

The search for missing pieces: a grounded theory of adult adoptees' experiences of searching and re-engaging with birth families.

HANCOCK-FRASER, C.

2021

The author of this thesis retains the right to be identified as such on any occasion in which content from this thesis is referenced or re-used. The licence under which this thesis is distributed applies to the text and any original images only – re-use of any third-party content must still be cleared with the original copyright holder.

The Search for Missing Pieces

A Grounded Theory of Adult Adoptees'
Experiences of Searching and Re-
Engaging with Birth Families

Clare Hancock-Fraser

A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of
the requirements of Robert Gordon
University for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy School of Applied Social
Studies

June 2021

ABSTRACT

The lived experience of adult adoptees in searching and re-engaging with birth families is an under researched area and receives limited focus in social work practice and policy. The aim of this study is to explore both the experience and the impact on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of adult adoptees of searching and re-engaging with birth families.

The study adopted a constructivist grounded theory methodology, drawing on the principles of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. The positionality of the researcher was of central importance to the study. Data was gathered from seven in-depth interviews with adult adoptees who were at different stages in the process of searching and re-engaging with their birth families. Saturation was achieved in the core category which had the two dimensions of *controlling the narrative* and *missing pieces*. Using constant comparison, the experiences of participants were coalesced around the core category, with elements of the core category being evident through six identified theoretical categories.

This thesis has demonstrated the lifelong impact of adoption contained within the unique narratives of adult adoptees. The grounded theory demonstrates the positive impact on emotional and psychological wellbeing of searching for and re-engaging with their birth families. Identification and acquisition of the *missing pieces* and their ability to *control the narrative* of both the search and in a broader sense the narrative of their lives, brought feelings of security, increased self-esteem and increased self-confidence. These positive outcomes appeared to have an impact on attachment behaviour, potentially leading to participants achieving an earned secure pattern of attachment.

This study has implications for social work practice in the fields of childhood adoption and in adult services with adopted adults. There are clear practice and policy implications for the promotion of identity work with both adopted children and adult adoptees.

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

Diagram	Page
Diagram 1 Marcia's 4 Status model	P 49
Diagram 2 Overview of Process of Theorising	P.103
Diagram 3 Theoretical Categories	P.117
Diagram 4 Theoretical Category 1	P.119
Diagram 5 Theoretical Category 2	P.134
Diagram 6 Theoretical Category 3	P.145
Diagram 7 Theoretical Category 4	P.162
Diagram 8 Theoretical Category 5	P 168
Diagram 9 Theoretical Category 6	P.181
Diagram 10 The Core Category	P.192
Diagram 11 The impact of controlling the narrative and finding the missing pieces	P. 193

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation of those people who have helped in the completion of this study.

Firstly, and most importantly, I would like to thank the participants who gave so generously of their time to be interviewed and were so willing to talk openly about their experiences. Colin Keenan, for starting me on the journey of learning, teaching and ultimately researching an aspect of theory that has remained a passion for three decades. Thanks to my supervisory team, Sarah, Janine and Chris for their guidance, support and patience. Sarah in particular, who helped to get me to the point of submission through much virtual handholding. Special thanks to Helen for the years of support offered with humour and patience. I wouldn't have got to the finish line without her unique and inspirational words of encouragement. To Kyle and Jade, for reminding me what it is all about. Finally, I would like to dedicate this study to the memory of mum, Pat, whose support and kindness over the years made me the person I am.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction and Motivation for the Research	1
1.2 Aims and Objectives	3
1.3 Initial Questions of Structure and Methodology.....	4
1.4 Positionality and Voice.....	5
1.4.1 Voice	6
1.5 Conclusion	7
CHAPTER 2 - CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	8
2.1 Adoption in Context	8
2.1.1 Historical Context of Adoption - 1930's to Present Day.....	8
2.1.2 Current Policy and Practice.....	11
2.1.3 The Move Away from Secrecy in Adoption	11
2.2 Review of the Literature	14
2.2.1 Engaging with the Literature in Grounded Theory Methodology...	16
2.2.2 When to Engage with Literature and Extant Theory in a	18
Constructive Grounded Theory Study	18
2.2.3 Presentation of the Literature	19
2.2.4 The Process of Engaging with the Literature	19
2.2.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	21
2.3 Key Themes Identified in the Literature.....	22
2.3.1 The Impact of Adoption on the Emotional and Psychological.....	23
Wellbeing of Adult Adoptees	23
2.3.2 Adoption and Identity.....	27
2.3.3 The Process of Identity Formation and the Role of.....	30
Communicative Openness	30
2.3.4 Reunion of Adoptees with Birth Families	32
2.3.5 Motivation for Searching and Reunion	32
2.3.6 The Outcome of Reunion.....	34
2.3.7 Adoption and Attachment.....	37
2.3.8 Conclusion.....	42
2.4 An Engagement with Extant Theory – Towards Theoretical	43
Sensitivity and Transparency	43
2.4.1 An Introduction to Significant Areas of Extant Theory	43
2.4.2 Concepts of Identity	44
2.4.3 Individual Identity	44
2.4.4 Social Identity	45

2.4.5 The Impact of Culture on Identity.....	46
2.4.6 Erik Erikson – The Modern Day Father of Identity.....	46
2.4.7 Further Examination of the Relationship Between Social and Individual Features of Identity Theory	47
2.4.8 The Process of Identity Formation - Self Determination.....	48
2.4.9 The Role of Narrative in the Process of Identity Formation.....	50
2.5 Attachment Theory	51
2.5.1 The Relationship Between Childhood Experiences and Adult..... Attachment.....	53
2.5.2 Adult Attachment Styles	54
2.5.3 The Impact of Attachment on Adult Relationships.....	56
2.5.4 Continuity and Change in Adult Attachment Styles – The..... Concept of Earned Secure Attachment.....	58
2.5.6 Conclusion.....	60
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY	61
3.1 Epistemological and Ontological Position.....	62
3.1.1 The Philosophical Foundations of Interpretivism and Constructivism	63
3.1.2 The Relevance of Interpretivism and Constructivism to this Study	65
3.1.3 The Double Hermeneutic - Resolving the Paradox	66
3.1.4 The Impact of Pragmatism	66
3.1.5 Summary	69
3.2 Methodological Considerations: A Justification of Constructive..... Grounded Theory.....	69
3.3 The Phenomenological Attitude	70
3.4 Looking Back: The Development of Grounded Theory	72
Methodology and its Key Concepts.....	72
3.5 An Introduction to Constructive Grounded Theory Methodology.....	74
3.6 Abductive Reasoning as a Central Feature of Grounded Theory	77
3.7 The Contribution of Symbolic Interactionism	80
3.8 Addressing Criticisms and Misconceptions of Grounded Theory.....	82
3.9 Rigour, Quality and Transparency	83
3.10 Conclusion.....	84
CHAPTER 4 – METHOD	85
4.1 Positionality.....	85
4.1.1 Impact of Positionality on the Research Process.....	87
4.2 Ethics and Access	89

4.2.1 Ethical Considerations	90
4.2.2 Initial Access and Communication of Ethical Issues to Participants.....	90
4.3 Sampling Strategy	91
4.3.1 Specific Features of Sample.....	93
4.4 Access	94
4.5 The Participants	95
4.6 Data Collection - A Justification of the Use of Semi-Structured Interviews	96
4.7 The Process of Conducting Interviews	97
4.8 Addressing Issues of Power in the Interview Process	100
4.9 Reflexivity and Self-Disclosure.....	101
4.10 Conclusion.....	102
4.11 Data Analysis and Theory Development.....	102
4.12 The Coding Debate	103
4.12.1 Overview of the Coding Strategy Used.....	105
4.12.2 Initial Coding.....	105
4.12.3 Focused Coding	107
4.13 Constant Comparison Using Abductive Analysis	109
4.14 Memo Writing and Theory Development	109
4.15 Theoretical Sampling	111
4.16 Theoretical Saturation	112
4.17 The Core Category	113
4.17.1 The Storyline.....	113
CHAPTER 5 – DEVELOPING THE THEORY	115
5.1 Introduction to the Six Theoretical Categories	115
CHAPTER 6 - A PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION	119
6.1 A Personal Narrative of Adoption – Conscious and Unconscious ... Thoughts and Feelings.....	119
6.2 A Personal Narrative of Adoption - Making Sense of Birth Family . and Adoptive Family Relationships.....	126
6.3 A Personal Narrative of Adoption – Secrecy and Openness	129
6.4 Summary.....	133
CHAPTER 7 MOTIVATIONS FOR SEARCHING	134
7.1 The Motivation to Search - The Start of the Process	135
7.2 The Motivation to Search – The Search for New Relationships.....	139
7.3 The Motivation to Search - The Search for Likeness.....	140
7.4 The Motivation to Search – The Search for Medical Information...	141

