garden and but yeh just driving away knowing that's it we're not going back again, you know that he was with us, because we'd been here, we'd taken him out for days out without the foster carers*

but just driving away thinking, that's it [laughed] I'm not going back again. It was a nice feeling but also daunting I suppose." (Nancy 185-192).

It also came through her lived experience that she hoped for others that the process of sudden intensity over a ten-day transition may have changed since she went through this experience

"It might have changed … not meeting them until you actually start the transition, we got all the information photographs things like that but we only met Lucas on day one of the transition…and then day ten he moved in with us." (Nancy 445-452).

The enormity, intensity and sudden nature of this timescale, and fear that it would not work out came through in Nancy's recollection again here, she seemed to be in a place of not knowing and uncertainty, like metaphorically taking this step was a huge responsibility to herself, her family and the child who she referred to at this time as someone else's. The data alludes to this being a reflection about not having met him, it's a very impersonal use of language, but highlights the apprehension she may have had at this time.

"Well yeh, that child is going to be my son, but I've not actually met him yet [laughed] and then you do and, so I remember us driving away from that cos we'd only stayed a few hours and I drove away feeling like 'oh my god', like its mixed emotions you don't know how to feel or how you should feel, and you don't know what's going to happen. It's a positive experience in terms of we, I mean he was lovely, we got on, we you know played 'together and it was lovely but he was someone else's child and you signed up for him to become your son [laughed] so it's, and I was very aware of that before, of that process before and I think that's why I wanted to make sure I got, it went, it was right because at no point did I want to start that process and go 'no I'm sorry, this isn't going to work'" (Nancy 480-491).

This was very similar experience for Mike, however as Mike told his story

"Max was ready and they wanted us so we got whisked along, so we had a meeting here with five social workers, and Jim sat in the corner there, these social workers starting pinging across and talking through things like this and all of a sudden they started getting diaries out and looking at dates of when he could move in." (Mike 380-385).

At this point in the interview Mike's body language was strongly indicating the overwhelming sense of anxiety he had felt at this time. For myself as the interviewer I felt a real sense of intensity in the room as he made these recollections, it was almost like he was describing a rocket being launched and the countdown starting.

"There were discussions around whether he could move in before Christmas or whether we wanted to wait. He was at the point where he wasn't quite walking, he wasn't quite talking he wasn't, we were very close to firsts, so if we waiting until January are we going to miss those." (Mike 400- 404).

The data implies that Mike felt emotionally hijacked, and whether he felt ready or not, he did not want to miss the first steps, almost like it was in his hands to choose when in reality he would be choosing to 'miss out'.

Mike also shared an anecdote about the first time he met the child he was going to adopt, he described his social worker as rogue, although I never took this to be indicative of a negative, it felt more like a term of endearment, and this must have added to the anxiety he felt as now his hopes for the future that were once dreams, were becoming a concrete reality, although it stood on unsteady ground.

"Now we went in preparing to meet this foster carer and this rouge social worker said 'oh he's upstairs having a nap shall we bring him down'. Now that wasn't meant to happen, we weren't meant to have that bump in together, but 30 seconds later he's there

*sat on my knee…now even though that wasn't meant to happen I'm so glad that it did happen because it was hard in the fact that he was sat on my knee and oh god, he's gorgeous, it feels right, but we hadn't been through approval panel." (*Mike 414 – 423).

I was shocked to hear how he was introduced to a child he hoped to adopt without being approved by panel. The data suggested that Mike was unclear if this type of social work practice was within guidelines.

"12 days solid of doing everything, waking him up, bathing him, going backwards and forwards … going there in the morning to wake him up … take him back before bedtime to bath him. I wrote a diary of what we did so that I could look back when I feel ready at how much we did." (Mike 429-435).

Mike talked of the tiring nature of the transition period, and it seems that even after this period of time he has not yet been able to look back at his own thoughts he recorded within his journal. It is implied through the data how Mike was overwhelmed he was by the sudden intensity of the transition to parenthood. He talked about it being "*A blur."* (Mike 378) and clearly had some confusion about whether he was ready or not as *"By the end of the twelve days we felt ready, even though we were weren't ready, we were ready, we were as ready as we were going to be.*" (Mike 470-472).

Another aspect of time that was highlighted was the length of the whole process, this is at the opposing end of the sudden intensity describing a slow start to the process. This was important for Nancy as she had a biological child to consider.

"I don't, you know the training and that, it seems such a small part because it took us so long to be at the point of being approved to adopt Lucas, it was almost two years prior that we'd had this, this few weeks of training and I just, it was important, but I don't, and it was helpful, but by that point we had gone through so much with different

social workers and erm, ... we'd moved on over two years Elle had got bigger and do

you know." (Nancy 339-347).

Joyce also spoke of the length of time the whole process took.

"*So, it was a year really of them being in and out of your house, life, not just us,*

like,…everybody family, meeting friends family, interviewing all them, like asking us

about, literally they wanna know from the day you were born, up until that day your sat

with them." (Joyce 241-245).

5.3.1: Discussion of Super-ordinate theme: A feeling of being nurtured by the process

5.3.2: The depths of the social work support experienced

Research suggests that the social worker plays a pivotal role in adoption preparation (Quinton et al, 1998), and this was the case for all three participants. It was interesting that although they were fully aware as participants that I was a trainee psychologist, that no one mentioned any involvement with any psychology services.

Two of the participants emphasised that the social worker was imperative to the success of process. The data gathered through the interviews and subsequent analysis suggests that they had the opportunity to develop positive relationships with the social worker (Kanuik, 1992), although it needs to be considered that there are several different social workers supporting the process of adoption at any one time, and part of the discussions highlighted that generally the social worker who supported the adults was more positively spoken about, whereas the child's social worker had more negative connotations.

Dance & Farmer (2014) and Farmer & Dance, (2016) research reported positive experiences of the social worker. The findings of the current research support this and interestingly the

research is also in agreeance with (Selwyn et al, 2014) who reported mixed findings, as both participants also report negatively regards the social worker for different reasons. The data agrees with findings such as those by Parker (1999) and Rushton & Monck (2009) that the level of satisfaction is dependent upon how well adoption preparation is delivered. It may be that the social worker has certain strengths in their practice, and also areas of weakness and this is reflected in consumer feedback. Definitely, for Nancy having particular skills in relation to the impact on the sibling really supported Nancy's view of the social worker as highly competent. For Mike the data is indicative that it was the whole package, and although he described her a 'rogue', this is meant in the most positive of ways, he liked that he was really listened to, and I feel that he also liked the fact she was a rule bender. This emphasises the nurturing nature of the process.

The data proposes that containment is a relevant concept to discuss. The process of containment as posited by Bion (1961) begins in the initial mother-child relationship. The mother provides the infant with emotional security to enable the infant to manage feelings, and subsequently creates conditions in which the infant can develop and engage in learning. The social worker offered that nurture around these processes and I feel that both Nancy and Mike felt contained by the social worker, which supported them to continue through a turbulent time, and allowed them to contain another (Bion, 1985).

Nancy and Joyce highlighted issues with the child's social worker. As with the majority of the research that was considered prior to the research taking place, many of the studies offered a variety of views. Dance and Farmer (2014) research suggests the incompetence of the social worker was also a factor "*...she'd [our social worker] lost it – it's like, come on! ...with the financial statement and everything, got lost in the post. Our deepest personal details went missing."* (p 106-107). Nancy used the word 'incompetent' to describe her child's social worker. On reflection I feel that during this interview I should have asked for more detail as to

why she felt like this. For Nancy it wasn't about incompetence, it was about being dumped on, but she had her social worker who continued to support the placement.

A final element of this sub-ordinate theme drew attention to unnecessary requirements such as redecorating the house and changing the size of the TV. There is a lack of research into adopters' experience of social work guidance of this nature, however implicit through the research adopters just saw the process as something they had to do.

5.3.3: Interactions with others who understand

Across the lived experience of all participants, other adults, who were not social workers were heavily involved in their recollections. There was an overall sense of relatedness through the similarities they desired by the end of the process of adoption, along with a revel of their valued contribution to their experiences.

The data suggests that this type of relationship communicates Bion's concept of Containment, as this is what foster carers and other adopters have offered the participants, that emotional regulation to know that what they are doing is okay, that it's normal to feel how they are feeling, and that in the future things will be brighter. Bion developed his understanding of containment further and suggested that in order for the mother to provide containment to another she has to feels contained by another (1985).

These relationships allow the new adoptive parents to reflect, in a safe space away from social workers, somewhere that is not viewed as part of the assessment, a place to be vulnerable and unsure, and ask questions. According to Kram & Isabella (1985) "I*n providing psycho-social functions, a peer relationship can support an individual's sense of competence and confidence in a professional role.*" (p.117), these functions include role modelling and friendship. This

comes back to the concept of 'relatedness', or 'connection' that they feel with these people who they view as similar to them. Self-determination theory posits that humans have three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Feeling connected is an aspect of relatedness.

Both Mike and Joyce spoke about the benefit of meeting other adopters, via the group sessions, and via wider circles of family or friends. Their recollection support previous research in the field regards the benefit of meeting adopters (Parker, 1999; Quinton et al, 1998; Turkington & Taylor, 2009). Joyce seemed to utilise other adopters in the same way as you expect biological families to utilise support from one another. For her this factor was complicated as it was another family member who had adopted children. She did however see the benefit of the adopters in the training sessions, and even partook in this herself at a later stage, as she saw the benefit to her and her partner to actually see parents and children who had no biological link interacting, and what she phrased as "*You can see that the child is attached to them, and was like this happy kid and you can see that it does work.*" (94-95). The data indicates this experience gives her a real sense of hope to have some form of belonging for the future, to be connected to her child in a way that she perceived a mother and a child should be. Much of what she had previously described of her interactions on the training course was all about the doom and gloom of becoming an adoptive parent.

Mike's relationships with adopters became specific to the locality of where they had received input from social workers. He knew people who had adopted and had seen that it could work but wanted reassurance that the people in his authority could support it to work for him.

All the participants had experienced the transition of the adopted child into their care. It is useful to consider the impact of the transition on all involved. The transition is emotive, and for the child they are essentially repeating the process of loss that they may have already

endured (Rutter, 1971; Bowlby, 1980; Winnicott, 1986; Breier et al., 1988). *"Trauma means the breaking of the continuity of the line of an individual's existence."* (Winnicott, 1986.p 22)

The links Nancy and Mike made with foster carers were more pronounced. Research suggests that foster carers are supportive (Parker, 1999). The specificity of how they supported came through the recollection of transitions and how the foster carers *"Saved the day."* (Nancy 275), and how they knew the routine of the children more so than the social worker, they were also often in a position to give more background information than the social worker, they knew food likes and dislikes. The research highlighted the welcoming nature of the foster carers which supports research by Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings, (2014). In contrast the research by Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings, (2014) also uncovered that some adopters endured negative experience in their interactions with foster carers, this was not supported by the current research, in fact both Nancy and Mike made reference within their recollection of events how they felt that they needed to support the foster carers as they felt the emotional impact when it came to them parting from this child that they had nurtured for such a long time. Research that was not highlighted initially by Boswell & Cudmore (2017) considered the impact on all involved in the transition between foster carer and adoptive parent. The research study highlighted that foster carers sometimes felt such a close bond with the children because they had cared for them from such a young age, but that once the transitions started they felt that had to become more of a professional and less of a mother figure in order to support the adoptive parents with the transition. At times the foster carers spoke of disapproval from social workers and guidance about keeping their emotions inside. The adopters in the study recognised the emotional impact, and also there was some consideration about most of the children containing their own emotions and seeming to be 'fine' throughout the transition process.

Research suggests that adoptive parents are advised to have no contact at all with foster carer once the transition was over (Meakings et al, 2018), however Mike described a photograph within his home of his son and his foster carer "*Above his bed he has got a picture.*" (Mike 334-335) and spoke about how he would keep this memory alive for his son in the future. This is more supportive of the findings from Boswell & Cudmore (2017) who concluded that the decisions regards ongoing contact were in the hands of the adoptive parent. I did not ask about face to face contact with foster carer during the interview.

5.3.4: The sudden intensity of the transition to parenthood

Research suggest that adopters experience adoption preparation as lengthy (Dance & Farmer, 2014; Adoption UK, 2010; Quinton et al, 1998), which is supported by the findings of the current research.

The similarity of the previous research and the findings of the current research are striking. A quote in the Dance & Farmer (2014) study suggests that after waiting a long time, once they were approved "*Up pops [our son]" (p.107),* which resonates with Mike's recollections, who had been matched with a child before he was approved at panel. Furthermore Mike's experience of having his transition session just prior to the Christmas holidays corroborates DfE research who also highlighted that transitions occurred at poor times, such as Christmas (Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings (2014).

5.4.1: Super-ordinate theme: Being in a position of knowing

Introduction to this super-ordinate theme

There was a strong sense from the data that all three participants wanted to understand their child, what they had gone through and how they could support that into the future, to move from a position of the unknown to the known. There was a level of divergence across participant's knowledge and ideas about parenting and what to expect when taking on a child that had been in the care system. All participants accepted that they had to go through certain processes for others to be a in position of knowing them, in order to be approved, and this seemed to be viewed as services checking that they were 'safe adults' to ascertain their suitability to care for a child process, rather than a preparation process. A final factor that emerged through their voices was the concept of choosing and therefore knowing that they were indirectly rejecting children, which was uncomfortable for some of the participants.

5.4.2: A need to understand 'my child'

Analysis

Nancy and Mike both made reference to their child's life story book, their comments suggested to me that they didn't value it as a resource; *"He has not been given a very good life story book."* (Nancy 366-367); *"They have provided it in an editable form so I might tweak it… I think it should start from us and work back."* (Mike 344-348).

The data implies that there is an agreement in Nancy and Joyce's recollections that the training offer was just too general, and not of much use to the actual real-life challenges.

> *"But I don't think the social workers in terms of the training and things prepared us for that process of erm getting to know him, I suppose, and we didn't know what motivated him, we didn't know him, so when he was having a big tantrum or a kick off he would just suddenly head butt one of us, it's like is he doing that intentionally, is that*

by accident, is he stressed, its, its knowing what motivated him I think and knowing him

as a person and I suppose it took a while for that trust to build up for both of us from

my perspective, from him as well, just knowing what made him tick." (Nancy 140-148).

Nancy had described it as *"It's a massive emotional journey and for both the child and us, erm,*

and I don't think there was enough emphasis on that maybe." (Nancy 164-166), and *"Just a*

big bag of emotions." (Nancy 503). This suggests that guidance around the emotional aspects

of caring for a child had not been part of the preparation, and this was the sense I made during

the interview, which I paraphrased back to Nancy.

Joyce could not recollect emotional support as part of her involvement with social care *"But I*

don't really remember them saying how anything could affect him." (Joyce 62-63).

The lack of understanding of the child was paramount for Mike, he seemed to be in a place of

not knowing and feared that he may never understand

"But now I'm thinking 'hmm' because I don't know' he was known to social services

very early on but there are parts of his early life I wasn't there, I wasn't even a fly on

the wall, the social workers weren't there. They only know what has been disclosed so

there could be so much more… cos I've got a little boy up there who can't tell me and

probably never will be able to tell me what happened exactly. I'm going to try and piece

it together from what I know from what I observe and that's okay, and I don't need to

worry about it because other adopters do it, so yeh." (Mike 651-672)

Nancy suggested that not knowing was part of the initial transition but that no-one focused on

this. *"You're going to be complete strangers."* (Nancy 153). This implies that she was annoyed

at not being told that this was a truth, the data indicates that she felt that this was an unspoken

truth. The participants wanted to move into a position of knowing about their child, and wanting

to understand their backgrounds and how they could best support them in their homes.

The data here is leading towards Joyce feeling failed to be prepared to know her child

"It's hard when they don't know what child you're gonna be placed with." (Joyce 303-304).

> *"It was always just, well he's only 2 so we don't know, and that was sort of like it, instead of saying he is only 2 but because he has been through this, this and this, this could affect him, but no you don't get anything like that."* (Joyce 65-68).

She went onto describe the *"shock"* of having a two-year old. (Joyce 179)

The group sessions that were led by social workers were experienced differently by all three participants. They all took something from them in different ways. Joyce questioned the usefulness and practical applicability of information *"So when you come to do letterbox now they didn't really tell you what you should be putting and things like that."* (Joyce 16-18). Whereas Mike experienced it more like *"Sit around a table and discuss."*, (Mike 193-194), and Nancy found it specifically useful around transition *"I think it really helped us to think about what we needed to do to prepare for that transition."* (Nancy 112-113). The group sessions were at an ambiguous level regards adopted children, and therefore did not fulfil the need to understand their child, or place them in a position of knowing.

Joyce spoke about how some of the basics were not covered for her. The data was leading towards there being a presumption that people have basic knowledge. She did not have an understanding of what an average two-year old would present like and shared that *"No, and they don't like give you, or don't say to you like, if you get a child that's 2 to 3, you know children of this age are like this, this and this, they don't really say that normal 2 year old and 3 year olds do these things"*. (Joyce 191-194)

Joyce made reference to poor information, she came across passionately about this and suggested a way forward which included training after the child had been placed, which would support a move towards knowing and understanding their child.

"*This is what your child has been through and this is how you could help and how they may present.*" (Joyce 55-56).

Out of all my participants Mike was the only one who spoke about the 'appreciate the child day'. His description is suggestive that this gathering of people brought the child into the realm of reality.

"*It was the 'appreciate the child day' when we met with, because he had had a previous social worker and a current social worker, we had foster carer there, we had medical, there was some other people there and we basically found out warts and all, everything... prior to that… there was just an imaginary child in the middle.*" (Mike 175-182).

5.4.3: Feeling probed and checked upon

Analysis

All three participants spoke about questions, lots of questions and personal questions. The data is suggestive that the focus of these interactions were weighted heavily towards a vetting process and feeling probed. This most strongly came through with Joyce, as during the interview I started to make sense of her sense making, and this generated a direct question during her interview.

Researcher: "*Which part of that did you think was more of a focus? Was it, it being a safe place, or finding out about you as people, or preparing you to be a parent?*"

Interviewee: "*Erm, them finding out it was a safe place, and them finding out about us, not them preparing us... because I think once a child is placed with you, dunno, you just, well you're not just left to it, but eventually you are, erm, I dunno, I think obviously*

their main focus is the safety of that child and them being placed with somebody that's

gonna look after em, more than maybe how we'd deal with it, sort of thing." (Joyce

262-273).

Joyce implied that she was accepting of this as just the way things had to be, although, she did

acknowledge how she perceived this system to have failed her because

"The third day of Billy being home he burnt himself and then so its things like, its things

that we never, you know thought of." (Joyce 153-155).

Through the data Joyce implied that she blamed the social workers for this accident, something

that would not have happened if they had given her more support to know and understand her

two-year old, rather than focusing on the probing and checking. *"It was just like that very shock*

of having this two-year old that was into everything." (Joyce179-180).

Nancy's feelings on the vetting process were not as strong, but she too commented that

"A social worker who came to visit us on a number of occasions to ask us loads of

questions, quite personal questions, just to I suppose to assess how appropriate we

were." (Nancy 15-17).

Mike surmised towards the therapeutic nature of talking about yourself *"It's not often you get*

to talk about yourself, and that's what it was, interviews together, interviews separate,

interviews with our family, interviews with friends." (Mike 61-63), and almost implied a gentle

start before the social workers pried a little deeper

"Questions of like, could you cope with this, how did you feel when you were a child,

what's your views on parenting, those kind of things because it made us think...but

actually were getting interviewed to be a parent." (Mike 183-187).

Mike concluded that *"She was doing the job of vetting us to be parents', but she was also doing the job of matching because she was matcher as well."* (Mike 205-207), and although he accepted this as a required process, and one that had worked for his family as he now has a "*Perfect little boy*" (Mike 142) he did reflect upon it as "*Strenuous and upsetting and hard work and exhausting.*" (Mike 137). Mike's use of language here, and how he describes his little boy is him accepting that all of the work that he had to put into this was worth it.

5.4.4: The uncomfortable feelings of rejection

Analysis

Potentially rejecting children as part of this process stood out for Nancy and Mike. For Nancy this started early in the process, and suggested how negative an experience this had been for her

> *"The hardest thing, and I don't know whether you would say it's part of the preparation, but I'm guessing it is, was when we were deciding on who we wanted to consider for adoption."* (Nancy 288-291).

The data indicated that for Nancy, making choices which included indirect rejection of children was highly uncomfortable. She knew that she was rejecting, and her being aware of this caused her some upset. The strength of her negative language indicates that she was not prepared for this rating process, whilst also being annoyed at herself for not questioning this process.

> *"He basically brought us ten profiles and asked us to rate them, erm, which was horrific, and we didn't know any better, we didn't know that that probably isn't the right way to do it but doing it made us , it wasn't something we were very happy with doing, and comfortable doing, so we had to come up with our top three, and erm, and*

so we said okay, we are interested in this little girl, can we get some more information about her, and he was like 'oh no, oh sorry now they've already found some potential adoptive parents for that child' and we were like 'oh right, we don't really feel quite comfortable then looking at the others, because I don't want a child to think they were second best', ...so we can't have the one we were really interested in so we will go for this one, so anyway we spoke to the manager and she was like 'oh my god, no that should not be happening, I can't believe that's happened', and we were like well it's just been horrific, and because you don't know any better." (Nancy 303-319).

Mike had a clear focus of what he was looking for and spoke about a level of choice that you have as an adopter that you don't get as a biological parent. Mike experienced a highly skilled social worker who had done her job well, which removed any requirement that could instigate negative feelings of rejection for him and his partner.

" You get to choose that child… for parents who give birth there are so many unknowns, we had the right to say we can't, and I know I couldn't have coped, I didn't want to cope at home with a child with diagnosed SEN because that's something I deal with in school and actually sitting down and thinking about it, I don't think I can, whereas a birth family they don't often have that choice, … we were very lucky because our son was the first paperwork we saw, we never had to say no, because the social worker had done the right thing and matched us." (Mike 146-158).

5.5.1: Discussion of Super-ordinate theme: Being in a position of knowing

5.5.2: A need to understand my child

Understanding their child is two-fold. Parents spoke about gaining knowledge, as does the literature, and there is also a defining line where information is bespoke to the child they are adopting.

Nancy and Mike both made reference to their child's life story book, this specific factor did not arise from the initial literature as it was not expected, however this is where the methodology has supported a deep understanding of their experiences as a whole. Research by Watson, Latter, & Bellew (2015) concludes that although there were some positives about life story books the general consensus was that the books provided were of poor quality. This finding supports the lived experiences of Nancy and Mike, and furthermore Mike commented that he planned to 'tweak' the life story book to which is also matched with some of the recollections of participants in the Watson et al, (2015) study who had been issued with electronic books that could be updated.

A component of the previous literature discussed the lack of information about the child, where it was too global, and lacking in information (Selwyn et al, 2014); Quinton et al, 1998; Parker, 1999). In this research the participant's interpretations of the training offered, and how this applied into their real life, seemed to focus on the preparation lacking emotional input. The data leads towards the interpretation that Nancy and Joyce felt that this lack of being emotionally prepared for their child was determined by what had been shared by the social workers, whereas Mike viewed the lack of emotional support being due to just being unable to know. This may be something to take forward for the future, that there is an acceptance that there will still be some unknowns about the child, and that being fully in a position of knowing is out of reach.

The global nature of the training was a real issue for Joyce, she felt that the timing of the training could be changed and that this could support her understanding of her son. Learning about the possible experience of 'a child' was no match for knowing about the experiences of your own child, however what she came to realise is that once they did know which child was coming to her there was still no real understanding of what he had been through, so on two accounts she felt that her service was poor, one blaming the social worker whilst the other blamed the nature of things just being unknown. Potentially utilising a psycho-educational programme once the child is placed could be a way forward. Research suggests that if the caregiver for the child is able to understand behaviours this can help lead to better relationships and outcomes for the child (Bammens, Adkins, & Badger, 2015). Previous research has campaigned for specific details pertinent to the child and for information to be given in writing and in a verbal format (Rushton & Monck, 2009; Parker 1999; Quinton et al, 1998). The need to understand their child is a need to form positive attachments, and that this motivates their need for information that is pertinent to this child. Research suggests that adoptive parents have an overwhelming urge to become a parent (Selwyn et al, 2014). The participants want to know as much as possible, to understand their child's behaviours, motivations, and needs. This links again to the theory of belonging (Baumeister& Leary, 1995), a drive to fulfil basic safety needs (Maslow, 1968), and a long awaited desire to form a long lasting attachment with their child (Bowlby, 1951; 1969; 1973; 1980; Bomber, 2007).

Nancy spoke of not knowing, not understanding behaviour and almost trying to second guess why her child was doing what he was doing, which is similar to Mike. It wasn't that this was the fault of others, it was just how it was. It was part of the process, and accepted that all the answers may never be there, but that they just had to work forward with it. I feel that further research into the unknowns of children's experiences prior to adoption may be beneficial for the future. Mike shared in his recollections the benefit he gained from actually meeting birth

parents, this is in opposition with research that states there were no benefits for the adopters themselves (Turkington & Taylor, 2009). Out of all my participants Mike was the only one who spoke about the 'appreciate the child day'. The data suggests that his description of this gathering of people brought the child into reality, through research there is also limited mention of the life appreciation day for the child (Selwyn et al, 2014).

Joyce was supported in her realisation through the interview process that she did not have a basic understanding of typical child development. Her recollections of the training sessions alluded to knowledge about adopted children and how they might present due to abuse or neglect. However, what was lacking for her was knowing the difference between typical and atypical behaviours. Information from the First4Adoption website explains the offer to adoptive parents to include 'key parenting skills, … and cover the special skills adoptive parents need to care for children who may have experienced neglect and abuse' (2020). It is unclear if this covers basic child development from texts such as 'From birth to five years: Children's developmental progress' (Sheridan, Sharma, & Cockerill, 2008). This is equally the case for the Coram BAAF guidance 'Preparing to adopt – England'. This text has a chapter named 'Children's development and attachment' (Dibben et al, 2014). Having a specificity with regards to knowing the difference between typical and atypical development could place adoptive parents into a position of knowing and understanding the reasons behind their child's development and behaviours.

Nancy and Joyce both highlighted that emotional aspects were lacking from the training offer. This thread of being emotionally unprepared came through both interviews. Their recollections corroborate previous literature that recognises adopting a child is an emotional experience (Parker, 1999; Howe,1988; Howe,1997). Feeling emotionally overwhelmed is also discussed as separate theme.

5.5.3: Feeling probed and checked upon

The word preparation means '*The act or process of getting ready for something or making something ready.*'(Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), However as part of adoption preparation there is a large element of checking, all three participants made reference to being questioned as part of their lived experienced. This supports research that suggests they focus more about checking they could cope as a parent, and being asked 'what would you do if . . . ?' (Rushton & Monck 2009) and probing into expectations and coping strategies (Quinton et al, 1998). Other research suggested that there was a disproportionate focus on procedures and checks at the expense of effective preparation and long-term support. (Adoption UK, 2010). This research supports this as Joyce recollected how she perceived this system to have failed her because her son got injured after being home for a few days. The data from Joyce indicates that she blamed the priority given to the probing and checking process and felt unprepared, and her needs were not anticipated prior to the child being placed (Meakings et al 2018).

During his interview Mike made reference to the therapeutic nature of the process, this is in agreeance with Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings (2014) who described the assessment process as an opportunity for personal growth and discovery.

There was also an element that one participant experienced the checking process being around finding the right match, which he accepted because he felt the social worker did a good job. Research within the literature made reference to multiple matches (Selwyn et al, 2014), this was not the experience for Mike, and was not something that Joyce made reference to, however Nancy had information on other children before adopting her son.

The data indicates that there is an emphasis on checking suitability here because these children are in the care of the local authority and they have procedures to adhere to that ensure that adoptive parents are suitable as parents. However, what is crucial here is the misleading nature

of the terminology used, and maybe if these parents had been asked if they felt adequately probed and checked upon, the answers would have been different to those about feeling prepared. Here there is a clear power dynamic in play and the social worker is the one with the power. An inquiry by Featherstone, Gupta, & Mills, (2018) into ethics and human rights that linked to the role of the social worker highlighted that adoptive parents felt that social workers have a great deal of power in relation to assessment.

5.5.4: The uncomfortable feelings of rejection

As identified within the previous literature parental preferences could potentially be 'stretched', but that parents were clear on what they were willing to manage (Dance & Farmer, 2014). The responses from Mike highlighted here that as an adoptive parent you are afforded the opportunity of choice, unlike a biological parent, but this is not really about choosing a child, its more about stating your preferences, such as gender and age. Mike was however, very clear that he did not wish to care for a child with special educational needs.

The data from Nancy suggested that making choices which included indirect rejection of children was linked to the social workers practice. She described a horrific experience which included rating potential children to adopt, which is understood as rejecting the children who were at the end of the list. The failures of the social worker continued as children who had already been matched were included in her choices. Here is it relevant to consider Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1951; 1969; 1973; 1980)

"*The infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.*" (Bowlby, 1951, p. 13)

It is suggested through the data via the recollections of the participants that they are aware of the impact that early attachments may have had on the children they may adopt, and do not wish to further reinforce any feelings of rejection. They are in a position of knowing that they are rejecting children which is an uncomfortable feeling to experience.

Recent literature shares with us the impact of poor attachments *"Their experiences of difficult early relationships are significant; such experiences can profoundly affect the growing child's vulnerability and resilience."* (Bomber 2007, p.8). The nature of the two participants who were child-focused in their journey towards being an adoptive parent, fits with a desire to create an environment that will challenge any negative view of the world via trying to manipulate and eradicate any previous internal working model where they are not safe, nor have a secure base with which they can explore from.

5.6.1: The intense emotional nature of the process

Introduction to this super-ordinate theme

The emotionality of the whole process is imperative and emerges throughout all the findings. However, a large trigger for emotion links to developing and therefore extending the family unit and protecting what is already in place with current family members. There was also concern about how the 'new' child would fit in, and what normal would look like and if that was even possible. Intense feelings that emotionally overwhelm came into the narratives of the participants, and the sense that was made of these touched on fear, exhaustion, concern, being nervous, upset by use of language and excitement.

5.6.2: Developing and protecting our family

Analysis

Nancy was the only participant where there was a biological child in the family unit. Nancy wanted to increase her family but ensuring that her daughter was impacted positively was a high priority. Nancy reflected that the social worker made her consider aspects of family life that had not come into her conscious mind

> *"For example, she helped us to think through particularly in terms of Elle (biological daughter)… said it might be easier for her if we adopted a little boy because there is less competition or threat."* (Nancy 33 -45).

Nancy seemed to really value the contact and expertise she gained through the social worker, and how her family could ultimately benefit into the future

> *"I don't know how it would have turned out if we had adopted a little girl, I have no idea but that's not something I think about really. I think that was helpful advice, it's not somethings I had thought about before."* (Nancy 52-56).

Throughout the process it came through Nancy's story that ensuring the well-being of her biological daughter was high on her agenda. This intensity of emotion was linked to protecting the current family but ensuring the well-being of the new child. Nancy really appreciated that these thoughts were considered by the social worker and were part of her adoption preparation. Nancy monitored it and thought about it often, she spoke about the day they met one another, and how Nancy's need for the process to impact positively on her daughter seemed to come to fruition in how she recalls their first meeting

> *"He just threw his arms around her and they were playing and they were getting on really well, she she she found that quite a positive experience."* (Nancy 499-501).

My interpretation of what sense Nancy made comes from what I know of her as an intelligent, highly educated individual who understands children's emotional needs far more readily than the average person. She understood his emotional journey more than the other participants and understood better how being in care may have affected him, which made this intensely emotional for her too.

Nancy states *"And it's like how to manage his emotions and then manage your own, it's massive, it really is massive"*, (Nancy 209-211). Although in this statement Nancy only mentions herself and her child, her use of the word 'massive' is indicative that this fear is about managing everyone, ensuring that her biological child is okay, and the foster carers and wider family. She saw this as her role to contain everything, however, underlying this is a real fear around normality, and wanting her family to develop whilst protecting what she already has. These two excerpts demonstrate her fear about how things could go wrong and the emotional fallout of this. She laughs nervously hiding a fear of abnormality. Her fears may have been due to the knowledge she had regarding children's well-being.

> *"Then we put him to bed at night, and that was the first time that he had slept here, so it was like 'ohhh, is he gonna sleep, what's gonna happen' [laughed] and you kind of I suppose, you kind like waiting for, well it felt like, I was for quite a, probably for about a week or two, kind of just waiting for it to hit him, do you know, cos you know its massive and he didn't cry, we'd never seen him cry, he didn't cry."* (Nancy 213-218).

> *"He, he was he just didn't cry, for two weeks he didn't cry once, and we were like, even like, cos at one point I remember having a conversation with my husband 'do you think he can cry, is he gonna be able to cry' [laughed] and then all of a sudden, it was when we'd been out for the day with my mum and she got out the car to go home, dropped her off, and he just burst into tears, and we were like 'oh there it is' [laughed] cos you*

just kind of felt like he was holding it together, you know like, maybe we also felt [laughed] like we were holding it together as well, and it was just, so yeh then he just cried, not forever, just like he should do, do you know" (Nancy 221-231).

Whilst reading and re reading Nancy's transcript the data was suggestive that she was questioning the end point of the process, trying to answer this question *'Are we a family yet?'*. This section of her transcript highlights these feelings.

"*I don't know maybe after the first month, we go 'yeh he's settled now', and then another month would go by and 'no no no no now he's settled', and that carried on do you know like month after month we were oh no now we are at the right point and it was probably looking back it took us a year I'd say to think now right this is what it's like as a family I suppose.*" (Nancy 241-246).

Joyce seemed to have a fear about what the future may hold and had shared previously about the doom and gloom experience she had with social worker. For Joyce a pivotal moment was meeting adopters and their children, as this physically showed the reality that you could develop a family and protect the relationship that is already in place with your partner.

"*And then when they come in and they've got this kid with them and you can see that the child is attached to them, and was like this happy kid and you can see that it does work…until we met that other couple at that session and that was like a massive turning, where you were like, yeh it does work were gonna be alright…yeh, cos then you see that it does work, it is gonna, even though this child has been through so much trauma they can attach to new people*" (Joyce 93-115).