7.5 The Motivation to Search – The Need to Identify and Find	142
Missing Pieces	142
7.6 The Motivation to Search - A Desire to Control the Narrative	143
7.7 Summary	144
CHAPTER 8 THE PROCESS OF SEARCHING AND RE-ENGAGING.....	145
8.1 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging - The Need for	146
Support.....	146
8.2 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging – Identifying and Reflecting on Feelings About Birth Mothers.....	148
8.3 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging – Gathering	149
Information and Making Contact.....	149
8.4 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging – The Impact of Re-..	151
Engagement	151
8.5 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging - The Realisation of ..	154
The Importance of Sibling Relationships	154
8.6 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging -Maintaining	155
Relationships	155
8.7 Summary	160
CHAPTER 9 - PERCEIVED EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL.....	162
OUTCOMES OF THE PROCESS OF SEARCHING AND RE-ENGAGING	162
9.1 Perceived Emotional and Psychological Outcomes - Participants’..	163
Reflections on The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging	163
9.2 Perceived Emotional and Psychological Outcomes – Perceptions..	163
of Increased Self-Confidence and Feelings of Security.....	163
9.3 Perceived Emotional and Psychological Outcomes – Finding.....	165
Missing Pieces and Feeling Complete.....	165
9.4 Perceived Emotional and Psychological Outcomes – Closure and..	166
Moving On	166
9.5 Summary	167
CHAPTER 10 CONTROLLING THE NARRATIVE	168
10.1 Controlling the Narrative - The Role of Personal Narratives in....	169
Identity Formation	169
10.2 Controlling the Narrative - Living with Two Separate Narratives.	169
10.3 Controlling the Narrative - The Impact of Secrecy and a Lack....	173
of Communicative Openness.....	173
10.4 Controlling the Narrative - Taking Control.....	174
10.5 Summary	175
10.6 Case study	176

CHAPTER 11 - MISSING PIECES.....	181
11.1 Missing pieces - physical likeness	182
11.2 Missing Pieces - Material Objects	183
11.3 Missing Pieces - The Significance or Otherwise of New Relationships	184
11.4 Missing Pieces - The Abstract Nature of the Missing Pieces.....	185
11.5 Summary	186
11.6 Case Study	186
12.1 Summary of the Theory Contained in the Core Category – The..	193
Storyline	193
12.2 Expansion of the Core Category	194
12.3.4 Self-Determination Theory and its impact on identity	212
12.3.5 The Impact on Psychological, Emotional and Relational Experiences of Adult Adoptees of Searching for Missing Pieces and	214
Controlling the Narrative	214
12.3.6 Conclusion	215
CHAPTER 13 – CONCLUSIONS AND POTENTIAL IMPACT	216
13.1 Limitations and Comparisons	216
13.2 Evaluating the Thesis	218
13.2.1 Credibility	219
13.2.2 Originality.....	219
13.2.3 Resonance	221
13.2.4 Usefulness	221
13.3 Implications of This Thesis for Research	222
13.4 Implications for Practice.....	224
13.4.1 Implications for Practice with Child Adoptees and Adoptive ...	224
Parents	224
13.4.2 Implications for Practice with Adult Adoptees.....	226
13.5 Summary	227
13.6 Final Reflections	228
REFERENCES	229
APPENDIX 1	269
APPENDIX 2	271
APPENDIX 3	273
APPENDIX 4	275
APPENDIX 5	281
APPENDIX 6	282
Appendix 7.....	287

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Adoption is a journey that everyone wants to go smoothly. Its paths are paved with romantic fantasies of perfect families and perfect children who, having somehow found each other somewhere along the way, are believed to live happily ever after. Until now very few people have looked at the obstacles along the road: the potholes, the land mines waiting to go off, the lack of road maps (Lifton 2002 p. 207).

1.1 Introduction and Motivation for the Research

My interest in this topic comes from both the personal and professional domains of my life. As an adoptive parent of two young adults, I have the lived experience, albeit second hand, of the issues that adoption brings into adulthood. I have been able to examine and balance this experience though with professional knowledge and experience gained from working as a mental health social worker as well as undertaking work on an adoption and permanence panel and undertaking the role of Curator ad Litem and Reporting Officer for adoption and permanence cases being presented at court.

The specific focus on the experiences of adult adoptees comes from the awareness that there is limited research into this stage of the adoption experience. The large body of research conducted in the field of adoption has focused primarily on the experiences and needs of children. Adopted children have, by right, adoption plans to ensure that they receive the appropriate support throughout their childhood. Little consideration is given though to their continued needs as adults when psychological, emotional and relationship challenges may come to the fore. This study aims to contribute to the limited research in this field and to encourage a continuation of the conversation in both academia and practice.

The aim of this inquiry is to focus the minds of professionals and policy makers on the future of adopted children throughout the lifespan and to increase the knowledge needed to support adult adoptees in whatever actions they decide to take in seeking out information about their past as

they reconcile the two family narratives to which they belong. The potential link between research and practice is addressed in chapter 13.

At this stage it is important to offer some explanation about the title of the thesis. The term *re-engagement* has been consciously chosen to reflect the core category and the theory that has been developed. The more commonly used term in adoption narratives and literature is *reunion* which carries with it connotations of the quality and ongoing nature of the relationship between birth family and adoptee. More importantly, it implies joining together again and raises expectations for all those involved that may not be fulfilled (Trinder et al 2004; Clapton 2003; March 1997). Re-engagement denotes the process and actions taken with no indication of outcome, alongside an acknowledgement that the adopted individuals in the study have a past, present and future in terms of their interaction with birth families, whatever form that interaction takes. This concept will be explored further in the development of the six theoretical categories and in the core category. Consideration was also given to the term adoptee, which appears in both the title and the body of the thesis. Initial concerns considered, were that the term suggested that being adopted was seen as the sum total of the person, an example of labelling through the use of convenient language. Discussions with colleagues, family and friends who are themselves adopted suggested otherwise. Their views were consistent in that they did not see it as an all-encompassing label, perhaps because of the lack of negative connotations that the term held for them. It was suggested to the researcher that it was a benign term, used in the same way as *child* or even *adopter*. A decision was therefore made to use the term adoptee throughout the thesis.

The initial motivation for this research comes from a personal and professional curiosity about the impact on the self of the merging of two narratives, that of the adoptive family and the birth family. Initial questions that were partially formed at the outset of the research were: what motivates people to seek information about their birth family? How is the process of searching and seeking experienced? And what impact on the concept of self and on emotional and psychological well-being does this process and the subsequent re-engagement have on an individual? Secondly, and more importantly, there is the imperative of raising the

awareness that adoption is a lifelong event and support may be needed for ongoing challenges long after the initial event itself has taken place (Freundlich and Lieberthal 2001; Grotevant 1997). Society in general, and even many of those who work in the field of social work, often fail to acknowledge or understand the long-term impact of the adoption experience. Alongside this is the popular *happy ever after* narrative often portrayed in the media whereby reunions are seen as uncomplicated, positive experiences that provide immediate closure for all those concerned. I was aware from personal and professional experience, as well as current research findings, that this is not the experience for many and that searching and re-engagement was often a complex and emotionally demanding process (Triseliotis, Kyle and Feast 2005; Campbell, Silverman and Patti 1991; Triseliotis 1973). Equally, not searching could bring its own emotional challenges (Howe and Feast 2001). Despite significant changes in adoption policy and legislation over the years, the focus has remained on the needs of children with adult adoptees receiving far less consideration. Therefore, although this is an academic thesis, it also has a professional context, with drivers being far from purely academic and therefore a strong practice orientation has been retained throughout.

The remainder of this introductory chapter will set out the approach taken, starting with an outline of the aims and objectives of the research before going on to explain the structure of the thesis. Brief consideration is given to the issue of positionality, though this is explored in more detail in chapter 4.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

Arriving at the aims and objectives for this inquiry involved questioning a number of assumptions about what the central concern of this study should be. In reality, the aims and objectives were adjusted and modified following the initial stages of the research. For example, following an initial reading of the literature, and from previous practice experience, the concept of ambiguous loss had been identified as an area of interest. However, this was not a concept that had prominence within the narratives, and therefore to have it as a focus of inquiry would have involved imposing preconceptions on the data. Conversely, the concept of self-determination had not been identified as a relevant concept for investigation, but from the early stages

of this study this concept, articulated specifically through the theme *controlling the narrative* appeared in all interviews, and was therefore included. Awareness of the impact and use of areas of extant knowledge brought to the fore the issue of theoretical sensitivity, whereby inspiration from knowledge of existing theories was drawn upon, whilst at the same time ensuring that such ideas were not imposed on the data (Glaser 1999, 1967). The balancing act of maintaining theoretical sensitivity whilst ensuring that the identified theory emerged from the data is addressed in more detail in chapter 2.

For clarity of explanation of the focus of this study, the aims and objectives have been presented here.

At the outset this thesis aimed:

- To explore the lived experience of adult adoptees following the process of searching for and re-engagement with birth families.