Even though she had this experience the fear still remained and was consolidated by another 'doom and gloom' experience, which made her question how normal her future would be.

"I remember being on one training session and there was an adoptive parent and they were saying how their adoption had broken down and a stuff, so that was pretty scary, thinking 'oh my god', …, I remember thinking that we are never gonna have a normal child…because even though you see people who are adopted who are quite normal erm I remember then everything that they tell you, it like your child is always gonna have an issue, your child is always gonna have a problem, your child will never be normal child, but then to see this normal child with these adoptive parents was like very very refreshing sort of thing…I think just panicked a bit, like shit, this could happen to us," (Joyce 435-452).

The fear of not being normal and not developing a normal family was also a factor for Mike

"Whether its Max watching Peppa Pig and he says mummy, and I suddenly think why has he said mummy, or down the lines he sees a mum and dad walking down the road and thinks where is my mummy, …, he isn't a normal child and, and it's the workshops and that that prepared us for realising that and I don't think we were ever in the sense of, we were going to have a normal family because we are a same sex couple." (Mike 295-302).

"I don't know what it is like for a straight couple and things but I assume it's much easier to just walk down the street and nobody really, I don't know, maybe that's just me, oh everybody is looking at us." (Mike 310-314).

The data indicated that Mike felt due to his sexuality he is adding to the difficulties his child may have in the future because visually it is obvious that the 'mother figure' is missing. His use of the word 'mummy' is also striking, and indicated that he feels he has taken away the opportunity of a mummy from his child, therefore questioning whether he is developing a family for his child in the traditional sense, which appeared to cause him emotional upset.

Another sense that came from Mike's recollections was whether his child would always be adopted, and whether 'being adopted' would ever be renounced.

> *"We talked about at one of the workshops is the idea of the family triangle the idea that adopted children, I can't remember what the points of the triangle but at the end of the day he will always be adopted child. He will always have, we might not talk about it every day we might not see emotion from it, it might not effect us everyday but there will always be something."* (Mike 288-293).

5.6.3: Feeling emotionally overwhelmed

Analysis

How language was used was a factor for Nancy. Her local authority had encouraged the use of the term 'tummy mummy', this caused great upset for Nancy and one that she had not anticipated.

> "*His understanding of that is like 'oh my real mummy' so that's kind of cos he knows he grew in her tummy, so he's like 'oh my real mummy', and I'm like 'noooooooooo I'm your real mummy' [upset, laughed]*" (Nancy 384-388).

She had felt strongly about this, almost like it threatened her role with her son that found an alternative way forward of her own *"so I'm trying to kind of change that a bit with Lucas so that he uses mum's first name rather than tummy mummy*" (Nancy 399-401).

Nancy termed the whole things as *"a massive emotional journey"* (Nancy 164-165). Whereas Joyce felt it scary in the early days.

"*It's just so scary at the beginning so it's knowing that it does get better, like I say from suddenly this two- year old being here 24/7*" (Joyce 285-287). Her use of language here suggests her level of fear and how she would manage without family support.

> "*I remember really worrying about Steve going back to work cos he only took about 3 weeks off I think. I remember being really, really worried about that, how the hell am I gonna cope with a child at home all the time on my own,*" (Joyce 390-393).

Mike reflected on his exhaustion

> "*I would have liked a break, I don't know why, our friends who I mentioned they had, three months later they got their little girl and they had a break and I'm so jealous of this break cos I just wanted a day when me and Jim could have been like 'breathe', what do we have to do, cos we were screwing things to the wall when we got home late at night.*" (Mike 519-524).

During the transition days Mike seemed to feel it most, as though he was on show to others, but also being considerate of how this was for other people

> "*it was exhausting, and not being on your best behaviour, but just trying to do everything right and thinking oh god I've got to ask this stupid question, I can't get this nappy on or I can't get you to sleep and also because it was her first foster child as well, and her first well when do I step back, and I just think, and her social worker was preparing her a little bit and she seemed to be lingering on a little bit, and I was thinking she hasn't packed any clothes yet, were not gonna have anything, cos I'm a bit of a worrier in that sense.*" (Mike 539-547).

Nancy seemed concerned about how she should feel when she met her new child, and the data indicated that when she was discussing this she felt a level of shame even voicing these words

but wanted to be open and transparent about how this was for her because she saw the value in sharing it

>*"I mean we were really nervous, I can picture us knocking on the door and erm and his foster mum opening the door and he was wrapped around her legs, it was like he was only little so he was clinging on to her legs, and I didn't notice him to start cos I was looking at her, and then I looked down and went 'oh that's him' [laughed], ... I think, I don't know whether, I don't think anyone had told me, but I think I had got in my mind, or I'd heard about maybe read, don't know that, you know 'love at first sight', that kind of thing that you see them and it's amazing...well that didn't happen, not at all [laughed], not for a long time, erm, and again I don't think we were prepared for that, that actually, or maybe it wasn't made explicit enough that's its gonna take you quite a while or it could take you quite a while to form that attachment and that bond and erm, and I don't know whether there is an expectation that you put on yourself, or other people expect it or just, cos this is going to be your son, so should you, 'oh yes, love you' from day one, and that, I don't know where that expectation comes from, or whether I just put that on myself."* (Nancy 455-477).

For Mike there was level of excitement that came with the reality of becoming an adoptive parent

>*"She kept saying 'he, he' and she hadn't said anything about this, and I thought I bet she has been doing some work in the background finding this child, and at that meeting she said, 'I've found you someone', and that kind of upskittled me going to adoption panel because it was making it very real"* (Mike 86-90).

In addition, Mike had to make considerations about wider family if he wanted to extend his family as soon as possible.

"*So there were discussions around whether he could move in before Christmas or whether we wanted to wait… it was basically a conversation as to whether me and Jim could put our personal Christmas on hold to have this child move in because they advise that the first Christmas is so close they normally don't place children over Christmas because families coming in and out of the home and stuff, so could we put that on hold.*" (Mike 400-409).

The participant's recollections and the sense that has been made encompasses the intense, emotionally overwhelming journey that they have been consumed by since their adoption preparation began.

5.7.1: Discussion of Super-ordinate theme: The intense emotional nature of the process

5.7.2: Developing and protecting our family

Research discussed in Chapter 3 postulates that parenting an adopted child is emotionally challenging (Howe,1988;1997; Parker, 1999), and the recollections of Nancy seemed to support research in this area. The experiences of the participants seem to support a fear about how these difficulties would impact on the children settling with their new families (Dance et al, 2002), and equally may impact on the family that is already in situ. Nancy was the only participant with a biological child, or any other child in the home, and her recollections of the preparation process highlighted her need to protect her child, whilst also developing and extending her family. Although research suggests that other children in the household need to be adequately prepared (Quinton et al, 1998) but that this is not the case, (Dance & Farmer, 2014) the recollections from Nancy about how supportive the social worker was and how she made her consider the impact on her biological child, and the new child, specifically considering how much her biological daughter looked like her, and if the adopted child was

sensitive to this it could be problematic, hence the suggestion of adopting the opposite gender. This suggested a need for the adopted child to physically feel a sense of belonging. Research in this field is focused on transracial adoptions and suggests that the children's awareness of their physical differences such as skin, eye, and hair colour differences began early, even pre-verbally for some children (Friedlander, Larney, Skau, Hotaling, Cutting, & Schwam, 2000). I felt that through Nancy's reflection of her feelings at this time that she was made to consider how a child would feel if they did not have similar physical features to that of the sibling. This evokes the theory of belonging (Baumeister& Leary, 1995).

The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation, and research posits that this pervasive drive that human beings have, can be satisfied by lasting positive and significant interpersonal relationships with others in the form of frequent pleasant interactions that are stable, and enduring with affective concerns for each other's welfare (Baumeister& Leary, 1995). There are links here with other psychological theory, Bowlby's (1969, 1973) attachment theory, Maslow (1968) recognition for 'love and belongingness' as part of his hierarchy of need. In relation to this research Nancy was very conscious that whichever child joined her family she wanted to ensure that emotional needs of the child were fully met, that they felt as though they belonged, and were able to form attachments with other members of the family. The data indicated that this was more evident for Nancy because she had more knowledge around the psychology of children than the other two participants.

Nancy's recollections posited the question 'Are we a family yet?', and her understanding of the situation, and whether being a 'normal family' would ever be possible was also a factor for both Joyce and Mike for different reasons. Although none of the participants commented on experiencing negative behaviours from their adopted children their fear around normality came through my interpretations of their recollections, and the statements that they made about whether or not they would have a normal family "*I remember thinking that we are never gonna*

have a normal child." (Joyce, 441), Whereas Mike felt that 'normal' was linked to being one of two parents in a homosexual civil partnership. Research supports their concerns, as adoptive parents wanting someone to talk and to be reassured about whether what they were experiencing was normal (Meakings et al, 2018). In addition, the research into adverse childhood experiences (Boullier & Blair, 2018; Shonkoff & Garner, 2012; Hughes et al, 2016; Hughes et al, 2017; Department of Health/Department for Education, 2017; Meltzer et al, 2003; Fisher, 2015; Anthony et al, 2019; Sempik et al, 2008; & Dance et al, , 2002) indicates that these are valid concerns.

Considering the findings from Wright (2009) it can be understood that Joyce had not previously comprehended that her adoption could fail. She stated in her interview after she met an adopter whose adoption had failed *"I think just panicked a bit, like shit, this could happen to us," Joyce 451-452.* There is no reason why this would be a consideration as the concept of adoption disruption is not in the public eye, not recorded, and there is a lack of UK research into adoption disruption post 1990 (Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings (2014). Although clearly because of her experience of meeting an individual whose adoption had failed this is a reality for some, just one that feels like the elephant in the room.

The fear of not being normal family and wanting to develop a family was also a factor for Mike, however this linked to his sexuality. Research into sexuality wasn't considered as part of the initial literature review as this was not an expected finding. Research into gay and lesbian couples suggests that the routes to parenthood are more limited (Wood, 2018), for almost half of the sample in a recent study adoption and fostering was the most common method of becoming a parent (Tornello & Patterson, 2015). There is little research into what it means to be a gay adoptive father (Goldberg, 2012), however men's experiences of being a family in community spaces is a factor considered in research (Wheeler & Goldberg, 2013). The theory of belonging posits that

"Human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is, by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments. People seek frequent, affectively positive interactions within the context of long-term, caring relationships.", (Baumeister& Leary, 1995.p.522).

For Mike his recollections link in with the theory behind belonging, in a way that he wants to be accepted by the wider society as a father and belonging to that family unit.

5.7.3: Feeling emotionally overwhelmed

As identified in the literature review adopting a child is an emotional experience (Parker, 1999), (Howe,1988. (Howe,1997), and even where adopters found the experience positive they still used words such as 'intense', 'difficult' and 'emotional' as descriptors (Dance and Farmer, 2014). The findings of the current research would be in agreeance with this. All three participant's lived experience involved a level of emotional turmoil, uncertainty, apprehension and being generally overwhelmed by the whole situation.

The use of the term 'tummy mummy' caused great emotional upset for Nancy, when her son used it to describe his birth mother. The use of language around adoption in the UK is one that has been researched (Clapton, 2018) within his paper he made reference to a book '*The Tummy Mummy'* which tells the story of adoption with child friendly language, although the reviews suggest that some are critical of the content.

Joyce shared major concerns about her husband going back to work after his paternity leave, she worried how she would cope and made reference to her husband. This resonates with research by (Tasker & Wood, 2016) who felt that adopters need to be helped to achieve a level of confidence in their ability to parent. Joyce had little confidence in her ability to successfully

conduct this role without another by her side, and was emotionally overwhelmed by this. It may have been further compounded by the injury her son suffered whilst in the care of both of them. Tasker & Wood, (2016) utilise the concept of 'unsafe uncertainty' (Mason, 1993) which describes a level of anxiety about their ability to parent, which describes Joyce. Her husband offered her the containment (Bion, 1961, 1985) that she needed in order to carry forward her skills and effectively contain a two year old whom she didn't feel prepared for, and did not have a basic understanding of typical child development, and therefore she felt all his behaviour was atypical and linked to his previous life experiences. Tasker & Wood (2016) conclude that social workers need to support adoptive parents to move from safe uncertainty to safe enough uncertainty, but possibly for Joyce and her husband was the supporter not the social worker.

Mike likened it to having to stop and *'breathe'* during the transition period. This use of language is clearly emotive. For Mike all the factors involved were compounded during this stage. He was fully aware of the impact on the foster carer (Boswell & Cudmore, 2017), and that he would potentially be creating another rejection for his son and breaking the connection with the foster carer (Meakings et al, 2018). In addition, it is relevant here to consider that Mike was advised to essentially cancel his Christmas and have no contact with other family members once his child was place. According to a research study by Meakings et al (2018)

> "…*parents had, almost routinely, been urged by social workers to minimise or avoid contact with family and friends when their child first moved into the adoptive home, to proverbially 'batten down the hatches'. They were told that uninterrupted quality time as a newly formed family would help promote attachment"* (p.66).

The advice with regard to length of time to stay away, and the specificity of this varied, as did the adopter's response to the advice. The data alluded to Mike feeling socially isolated from his wider family and the world, and therefore he had to make a choice between his mental

health and the attachment needs of his child. Participants in the Meakings et al (2018) study reported feelings of stress and anxiety from socially isolating themselves.

Nancy had concerns about initially having to love her child and was concerned that she did not feel this way, which may have been intensely emotionally distressing for her. Mike had a nervous disposition from the first point of the adoption process, like he was unsure if he was good enough to be a parent (Winnicott, 1973) and felt relieved after initially chatting with social workers about the process, further compounding his anxiety once he knew there was a potential match but he had not been approved by panel.

5.8: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to present and discuss findings of the research in relation to the research question, which is:

- What is the experience of adoption preparation of three adoptive parents?

It seems from the findings of this research that there is cross over with other literature in the field, and that there is little change in what adoptive parents have been sharing to a lesser or greater extent since the 1990's. The sense I have made of their lived experiences, and what I take forward from this is that the lived experience is not just about what they are going through at the time. There is what they need before the child is placed, what they need during (during transition phase), and what they need afterwards.

The analysis led to the development of three super-ordinate themes, a feeling of being nurtured, being in a position of knowing and the intense emotional nature of the process. The implication for professional practice will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Reflections on the research process and implications.

6.1: Introduction

In concluding this thesis I will commence by revisiting quality in research by means of Yardley's (2000) criteria and Smith's (2011) criteria. I will then consider the limitations of the study and conclude with recommendations for further research and implication for practice.

6.2: Quality in research

In this section I will return to Yardley's (2000) criteria for quality in research, and also consider Smith's (2011) criteria.

- Sensitivity to context

Within the research I feel that have been dedicated to sensitivity to context. I reflected throughout the process using Langdridge's (2007) reflexive questions throughout this process (see appendix G). I have thoroughly reviewed the literature and after initial reflection decided against using research for my literature review that was outside of the UK. Throughout my analysis and discussion, I have acknowledged the sense the participants made, and sense I have made as a result of the double hermeneutic.

- Commitment and rigour

I have worked diligently to apply phenomenology to all aspects of the research process. I have applied my research analysis skills to comply with Smith, Flower & Larkins (2009) guidance. I have shown commitment to the research topic and have highlighted my positionality with regard to this and my epistemological and ontological beliefs. Rigour highlights the need for data and the subsequent analysis to be adequate, this includes the ability of the sample to provide the information. I feel that the research has been systematically conducted, all

guidelines were followed Smith, Flower & Larkins (2009), and transcripts were available for my supervisor. Samples of this are shared within the appendices section of this thesis. Rigour has been highlighted through the many levels of interpretation as explained through my procedural chapter. This was a lengthy process that required a high level of reflection, and I utilised a critical friend several times during the process.

- Transparency and coherence

In my results section there is clear definition between the spoken word of the participant, and the use of the double hermeneutic, and second order sense making. I feel that the reflective boxes have allowed me to add an extra level for the reader to understand my thought processes both during the interviews and during analysis phases. The organisation of the emergent themes into subordinate and superordinate themes add to the coherence and structure of the thesis.

- Impact and importance

The information gained through this process of listening and interpretation can offer some insight to the adoption community. The information that has been shared and listened to throughout this research is of great importance and adds to the value of research in the field. In the conclusion I will highlight ways forward for future research and implications for professional practice which includes Educational Psychology practice.

Smith (2011) set guidelines for 'good' IPA research. Within my methodology I commented on his guidelines which I will now consider.

- The paper should have a clear focus.
- The paper will have strong data.
- The paper should be rigorous.

- Sufficient space must be given to the elaboration of each theme.

- The analysis should be interpretative not just descriptive.

- The analysis should be pointing to both convergence and divergence.

- The paper needs to be carefully written.

This thesis has considered adoptive parent's experience of adoption preparation, within the field of adoption research this is a relatively specific research focus. The data for this research was supported by a pilot interview. This allowed the researcher to be reflective about the interview schedule and amendments were made, which supported the development of a much richer data set. The appendices include detailed examples of the transcripts with emergent themes and initial notes. All superordinate themes include information from all participants, and all participant's views were evident in seven of the eight subordinate theme. Across these themes convergence and divergence are fully evident and explained. The shared experiences of the participants and interpretation of these was prioritised and given adequate space in the body of the thesis. The research is fully engaged with the double hermeneutic, but also includes some simpler descriptive elements that add clarity for the reader. The results and discussion sections were merged to add clarity for the reader. It is hoped that I have sustained the reader's attention by formulating my paper in a way that is clear, understandable and explicit.

6.2: Limitation of the study

IPA is idiographic, it looks to consider the particular, which means it is not generalisable or transferable. However, my interpretations via the use of the double hermeneutic of my participants lived experienced are specific to them, and the time and place they experienced them and therefore generalisability was not a requirement of the research.

IPA is based on the language from the interview transcript. It is argued that the transcript will only tell us what they have said about the phenomenon, rather than it being about the experience itself, or where the experience of the phenomena originated (Willig, 2008).Due to time constraints I may have misinterpreted their sense making, however I do not feel that this is the case and feel that I have added some value with the outsider perspective (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I feel that if I had been afforded more time I could have delved deeper into the phenomena and that this would have added to the depth of knowledge gained. Further depth of knowledge and increased divergence could have been included with the addition of representation across the whole of the UK, not just the North of England within the sample.

The sample size was at the lower end of what is advised. This was due to what was available within the research timescales.

6.3: Recommendations for further research

This thesis has been a part of my life for almost two years. This has given me time to consider other possible routes for research in this field, and my experience of interviewing and implementing interpretative analysis has also impacted on my thoughts. These recommendations include: -

- Further research into the lived experiences of adoptive parents that considers a larger group. In order to enhance the homogeneity of the sample it may be useful to approach one specific adoption agency and access a cohort of adopters through this pathway. This would allow an understanding of how different individuals experience one specific adoption agency's method of adoption preparation.
- I would be interested to explore the lived experience of social workers views of preparation practices utilising IPA as a methodology.

- My research highlighted a need for further emotional support, as this was a thread through the findings as a whole and corroborates with previous research (Parker, 1999; Howe,1988; Howe,1997; Dance and Farmer, 2014; Tasker & Wood, 2016; Boswell & Cudmore, 2017; and Meakings et al, 2018). Therefore, I would be interested to explore this specific detail of adoption preparation in more depth, considering the emotional factors, needs and requirements of adopters and the children.

- Furthermore, I would be interested to further explore the transition period as this was highlighted through previous research (Dance & Farmer 2014, and Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings, 2014), and was a significant factor through this thesis.

6.4: Implications for practice

It is recognised that there is a great deal of positive practice that occurs through social workers across the country for adoption preparation (Selwyn et al, 2014; Dance and Farmer, 2014; Farmer & Dance, 2016). There is currently no defined role for Educational Psychologists as part of the adoption process within the DfE guidance (2013). The findings of this research suggest that EPs could offer a significant role prior, during and post placement, and it is my proposal that Education psychology and social work professionals could work collaboratively towards the following recommendations that are presented though the superordinate themes.

A feeling of being nurtured

The implications for services from these experiences are as follows: -

- EPs are skilled in offering nurture and utilising interpersonal skills when working with professionals. EPs could support Social workers to develop further skills to benefit their relationships with adopters. This could include sharing the lived experience of adopters and allowing insightful discussions to commence regards the complexities of being

adopted, and also being an adopter. It would go beyond offering basic training on attachment theory, and would facilitate empathy through the shared knowledge that for these young children basic survival requires an intense amount of psychological and physical energy, and their experiences can result in habitual controlling and avoidant behaviours that impact on their daily lives (Hughes, 2004). This type of work is explored through Hughes' collection of poetry, which encompasses how it feels to look after an adopted child and also to be one (Hughes, 2012). Careful sharing and exploration of this type of resource could yield the power to open up conversations for better outcomes for all involved.

- This research highlighted the wealth of the relationship between the foster carer and the adoptive parent. How they felt contained (Bion, 1985) however, other research indicates that this is not always the case (Selwyn et al, 2014). Services could work collaboratively to facilitate relationships between foster carers and adopters to ensure that these are positive experiences. Furthermore, professionals could benefit from further insight and exploratory conversations about attachment, beyond the theory. Thus moving towards a shared understanding of the actualities of the impact of early life trauma of the child and the impact of the loss of another care giver, whilst also appreciating the potential loss felt by the foster carer (Boswell & Cudmore, 2017) when transitioning to adoptive care.

- Introductions to the transitions could be better supported, as it was anxiety provoking having not met a child prior to agreeing to move forward with an adoption. This could potentially include using video footage of their child interacting with other adults (Selwyn et al, 2014).

Being in a position of knowing

The implications for services from these experiences are as follows: -

- EPs are in a position to offer training to local adoption agencies or jointly deliver training in relation to typical and atypical child development and how to support adopters to understand these needs. This could also include an awareness of special educational needs with regard to learning, and social, emotional and mental health needs of looked after children, as it is recognised that their needs remain similar to those in stable foster care placements (Gore Langton, 2017). There is substantial evidence to suggest that EPs' professional training and background in psychology, along with their position within local authority services, enables them to contribute effectively within Children's Services (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires, & O'Connor, 2006)

- EPs are in a position to offer consultation to adoptive parents to support with a range of issues (Osborne & Alfano, 2011; Gore Langton, 2017). This could be in collaboration with social work professionals and could look to explore and accept the unknowns of their child's lives.

- Social workers to be supported sensitively through opening up the dialogue of conversations about the complexity of the situation, and support the development of empathy in relation to how some adopters experience 'rejecting children' as part of the matching process, and therefore consider ways forward that reduce this exposure.

- Moving forward, a level of clarity could be applied to differentiate between what the processes are for checking suitability, and what support there is for preparation to receive a child.

The intense emotional nature of the process

The implications for services from these experiences are as follows: -

- EPs are in a position to offer training to local adoption agency's or jointly deliver training in relation to the emotional needs of adopters and their families, foster carers and the children being placed. This would need to be approached sensitively through developing a dialogue that unpicks the issues that may arise and utilises resources such as *'It Was That One Moment...'* (Hughes, 2012) which explores the complexities of understanding the pain, hurt and yearning fostered and adopted children carry with them, and the strength and courage it takes for them to begin to believe that some adults can be trusted. In addition, EPs could support adoptive parents to develop the resilience to move forward, again utilising similar resources and feel more prepared to face challenges which could allow for more opportunities to share good practice stories with new adopters and create a supportive network, therefore reducing the risk of adoption disruption (Wright, 2009) or negative experiences of being an adopter.

- A study by Norwich, Richards & Nash (2010) highlighted the benefit of EP specialist roles which included work within the local authority, for example, to support staff working with children in care. EPs should routinely be part of the adoption preparation, process to work in collaboration with colleagues from social care in order to provide a holistic overview. Social workers to have the opportunity to consider research findings in relation to their roles with children and families.

6.5: Conclusion

This thesis looked to explore the lived experiences of three adoptive parents. It has recognised that a large number of children are placed for adoption each year, and that research highlights similar issues across a 30 year period, and therefore this thesis has attempted to delve deeper into the experiences of those who undergo the adoption preparation process. The findings of this research through analysis highlighted that these adoptive parents experienced a feeling of being nurtured, being in a position of knowing and the intense emotional nature of the process.

Recommendations for further research include understanding the lived experiences of adopters specifically, in relation to emotional well-being prior, during and post adoption, and the experiences of adopters and foster carers during transition into adoptive care.

Implications for professional practice include an increase in collaborative working between social work professionals and EPs, which includes consultation opportunities for adoptive parents, and developing a training offer.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Ethics approval letter

Karen Andrews-Longbone
Registration number: 170110019
School of Education
Programme: DEdCPsy - Doctorate of Child and Educational Psychology

Dear Karen

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring adoptive parents experience of agency supported adoption preparation
APPLICATION: Reference Number 024932

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 30/04/2019 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 024932 (form submission date: 18/04/2019); (expected project end date: 04/05/2020).
- Participant information sheet 1060256 version 1 (18/04/2019).
- Participant consent form 1060257 version 1 (18/04/2019).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

See amendments from reviewers above. Please attend to these.

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy:
  https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy:
  https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix B - Information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

1.   **Research Project Title:**

Adoptive parents experience of agency supported adoption preparation.

2.   **Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3.   **What is the project's purpose?**

The research aims to explore adoptive parents experience of adoption preparation. This will be done by interviewing adoptive parents and allowing them to share their experiences. It is hoped that the research will offer some insight into their experiences which may be useful for future adoptive parents. This research will form part of a doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology for the researcher. Within the context of this research 'Adoption Preparation' will be understood as the process that an adoptive parent goes through prior to becoming an adoptive parent.

4.   Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you have adopted a child (within timescales no less than 6 months ago and no more than 5 years ago), and therefore have received some adoption preparation work through your adoption agency. The researcher is interested in how you experienced your adoption preparation. You have been approached as a potential participant because you have links with the Educational Psychology service, as have all other participants.

5.   Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time prior to the data being analysed (once the data is analysed it will not be possible to identify individual participants) without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the main researcher Karen Andrews-Longbone, email - <u>kandrews-longbone1@sheffield.ac.uk</u>, telephone 07867946611.

6.   What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

If you agree to take part, then you will be interviewed for up to 1 hour. The interview will take place somewhere that it suitable for you. The interview questions will cover agency supported Adoption Preparation and how you as an individual experienced this process. The interview questions, which are all open-ended questions will be shared with you prior to the interview so that you are fully aware what may be discussed.

7.   What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is not anticipated that there are any disadvantages or risks involved in taking part in the research. However, discussing your experiences may be emotive. If you become upset during the interview, then the interview will cease and you will be given the option to either:-

- take a break,

- terminate the interview for today and rearrange,

- or terminate the interview without reconvening.

8.   What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will be useful for organisations who plan adoption preparation.

9.   Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team.   You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

All data will be stored in accordance with The University of Sheffield's data protection policies and procedures. Following transcription of the interviews the audio files will be destroyed. The transcribed interviews will use pseudonyms and therefore you will not be identifiable to anyone outside of the research project. All data will be destroyed after three years from publication of the thesis. The data will not be used in any future research.

10. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice *https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.*

11. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

All interviews will be audio recorded, using a dictaphone. These interviews will be stored on Google Drive, as part of the University of Sheffield system, and will be stored in line with the University's procedures. Once the interviews are transcribed any uses of personal names will be replaced with a pseudo name, and the main researcher will be the only individual who will be aware of your true identity. All audio recording will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

The transcript will be accessible to the main researcher and will include pseudo names only and therefore will not be able to identify the participants. This document will be shared with the research supervisor and possibly another student researcher who may assist with quality assuring the findings of the research.

The transcribed interviews with pseudo names will be stored for a period of three years after the research has been published.

The audio recordings of your interview made during this research will be used only for analysis only. No other use will be made of them, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

It may be that you are part of the pilot work and therefore your interviews may not be used in the final research findings, however if the pilot information is felt to be detailed and robust, and methods do not change after pilot interview have taken place, your information may be used in the final research findings.

12.   Who is organising and funding the research?

The University of Sheffield, Department of Education, Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology course is organising the research.

13.   Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

14.   Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by Education department. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

15.   What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?

The key people who you may need to contact are listed below

Main researcher: Karen Andrews-Longbone, email - kandrews-longbone1@sheffield.ac.uk, telephone 07867946611

Research Supervisor: Dr Sahaja Davies, email - t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk

Course Director : Dr Anthony Williams, email - anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk   (Dr Williams is not linked to the project, he can be contacted in the event of a complaint)

Should you wish to make a complaint about the research it would be advisable to contact Dr Sahaja Davies initially, and then escalate this to Dr Anthony Williams if required.

If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, information about how to raise a complaint can be found in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

16.   Contact for further information

If you wish to obtain further information about the project you can contact the main researcher: Karen Andrews-Longbone, email - kandrews-longbone1@sheffield.ac.uk, telephone 07867946611, or alternatively you can contact the Research Supervisor: Dr Sahaja Davies, email - t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk

Any participant will be given a copy of this information sheet along with a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, and for taking part in the research project.

Date 18/04/2019

Appendix C - Consent form

Participant consent form

Adoptive parents experience of agency supported adoption preparation.

Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 18/04/2019 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed, and audio recorded about my experience of adoption preparation.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study prior to my interview, during my interview, and up to a date to be agreed with the researcher prior to the analysis of the interview. I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		

I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part may be part of the pilot, and therefore my information may not be used in the final research findings.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed]   Signature   Date

Name of Researcher [printed]   Signature   Date

Project contact details for further information:

Main researcher: Karen Andrews-Longbone, email - kandrews-longbone1@sheffield.ac.uk, telephone 07867946611

Research Supervisor: Dr Sahaja Davies, email - t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk

Course Director : Dr Anthony Williams, email - anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk   (Dr

Williams is not linked to the project, he can be contacted in the event of a complaint)

Appendix D - Debrief information

Debriefing Information Sheet

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking part in this research project.

If you found the process of talking about your experiences upsetting and these feelings continue to persist after the research project has finished, it is advised that you contact your adoption agency.

There are also national organisations and charities available to offer support.

- Adoption UK (https://www.adoptionuk.org/support) offer support groups across the UK. Groups are friendly and welcoming, you must be a paid member to access this service, whether you adopted ten years ago, or are in the process now. There is also a helpline in England that you can access by calling either 07904 793 974 or 07539 733079, which can be accessed **Monday to Thursday 10.00am - 2.30pm and Friday 10.00am - 12.30pm (excluding bank holidays).** You can also email them on AUKhelpline@pac-uk.org **Monday to Thursday 10.00am - 4.00pm and Friday 10.00am - 2.30pm**

- We Are Family is a charitable incorporated organisation. You can access them via https://wearefamilyadoption.org.uk/

You are also welcome to contact me again to discuss any part of your involvement in the research project.

Best wishes

Karen Andrews-Longbone

Trainee Educational Psychologist

The University of Sheffield

kandrews-longbone1@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix E - Interview schedule

Interview schedule

Questions for the semi structured interviews will include

1.   Can you tell me about how you were prepared for becoming an adoptive parent?

2.   Can you tell me about a time when you have used something that you learned as part of your adoption preparation?

3.   What did you expect your adoption preparation to include?

Further prompts will include:

•   Can you tell me some more about that?

•   Tell me what you were thinking?

•   How did you feel?

•   Why?

•   How?

Questions that clarify and query a statement such as 'Why was it obvious that it would be difficult?'

Appendix F - Amended interview schedule

Interview schedule - Questions for the semi structured interviews will include

Main question

Can you tell me about how you were prepared for becoming an adoptive parent?

Secondary question

Can you tell me about a time when you have used something that you learned as part of your adoption preparation?

Possible further areas to follow to elicit further detail, if required, but follow the lead of the interviewee

Did you 'feel' ready/prepared/insight for your child – post training? (terrified, confident etc).

Did the preparation impact on this?

Be inquisitive about the content of the preparation/course/training (did anything stand out, was there anything significant, was it useful, something you have used in practice, in what way)

Did you refer back to your training?

Was anything upsetting/difficult to hear?

Further prompts will include:

- Can you tell me some more about that?

- Tell me what you were thinking?

- How did you feel?

- Why?

- How?

Questions that clarify and query a statement such as 'Why was it obvious that it would be difficult?'

Other things to think about

- Should be dominated by how it felt
- Use memory to invoke the experience

Appendix G - Langdridge reflexive questions

Method box 5.1
Questions to encourage a reflexive approach to research

Below are a series of questions that a researcher might wish to reflect on in the context of a research project taking reflexive issues seriously:

1. Why am I carrying out this study?
2. What do I hope to achieve with this research?
3. What is my relationship to the topic being investigated?
   – Am I an insider or outsider?
   – Do I empathize with the participants and their experience?
4. Who am I, and how might I influence the research I am conducting in terms of age, sex, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and any other relevant cultural, political or social factors?
5. How do I feel about the work?
   – Are there external pressures influencing the work?
6. How will my subject position influencing the analysis?
7. How might the outside world influencing the presentation of findings?
8. How might the findings impact on the participants?
   – Might they lead to harm and, if so, how can I justify this happening?
9. How might the findings impact on the discipline and my career in it?
   – Might they lead to personal problems, and how prepared am I to deal with these should they arise?
10. How might the findings impact on wider understandings of the topic?
    – How might your colleagues respond to the research?
    – What would the newspapers make of the research?
    – Does the research have any implications for future funding (of similar research and/or related organizations)?
    – What political implications might arise as a result of the research?

Page 59

Nancy

personal ques

32 suppose where we were coming from, wanting an adopted child, so
33 that was really helpful I think [laughed] no it was it was. So for
34 example she helped us to think through particularly in term of Elle
35 (biological daughter) and what would be best for her because I think
36 she would have been 4, no a bit older than 4, we started the process,
37 in term of finding out about adoption and things when she was
38 about 4 and then I think we got assessed when she was 7, 6 or 7
39 anyway, and our main priority was to ensure that whoever we
40 decided to adopt they could have a relationship with Elle, be able to
41 socialise and develop that relationship with Elle, she was very much I
42 want a younger brother or sister, and in the end she actually decided
43 that she wanted a brother and we went with that, erm we weren't
44 bothered, but again the social worker said it might be easier for her if
45 we adopted a little boy because there is less competition or threat

46 Researcher: okay

47 Interviewee: so she said, obviously Elle had looked a lot like me and
48 the difference in erm, if we were to adopt a little girl the difference
49 would be more noticeable, because Elle looks like me and the
50 adopted girl wouldn't look like me, does that make sense

51 Researcher: okay, is that something you had thought about before

52 Interviewee: no, not thought about that at all, erm and I think, I
53 don't know how it would have turned out if we had adopted a little
54 girl, I have no idea but that's not something I think about really. I
55 think that was helpful advice, its not somethings I had thought about
56 before.