The objectives of this research were as follows:

- To explore the impact of infant adoption in adult years.
- To explore the motivation for adult adoptees in searching for information about their origins and their birth families.
- To explore the experiences of adult adoptees when they search and re-engage with birth families.
- To consider the impact of searching and re-engagement with birth families on the emotional and psychological well-being of adult adoptees.

1.3 Initial Questions of Structure and Methodology

This research has been motivated by both curiosity and a desire to have a positive influence on practice in the field of adoption. The primary methodological approach taken is a Constructive Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) (Charmaz 2006), with the aim of developing a grounded theory of adult adoptees' experiences of searching and reengaging with birth families. In recognition of the understanding that the word theory is fraught with ambiguity and ambivalence (Bryant 2020), the concept of what theory is, and the action of theorising are explored in more detail in chapter 5.

The choice of a CGTM has strongly influenced the structure of this thesis and has brought with it a number of challenges. Specifically, the challenge of trying to convey grounded theory through the linear writing process (Schreiber, Noerager and Stern 2001). These challenges are examined in later chapters of this thesis. It is helpful at this early stage though to provide a brief overview of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 is a contextualisation of the study, including a brief review of the literature and an overview of extant knowledge in specific areas that appeared as significant from early on in the research process. Chapter 3 is an exploration of methodology, chapter 4 addresses questions of method. Chapter 5-11 outline the findings of the thesis, with the identification of the six theoretical categories, including an exploration of the dimensions of each category. Chapter 12 demonstrates the emergence of the core category along with the location of the emergent theory in relation to the wider literature and areas of extant theory. The final chapter, chapter 13, explores the implications and impact of the thesis for both practice and research.

1.4 Positionality and Voice

This study starts with the proposition that within the context of CGTM, the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and interpreting data (Mills, Bonner and Francis 2006; Conrad 1982), and that in grounded theory, researchers must account for their position in the research process. The rationale and justification for this position is succinctly explained by Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006 p. 11).

Including the researcher as a co- constructor of meaning signifies that his or her history and influences need to be made transparent within the reflective memos written. If constructivist grounded theorists are able to consciously bring to the surface their own histories and thinking, they will create a point of referral and interrogation for themselves, and subsequently the reader, in relation to their theoretical analysis.

This approach is further expanded upon by Suddaby (2006 p.640).

... they must engage in ongoing self-reflection to ensure that they take personal biases, world views and assumptions into account whilst collecting, interpreting and analysing data.

In accordance with the principles explained above, the researcher themselves becomes an important focus of the research and therefore the impact of positionality in relation to this inquiry was identified as an important area to explore. It was therefore necessary to reflect on my own identity and personal experiences, perspectives, assumptions, theoretical and practice knowledge throughout the whole process of conducting the inquiry. If personal and professional experiences and knowledge are explicit, they are manageable and add depth to all stages of the research process by drawing on the range of lived experience. In this way, lived experiences are turned into research tools (Moser 2008; Kleinman and Copp 1993). Issues relating to my positionality in relation to this inquiry are discussed in detail in chapter 4.

1.4.1 Voice

Academic convention is that the third person is used in the presentation of empirical research. However, there are increasing arguments for a contrary position (Mitchell 2017; Given 2008; Webb 1992). With regard to this inquiry, consistent use of the third person is not appropriate, particularly given my positionality in relation to the research process as discussed above and in chapter 4. Feedback from my transfer viva suggested that it was not evident that I was *really present* in the research process which is at odds with the methodological approach taken. This feedback has been taken on board, and is consistent with the views of Charmaz and Michell (1996 p. 286) who state,

There is merit in humility and deference to subjects' views, and there is merit in systematic and reasoned discourse. But there is also merit in audible authorship.

The approach taken therefore, is that the third person is used where appropriate but in sections closely allied to personal and professional experiences, and my position with regard to the research process, the first person is used. By adopting this approach, I have been able to acknowledge my role in the process of conducting the inquiry and in making meaning from the shared experiences of the participants. Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) state that as co-constructivist the researcher can include their own voice to present themselves as human rather than a disembodied data gather.

1.5 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has identified the central question that this thesis seeks to address as well as the aims and objectives of the study. In addition, it has highlighted and begun to address a number of issues in relation to methodology and perspective. The next chapter will explain the context of the research in more detail, with an overview of adoption in Scotland, an exploration of the literature and of relevant extant theory.

CHAPTER 2 - CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Having outlined the questions that this thesis seeks to address along with brief consideration of the role and impact of positionality, this chapter will turn to the task of setting the research in its context. Initially the social phenomena of adoption including both historical and recent developments in policy and practice are presented. Following on from this an exploration of current research and relevant aspects of extant theory are explored.

2.1 Adoption in Context

This section will briefly consider the historical context of adoption in the UK. Recent policy and practice issues in relation to adoption, including the move to more openness in adoption arrangements are then discussed. Adoption is a formal means of providing children in need of alternative permanent care with the opportunity to be brought up within a family. A useful starting point in the definition of adoption is that provided by BAAF (2005) where it is stated that adoption is:

a way of providing a new family for children who cannot be brought up by their own parents. It is a legal procedure in which all the parental responsibility is transferred to the adopters. An adopted child loses all legal ties with their first mother and father (the *birth parents*) and becomes a full member of the new family, usually taking the family's name

The significance of the legal process of adoption and the subsequent impact on all parties involved is conveyed in the definition by the Scottish Executive (2005). It is explained as,

one of the most radical interventions to make in the life of a child," given that it legally terminates the child's relationship with their birth family (Hill, Wheeler, Merredew and Lucassen 2010).

2.1.1 Historical Context of Adoption - 1930's to Present Day

Adoption occurs in all societies, yet the form of the adoption process differs and has changed throughout history. In the UK pre-1930, adoptions were privately arranged by individuals or by charitable adoption agencies. The Adoption of Children (Scotland) Act 1930 introduced a legislative framework for adoptions in Scotland. Since the introduction of the 1930 Act adoptions

have been arranged by charitable bodies or local authorities and then ratified by civil courts (Birthlink 2014). The Registrar General for Scotland has maintained the Adopted Children Register since the 1930's.

The Adoption of Children Act 1949 was an important milestone in adoption policy and practice. A significant development in adoption practice brought about by this piece of legislation was the inclusion of time frames for consent and adoption orders. One of the main concerns was to protect adoptive parents from uncertainty and distress should a birth mother change her mind about plans for the relinquishment once placement with an adoptive family was established (Young and Neil 2009; Neil and Howe 2004). The highest number of adoptions in the UK was in 1968, with the numbers declining since then (National Records of Scotland 2020). Alongside legislative developments, there have been significant changes in the context of adoption and adoption practice in the UK over the last 40 years. In the 1960's, the main reasons for children being adopted in the UK had been unmarried mothers relinquishing their children for adoption and stepparents adopting their new partner's children (Gheera 2014).

Changes in the social, cultural, economic and legal context have meant that the reasons for adoptions taking place have significantly altered. Prior to the 1970's, the majority of children that were placed for adoption were healthy babies (Neil and Howe 2004; Neil 1997). Post 1970's the age of children adopted has increased with decreasing numbers of healthy babies being adopted. During the 1960's and 70's there was some attempt to inform practice and policy by drawing on available theory, that led to a deeper understanding of the importance of the impact of separation and loss (Bowlby 1953). Alongside this, the Houghton Committee in 1969 was appointed to look at adoption within the context of rapidly changing social attitudes towards the family and sexual relationships and increases in welfare provision for single parents (Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle 2005). At this time, evidence was also beginning to emerge regarding the potential damage to adoptees of not having knowledge of their genealogical backgrounds. To inform the work of the Houghton Committee, John Triseliotis was commissioned to undertake a study in Scotland investigating the use made of birth records by adopted adults (Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle

2005). The report written by Triseliotis entitled *In Search of Origins* was published in 1972 (Triseliotis Feast and Kyle 2005; Triseliotis 1973). This report highlighted the negative impact of secrecy on the lives of adoptees. The report and the subsequent recommendations from the Houghton Committee brought about significant changes in legislation that made it possible for adult adoptees to access their birth records from the age of 18 (17 in Scotland).

Even by the 1980's though, there were still mixed opinions as to the impact of open adoption, with writers such as Ward (1981) arguing against open adoption, stating that it would adversely affect the child's ability to form affectional bonds with their birth family. Though this view was supported by other writers, there was limited empirical evidence to support this view, and research was emerging of the benefits of adopted children maintaining some form of contact with their birth families (Thorburn et al 1986; Borgman 1982; Sorich and Siebert 1982).

Interest was also growing in the development of adopted people's identity over the lifespan (Feast 2013; Feast and Howe 1997). As a result, after the 1970s, adoption practice became more child centred and adoption legislation was driven by the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child (Mignot 2017; Lewis 2004; Marsh and Thorburn 2002). The introduction of the Children Act 1975 established the primacy of the child's welfare in adoption proceedings (Adoption Act 1976. S6; Children Act 1975. S3).