57 Researcher: I don't think that is something that I would have thought
58 about, but now you have said that, I can kind of see that it does
59 make sense

60 Interviewee: yeh, I thought it was yeh, useful for her to bring that up.
61 And having that discussion with her around exploring what we

was it helpful?
did she feel
uncomfortable

Commented [ka3]: Was it helpful? Why the laugh

exploring our thoughts
on how it would
impact on Elle

SIBLING
RELATIONSHIP

impact
sibling
not adopted
form friends
aim to

Commented [ka4]: Useful guidance as it was not
something they had thought about

not something they had
thought about, less
threat

inclusion of RAD

looking like
sibling?

122   Interviewee: on reflection

123   Researcher: so would you say you felt ready, I don't want to put
124   words into your mouth, it helped you feel ready initially

125   Interviewee: no, erm, I don't think it was enough, because it was
126   very general, it wasn't specific to Lucas (adopted child) , or to us as a
127   family it was very general, erm and , I always remember erm after
128   Lucas moved in and I do, thinking the first year was really tough,
129   really tough and it took a while to I suppose bond because what I
130   don't think they emphasis enough is that he, to us, he is a complete
131   stranger, and we were complete strangers, yes we had got all the
132   information about erm , what time he slept, what he liked to eat,
133   what he liked to play with, things like that, and he obviously had
134   photographs of us and would kiss those before bed, and when we
135   first met, it was lovely cos we went and saw him and I knelt down
136   next to him and he just threw his arms around me and gave me a big
137   hug because obviously the foster carers had prepared him really well
138   and that was lovely but erm, what was missing, and again I suppose
139   that's information from the foster carers as well but I don't think the
140   social workers in terms of the training and things prepared us for
141   that process of erm getting to know him, i suppose, and we didn't
142   know what motivated him, we didn't know him, so when he was
143   having a big tantrum or a kick off he would just suddenly head butt
144   one of us, its like is he doing that intentionally, is that by accident, is
145   he stressed, its, its knowing what motivated him I think and knowing
146   him as a person and I suppose it took a while for that trust to build
147   up for both of us from my perspective, from him as well, just
148   knowing what made him tick.

149   Researcher: right so you felt that bit was, it would have been useful if
150   there had been more specifics about him

151   Interviewee: yeh, but I think also maybe, I think even just in general
152   if they'd said you will, and they did to a certain degree, you know

[Handwritten margin notes:]

not enough.

LACKING INFORMATION

very general, Not specific to Lucas

NON specific. knowledge

- information was about practical information

LACKING specific

we didn't know what motivated him

LACKING INFORMATION

NON specific knowledge

s → Nonspecific Lacking info

Mike

153 it's the only thing I could compare it to, and its really horrible, not
154 horrible but weird, its like adopting a cat, you go to a shelter and you
155 pick the cat you want, and we had done that, and it was picking a
156 child that was right for us, we were very lucky because our son was
157 the first paperwork we saw, we never had to say no, because the
158 social worker had done the right thing and matched us. Now our
159 friends who had adopted before us they did say no, and they found
160 that really hard and we met with them and they had got this
161 paperwork and they had the worry of would they let them see more
162 paperwork on other children, but the child was not right for them,
163 and they had to be brave and say no. I've forgotten what the
164 question was?

165 Researcher: no its fine, its all really interesting to get your insight.
166 Erm, so do you, what part of the preparation was most significant for
167 you, do you think?

168 Interviewee: are we talking the whole process

169 Researcher: if we think about where, where something was shared
170 with you to give you insight into I suppose

171 Interviewee: if we are talking about (I can say my sons name, it
172 makes it easier)

173 Researcher: you can. The name will not be used in the write up

174 Interviewee: when it came to we actually knew it was Max (adopted
175 child), if we are talking about after that and Max was in the picture it
176 was the 'appreciate the child day' when we met with, because he
177 had had a previous social worker and a current social worker, we had
178 foster carer there we had medical, there was some other people
179 there and we basically found out warts and all, everything, now with
180 him involved I think that was the most important thing. Prior to that
181 where Max wasn't in the picture and there was just an imaginary
182 child in the middle I think the preparation was the meetings with the

didn't have to say no.
Skilled SW

Commented [ka12]: Feeling - strenuous and upsetting and hard work and exhausting

the process was about them knowing us - but that also there were some choices - lost himself a little

- Reality of future.

Commented [ka13]: 'appreciate the child day - this was most useful

found professionals supportive. -ALL.

6

246 got anything from that cos it was a hard conversation, and just hard
247 to have so they prepared us and in the fact of actually telling us why
248 we maybe needed to do that

249 Researcher: okay, so what was the purpose of that meeting then

250 Interviewee: for the future for Max in the sense that so that he can
251 then piece together that we know that part of his life, and we've met
252 his birth mother and step father and also in a sense for mum to
253 understand where he has gone, and for her. I don't think we walked
254 away with anything and was like 'yeh right' but this felt good. We
255 walked away thinking right when Max turns 18 a says im off to go
256 and find my mum I now feel a bit more prepared to know what kind
257 of person she actually is to preparing him for yeh, her fantasies that
258 happened and that she might not have a true sense of what
259 happened, whereas before it was all on paper before, and I don't
260 think without meeting her and the life appreciation day I had a very
261 different story going on in my head. It was almost a bit of a fairy tale
262 it was a bit nicer. And I think actually meeting her made me
263 understand a bit more her personality and also the life appreciation
264 day made me understand a bit more the reasons why he cant live
265 with her. I think cos when we read the paperwork I kind of felt sorry
266 for her, and had a bit of a fairy tale going on in my head, but at the
267 end of the day he cant live with her and theres reasons for that and
268 that made it real, and I think if your just given that document that
269 piece of paper that was that (gestured) thick, I read it hundreds of
270 times and it was there but without meeting them and the life
271 appreciation conversations I had a very different picture

272 Researcher: so can you think of a specific example of like when you
273 have used, because you talked about attachment in the preparation
274 in the workshop sessions, so if you now fast forward to Max living in
275 your family home, is there anything from that that you go back to,
276 and think 'ahh... they said about this'

Commented [ka17]: Modelled activities

Commented [ka18]: Meeting birth family

open, transparency about birth family

Commented [ka19]: Prepared for future having the knowledge about family having actually met birth parent

ideal that was challenged.

Commented [ka20]: Story in my head. Did he have an ideal that was challenged

Commented [ka21]: Did this give him more understanding of his child and how he might present

Commented [ka22]: But what was this fairytale, and is the opposite of the nightmare??? is this what he is describing

Commented [ka23]: This wasn't as real as meeting birth mum

preparation ruled out the fairytale.

Joyce

Bad timing

55 Interviewee: of like a 'this is what your child has been through' and
56 this is how you could help and how they may present

57 Researcher: does that come through anywhere else, I'm curious, I
58 don't know? Does it come through the social worker?

59 Interviewee: they do bits, we met foster parents, so we knew like his
60 behaviour and how things were, we met his doctor, but that was like
61 pointless because they don't really know anything about like the
62 child, so yeh, cos they go through like his background, but I don't
63 really remember them saying how anything could effect him

social foster parent

64 Researcher: okay

65 Interviewee: it was always just, well he's only 2 so we don't know,
66 and that was sort of like it, instead of saying here is only 2 but
67 because he has been through this this and this this could effect him,
68 but no you don't get anything like that

lack of information.

69 Researcher: right, okay, that's really interesting, erm can you think
70 about life now, can you think of a time where you specifically
71 thought back to part of the preparation, where you have been taught
72 something that has really helped

support from. other ADOPTERS

73 Interviewee: No, not from them, not from social worker, I go to other
74 adopters for like ' why is he doing this?'. I've got my step sister, they
75 have got an adopted child

76 Researcher: okay

77 Interviewee: but I remember when Billy (adopted child) first came,
78 and I used to text Robin (step sister) all the time and be like, why is
79 he doing this and why is he doing that, and she would be like, cos he
80 is 2, you know like, and she was like 'that's just normal'. And weve
81 got other friends now who are adopters and we will probably speak
82 to them more, and we did really all along rather than go to to them
83 [social workers], or to that training.

113 Interviewee: yeh, cos then you see that it does work, it is gonna,
114 even though this child has been through so much trauma they can
115 attach to new people

116 Researcher: so when you had finished your training, I'm not sure
117 whether there was gap between that finishing and you being
118 matched, how did you feel? Did you feel ready?

119 Interviewee: erm, we probably felt ready but didn't feel ready, like
120 you do as much as you can like, and like, I'm very like, I like lists, I like
121 organising, so everything was like, and everything on paper we had it
122 ready, but then for this, I always say to my friends, you have, when
123 you give birth to a child, you have, you've got that time from them
124 being a day old, to maybe one, eighteen months until they start
125 running around and then like you learn of like what they can get to
126 and stuff, but to just suddenly have a two year old in your house, and
127 even though we have checked everything, weve been through
128 everything we can, social workers have been round and okay'd
129 everything, to have a two year old that can suddenly climb up
130 everything and run around and that's from day one, and you don't
131 have that year of preparing to understanding what they can get into
132 and what they can do

133 Researcher: so was any of that part of the preparation?

134 Interviewee: no

135 Researcher: okay, I wonder why that was

136 Interviewee: I don't know. I remember her (social worker) saying
137 things like obviously, but it was silly things that they wanted us to do,
138 we a telly that was a bit bigger than that one (pointed at TV) and we
139 had to get rid of it, you know things like this because we didn't want
140 his (child's) social worker to think we sat and watched telly all day

141 Researcher: so what was their rationale behind getting rid of a bigger
142 telly?

Handwritten annotations:
Future possibility of a family.
ready but not ready.
Logistically ready.
CHECKING Process
TIME quick? - Not here? - here true?
practical stuff.
this felt very judgemental & dated
JUDGED ON THE STANDARDS IN THE Home
TV - Checked TV was an issue - had to look not too big. be part ? the have had to be right
Certain standard for the house.

Appendix I - Reflections and emergent themes

Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme
A feeling of being nurtured by the process	The depths of the social work support experienced
	Interactions with others who understand
	The sudden intensity of the transition to parenthood
Being in a position of knowing	A need to understand 'my child'
	Feeling probed and checked upon
	The uncomfortable feelings of rejection
The intense emotional nature of the process	Feeling emotionally overwhelmed
	Developing and protecting our family

Superordinate theme – A feeling of being nurtured by the process

The depths of the social work support experienced

Importance of relationships
SKILLED SW
SOCIAL WORKER LISTENED AND WAS INTERESTED IN ME
SOCIAL WORKER PREPPED FOR PANEL
Social worker incompetent
Value of social work guidance
Judged pulled up on things that didn't make sense
Drop and run social worker
Judged on odd things

Quotes with initial notes and emergent themes

The social worker we got was lovely, really nice, and I think that probably made a difference. Nancy 20-21	Supportive relationship with the social worker. Relationship was important

	Probably??? – was she not sure. Did she need the social worker to make a difference IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS
erm so she was really good and it was quite relaxed Nancy 24	is this how she felt about the adoption social worker - relaxed IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS
I think she also helped us to think more clearly about what is was that we wanted in terms of adopting a child, what we were gonna get out of it, kind of what, I suppose where we were coming from, wanting an adopted child, so that was really helpful I think [laughed] no it was it was. Nancy 29-33	Supported us to think about things in a way we had not before. This was something they had not thought about before. Did she laugh because she felt silly at not thinking about what she wanted before they started the process? – feeling silly – she was already a parent, surely she should know? But it was okay as she was supported through this IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS
she made us think about what we wanted, and what we could manage and what we couldn't manage and what our prioritise were and that was really really helpful, I don't know if all	Understanding limitations and expectations of the family

social workers do that, kind of go into that much details and explore it in that much depth but erm I felt that she really kind of understood us as a family and what we wanted and she had that in mind the whole time which was helpful which was really good. Nancy 62-69	Feeling of being invested in as a family Was this because she had a good relationship with the social worker. Made us think differently?
luckily we changed social workers and we had a really good social worker, erm, who again we felt got us and understood us as a family, and she was very sensitive and very supportive, and was quite gentle with us after that, she was kind of there was no pressure, she was erm, she would just be like, 'oh I'm wondering if this one might' erm and we did look at another profile in more detail, Nancy 325-331	Skilled social worker who knew her job. Supported them to find the right child, rather than them picking once from a brochure. This relationship was really important for them, to get it right. IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS
the social worker laura was really really good and she just listened and asked questions, it just flowed I think, and when we got to the end of stage 2 before we went to panel we got the PAR, and actually reading that you could see that she had listened, and she hadn't recorded anything she had just written notes down but the conversation was there, and she got this view of us. Mike 71-76	Felt listened too Heard SOCIAL WORKER LISTENED AND WAS INTERESTED IN ME
we had some preparation with the social worker she came and asked us, she, when, we looked at the paperwork and she said you look at the paperwork and think about what	SW supported and prepped for panel. Her support her was really useful.

questions panel will ask you and I will come and do some panel prep with you and do some questions I think they are gonna ask you and we will talk about what you are gonna say, and how you are going to answer them, so we did that the Thursday before we went to panel. Mike 78-85	<u>Is he implying that she helped them jump through the hoops. He later talks about being a performing seal</u> SOCIAL WORKER PREPPED FOR PANEL SOCIAL WORKER LISTENED AND WAS INTERESTED IN ME
I think the relationship with the social worker was really important because we were able to then ask those questions and I would then ping her an email 'silly questions but…. Duh duh duh'. Mike 129-132	Approachable. <u>Felt comfortable.</u> <u>Was what he needed</u>. Able to ask when he didn't know
I think it might have come from our social worker because we were talking about how to introduce for younger children because obviously they can't flick through a book, and read a book, so we had the family book which was all the photographs and then we had, they suggested a butterfly talking book but we couldn't find it so we ended up buying a book for people with dementia where you can record your voice on each page. He still flicks through it now, it's in his play room, and brown bear in the kitchen, brown bear with nanny, and then he physically had the bear. Mike 491-499	She had ideas about transition object and How to support him to settle. <u>She thought outside the box?</u> SKILLED SOCIAL WORKER

yeh and also big a4 pictures of me and Jim laminated were, foster carer put in his bedroom, when we knew it was all happening in his bedroom, in the kitchen all over, just and we also swapped numbers with the foster carers and she would send little videos and we would send whats app messages 'morning Max' and those kind of things, and those ideas came from the social worker cos obviously she has done it loads of times. Mike 501-507	She had ideas about transition object and How to support him to settle. <u>She thought outside the box?</u> SKILLED SOCIAL WORKER
and she didn't disappear at that point because after he is here but his social worker is visiting weekly, our social worker is visiting weekly. Mike 585-587	<u>Available SW – or is she checking?</u>
I was worried about our social worker in the beginning mainly because she was part time, that worried me, but she was the best, I'm sure they all are, but she was. If anything happened to Max I would pick up the phone and call my social worker. In fact he fell and chipped his tooth a few weeks into being here, and straight away I was trying to get hold of her for the adoption side, I'm I supposed to tell you? I knew what to do for the medical side. Mike 685-692	Social worker accessible and approachable SKILLED SOCIAL WORKER
Lucas's social worker was incompetent I would say, erm we had a whole heap of trouble with her. Nancy 260-261	INCOMPETENT SOCIAL WORKER – This is the child social worker

I remember her (social worker) saying things like obviously, but it was silly things that they wanted us to do, we a telly that was a bit bigger than that one (pointed at TV) and we had to get rid of it, you know things like this because we didn't want his (child's) social worker to think we sat and watched telly all day. Joyce 136-140	Having a big tv was not okay? <u>Felt judged? Are they ,missing the point – the SW.</u> <u>This was not supportive, and didn't feel supportive</u> JUDGED PULLED UP ON THINGS THAT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE
because it looked like it was the focal point of the room, the house, the room, and they didn't want his (child's) social worker to then come in and be like, so they just sit and watch telly all day, cos they have got a big telly joyce 143-146	<u>Judged on the standards within the home. This had no impact on parenting style or skill</u> JUDGED PULLED UP ON THINGS THAT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE
so it was weird things like that that we had to do, but yeh, like I say it's very different to being prepared like in a home way to then actually him Billy coming into the home and no actually we weren't really prepared Joyce 148-151	Talking about the TV and this focus meant that they were not prepared for him VALUE OF SOCIAL WORK GUIDANCE
I remember them always saying never to say no to him and I found that very strange, cos how do you set boundaries and things for the child, and they were always like try not to	I don't think that lasted very long. <u>Did she feel that this was pointless advice? Did this and the TV guidance make her think they were of no use?</u>

say no, just remember to say it like this or like this, but, like, I don't think that lasted very long of us not saying no to him. Joyce 210- 214	VALUE OF SOCIAL WORK GUIDANCE
I remember our social worker being a lot more helpful than his (child's). His was sort of like 'right you're taking one of our children, thanks see you later', and we've not seen any of them again since, but whereas ours have been really good. Joyce 410-413	child being placed and then they were gone. <u>They were grateful that they had one off their list?</u> DROP AND RUN SOCIAL WORKER
we have got his life story book, we haven't got his later in life letter yet, I don't know if I like it, cos he's from (place) AND they have provided it in an editable form so I might tweek it the way it's written its written from birth whereas I think it should start form us and work back mike 344-348	Not placing much value on the life story book. Felt it was done wrong VALUE OF SOCIAL WORK GUIDANCE
the social worker came round it was like the house is very dark you're going to have to redecorate. I am very proud of our house, we have worked so hard on it, and I know why she said it because some kids are scared of the dark but we would never have a kid that was scared of the dark. I love dark colours, but for then for me to go and then rant at somebody 'bloody social workers walked in and said ' that's really important for the	Really didn't value to the guidance about changing their home. <u>There was a reason it was like it was, and what did it matter.</u> Needed someone to moan too about the SW JUDGED ON ODD THINGS

whole process to have that support away from your support because it is hard. Mike 698-705	
We had a pond at the side, and she said, I wouldn't have a pond, now she was only passing her opinion, next weekend we were filling that pond in, that's ponds gone it now a water feature, I think when she came for the house check she said I'm spoken to my manager it will be fine, well we've got rid of it, but you are jumping through hoops and sometimes feel like a performing seal. Mike 710-716	<u>Had to do all these things I thought were silly just to be approved to have a child</u> Did things that I didn't need to do JUDGED ON ODD THINGS

Interactions with others who understand

FOSTER CARER SUPPORT SUPPORT FROM OTHER ADOPTERS SUPPORT FOSTER CARER SUPPORT FROM OTHER ADOPTERS

Quotes with initial notes and emergent themes

they were amazing they were brilliant lovely people who had welcomed us into their home and they were fantastic. Nancy 203-205	Really appreciated the support from the foster carer FOSTER CARER SUPPORT
the biggest help in all that time were his foster carers. Nancy 264-265	Really appreciated the support from the foster carer. *Biggest – is this how massive she felt the support was* FOSTER CARER SUPPORT
they were brilliant, they gave us as much information as they could, erm, they were really supportive, sort of emotionally as well as practically, and they just in term of, like his social worker should have coordinated it all, and actually she wasn't very good at doing that, erm, so for us or for me, I can't speak for Jonathon (husband), they were like, they couldn't have	<u>Is she saying that the foster carer did things that she felt the SW should have done?</u> *Coordination – with out this would it have all fallen apart*

done anymore really, than they did, so, erm, and I suppose they kind of saved the day as it were cos we'd had such a horrific time with the other social workers, hmm yeh. Nancy 267-275	*they kind of saved the day* Really appreciated the support from the foster carer FOSTER CARER SUPPORT
we met foster parents, so we knew like his behaviour and how things were. Joyce 59-60	Useful information from foster carers Behaviour? Was it good or bad? – should have asked SUPPORT FOSTER CARER
No, not from them, not from social worker, I go to other adopters for like ' why is he doing this?'. I've got my step sister, they have got an adopted child. Joyce 73-75 (in response to a question from me 'can you think of a time where you specifically thought back to part of the preparation, where you have been taught something that has really helped	Felt that other adopters understood her more? Was this because they had adopted and the SW had not? SUPPORT FROM OTHER ADOPTERS
but I remember when Billy (adopted child) first came, and I used to text Robin (step sister) all the time and be like, why is he doing this and why is he doing that, and she would be like, cos he is 2, you know like, and she was like 'that's just normal'. And we've got other	Step sister had been thought it? <u>It was okay to be vulnerable around family but not SW. Did other adopters know more?. Is this about lack of support from social workers? Or lack of approachability</u>

friends now who are adopters and we will probably speak to them more, and we did really all along rather than go to to them [social workers], or to that training. Joyce 77-83	SUPPORT FROM OTHER ADOPTERS
the thing we probably found most useful was when a couple came in to one of the sessions that had adopted and then talking about their experiences and things, and that was probably the thing that I think that throughout all the training, the thing that me and Steve (husband) said was that it all seemed very like doom and gloom, there was never anything like positive. Joyce 86-91	Did other adopters know more? Did the other adopters share good stories – did it show them hope for the future SUPPORT FROM OTHER ADOPTERS
It was good meeting current adopters. Mike 111-112 even though we knew adopters, it was actually an adopter that had been through the process, that had been asked those questions. Mike 119-121	Did other adopters know more? Why was it good? Is it the proof that it works? SUPPORT FROM OTHER ADOPTERS
the whole introduction process was about learning his routine and we kept his routines and the things he ate and we made sure we had those things in the freezer. We had given him a few meals here so we worked out where putting the highchair to start with, just those little things, and he had had a nap here, as until that point he hadn't spent the night so erm the first time he was gonna have a nap here the foster care was like, cos he's a bit funny about	Foster carers could share real useful practical stuff The foster carer had done the hard work, so if we just copied that it would work? Right? Familiarity and successful transition FOSTER CARER SUPPORT

sleeping so we borrowed her sheet and brought some of his things to out in there so it felt familiar. Mike 454-462	
I think the original plan was for 9-10 days but the foster carer had an older daughter, and she would have had to have gone to school on the Friday, so there was consideration of her family and her saying goodbye, he was their first foster child and it had been a long placement as well so there was lot of his needs, our needs, their needs and that when planning meeting was important, and I think those last couple of days it was like let's just, we're ready, we can do this a bit longer.mike 511-519	This was not one sided, there was also consideration for the foster carer and how they would feel handing over this child. Trying to keep everyone okay SUPPORT FOSTER CARER
but, that I mean, he'd been with his foster carer since birth and he was just over two and for them it was really really hard, really hard and we were very aware of that Nancy 201-203	

The sudden intensity of the transition to parenthood

TIME

TIME IMPACTS ON CONTEXT
BAD TIMING
TIME
ANTICIPATION
A SERIES OF RUSHED EVENTS
FOMO
RUSHED/SWEPT AWAY

Quotes with initial notes and emergent themes

erm 10 days, we kind of more or less lived with them and then, yeh very quick visit, we had managed to make time to have a photograph in their garden and but yeh just driving away knowing that's it were not going back again, you know that he was with us, because we'd been here, we'd taken him out for days out without the foster carers but just driving away	Emotional *[laughed] – nervous laughter at the task she had taken on*

thinking, that's it [laughed] I'm not going back again. It was a nice feeling but also daunting I suppose. Nancy 185-192	*Erm 10 days. <u>Was this too quick for them. Rushed.</u>* <u>*Quick*</u> Sense of finality TIME
it might have changed, of not meeting them until you actually start the transition, we got all the information photographs things like that but we only met Lucas on day one of the transition. Nancy 446-448	Not meeting them until you start the transition. *Not meeting them – she didn't know this child yet.* TIME
and then the transition period started and we didn't meet him until that day one, and then day ten he moved in with us. Nancy 450-452	Day one you meet him Day ten he lives with you TIME
well yeh, that child is going to be my son, but I've not actually met him yet [laughed] and then you do and, so I remember us driving away from that cos we'd only stayed a few hours and I drove away feeling like 'oh my god', like its mixed emotions you don't know how to feel or how you should feel, and you don't know what's going to happen. It's a positive experience in term of we, I mean he was lovely, we got on, we you know played together and	That child is going to be my son – *That child* *Fear, anxiety 'haven't met him yet but he is going to be my son'* TIME

it was lovely but he was someone else's child and you signed up for him to become your son [laughed] so it's, and I was very aware of that before, of that process before and I think that's why I wanted to make sure I got, it went, it was right because at no point did I want to start that process and go 'no I'm sorry, this isn't going to work' Nancy 480-491	
erm, we probably felt ready but didn't feel ready, like you do as much as you can like, and like, I'm very like, I like lists, I like organising, so everything was like, and everything on paper we had it ready, but then for this, I always say to my friends, you have, when you give birth to a child, you have, you've got that time from them being a day old, to maybe one, eighteen months until they start running around and then like you learn of like what they can get to and stuff, but to just suddenly have a two year old in your house. Joyce 119-126	<u>Logistically ready with stuff – but not anything else?</u> Didn't have the time to get used to him being there – it wasn't gradual like it is with a baby. <u>All very quick</u> TIME
even though we have checked everything, we've been through everything we can, social workers have been round and okay'd everything, to have a two year old that can suddenly climb up everything and run around and that's from day one, and you don't have that year of preparing to understanding what they can get into and what they can do . Joyce 127-132	Not there, then he is there? Too quick <u>A year of preparing – she didn't have that – would she have rather had that? Is this about her need for a biological child?</u> TIME

so then we went to adoption panel, got approved, saw this paperwork for our now son that very next day and then went through the whole of the introduction and foster carers and getting to know about our son. Mike 92-95	The passing of time was very quick here between these steps. A SERIES OF RUSHED EVENTS
the first day we brought him home properly or the first day we brought him here, because it was a blur. we did 12 days of introductions Mike 377-379	Whirlwind *Blur* RUSHED/SWEPT AWAY
So We agreed looking at the file, yes we are interested, Max was ready and they wanted us so we got whisked along, so we had a meeting here with 5 social workers, and Jim sat in the corner there, these social workers starting pinging across and talking through things like this and all of a sudden they started getting diaries out and looking at dates of when he could move in. (MADE A GESTURE THAT INDICATED BEING OVERWHELMED – shook hands at the side of his face) Researcher: okay Interviewee: so this all happened, and everyone left and our social stayed and she was like 'are you alright, are you alright', and I just stopped and said is that what that meeting is normally like, she said 'no, we normally go away and things, but they are almost in a rush' Researcher: so what was that like how did it feel be sat there	we got whisked along. Them looking at diaries and dates. <u>The child was ready so we had to be if we wanted him</u> RUSHED/SWEPT AWAY He was at the point where he wasn't quite walking, he wasn't quite talking he wasn't, we

Interviewee: it was exciting but your also sat through a meeting that they are always having and your thinking is this how it is normally, because it was pinging dates across. She basically turned around, one of the social workers, the one who was leading it all, leading our case, is a bit of a rogue social worker, just likes things done and get on, and she was very keen on the match, they had looked at several other families and he had been in foster care a long time and they just wanted it to move ,and we just fitted. So there were discussions around whether he could move in before Christmas or whether we wanted to wait. He was at the point where he wasn't quite walking, he wasn't quite talking he wasn't, we were very close to firsts, so if we waiting until January are we going to miss those. So it was basically a conversation as to whether me and Jim could put our personal Christmas on hold to have this child move in because they advise that the first Christmas is so close they normally don't place children over Christmas because families coming in and out of the home and stuff, so could we out that on hold, and yes we could, lots of other questions like could I leave work like soon, work were aware that I was getting ready to go so were we financially capable of doing that so it all went ahead. We went to meet the foster carer that was the next stage, that was just meant to be a meeting with the foster carer and it was agreed to go to her home. Now we went in	were very close to firsts, so if we waiting until January are we going to miss those If they didn't take that jump at that moment it was going to be too late Fear of missing out (FOMO) ANTICIPATION They were happy to place their lives as they knew them on hold and swap it for a new life. They had to go at the pace of the social workers questions like could I leave work like soon RUSHED/SWEPT AWAY We me him – he was there. This was real. There was no going back

preparing to meet this foster carer and this rouge social worker said 'oh he's upstairs having a nap shall we bring him down'. Now that wasn't meant to happen, we weren't meant to have that bump in together, but 30 seconds later he's there sat on my knee.	A SERIES OF RUSHED EVENTS
Researcher: okay	
Interviewee: now even though that wasn't meant to happen I'm so glad that it did happen because it was hard in the fact that he was sat on my knee and oh god, he's gorgeous, it feels right, but we hadn't been through approval panel, social worker kept saying to me, and we kept saying it's going to be fine, it's going to be fine, it's just a formality, it's going to be fine, you wouldn't have got this far, you've got social workers coming round here saying yes this is a good match, but you've still got to get over that last hurdle of that panel, erm got through that and then we started the introductions the next day so erm, through the panel started the introductions and that was just 12 days solid of doing everything, waking him up,	Panel was still a challenge Panel and then they started the next day. A SERIES OF RUSHED EVENTS.
bathing him, going backwards and forwards to (place named), sometimes going there in the morning to wake him up to bring him back here, to then take him back before bedtime to bath him. I wrote a diary of what we did so that I could look back when I feel ready at how much we did. The first day he came here the foster carer brought him for a few hours and then	This sounded exhausting for them to cope with this level of being rushed *Whisked*

went for a coffee and came back and took him, but the, it was December the 8th the day we picked him up, so the night before, a few days before everything was here, everything he was going to bring with him was here, we had set everything up ready so that morning we went him and literally whisked in whisked out and took him and then came back and just, err, like just like anything like just getting home from the hospital with having a baby and do you think oh my god . mike 379-443	*like just getting home from the hospital with having a baby and do you think oh my god* <u>Likened it to a biological child. – Is this how he felt about him, even at that point on day one?</u> RUSHED/SWEPT AWAY
by the end of the twelve days we felt ready, even though we were weren't ready, we were ready, we were as ready as we were going to be, like we would go and bath him and be driving back and think, we haven't got a bath seat, we need to go to Tesco's and get a bath seat, mike 470-473	Panic Rushing RUSHED/SWEPT AWAY
I think the one thing with the process they don't tell you when you should start buying things, do you start buying things before you get the yes, he is yours and risk not getting a yes, mike 476-479	We didn't know when to star doing these things. <u>Was this because it all felt rushed</u> RUSHED/SWEPT AWAY
I don't, you know the training and that, it seems such a small part because it took us so long to be at the point of being approved to adopt Lucas, it was almost two years prior that we'd had this, this few weeks of training and I just, it was important, but I don't, and it was helpful,	The time it took impacted on what was going on for us as a family TIME IMPACTS ON CONTEXT

but by that point we had gone through so much with different social workers and erm, I don't know whether we, there was stuff we still had in mind obviously from the training but so much had happened, we'd moved on over two years Elle had got bigger and do you know. Nancy 339-347	
the initial thing to being approved to adopt Lucas, it was two years it took. Nancy 263-264	Taking a long time TIME
I know we talked about that period of time from start to finish, so maybe does it continue on? Interviewee: it has with us, but we have been very very lucky cos we have still got the same social worker if we need her. I still email her and ask her stuff and things and the groups and stuff that we go to, that we are invited to are good, and we are invited to training and stuff more now aswell, and then I got an email the other day asking me if there was any training that I wanted Joyce ?????	<u>After the child had been placed I then know what training I need. This is what she implied as a solution to the problem of the timings</u> BAD TIMING
they booked for them to come to the house and they gave us paperwork, it was like that first step before a formal step MIKE 40-42	fear about what they were doing, feeling like they needed some support, but once they got in it was informal

it then got submitted for the end of stage one, we then got approved to go onto stage 2, luckily we kept the same social worker, and we didn't take a break, because you could have taken a break at the end of stage 1. Moved onto Stage two and that's all the interviews and digging in deeper and personal questions. Mike 55-59	paperwork process, supported through this, and checked it all, they helped them get approved???? Really needed a break. Was it all too quick TIME

Superordinate theme – Being in a position of knowing

A need to understand 'my child'

IN A PLACE OF NOT KNOWING NON SPECIFIC LACKING INFORMATION LIMITATIONS OF THE TRAINING PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

NEW KNOWLEDGE

LEARNT NOT MUCH

LACKING INFO ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

THEORETICAL BASED KNOWLEDGE

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

NEW INFORMATION

Quotes with initial notes and emergent themes

another thing they talked about was how you refer to birth parents, and erm and life story work and things like that they talked about erm, which the concept of is really useful but in practice it's not been great because he has not been given a very good life story book, and, and then they say things like refer to birth mum as 'tummy mummy', erm but then your like how do you refer to birth dad then cos that's, dad's never covered really because I think in general they don't. Nancy 363-370	Odd use of terminology Life story book

	Indicates that something is lacking or that the system here is poor because Tummy mummy …..daddy???
but I don't think that down to me doing the training I think that down to be doing Educational psychology [laughed] yeh I think it's difficult to know. I think the training helped at that time, in that short period in the first few weeks but then I think it was actually quite limited in how much it did help. Nancy 116-120	Limitations of the training. Sounds like she is being nice and that there was not a great deal of use in the training LACKING INFORMATION
I don't think it was enough, because it was very general, it wasn't specific to Lucas (adopted child) , or to us as a family it was very general, erm and , I always remember erm after Lucas moved in and I do, thinking the first year was really tough, really tough and it took a while to I suppose bond because what I don't think they emphasis enough is that he, to us, he is a complete stranger, and we were complete strangers, yes we had got all the information about erm , what time he slept, what he liked to eat. Nancy 126-132	<u>The general nature of the training. It's not about the child they have or will be adopted because this is not yet known and once it is then its 10-12 days.</u> Lots of practical information about food sleep etc NON SPECIFIC