However, though there was recognition of the impact of adoption on children at this time, there was little understanding of adoption being a lifelong event that could predispose adoptees to psychological difficulties around attachment, loss and identity. There was also a lack of focus on the rights of adoptees, and they were seen as the passive recipients of well-meaning policy and practice. In addition, despite current attention in the media and general discourse, and regardless of advocacy rights efforts, adoption remains culturally speaking second choice and second best, a view, shaped in part by views of the biogenetic family as the norm (Singley 2018).

2.1.2 Current Policy and Practice

Children are now adopted mainly from local authority care because their birth family situation places them at risk. Current legislation is laid out in The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, which place a duty on local authorities to provide fostering and adoption services. Following an increase over a two-year period (2016, 2017), the number of children and young people legally adopted in Scotland fell from 328 in 2017 to 286 children in 2018 (Care Inspectorate/adoption 2020). Of the 190 children adopted 2017-18, (not including in-family adoptions), 64% were boys which is a continuation of the pattern established in previous years of more boys than girls being adopted. 95% (179 children) were of White Scottish ethnicity with only 4% (8 children) being of multi-ethnic origin and 1% (3 children) were of Black African ethnicity (Scotland's adoption register 2017-18).

2.1.3 The Move Away from Secrecy in Adoption

Until recent times, adoption practice was organised according to a closed model of adoption. The term closed adoption denotes a permanent severance of all ties with the birth family (Baron and Pannor 1993). Historically, there has been an emphasis on secrecy in adoption arrangements, with the aim of adoption being a clean break for the adoptee and the birth family. Secrecy was originally seen as necessary to solidify the form of kinship equivalent to *blood ties* (Logan and Smith 2005). This closed model of adoption was first articulated through the Adoption Act 1926 and was reinforced by later pieces of legislation until the late 1970s (Baron and Pannor 1993). Adoption was essentially seen as a solution to complex and often shameful events. It was not recognised that adoption could potentially be a problem in itself (Grotevant 2000).

In recent years there has been a significant re-appraisal regarding attitudes towards adoption practices and a move to more open models of adoption (Triseliotis et al 1997). Policy and practice aims are for contact with birth parents to be promoted where appropriate, along with the sharing of information between birth families and adoptive families. The concept of openness does not just extend to the arrangement of adoptive placements though. It is perhaps useful at this point to identify the terminology used in

adoption arrangements. When reference is made to older children moving to adoption from local authority care, the arrangement and the terms used are often that there is *inclusive adoption* or *adoption with contact* (Triseliotis 1991). However, not infrequently, these terms are used interchangeably in both practice and policy (Triseliotis 1991). In principle though, the move in terms of policy has been towards openness and specifically communicative openness in adoption, involving a more inclusive and less secretive approach (Brodzinsky 2005; Neil and Howe 2004). Brodzinsky wrote of communicative openness as being an ongoing process rather than a series of isolated events. It exemplifies both how a family may operate, and the intended message being internalised by the adoptee. Brodzinsky states that such an approach promotes positive identity and increased self-esteem which enables emotional healing (Brodzinsky 2005).

Increasingly there is a recognition that the concept of openness is about much more than satisfying curiosity or the need for information. There is a complex emotional component and a range of unresolved identity issues involved in the need for information, irrespective of the relationship, positive or negative, with adoptive parents. As long ago as the 1960's and 1970's research was starting to challenge the notion that adopted people who searched for, or were interested in, their birth family did so as a form of deviance but instead were individuals who had a natural right to access information about their origins (Triseliotis 1973; McWhinnie 1967). This right to know includes not just details of biographical heritage, but also the much wider and often complex question of why an individual was adopted (Courtney 2000). The increase in openness in adoption can be understood as a response to the changing nature and purpose of adoption. As discussed earlier, prior to the 1970s, the majority of children being placed for adoption were babies (Neil and Howe 2004; Neil 1997). However, today the majority of children placed for adoption are from the care system, with a higher age profile than in the past (Coram BAAF 2020). In many of these cases, especially where children are older, they may have established relationships with members of their birth families and it is recognised that ignoring these relational bonds may not be in the best interests of the child.

In addition to the psychological domain, openness can also be seen in structural terms. Within the structural domain, openness is seen as the

correlation now present in the social work profession, as well as in wider society, between permanence and identity and the uncertainty that is inherent in closed secretive adoptions.

This change in practice has, in part at least, resulted in a growing awareness of the potentially damaging consequences of secrecy inherent in the traditional model of 'confidential' adoption (Jones 2013 p.1).

The traditional emphasis on secrecy was in part an attempt to avoid stigma and to foster the attachment between birth family and child but the reality is that adoption can never be a clean break. Issues of identity and heredity continue to be important. Modell (1994) explained that closed, confidential adoptions used the *as if* model. The child was brought up *as if* the adoptive family was their only family, the adoptive family *as if* the child was theirs by birth, the birth parents *as if* the child had no connection to them. Within this model of adoption, the adoptive family is intended to substitute the birth family. The research by Modell (1994) highlighted the contradictions between the aspirations of the *as if* principle and the reality of the life experiences of adoptees, birth parents and adopters (Jones 2013).

Current aims in policy and practice identify that all parties have a role to play in managing the emotional complexities of the experience of adoption, not just the adoptees themselves. In accordance with this, current adoption plans may include arrangements for direct contact, but more often than not, they stipulate indirect contact. Alongside this, there is a general ethos for all those involved, particularly adoptive parents, to communicate openly with their children about their birth families and the circumstances around their adoption (Brodzinsky 2005; Neil and Howe 2004). Jones (2013) identifies that progress in implementing changes in policy has been slow due to the social and cultural contexts in which adoption takes place. She suggests that openness in adoption needs to rely on not doing more of the same but instead moving towards a position of critical engagement with openness as a culturally specific and potentially problematic social process (Jones 2013). In her consideration of UK legislation Jones identified that it neither promotes nor discourages openness, instead leaving it for consideration of individual circumstances (Jones 2013). Practice still appears to be based on the model of family substitution and is at odds with

what we know about identity in terms of dual connection (Jones 2013). To make progress in reframing the adoptive experience, further consideration is needed of what adoption means to all members of the adoption triad (Jones 2013). Current Government policy focuses on the avoidance of delays in children being placed in secure family relationships but there appears to be insufficient consideration of long terms impact of adoption and the ways in which some potential difficulties can be mitigated (Hill 2013).

Though closed adoptions and a high level of secrecy in adoptive arrangements have certainly been a feature of adoptions in Scotland, it should also be acknowledged that this in part has been a reflection of social and cultural norms and that in a legislative context there has always been greater openness with regards to adoption in Scotland than in the rest of the UK (Critchley et al 2018). Unlike other UK jurisdictions, in Scotland it has always been possible for adopted people to access the facts of their adoption through individuals being able to access their annotated birth certificate without any intermediary. This more open attitude was reflected in the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1979 (S45).

Continued changes in policy and practice, alongside the impact of social media, has led many more adoptees to experience reunion with birth families than in the past. The majority of adopted people involved in reunions were born during the 1960s and 1970s, these being the decades when adoptions rates were at their highest (Clapton 2018).

2.2 Review of the Literature

A scoping review of the literature took place at the outset of the research process, prior to primary data collection. The scoping review aimed to consider the broad subject of adoption and contact with birth families. This wide-ranging engagement with the subject is an approach recommended by McGhee, Marland and Atkinson (2007). The initial engagement with the literature served two main functions. Firstly, to establish whether the chosen topic has been studied (or not) and if so, in what way and by whom. Secondly, this initial scoping of the literature enabled me to become more familiar with the subject area, with the caveat of not committing to any

specific aspect of the subject but as an aid to developing the focus of the inquiry. Engagement with literature at this stage of the inquiry is in opposition to the approach put forwards by Glaser (1999, 1967), who argued that grounded theorists could not know what literature might be of relevance until the end of the analysis. Concerns raised by Glaser (1999, 1967) were considered, but the approach adopted was aligned to Charmaz's position, that being that the literature should be engaged with critically and comparatively from the first stages of the inquiry and that the researcher should maintain an ongoing relationship with both literature and extant theory throughout the research process (Bryant and Charmaz 2019; Charmaz 2014). In recognition of the ethos underpinning CGT, a healthy scepticism and open mind was maintained throughout this initial scoping review of the literature alongside a concerted effort not to be overly influenced by the previous findings and debates (Charmaz 2014).

This initial scoping of the literature therefore looked at a wide range of issues within the field of adoption. Areas such as the impact of adoption on children, issues of contact and openness and the lifelong experience of adoption including issues of identity, attachment and loss were initially considered as possible areas for investigation. These are topics that have received prominence in the more general adoption literature that I was familiar with and which had been of interest to me throughout the course of my professional practice experience.

What emerged at an early stage was that there was a limited amount research that focused on adults who were adopted, specifically in terms of the impact of re-engagement with birth families. In addition, the voice of adults who were adopted seemed to be all but absent. Therefore, issues related to adult experiences of adoption and the impact of searching and re-engagement with birth families were considered the most valuable areas for further research. A study that explored and reflected the lived experience of adopted individuals in adulthood was prioritised for investigation. These areas also reflected my own personal and professional interests. Following on from the initial scoping exercise, a more detailed and focused literature review was conducted to provide further context and rationale for the study.

2.2.1 Engaging with the Literature in Grounded Theory Methodology

As indicated in the previous section, engagement with the literature pertaining to the area of inquiry is a contentious issue within Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) (Bryant and Charmaz 2012). In their original version of GTM, Glaser and Strauss (1967) adopted the position that the researcher should not engage with literature until the analysis was complete, with the aim of considering the data collected with fresh eyes.

They proposed that the researcher should

ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to ensure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas (Glaser and Strauss 1967 p. 37).

By conducting a literature review, they contended that the researcher would expose themselves to dominant theoretical constructs on the phenomenon being researched. This had the potential to inhibit the generation of new theory emerging inductively from the data.

Though Strauss, as a co-author alongside Glaser, originally advocated delaying the literature review, in more recent years he adopted a slightly more flexible approach. Strauss acknowledged that researchers would have lived experience and knowledge prior to embarking on the research being conducted, and that the rich background of information that researchers brought with them should be used to sensitise the researcher to the phenomena being studied (Strauss and Corbin 1997; Corbin and Strauss 1990). This reflects a more sympathetic and constructive approach to engagement with both previous research and the theoretical concepts related to the area of inquiry as being essential to the research process has been put forwards. Strauss and Corbin (1997) saw literature as a methodological tool that should be purposefully used in a grounded theory study at an appropriate time. Rather than approaching and conducting the study with a blank canvas they adopted a more pragmatic approach and suggested that the researcher should draw on the literature to aid in the formulation of questions and theory development. In this way, literature is used to stimulate theoretical sensitivity (Corbin and Strauss 1990).

In more recent times Charmaz (2014, 2006) has positioned that in order to extend the core concept of a theory to explain a range of phenomena from other spheres of practice, a knowledge of the literature is essential. Reviewing the literature helps the researcher to highlight the conceptual background within the substantive area under study and helps in the final stage of the research process. Exposure to and acknowledgement of the literature also facilitates theoretical sensitivity which brings an additional and critical form of data against which interim or later analysis can be positioned (Hoare, Mills and Francis 2012; Goldkuhl and Cronholm 2010). Urquhart, Lehmann and Myers (2009) expand on this by stating that in order to gain a more explicit understanding of the subject being studied, there is a need for theorists to link data, existing literature and other insights to phenomena that are encountered in the field in both an inferential and iterative manner. This is consistent with an approach that draws on abductive analysis, as will be discussed further in chapter 3. Thornberg (2012) concurs with this view and also the position taken by Charmaz (2014, 2006), who suggests that literature as data should be viewed as being on a par with data generated through the interviews. Thornberg (2012) acknowledges though that there are a number of challenges with this approach, not least the fact that the researcher is removed from the context of previous inquiries.

The implications of conducting a literature review in the early stages of constructive grounded theory research are presented as relating not only to the methodological approach, but also, to its epistemological framework which is discussed in chapter 3. Within CGTM, attention is on the researcher and his/her influential role throughout the entire process of the research (Hall and Callery 2001). The value of exposure to the literature added depth and theoretical sensitivity throughout all stages of this inquiry. On a purely practical level, to have been as immersed in this area of inquiry for as long as I have been and to not be influenced by it would be unrealistic. In line with the position taken by Charmaz (2014, 2006), thorough exploration and explanation of the literature was undertaken with key findings being presented in the early sections of this inquiry with the aim of this approach leading to a greater degree of transparency.

2.2.2 When to Engage with Literature and Extant Theory in a Constructive Grounded Theory Study

In her earlier writings, Charmaz (2006) leaves the decision of the timing of conducting the literature review to the researcher and states that this will be influenced to a large extent by the positionality of the researcher. Dunne (2011) identified a process of using the literature which starts with a noncommittal approach, moving to more focused searching as the identification of significant concepts within the data become apparent. The literature is ultimately used to enable the researcher to articulate the developing theory with significant related theories, the emphasis being on integration between the various aspects of the inquiry (Dunne 2011).

By 2019, the position taken by Charmaz had developed and she adopted a position more aligned to that of Thornberg and Dunne (2019), who proposed the value of identifying three main phases of the literature review in CGTM. The first phase is the initial literature review which takes place prior to data collection. The aim at this point is to become broadly familiar with the subject area. It is important that this stage is a non-committal exploration of the literature (Thornberg and Dunne 2019). The second phase is an ongoing literature review, which takes place during data collection and is influenced by the raw data, which in this inquiry consisted of interview data and initial reflective logs and memos. At this stage, specific themes and ideas are emerging and there is an iterative approach to data collection, analysis and engagement with the literature. Finally, the third phase of the literature review takes place towards the end of the study and is conducted in order to contextualise the constructed grounded theory in relation to specific theoretical and empirical research reference points (Thornberg and Dunne 2019).

An approach closely aligned to the stages identified by Thornberg and Dunne (2019) was utilised as guidance for this inquiry. An initial scoping of the literature was conducted to define and justify the study undertaken, further exposure to the literature and relevant theoretical concepts were engaged in throughout the collection of data with the aim of locating the findings from the data within the broader literature. As the inquiry progressed, continued reading and analysis of literature was conducted iteratively

throughout all stages of data collection and analysis, with familiar literature being re-examined in the light of the theory as it developed.

2.2.3 Presentation of the Literature

As demonstrated above, the iterative approach to engaging with the literature has driven the process of conducting this inquiry. However, this approach brings challenges in terms of when and how to present this material. A decision was made to present a short, focused literature review, consistent with the second stage identified by Thornberg and Dunne (2019), in the early sections of the thesis, with an acknowledgement that the material will be returned to in more detail in the exploration of the place of the grounded theory in relation to the wider literature theory presented in chapter 12. This approach enables an explanation of the context and rationale for the study but avoids unnecessary repetition of significant material.

2.2.4 The Process of Engaging with the Literature

The process of identifying appropriate literature was far from straightforward. Though Systematic Literature Reviews (SLR) are often presented as the standardised method and gold standard for literature reviews in that they *are replicable, transparent, objective, unbiased and rigorous* (Boell, Cecez-Kecmanovic 2015 p. 48), this approach to reviewing literature in the social sciences has attracted some criticism. While bias reduction is one of the main advantages put forwards for conducting an SLR it must be noted that this approach does not completely eradicate the risk of bias, it simply reduces it (Whitmore, Chase and Mandle 2001). The tasks involved in systematic reviewing, from applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, to extracting data for critical appraisal, are still predisposed to create bias if they are not implemented correctly. Moreover, there is no widely accepted method for assessing the validity of studies (Whitmore, Chase and Mandle 2001). Greenhalgh, Thorne and Malterud (2018) propose that a more appropriate approach, particularly in the field of social studies, is one which lends itself to a more interpretive and discursive synthesis of existing literature. The hermeneutic review, a form of narrative review, is one which takes as the reference point *verstehen*, the process of creating an interpretive understanding (Boell and Cezec-Kecmanovic 2014). As Smyth and Spence explain, literature cannot be regarded as objective truth

to be thematised, categorised, critiqued and then pieced together to create an argument (Smyth and Spence 2012; Smyth 2005).

In relation to both the methodology and methods drawn on for this inquiry, the focus on the

...continual deepening of insight...obtained by critical reflection on particular elements of the dataset...in the context of a wider body of work (Greenhalgh, Thorne and Malterud 2018 p.3)

appeared to be the most appropriate approach to adopt, enabling me to critically engage with ideas presented in the literature. To counter the criticism that narrative reviews cherry pick evidence, Greenhalgh, Thorne and Malterud (2018) contend that evidence is selected purposively with an eye to what is relevant.

In summary, it is argued that the key purpose of exploring literature in hermeneutic research is to provide context and provoke thinking. Literature, which can include anything that provokes thinking on the phenomenon of interest, becomes an essential dialogical partner from which scholarly thinking and new insights emerge (Smyth and Spence 2012). Engagement with the literature is distinctively interpretive, calling for the reader to engage with text in a manner congruent to the philosophy of Gadamer [1900-2002] (Smyth and Spence 2012). Smyth and Spence (2012 p.11) discuss the *dynamic and contextual nature of understanding*. Thus, there is a restless back and forth movement, or *play* (Smyth and Spence 2012 p.13).

The aim when conducting the review of literature was therefore the creation of interpretive understanding (*verstehen*) throughout the process of searching and writing the literature review. Understanding of each paper was interpreted in the context of other papers from the literature. The understanding of each part relates to the understanding of the whole and vice versa. Understanding was also developed through the process of constant comparison with empirical data. This movement back and fore between the parts and the whole in the process of developing a broader and richer understanding is described as the *hermeneutic circle* (Boell, Cecez-Kecmanovic 2014). The concept of researcher as *bricoleur*, that is making use of whatever comes to hand (Denzin and Lincoln 2005), is also broadly

applicable here within the format of the narrative approach to conducting a literature review (Green, Johnson and Adams 2006).