	Lacked the focus on emotional impact
but I don't think the social workers in terms of the training and things prepared us for that process of erm getting to know him, I suppose, and we didn't know what motivated him, we didn't know him, so when he was having a big tantrum or a kick off he would just suddenly head butt one of us, it's like is he doing that intentionally, is that by accident, is he stressed, its, its knowing what motivated him I think and knowing him as a person and I suppose it took a while for that trust to build up for both of us from my perspective, from him as well, just knowing what made him tick. Nancy 140-148	LACKING INFORMATION NON SPECIFIC It was unclear what motivated him. They felt that they had to second guess his behaviours IN A PLACE OF NOT KNOWING
I think even just in general if they'd said you will, and they did to a certain degree, you know you're going to be complete strangers, this child is going to come into your house, you need to make changes and prepare things ready for them to make them feel comfortable and safe and all that kind of stuff, but no one kind of mentioned that it's going to take you some time to get to know your child, and that's okay, dya know, and I think, I don't know just it's almost like the training was very much focused on that first, the settling in period. Nancy 151-159	An honesty about the difficulties you may face would have been useful. LACKING INFORMATION LIMITATIONS OF THE TRAINING The practical stuff was helpful. The emotional stuff was lacking.

wash the bedding in the same wash powder that the foster carer uses, it was very practical, but actually it's a massive emotional journey and for both the child and us, erm, and I don't think there was enough emphasis on that maybe. Nancy 163-166	
because you haven't been through it before you don't know what to ask, you don't know, cos if we were to do it again I'd know the kind of things I would be asking the foster carer, I'd know the things that I would be speaking to the social about but because you've never done it before you don't know, what to ask. Nancy 168-172.	Vulnerability You don't know what to ask because this is totally new IN A PLACE OF NOT KNOWING
again there was no emotional, from what I can remember I don't think there was anything around the emotional aspect of how us as adoptive parents would feel. Nancy 195-197	LACKING INFORMATION
it was very much focused on how the child might experience situation and practically what we could do to support them. Nancy 199-201	the child, not 'my child' LACKING INFORMATION
but that's fine if you know at the moment because of his age, its easy isn't it, it's logical to see it like that but I don't think there was been, there wasn't enough preparation around that. Nancy 389-391	
erm but I don't know it's just a big bag of emotions the whole process.	not emotionally prepared

Researcher: it sounds that way, but it also sounds like, you almost weren't prepared emotionally Interviewee: no definitely not, I'd say definitely not . Nancy 503-507	LACKING INFORMATION
But erm I don't know whether we came away thinking that we'd learnt maybe a great deal at those so when you come to do letterbox now they didn't really tell you what you should be putting and things like that. Joyce 15-18	LEARNT NOT MUCH LACKING INFORMATION They didn't tell us how to do things. I think she would have found this useful
but I don't really remember them saying how anything could effect him. Joyce 62-63	LACKING INFORMATION NON SPECIFIC *Not about 'Him'*
it was always just, well he's only 2 so we don't know, and that was sort of like it, instead of saying here is only 2 but because he has been through this this and this this could effect him, but no you don't get anything like that. Joyce 65-68	LACKING INFORMATION NON SPECIFIC Not about him – not about my child – because they didn't know, did they not have his file?
because the third day of Billy being home he burnt himself and then so its things like, its things that we never, you know thought of . Joyce 153-155	actually was not prepared, as Billy had an accident in the first week. Frustration at not

	being prepared so that accidents did not happen. They had been advised about TV but not about how much he would get into stuff which led to this. LACKING INFORMATION LIMITATIONS OF THE TRAINING
for it to being like all the time it was just, I dunno I just don't think that was something that they really prepared you for Joyce 168-170	she didn't think about the whole house all of the time. not being able to turn her back (my words) LIMITATIONS OF THE TRAINING
it was just like that very shock of having this two year old that was into everything Joyce 179-180	is this about specifics again? she didn't get told that he would be into everything NON SPECIFIC

so kind of what you are describing, I suppose, and you have sort of suggested this already when you said that you had text somebody in your family who had adopted a child, that 'being into everything' is a very Interviewee: normal two year old thing, yeh Researcher: was that?, did that? Interviewee: no Researcher: did they look at sort of child development? Interviewee: no, and they don't like give you, or don't say to you like, if you get a child that's two to three, you know children of this age are like this, this and this, they don't really say that normal two year old and three year olds do these things. Joyce 183-194	no child development training? <u>Was it a presumption that they would know what an average two year old was like, so they didn't cover typical and atypical development</u> LACKING INFO ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT
so for me the preparation probably was from that first assessment up until him coming, like the whole process of it all, of them coming round all of the time, preparing the house preparing us in a way in a way, as much as they could, but like I say it's hard when they don't know what child your gonna be placed with. Joyce 300-304	how long it lasted, not about one part, about the whole process. Reference to it being hard when they don't know the child who will be placed with you. LACKING INFORMATION

but like I say it's hard when they don't know what child your gonna be placed with Researcher: right Interviewee: so maybe these are things that should be done when they know what your child has been through, gonna be like. Joyce 303-307	Reference to it being hard when they don't know the child who will be placed with you. NON-SPECIFIC
cos like we met with his foster parents, and she sort of went through what he was like and what you know, and his social workers went through his background and everything but then, like I said, nobody prepared you as in the fact of, your child's been through this, so this is how, he does these things, might be, because of, or he could present like this, like I say, at the training, it was just a blanket of adopted children, more than a child that has been past from pillar to post, cos that what had happened to Billy, he'd been at 3 different places before us, so where some children don't get that, and some children get more I suppose but like, it's just like a blanket isn't it of adopted children, they have attachment issues, neglect, blah de blah de blah, whereas more as your child has been through this so your child might be . Joyce 311-323	not specific enough. <u>it was blanket about adopted children</u> NON-SPECIFIC
Researcher: so when you interact with your son now do you think back to ' I need to think about it like this?' you mentioned that they told you not to say no. is there anything else like that that comes into your conscious ?	don't think back to preparation the preparation doesn't come into conscious mind when dealing with Billy

Interviewee: yeh, but this wasn't like in the preparation stuff this was like afterwards Researcher: okay Interviewee: so I suppose this is why it might have been helpful before. Afterwards it was sort of like cos with Billy you have to distract him. Cos if he is like mardy and you have to get him in the car, it's like, 'right, I'm gonna get my seatbelt on first', if I just shouted at him 'get your belt on, get your belt on', it gets me nowhere, but that's like things they help you with I suppose a bit more afterwards. Joyce 328-340	knowing what made him tick would have been useful LIMITATIONS OF THE TRAINING
Researcher: and did the preparation that you had do you think that impacted on how you felt, cos maybe you would still feel scared, but do you think you felt more scared or less scared? Interviewee: I don't think that really helped with that I suppose . Joyce 395-398	training did not impact on feelings
but I don't suppose that the preparation helped with any of that anxiety really Joyce 409-410	LIMITATIONS OF THE TRAINING
I think it's just very different once the child here init, it's alright being in a classroom and being like, this is how everything is on paper, black and white, but then when there is a child coming into your house its very different, like from what, cos they don't know what child your gonna be placed with. Joyce 27-31	About the reality of having the child with you, and them being this imaginary child. LIMITATIONS OF THE TRAINING

so they can't teach you about what your child has been through so when you get your child and it's been through nothing what they have taught you about that's very. Joyce 33-35	Frustration NON SPECIFIC
so we went through all things like that and they showed you how these children might present and stuff and erm, it just seems so long ago now 4 and a half five years ago. Erm I remember going through all that and how attachment. We did a lot on attachment and how a child, like all the different ways and how the child attaching to us, it's gonna be very different for every child and like how erm could take longer and everything and they go through all stuff like that but I'd say they don't know what you child is gonna be like so maybe that is something they should do once you know. Joyce 42-50	The timings here are not helpful. She is offering a solution. Did she feel let down and is she now trying to help others? LIMITATIONS OF THE TRAINING
of like a 'this is what your child has been through' and this is how you could help and how they may present. Joyce 55-56	She has offered a solution here
so now, you know your child and you know what training you wanna do, and need, it is a lot better to be able to go 'I don't need to go on that one, but ohh that will help' Joyce 352-354	would be better to have specific training to access when you know your child
I just think once you know what child is gonna be placed with you a bit more information about how that child might present and things, cos it alright thinking you are ready, but you never are when they come home Joyce 423-426	wanted more specific prep

I think every step of the way, when we found out more it threw out more questions. Mike 128-129.	Made him think about new things
the workshop at the end of the day it was only two days and it wasn't very, it wasn't power point led but that sit around a table and discuss, mike 192-194	
I think it was definitely useful at that time and I think it really helped us to think about what we needed to do to prepare for that transition. Nancy 111-113	Useful. How we could help ourselves PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE NEW KNOWLEDGE
it was literally the washing, get the same washing powder as the foster carer and wash his bedding in that. Nancy 351-353	Link here to sensory aspect of transition and attachments. PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE
just the fact that it made us focus more on the early stages of adoption and the transition. Nancy 414-415	This was information she didn't know, because she was focused on the teenage years NEW KNOWLEDGE
I think that they just tell you maybe everything very black and white, and everything like factual and very like, this is how an adopted child will be and they have been through so much trauma, taken away from their birth parents to then you know so it's all like. Joyce 98-102	but did she want an answer is this more about wanting to know the child's history. LACKING INFORMATION

	NON SPECIFIC
they did like give you a list of books to read Joyce 204	
that meeting was good because it went through the process, the steps that we were going to take, even though I don't think we fully understood it, but I think that a lot of the way through the process. MIKE 44-47	going from having no idea to having some idea, but never fully understanding
but it was a lot of discussion and talking about attachment and worst case scenarios and dealing with birth families and letter box contact, and that was covered, yeh, it was useful, yeh lots I think for the attachment side of it I knew from the job and things but it was good for Jim to get that side of things spoke to him same messages as the side of a parent rather than me as an educator. Mike 105-111	The factual stuff was useful, and it is helpful for other people, not me because I already knew this? THEORETICAL BASED KNOWLEDGE
if we are talking about after that and Max was in the picture it was the 'appreciate the child day' when we met with, because he had had a previous social worker and a current social worker, we had foster carer there we had medical, there was some other people there and we basically found out warts and all, everything, now with him involved I think that was the most important thing. Prior to that where Max wasn't in the picture and there was just an imaginary child in the middle I think the preparation was the meetings with the social worker. Mike 175-183	'appreciate the child day - this was most useful. This is actually about the child who you are taking home, and it is really useful. In contrast to not knowing who he was, or if there would be a 'he or she' NEW KNOWLEDGE

I mean we were shown examples, they had examples of what a good letterbox was and what an okay one was and what a bad one was, and that was really useful and we then, me and Jim went away and thought, how are we going to do this not knowing what our situation would be with letter box, but then we discussed well actually we will wrote it like a newsletter and then every time we have got to do one we cover the same things, what his shoe size is, what is favourite colour is, the same things all the time because then it becomes, cos at the end of the day with the letterbox I'm writing to a person who I don't particularly like or I have a love hate relationship with and it's not a nice things to have to do but it's a thing we are doing with them. Mike 226-237.	PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE They shared lots of practical stuff, but then I decided to do it my way- so was it useful?
we agreed to meet birth family after Max was placed with us, and they prepared us a lot for that because I was really worried about how that would go because same again your meeting somebody you don't like, yeh it was really awkward but both Max social worker and our social worker were there to support us with that, and someone else too maybe a service manager or something, erm , and I don't think the social workers wouldn't have been there but if they hadn't have been I don't think I would have got anything from that cos it was a hard conversation, and just hard to have so they prepared us and in the fact of actually telling us why we maybe needed to do that	Modelled activities NEW KNOWLEDGE They supported him to find out more about the birth family and possibly challenge some of the ideas that he had in his head

mike 238-248	
Yeh so yeh we spent a lot of time in meetings and stuff and workshops talking about the later in life letter and what that means and how to share that with the children and how that conversation might come up and where are we gonna hide this letter because I just don't want him to stumble over it when he is 13. Mike 361-365	NEW KNOWLEDGE
but now I'm thinking 'hmm' because I don't know' he was known to social services very early on but there are parts of his early life I wasn't there, I wasn't even a fly on the wall, the social workers weren't there. They only know what has been disclosed so there could be so much more, he has got a star blanket he has had since he was a baby he loves it when you sing to him, but when you sing twinkle twinkle little star he doesn't say anything, but it's not that he doesn't like singing and he loves stars, he will find stars, star star star, but he is not that animated when you sing that song, is that a song she used to sing to him, is it something he has on his mobile when he was in the nursery, the tune, your mind Researcher: you're doing a lot of guessing, your trying to work it out but you have no one who can give you an actual answer	NEW KNOWLEDGE This seems to be an acceptance that although there is stuff to know out there, it may be that it is never fully known because of the age of his child.

Interviewee: yeh but social workers and talking to other adopter and having that whole other support network, is actually it's okay for me to think that, I may not be at that point where I am gonna think it and ignore it but I, still thinking and not worrying but picking at it a little bit, but actually that's normal, cos I've got a little boy up there who can't tell me and probably never will be able to tell me what happened exactly. I'm going to try and piece it together from what I know from what I observe and that okay, and I don't need to worry about it because other adopter do it, so yeh. Mike 651-672	

Feeling probed and checked upon

Feeling probed and checked upon
PERSONAL QUESTIONING CHECKING PROCESS

Quotes with initial notes and emergent themes

a social worker who came to visit us on a number of occasions to ask us loads of questions, quite personal questions, just to I suppose to assess how appropriate we were. Nancy 15-17	PERSONAL QUESTIONING CHECKING PROCESS
I mean she asked personal questions , but it was quite, didn't feel to serious, you now it was quite relaxed experience it wasn't too stressful err, she generally just came and had a discussion with us, it wasn't like question after question, it was just kind of general chat about us and about the situation. Nancy 25-29	PERSONAL QUESTIONING CHECKING PROCESS
it was just like a means to an end sort of thing, I understand that why they were coming in and doing everything they were doing so, we would just sit, cos it's a lot of them coming in once a week asking you questions about your whole life, and I just saw it as like er, I understand that they needed to know that he was coming into a safe home, so, we just did it, sort of thing. Joyce 224-230	the preparation was just something they had to do PERSONAL QUESTIONING CHECKING PROCESS
it was a year really of them being in and out of your house, life, not just us, like (family members named), everybody family, meeting friends family, interviewing all them, like asking us about,	

literally they wanna know from the day you were born, up until that day your sat with them . Joyce 241-244	
Researcher: which part of that did you think was more of a focus? Was it, it being a safe place, or finding out about you as people, or preparing you to be a parent Interviewee: erm, them finding out it was a safe place, and them finding out about us, not them preparing us. Joyce 262-266	PERSONAL QUESTIONING CHECKING PROCESS
because I think once a child is placed with you, dunno, you just, well you're not just left to it, but eventually you are, erm, I dunno, I think obviously there main focus is the safety of that child and them being placed with somebody that gonna look after em, more than maybe how we'd deal with it, sort of thing. Joyce 269-273	PERSONAL QUESTIONING CHECKING PROCESS
it's not often you get to talk about yourself, and that's what it was, interviews together, interviews separate, interviews with our family, interviews with friends, mike 61-63	
Stage two almost questions of like, could you cope with this, how did you feel when you were a child, what's your views on parenting, those kind of things because it made us think actually who could be a good parent but actually were getting interviewed to be a parent .mike 183-187	Questions with the social worker to consider my views of being a parent PERSONAL QUESTIONING CHECKING PROCESS

1:1 with the social worker with me and Jim sitting talking about us and how we were going to cope with this then, anything, it was the questions like, could you deal with supporting a child who has been sexually abused, now, we had probably thought about that but not actually had the conversation even between us but actually and it wasn't the case of her needing an answer there and then, we talked about it, but I hadn't even thought about when that child becomes sexually active and we are signing up for this now and we need to know in a sense of when I said about adopters getting that choice, you do get that choice, I can't remember what we said, but we don't have to worry about that now, erm but erm yeh those conversation are actually, she was doing the job of vetting us to be parents but she was also doing the job of matching because she was matcher as well so she was looking for those children so when Max did come up it ticked all the boxes, or most of the boxes.mike 194-209	1:1 time with a social worker much more beneficial that workshop style.

Was this because it was specific to them, and not too broad

PERSONAL QUESTIONING

CHECKING PROCESS |
| the process seemed, even though I think the process is very strenuous and upsetting and hard work and exhausting there is no other way to do it. I can't see how you can, it's a child's life and the only way they can match and adopted family together is by getting to know you. Essentially where your sat now there was a stranger who didn't know us and she did the work to find us a perfect little boy, who is upstairs sleeping, who suits us so much and he, there. Mike 136-143 | PERSONAL QUESTIONING

CHECKING PROCESS |

The uncomfortable feelings of rejection

CHOOSING
DIDN'T HAVE TO SAY NO

Quotes with initial notes and emergent themes

the hardest thing, and I don't know whether you would say it's part of the preparation, but I'm guessing it is, was when we were deciding on who we wanted to consider for adoption. Nancy 288-291	*Who we want to consider*? Is this about gender or type of child or type of situation they have come from CHOOSING

looking at all of the profiles of the children and not not knowing, do you know you're you're you're kind of, how your meant to know whether to say yes we will find out more information or no we won't, we ended up getting rid of the social worker and changing him anyway, he basically brought us ten profiles and asked us to rate them, erm, which was horrific, and we didn't know any better, we didn't know that that probably isn't the right way to do it but doing it made us , it wasn't something we were very happy with doing, and comfortable doing, so we had to come up with our top three, and erm, and so we said okay, we are interested in this little girl, can we get some more information about her, and he was like 'oh no, oh sorry now they've already found some potential adoptive parents for that child' and we were like 'oh right, we don't really feel quite comfortable then looking at the others, because I don't want a child to think they were second best', or so do you know like, so we can't have the one we were really interested in so we will go for this one, so anyway we spoke to the manager and she was like 'oh my god, no that should not be happening, I can't believe that's happened', and we were like well it's just been horrific, and because you don't know any better. Nancy 300-319	She really did not like that she had to look at profiles of children and score them second best' – this was very uncomfortable for her. Some relief when they found out that this was not how it is done. Upsetting Horrified CHOOSING

you do your tick list don't you 'could you manage a child who has got physical disabilities could you manage a child who has got this that and the other, and we did that and that was quite hard to do, but we were quite, we stuck to our guns with that because we had Elle. Nancy 293-297	There is an element of choice and although it was uncomfortable, it was necessary to get it right for biological child CHOOSING
one of the benefits is that you get to choose that child, and the child gets to choose the right family and I think for parents who give birth there are so many unknowns, we had the right to say we can't, and I know I couldn't have coped, I didn't want to cope at home with a child with diagnosed SEN because that's something I deal with in school and actually sitting down and thinking about it, I don't think I can, whereas a birth family they don't often have that choice, so it's , it's the only thing I could compare it to, and it's really horrible, not horrible but weird, it's like adopting a cat, you go to a shelter and you pick the cat you want, and we had done that, and it was picking a child that was right for us, we were very lucky because our son was the first paperwork we saw, we never had to say no, because the social worker had done the right thing and matched us. Mike 146-158	Mike was aware that saying no was a thing from his contact with other adopters. I feel that through his words he is relieved that he didn't have to go through this. DIDN'T HAVE TO SAY NO

Superordinate theme – The intense emotional nature of the process

Feeling emotionally overwhelmed

LACK OF EMOTIONAL PREPARATION OVERWHELMED EMOTIONALLY DRAINING EXHAUSTED ANTICIPATION

Quotes with initial notes and emergent themes

but actually it's a massive emotional journey. Nancy 164-165	*massive emotional journey*

but so his understanding of that is like 'oh my real mummy' so that's kind of cos he knows he grew in her tummy, so he's like 'oh my real mummy', and I'm like 'noooooooooo I'm your real mummy' [upset, laughed] Nancy 384-388	*'nooooooooo I'm your real mummy' [upset, laughed] – she was not prepared for this. She had gone through the process to be a mummy but the language they used had gone against her. It is a poor use of language as she points out later, and she actually does something to change this* Feeling hurt *LACK OF EMOTIONAL PREPARATION*
so I'm trying to kind of change that a bit with Lucas so that I he uses mums first name rather than tummy mummy. Nancy 399-401	*She found a solution to the problem she had with the terminology*
I mean we were really nervous, I can picture us knocking on the door and erm and his foster mum opening the door and he was wrapped around her legs, it was like he was only little so he was clinging on to her legs, and I didn't notice him to start cos I was looking at her, and then I looked down and went 'oh that's him' [laughed], and then he ran off into the house, we went in and I knelt down next to him and he just threw his arms round me which was like, it was lovely, but I	The reality she had in her head, and what she thought she was supposed to feel. Was it there? Anxiety at seeing him for the first time. *'oh that's him' [laughed], - nerves.* <u>There is a huge anticipation at this point</u>

think it was just really strange experience I think, I don't know whether, I don't think anyone had told me, but I think I had got in my mind, or id heard about maybe read, don't know that, you know 'love at first sight', that kind of thing that you see them and it's amazing. Nancy 455-466	*LACK OF EMOTIONAL PREPARATION*
well that didn't happen, not at all [laughed], not for a long time, erm, and again I don't think we were prepared for that, that actually, or maybe it wasn't made explicit enough that's its gonna take you quite a while or it could take you quite a while to form that attachment and that bond and erm, and I don't know whether there is an expectation that you put on yourself, or other people expect it or just, cos this is going to be your son, so should you, 'oh yes, love you' from day one, and that, I don't know where that expectation comes from, or whether I just put that on myself or whether. Nancy 468-477	*well that didn't happen, not at all [laughed],- is this a feeling of guilt?* She was not prepared for how she may or may not feel when she met him *LACK OF EMOTIONAL PREPARATION*
dunno cos it's just so scary at the beginning so its knowing that it does get better, like I say from suddenly this two year old being here 24/7. Joyce 285-287	emotion feeling of being overwhelmed initially **OVERWHELMED**
I remember really worrying about Steve going back to work cos he only took about 3 weeks off I think. I remember being really really worried about that, how the hell am I gonna cope with a child at home all the time on my own, still with social workers coming in and stuff and then if he was at work. Joyce 390-394	emotion feeling of being overwhelmed initially. worried that she was not able to do this on her own **OVERWHELMED**

Myself and Jim (husband) suddenly thought ' why are we waiting' we went to, no, we got an information pack, we already had an information pack a year or two before but kind of we had moved to this house and thought that maybe now is the time to contact them, but it sat in a drawer, and then our friends came and said that they were going to adopt, and we thought 'why are we waiting' Mike 13-18	The excitement of making the decision that they wanted to adopt. ANTICIPATION
ok, so I'm just wondering if you can tell me how you were prepared for becoming an adoptive parent Interviewee: [laughed] erm Mike 2-4	*did he laugh because of my question?. it was quite a loud laugh, that almost felt like he was laughing at the word preparation* ANXIOUS
it felt like it was going to be formal, I remember me and Jim getting out of the car and holding hands and walking in, but it wasn't, it was very informal, in the sense that we went into a room with social worker MIKE 33-36	<u>Fear about what would happen next. Or where they wondering if this was the right step to take?</u> OVERWHELMED
gave us the pack to register our intent, our interest sorry, we sent that off MIKE 50-51	why did he say intent instead of interest?

it was nerve racking to think about it, that we were going to do it, my husband, he's, I think he found it more therapeutic, the way he explained it to other people was that it's not often you get to talk about yourself mike 61-64	nervous feeling - felt that other found it therapeutic, but he didn't opportunity to talk and verbalise things I had never said out loud before. <u>But was this hard to do? Did it take it out of him, thinking about the child he wanted but didn't yet have?</u> EMOTIONALLY DRAINING
So I think it (the workshops) made us more anxious but it actually prepared us for the next thing or the next set of questions,mike 132-133	<u>Useful but exhausting because of the emotional attached</u> EXHAUSTED ANXIOUS OVERWHELMED

what are we gonna do, and wed been prepared of things like, just stay in the home so he knows where you are, if you need anything just get people to drop it round for you but don't let them in, I can't remember, there was something that we had forgotten, and like 'we are gonna have to go to Morrisons, we had to take this thing, car seats, toddlers, trolleys the whole thing, it was like are we okay, yeh. Mike 445-451	<u>Scared to do something wrong, THEY had taken a chance on us, what if we went against what they told us?</u> OVERWHELMED
I would have liked a break, I don't know why, our friends who I mentioned they had, three months later they got their little girl and they had a break and I'm so jealous of this break co I just wanted a day when me and Jim could have been like 'breathe', what do we have to do, cos we were screwing things to the wall when we got home late at night. Mike 519-524	*'breathe' – didn't get chance for a breathe.* *Gasping for air* *EXHAUSTED* *EMOTIONALLY DRAINING*
exhausted actually when he was here and ours it was a lot easier because we were in a stranger, in the foster carers home, this foster carer who is amazing and has done an amazing job but we don't know them, with a child we don't know, just being in somebody else life all the time mike 533-537	
it was exhausting, and not being on your best behaviour, but just trying to do everything right and thinking oh god I've got to ask this stupid question, I can't get this nappy on or I can't get you to sleep and also because it was her first foster child as well, and her first well when do I step back,	<u>Worried about the foster carer – felt like they needed to look out for her too. This is another</u>

and I just think, and her social worker was preparing her a little bit and she seemed to be lingering on a little bit, and I was thinking she hasn't packed an clothes yet, were not gonna have anything, cos I'm a bit of a worrier in that sense. I just wanted his clothes home so that I could sort through them and things and it felt like she was holding on but she is going through the process of giving up a child that she has cared for for 10 months. Yeh it was just a lot, it was just hectic, it was hectic but planned because we had a timetable, be here for this time, pick up at that time, drop off at that time, and of course you've got a toddler who, he's a sleep, at that point he was still having two naps, he was sleeping for 12 plus hours, so were getting there and just like, he's not up, or he's having a nap, or we were waiting for him, he was having tea, but he likes a bit of down time, but that time was in the car, and yeh. Mike 539-557	<u>emotionally draining factor. Is this because he was a caring person?</u> <u>There was so much to fit in, and a routine to follow for a toddler. Sounds like they are not sure how they managed it</u> *EMOTIONALLY DRAINING*

Developing and protecting our family

PROTECTION OF CURRENT FAMILY UNIT

IMPACT ON SIBLING

TESTING ARE WE A FAMILY YET

IS OUR CHILD GOING TO BE NORMAL

FUTURE POSSIBILITY OF A FAMILY

REALITY OF BEING A FAMILY UNIT

ACCEPTANCE ABOUT THE DIFFERENT FAMILY UNIT

Quotes with initial notes and emergent themes

for example she helped us to think through particularly in term of Elle {biological daughter) and what would be best for her because I think she would have been 4, no a bit older than 4, we started the process, in term of finding out about adoption and things when she was about 4 and then I think we got assessed when she was 7, 6 or 7 anyway, and our main priority was to ensure that	Exploring their thoughts on how it would impact on Elle PROTECTION OF CURRENT FAMILY UNIT

whoever we decided to adopt they could have a relationship with Elle, be able to socialise and develop that relationship with Elle, she was very much I want a younger brother or sister, and in the end she actually decided that she wanted a brother and we went with that, erm we weren't bothered, but again the social worker said it might be easier for her if we adopted a little boy because there is less competition or threat. Nancy 33-45	IMPACT ON SIBLING
I don't know how it would have turned out if we had adopted a little girl, I have no idea but that's not something I think about really. I think that was helpful advice, it's not somethings I had thought about before. Nancy 52-56	She didn't want to mess with what she had, but this was a thought only after the SW planted the ide in her mind? PROTECTION OF CURRENT FAMILY UNIT EASE OF INCLUSION
and it's like how to manage his emotions and then manage your own, its massive, it really is massive, Nancy 209-211	
then we put him to bed at night, and that was the first time that he had slept here, so it was like 'ohhh, is he gonna sleep, what's gonna happen' [laughed] and you kind of I suppose, you kind	They were in a place of not knowing, always guessing. They were waiting for the things

like waiting for, well it felt like, I was for quite a, probably for about a week or two, kind of just waiting for it to hit him, do you know, cos you know its massive and he didn't cry, we'd never seen him cry, he didn't cry. Nancy 213-218	<u>they were used to with a biological child, that experience had influenced their expectations.</u> IS OUR CHILD GOING TO BE NORMAL
he, he was he just didn't cry, for two weeks he didn't cry once, and we were like, even like, cos at one point I remember having a conversation with my husband 'do you think he can cry, is he gonna be able to cry' [laughed] and then all of a sudden, it was when we'd been out for the day with my mum and she got out the car to go home, dropped her off, and he just burst into tears, and we were like 'oh there it is' [laughed] cos you just kind of felt like he was holding it together, you know like, maybe we also felt [laughed] like we were holding it together as well, and it was just, so yeh then he just cried, not forever, just like he should do, do you know. Nancy 221-231	Why isn't he crying? Is he normal. Relief that he did have emotions. Concern about emotion processing. IS OUR CHILD GOING TO BE NORMAL
we had to kind of make sure that she got what she needed out of having a brother or a sister Nancy 297-298	<u>Elle was a priority. This had to be right for her.</u> PROTECTION OF CURRENT FAMILY UNIT IMPACT ON SIBLING

he just threw his arms around her and they were playing and they were getting on really well, she she she found that quite a positive experience. Nancy 499-501	The relief when I felt that it was going to be okay for Elle IMPACT ON SIBLING
I think I used a lot of, erm my knowledge and experience working with young children and psychology and all that kind of things, I think I relied a lot on that and, and it was a lot of trial and error just testing things out, erm and I remember at each, I don't know maybe after the first month, we go 'yeh he's settled now', and then another month would go by and 'no no no no now he's settled', and that carried on do you know like month after month we were oh no now we are at the right point and it was probably looking back it took us a year I'd say to think now right this is what it's like as a family I suppose. Nancy 237-246	<u>When would it be okay? Not knowing when the family was a different kind of family, a larger family.</u> TESTING ARE WE A FAMILY YET
and then when they come in and they've got this kid with them and you can see that the child is attached to them, and was like this happy kid and you can see that it does work. Joyce 93-95	<u>This gave her a real sense of hope for the future.</u> FUTURE POSSIBILITY OF A FAMILY
until we met that other couple at that session and that was like a massive turning, where you were like, yeh it does work were gonna be alright, Joyce 105-107	<u>This gave her a real sense of hope for the future.</u> FUTURE POSSIBILITY OF A FAMILY

yeh, cos then you see that it does work, it is gonna, even though this child has been through so much trauma they can attach to new people Joyce 113-115	This gave her a real sense of hope for the future. FUTURE POSSIBILITY OF A FAMILY
I remember being on one training session and there was an adoptive parent and they were saying how their adoption had broken down and a stuff, so that was pretty scary, thinking 'oh my god', erm but yeh like meeting more adoptive parents that have adopted like seeing the positive side of it is definitely a thing that sticks out because I do remember thinking it's all like, this, I never, I remember thinking that we are never gonna have a normal child. Joyce 435-441	This was a terrifying thought and the only negative that she shared about her own thoughts. FUTURE POSSIBILITY OF A FAMILY
because even though you see people who are adopted who are quite normal erm I remember then everything that they tell you, it like your child is always gonna have an issue, your child is always gonna have a problem, your child will never be normal child, but then to see this normal child with these adoptive parents was like very very refreshing sort of thing Joyce 443-448	This was a real fear for her. What if it went wrong, what would happen then, she wouldn't have a family. Fear IS OUR CHILD GOING TO BE NORMAL
I think just panicked a bit, like shit, this could happen to us, luckily obviously it didn't, but and then like, they didn't go into great detail, but then when you think about it, and then I come home and start researching things and you can see why they happen and because just suddenly putting	Is our child going to be right for us? Did the matching process work? Or will it fail?

a child with parents, it's like going to work you don't always get along with everybody I suppose, so then bringing a child in, there could never be that connection sort of thing. Joyce 451-458	
she kept saying 'he, he' and she hadn't said anything about this, and I thought I bet she has been doing some work in the background finding this child, and at that meeting she said, 'I've found you someone', and that kind of upskittled me going to adoption panel because it was making it very real, and yeh. Mike 86-90	experienced being prepared for panel change in how he felt from their being a hypothetical child to being and actual real life child. Responsibility. REALITY OF BEING A FAMILY UNIT
just made it real rather than. Mike 115	Real REALITY OF BEING A FAMILY UNIT
we talked about at one of the workshops is the idea of the family triangle the idea that adopted children, I can't remember what the points of the triangle but at the end of the day he will always be adopted child. He will always have, we might not talk about it every day we might not see	Is this a bit of an elephant in the room. Talked about the family triangle – Is this a thing? The third wheel that is always on the periphery

emotion from it, it might not effect us everyday but there will always be something . mike 288-293	ACCEPTANCE ABOUT THE DIFFERENT FAMILY UNIT
whether its Max watching peppa pig and he says mummy, and I suddenly think why has he said mummy, or down the lines he sees a mum and dad walking down the road and thinks where is my mummy, we've got the third element of being a same sex couple as well but its, he isn't a normal child and and it's the workshops and that that prepared us for realising that and I don't think we were ever in the sense of, we were going to have a normal family because we are a same sex couple. Mike 295-302	The same sex couple impacts for him, as they cannot pass as a *'normal family' – I felt that he was accepting of this.* <u>Is there a transparency about the birth family?</u> ACCEPTANCE ABOUT THE DIFFERENT FAMILY UNIT
you can fall into the sense of waking up in the morning and forgetting that you've got an adopted child living in your house, I don't know what it is like for a straight couple and things but I assume it's much easier to just walk down the street and nobody really, I don't know, maybe that's just me, oh everybody is looking at us, mike 309-314	Would people be looking at us? Was that an unconscious fear of his ACCEPTANCE ABOUT THE DIFFERENT FAMILY UNIT

and one of things that I put was about how it was important to celebrate that, and it came from work shops as well, that adopted children need to accept that they are adopted to survive and talking about children and those things that came from the workshops I think stays with me . mike 325-329	*Acceptance. Is that for the child or the adult??*
I think what I've found talking to adopters, is that adopters understand adopters, even though there still children there are still I don't know know, it's like there's normal children and there's these Researcher: so adopted children understand other adopted children Interviewee: yeh yeh and families Researcher: okay Interviewee: yeh like that that thing about me saying with Max is it toddler or is it adoptive, now maybe birth families don't have to think about that, if they have additional needs they do, it is like an additional need, it is like another thing to consider . mike 617-626	<u>Like understands like</u> <u>Like this is a special membership group?</u> ACCEPTANCE ABOUT THE DIFFERENT FAMILY UNIT