Green, Johnson and Adams (2006 p.106) describe narrative reviews as being *comprehensive narrative syntheses of previously published information*. They proceed to state that writing a good narrative review is dependent on the use of good methods. In accordance with this approach, formal searching of data bases were conducted. Alongside this, references were followed from retrieved articles, also known as reference tracking or snowballing (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic 2010). It is important to acknowledge that alongside the suitability of this approach within the chosen methodology, it was also personally pragmatic, enabling me to develop my understanding of the current parameters of the phenomena under consideration.

Developing clear inclusion criteria is an essential aspect of a review, even a brief hermeneutic review, to ensure that the boundaries of the review questions are clearly defined (Cronin, Ryan and Coughlan 2008). The criteria should not be too narrow so as to exclude studies that may be of importance to the review, but not so broad that the review loses focus and becomes unmanageable. It was also important that a reflexive approach was adopted and therefore this review, though initially defined by inclusion and exclusion criteria, was also closely aligned to the theoretical categories emerging from the data. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to facilitate the initial screening of available literature.

2.2.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To be included within the review, the research had to fulfil one or more of the following criteria:

- Studies that explored the psychological and emotional impact of an adoptive status on adult adoptees.
- Studies that explored the relationship between adoption and attachment patterns of adult adoptees.
- Studies that explored the impact of an adoptive status on adult relationships.
- Studies that explored the impact of adoption on identity formation.

- Studies that explored the experiences of adult adoptees searching for birth families
- Studies that explored the experiences of adult adoptees and the relationships they formed with birth families.
- On the whole studies that were conducted in the last 40 years were prioritised, but earlier studies that have remained significant in the literature were included on their merits for example longitudinal studies, studies cited frequently in other papers and studies conducted by key researchers in the chosen field.

Studies were excluded for the following reasons - Studies not published in the English language.

- Studies that were not peer reviewed.
- Studies published more than 40 years ago (see point 7, 2.3.6)

All studies were initially screened against titles and abstracts. This provided a general overview of which papers were appropriate for in-depth review. Following the initial screening, full texts of those papers selected for in depth review were scrutinised to ensure that they met the review criteria. Databases were selected that indexed qualitative and quantitative studies that were identified as relevant to the focus of inquiry. The concepts of adoption, attachment, identity, birth families and contact/reunion were used as key search terms with synonyms developed using combinations of truncations to best capture the search terms related to these concepts. Boolean operators were used between concepts and their truncations to identify literature evidencing the relationships between the key concepts.

2.3 Key Themes Identified in the Literature

A decision was made to present only aspects of the literature that had relevance to the data gathered from interviews. The approach taken was to conduct a non-committal literature review where the material identified and presented is assessed as relevant dependent by emergent theory (Urquhart and Fernandez 2006). As explained previously, engaging with the literature was an iterative and fluid process whereby identification of what was and was not relevant emerged throughout the process of the inquiry. The literature has been presented under the four main headings of:

the impact of adoption on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of adults; identity and adoption; reunion of adoptees with birth families and attachment issues and adoption. It is recognised though, that in reality, the organisation of material under these four headings creates artificial boundaries, as there are many overlapping themes within these areas of inquiry.

2.3.1 The Impact of Adoption on the Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing of Adult Adoptees

Despite an increase in interest in recent years in the adult adoptee's experiences of adoption, the body of literature as a whole still retains a focus primarily on psychosocial adjustment in childhood and adolescence (Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari 2014; Baden and O'Leary Wiley 2007). Much of the research on the experience of adoption for adult adoptees has emerged in the past forty years, with an increased focus since 2000 (Palocios and Brodzinsky 2010; Grotevant 1997; Brodzinsky 1987).

One of the earliest longitudinal studies in Europe in the field of adoption was conducted by Seglow, Pringle and Wedge (1972) in the UK, followed by a study by Banham and Sigvardsson (1990) in Sweden. Both of these studies focused on early childhood adoptions and followed participants into adulthood. Results from these studies indicated increased adjustment problems in childhood and early adolescence but by later adolescence and young adulthood little difference was found between adoptees and non-adoptees. Similar results were reported by Hoopes (1984), Stein and Hoopes (1987) and Kelly et al (1998) in their studies in the US. These themes of the resolution of adjustment problems in adulthood can be dated back to Kirk's publication of *Shared Fate* in 1964. Kirk's work focused on the role of adoptive parents, particularly with regard to what is now identified as communicative openness within adoptive families (Grotevant et al 2010; Jones and Hackett 2007; Grotevant and McRoy 1997). However, other more recent studies contradict these early findings and have shown that individuals who were adopted may struggle with a variety of psychological issues in childhood and that those issues may not be resolved in adult years (Leon 2002; Brodzinsky 1993).

Overall, the literature presents a complex picture of long-term outcomes for adopted adults (Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari 2014; Kelly et al 1998 and

Feigelman 1997). What is evident is that there is a prevailing divide present, even in the more recent literature, with some studies reporting few differences in psychological well-being (Saiz and Main 2004; Borders, Black and Pasley 1998; Kelly et al 1998 and Freigelman 1997). Others, equally as compelling, reporting substantial differences in self-concept (Levy-Shiff 2001) and psychological distress (Cubito and Obremski Brandon 2000; Smyer et al 1998; Brodzinsky 1987), with overall poorer outcomes in terms of psychological and emotional well-being (Feeney, Passmore and Peterson 2007; Levy-Schiff 2001).

In a large-scale study (525 female and 191 male adoptees) conducted in the US in 2000, the psychological adjustment in adult adoptees was studied, focusing on the areas of distress, depression and anger (Cubito and Obremski Brandon 2000). The findings from this study indicate that adult adoptees are at risk for elevated levels of overall distress, depressive symptomology and anger (Cubito and Obremski Brandon 2000). However, though scores were elevated, Cubito and Obremski Bandon (2000) suggest that figures still fall short of outpatient norms and the issue of recruitment source needed to be considered as within the sample, women recruited via the internet were significantly higher in depression than women recruited via support meetings. Curtis and Pearson (2010) also raise concerns about limitations in sampling and design for much of the research in the field of adoption. An additional consideration when drawing conclusions from the study by Cubito and Obremski Brandon (2000) are the significant differences between the US and UK populations and any comparisons should be viewed with caution. Aside from the larger numbers of children adopted in the US compared with the UK, a greater proportion (49%) of US adoptions are of minority ethnic children (AFCARS 2019) compared with England (2019) where 18% of children were of minority ethnicity (Sturgess and Selwyn 2000), with 14% of looked after children that were adopted were of minority ethnicity (Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting Year 2020, 2021).

In the US in 2019, the majority of adopted children were adopted by foster carers (52%), with stranger/matched adoptions accounting for only 11%, the remaining 36% of children being adopted by relatives/step-parents (AFCAS 2019). In 2019, in the UK, only 15% of children were adopted by

foster carers and 85% by strangers (Sturgess and Selwyn 2000). Though it is not possible within this review to explore the implications of these differences, what is pertinent in the examination of studies conducted in the US, is that there are significant differences in the rates of adoption, the routes to adoption and the background of adopted children between the US and the UK.

Whilst acknowledging the complexities in this field of study, Feeney, Passmore and Petersen (2007) identified some differences with regard to self-esteem, maternal care and maternal over-protection between 2 sample groups of 100 adult adoptees and 100 non-adoptees (friends of the adoptee sample). These differences were qualified though by consideration of the adoptee's reunion status (Feeney, Passmore and Petersen 2007). Contrary to predictions, reunited adoptees reported lower self-esteem than the two other groups (non-adoptees and adoptees who had not reunited with birth parents) (Feeney, Passmore and Petersen 2007). The two possible explanations put forwards by the authors are that reunion has a negative impact on self-esteem and causes adoptees to re-evaluate their relationships with their adoptive mothers. Alternatively, those with low self-esteem may be more motivated to seek reunion with birth families (Feeney, Passmore and Petersen 2007). It should be noted that these findings are not consistent with other studies where adoptees report that reunions generally enhance their self-esteem and that adoptees with lower self-esteem who perceived adoptive mothers as less caring were more motivated to search (Passmore 2005). Furthermore, the study by Feeney, Passmore and Petersen (2007) stated that identity processing styles seemed more significant than adoptive status in predicting levels of self-esteem. Feeney, Passmore and Petersen (2007) also reported that the sample of adoptees in their study had varying degrees of positive and negative relationships with their adoptive families, none of which demonstrated any direction of change.

In their investigation of the psychological impact of adoption, Silverstein and Kaplan (1982) identified separation from birth parents as being at the root of psychological issues that persist into adulthood for individuals that are adopted. They proposed that this comes from a sense of rejection and perceived shame, especially when secrecy has been a factor (Silverstein and Kaplan 1982). It is suggested that secrecy regarding the adoption feeds into

the adoptees sense of loss, which emerges during significant life events (Cubito and Obremski Brandon 2000; Silverstein and Kaplan 1982). Other researchers have also concluded that it is the psychological experiences for the adoptee of rejection, separation and loss that are linked to an increase in psychological disorders (Brodzinsky 1987). In addition to these findings, prior research suggests that from a psychodynamic perspective adoption complicates early object relations and the formation of self-identity (Sorosky, Barron and Pannor 1975).

Grotevant (2003) suggests that the apparent inconsistencies and contradictions in findings could be a result of focusing on main effects such as mental health and psychological well-being, facets that can be affected by a wide range of contextual and relationship issues. He proposes that studies might instead be better investigating mediating processes and moderating variables (Grotevant 2003). Consistent with this view of the experience of adoption, an exploratory study conducted by Penny, Borders and Portnoy (2007) identified that personality and temperament had a significant impact on the lifelong experience of adoption. This study focused on the narratives representing the voice of the adoptees and through these narratives, five stages of awareness and acceptance of the adoption experience were identified: no awareness; emerging awareness; drowning in awareness; emerging from awareness and finding peace (Penny, Borders and Portnoy 2007). The study further identified that factors such as relationship status and satisfaction impact on the experience of adoption with adoption described as a

Lifelong process complicating the ability to negotiate normal, developmental tasks (Penny, Borders and Portnoy 2007 p.31).

Amongst studies that identify the experience of adoption as having an impact in adult years, the key time period for psychological and emotional distress emerging has been shown to be during significant adult stages, when issues of integrating past, present and future alongside questions of the adult's personal history come to the fore (Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari 2014). The study conducted by Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari (2014) identified adulthood as a key stage in terms of identity formation with the suggestion

that parenthood, in particular, brings to the fore new roles that need to be undertaken and the need to integrate the past, present and future.

Passmore and Feeney (2009) warn of adopting a binary approach when studying adoptees and non-adoptees and highlight the fact that adoptees are not a homogenous group as each person has a unique narrative (Passmore and Feeney 2009). Facets such as the quality of relationships with adoptive parents, identity processing styles and reunion status all impact on the psychological and emotional well-being of adoptees (Passmore and Feeney 2009). Passmore and Feeney (2009) also warn of the dangers of both over-pathologising and under-pathologising the emotional and psychological well-being of adoptees or as Kirk, described *denial of difference* and *insistence of difference* (Kirk 1964). Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari (2014) suggest that the most functional strategy in terms of thoughts about adoption is positioned in the middle of the continuum, acknowledging difference without overt insistence on its presence (Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari 2014). This facilitates an ability to feel comfortable with two aspects of belonging, to both birth families and adoptive families (Brodzinsky 1990). Through this, adoptees are more likely to be able to integrate all aspects of their personal narrative (Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari 2014).

As has been demonstrated, much of the literature is contradictory and identifies that alongside the experience of adoption, a number of other factors may have an impact on outcomes for adult adoptees. It has also been suggested that there appears to be a significant gap in current research that moves beyond an understanding of the psychological and emotional outcomes for adult adoptees and looks at protective factors that can be drawn on to assist their transition through adulthood and help resolve issues of identity and loss (Borders, Penny and Portnoy 2000).

2.3.2 Adoption and Identity

It has been proposed that one task that adults who are adopted face is to understand and acknowledge their identity within the context of being adopted. Numerous studies have argued that the process of identity formation assumes particular significance for adoptees and is often prolonged and complicated (Moyer and Juang 2011; Freundlich and

Lieberthal 2001; Grotevant 1997). Much of the literature on identity issues within the adoption experience has focused on difficulties during adolescence though from a developmental perspective adulthood has also been identified as a time for resolving basic identity conflicts, which brings the formation of a coherent, stable and positive self (Levy-Shiff 2001; Triseliotis 1985; Brodzinsky et al 1984). Challenges encountered within research in this field are further discussed by Kalus (2014) who suggests that methodological constraints such as the heterogeneity of the adopted population, lack of suitable comparison groups and within group differences may account for the mixed findings.

Much of the literature on adoption and identity focuses on issues of personal identity development with findings suggesting that adoptees face significant challenges in this process unlike those that are not adopted. A number of studies examining the impact of being adopted have proposed that adoptees tend to suffer from a confused sense of self and that this issue must be confronted when entering or during adulthood (Moyer and Juang 2011; Brodzinsky 2005). Research findings indicate that this increased vulnerability to identity problems, are generally attributed to the unique psychological experience of the adoption process (Brodzinsky 1987; Sorosky Barron and Pannor 1975). Adoptees need to construct their own story or narrative within two families, both birth and adoptive (Grotevant 1997). Studies have shown that adult adoptees have difficulty in assimilating the identity that they have as a member of the adoptive family with the identity they have with their birth family. Such identity confusion emanating from the two narratives and two strands of identity, can lead to low self-esteem and lack of confidence (Humphrey and Humphrey 1989). Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari (2014) further hypothesise that missing a crucial part of their origins affects the identity process for adoptees, this in turn can impact on personal relationships.

Grotevant (2000) concluded that identity formation in adolescence is based on a shared family history. This has clear implications for the adopted adolescent or adult. Silverstein and Kaplan (1982) further identified that issues of identity come to the fore when three factors intersect, an awareness of the significance of their adoption, a drive towards independence and a biopsychosocial strive towards developing an

integrated identity. During this process, identity is defined by what one is and what one is not. Adoptees lose one identity and gain or borrow another (Silverstein and Kaplan 2004). Grotevant (2010) also proposes that the identity of the adoptee is irretrievably bound to their connection with their birth family. The explanation put forwards to explain this phenomenon is that identity with the original birth family may come from what is known about them or what is imagined and that this sense of identity needs to be integrated with the identity that the adoptee has gained from their adoptive family. Grotevant et al (2010) propose that in their search for identity, adoptees have to contend with questions such as, where they came from, why they were adopted, do they have siblings and do their birth family think about them. These questions encapsulate the sense of heritage and origin that are part of an adoptee's identity. Grotevant (1997) positioned that the layers of unknown personal, genetic and social history often complicate adoptee's identity development. Moreover, several studies suggest that most adopted persons' desire to understand the genesis of their biological origins reflects a fundamental interest in reclaiming a missing part of themselves (Brodzinsky 1987; 1993; Kowal and Schilling 1985; Sobol and Cardiff 1983; Simpson, Timm, and McCubbin 1981; Sorosky Baran and Pannor 1975). What is evident from the literature is the extent to which feelings of differentness pervade the personal experience of adoption often resulting in a sense of incompleteness (Brodzinsky 1993, 1987).

Much of the theoretical, empirical, and clinical literature also acknowledges identity discontinuity as a potential conflict associated with the adoptive status (Brodzinky 1993; Kowal and Schilling 1985; Sobol and Cardiff 1983; Sorosky Baran and Pannor 1975). Unlike those who are not adopted, adoptees need to construct their own story or narrative. This is in part, due to adoptees having to come to terms with an emerging self within the adoptive family, and for those who reunite with one or more birth relatives, negotiating the additional task of integrating their biological with their adoptive identities (Passmore and Feeney 2009; Brodzinsky 2005; Grotevant 1997).

Broader literature on identity development indicates that the process of psychological adjustment may be more complex for girls than for boys,

especially in relational domains (Kroger 1997). It has been suggested that girls are likely to show more interest than boys in activities such as establishing contact with and gaining more information about their birth families. Consistent with these findings, studies have found that women are more likely than men to seek out birth family information than men (Skinner-Drawz et al 2011).

2.3.3 The Process of Identity Formation and the Role of Communicative Openness

Grotevant et al (2010) state that in facing the challenge of developing a coherent identity as an adopted person, individuals must decide what it means have a connection to both an adoptive and birth family and integrate both of these connections into a coherent adoptive identity narrative. They explain that this process does not occur in a vacuum; it occurs in daily social interactions with significant others, especially adoptive family members. Henze-Pedersen (2019), in her qualitative study of fifteen adoptees, identified a link between openness in adoption and identity and concluded that a high degree of openness is important for the identity of adoptees. Henze-Pedersen (2019) differentiates between two types of openness: biographical knowledge and communicative openness. She makes reference to a continuum of different levels of contact between the birth family and adoptive family, ranging from closed adoptions to open adoptions, stating that openness helps to create links between the past, present and future with adoptees experiencing a negative relationship between closedness and their identity formation. Grotevant (2010) also examined the ways in which identity issues are resolved and concluded that the effects of contact on identity may be related to the conversations that adoptive parents have with their children about adoption that are opened up when contact issues are present. These adoption-related conversations within the adoptive family were found to mediate the association between contact with birth relatives and adoptive identity formation during adolescence. The effects of contact and adoption-related conversation on adoptive identity were found to extend into emerging adulthood.

The study by Henze-Pedersen (2019) also identified some unexpected findings though, whereby it was found that closedness can bring inner peace and an unbroken life story and that openness can bring troubling thought

patterns. These findings are consistent with those of Sharma McGue and Benson (1996) who interpreted their findings to suggest that adoption per se does not have a negative effect on identity formation and that issues of reunion can impact negatively on the emotional well-being of adoptees. Henze–Pedersen (2019) concludes that for many adoptees, these experiences are not static and different meanings are understood throughout the life course, suggesting the need for further research in this field. In amongst these mixed and at times, contradictory findings, are the findings from the significant study conducted in Scotland by Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle (2005). Having studied adoptions that took place pre 1975 involving children mostly under the age of 18 months, information was gathered from 126 adopted people, as well as 93 birth mothers and 93 adoptive parents. Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle (2005) position that communication and openness are two of the key challenges for all parties in the adoption triangle. Of particular significance in the results of the study is the finding that the closer adopted people felt to their adoptive parents, the more they felt a sense of belonging and identity which resulted in higher self-esteem and a general increase in emotional health. Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle (2005) identified a particular pattern of closeness between adoptive parents and their adopted children in that relationships were close in childhood, fell sharply in adolescence, and went up in adulthood, though never regained the level achieved in childhood.

A final aspect of the literature regarding the relationship between the adopted status and identity is the concept that adoptive identity is socially constructed and often carries with it negative connotations based on stigma and shame (Garber and Grotevant 2015; Wegar 2000; Grotevant 1997; Miall 1996). In a study conducted by March (1995), the adoptee's accounts appear to fit Goffman's 1963 theoretical model of social stigma whereby there is an awareness of being seen as different (Goffman 1986). This study by March (1995) examined self-perception rather than an assessment of the reactions of others to adoption. March (1995) concluded that secrecy strengthened the sense of stigma. The search for the birth mother was an attempt to neutralise this stigma by gaining information about biological kinship ties and thus gaining a sense of generational continuity, which enabled adoptees to see themselves as more socially acceptable. Limitations

of this study identified by March herself, point to the fact that the study uses exploratory data and is based on a sample that desired reunion (March 1995). This study does raise the question though, of whether or not non-searching adoptees who possess detailed background information have a lesser sense of social stigma than those that choose to search.

2.3.4 Reunion of Adoptees with Birth Families

Since the early 1970's there has been a dramatic increase in the frequency with which adoptees search for information about, or seek contact with, birth families when they reach adulthood (Cubito and Obremski-Brandon 2000). With this increased activity an increasing amount of evidence is emerging regarding search, reunion and reunion outcomes (Rushton 2007; Feast 2002; Silverman, Campbell and Patti 1994; Silverman et al 1988). Most of the studies conducted are observational and exploratory in nature. Though of value in terms of representing the lived experience of adult adoptees, there are criticisms that with the majority of research being cross sectional, there is a lack of data regarding longer term outcomes. One finding put forwards by Clapton (2018) identified that when reunions are assessed over a lengthy period, it can be seen that for most, these ties deepen and develop a longevity that carries with it expressions of kinship. Modell's findings are consistent with those of Carston (2018), explaining further that relationships that are based on biology alone are flimsy and a sense of kinship can only be achieved over a number of years of shared experiences (Modell 1994). Overall, research findings cover a wide range of dimensions of this aspect of adoption with inconsistent findings. If any generalisation could be drawn it would be that the nature of searching and reunion is multi-dimensional with varied motivations to engage in the search and varied outcomes.

2.3.5 Motivation for Searching and Reunion

Much of the research into adult adoptee's reunions with birth families has focused on the motivation for searching (Sachdev 1992). One of the most significant issues emerging from the data is the lack of similarity amongst searching adoptees. There is no specific sociological category or personality type, socio-economic status, or educational levels that leads people to search or to engage in contact with birth families (Sorosky, Baron and Pannor 1974). In addition, adoptees that have access to a large amount of background information appear to be just as likely to search as those who

possess little or no knowledge (Fitsell 1992). Adoption itself seems to be the only unifying factor (Pachecho and Eme 1993).

Much of the early research identified dissatisfaction with adoptive parents as being the main motivating factor related to adoptees searching for birth families (Sorosky Baran and Pannor 1975; Triseliotis 1973). Early studies also saw searching as a symptom of adoption breakdown (Triseliotis 1973). More recent studies though, contradict these findings and assert that the motivation to search is driven by a wide diversity of motives (Affleck and Steed 2001). Kowal and Schilling (1985) suggested that the reason for adoptees searching falls into three broad categories. Some adoptees search to resolve identity issues, driven by a desire to share future experiences with a naïve view that it will be easy to continue the severed relationship with the birth mother. Other adoptees are searching for biological and genetic information and thirdly, some search as a result of psychological trauma, where search is a form of therapy in that adoptees are searching for personal change. Andersen (1989) states that these three categories are not mutually exclusive, but one is generally more dominant than the others. Andersen (1989) also puts forwards the view that adoptees may not be consciously aware of their motivation for searching. Anderson challenged the belief that searching reflects pathology or dissatisfaction and suggests that it is more a model of personal growth (Andersen 1989). Carsten (2000) explains that in strongly asserting the positive value of *knowing where you have come from*, adoptees demonstrate the importance of establishing continuities in their own lives between past, present, and future. The crucial nature of this sense of historical continuity to interviewees' sense of self and kinship demonstrates the kinds of ruptures and losses that are set in train by the adoption practices.

The research conducted by March (1995) identified that the social and cultural constructs of the adoptive status itself is the main motivating factor for reunion. March (1995) studied the experiences of 60 reunited adults, investigating the links between the perceived social stigma of adoption and the motivation for reunion. March (1995) states that the perception of the social stigma of being adopted comes from the adopted family structure being *othered* with levels of secrecy adding to the feelings of being outside

normal family structures (Overall 1991). Respondents in the study reported having an awareness of adoptive families as different types of families and were acutely aware of society's views of this. They described how adoptees experience being asked questions about their birth mother, with huge significance being attached to this which often brought negative connotations. Respondents also identified absence of biological ties as significant and searching was an attempt to gain a sense of generational continuity that other, non-adopted people had.

Kowal and Schilling (1985) identified that when there is a disruptive change in the relationship with the adoptive parent such as the adoptive parent's death or divorce, or estrangement of the relationship between adoptive parent and adoptee, there can be increased motivation for searching for birth parents. However, more recent studies have found that the vast majority of adoptees who search have positive relationships with the adoptive parents (Farr, Grant-Marsney and Grotevant 2014; Pacheco and Eme 1993), and that the quality of adoptive relationships (positive or negative) is not associated with the decision to search (Sachdev 1991). The desire for the adoptee to reassure the birthparent of their own well-being can also be a motivating factor (Sachdev 1992; Sachdev 1991). Campbell, Silverman and Patti (1991) however identify the catalyst for searching as being commonly related to significant changes in the adoptees' lives with life cycle transitions such as pregnancy and birth being particularly significant. Additional studies though found that relationships with adoptive parents continues to play a pivotal role in supporting the adoptees in the search and reunion process (Farr, Grant-Marsney and Grotevant 2014).

Sibling relationships have also become the subject of considerable attention in adoption research and a significant proportion of those who are motivated to search are seeking information about birth siblings. The study by Ludvigson and Parnham (2004) investigated motivations for searching. They identified that adoptee's feelings in relation to the search and their experiences of contact focused on reunion with their *lost* sibling.

2.3.6 The Outcome of Reunion

Studies have shown that there is no one post reunion pathway following reunion with birth families. The literature also considers the outcome of

reunion from different perspectives. Rosenzweig-Smith (1988) writes of the outcome of reunion in terms of success, focusing on the outcomes of the relationship with the birth mother. The adoptee blaming the birth mother for the adoption was seen as predictor of poorer outcomes in reunions. Other studies see outcomes and success through a broader lens such as the impact on adoptive family relationships and overall feelings of satisfaction (Howe 2001; Pacheco and Eme 1993), with people feeling more complete post reunion (Howe and Feast 2001; March 1995). Recent studies have also identified that adoptees with positive adoptive family relationships and high levels of openness have greater satisfaction with birth family contact (Farr, Grant-Marsney and Grotevant 2014; Howe 2001).

A number of studies conducted over a wide time frame have sought to consider the emotional and psychological outcomes of those adoptees that search against those that do not. In a study conducted by Passmore and Feeney (2009) it was found that contrary to predictions, reunited adults reported lower self-esteem than both the non-reunited adoptees and the non-adoptees. Two possible explanations for these findings have been put forwards. Firstly, reunions may in themselves affect self-esteem causing adoptees to reassess their relationship with their adoptive mothers in a less favourable light than before the reunion. Another explanation is that those adoptees with lower self-esteem who already perceived their relationship with their adoptive mother as unsatisfactory, were more motivated to search for and subsequently find their birth mothers. This explanation is more consistent with previous research on search status where it has been found that searchers had lower self-esteem than either non-adoptees or non-searchers (Borders, Black and Pasley 1998). Cubito and Obremski Brandon (2000) have put forward the view that mental health professionals should be aware of the possibility that searching for one's biological heritage has the potential to be a stressful process, bringing increased psychological vulnerability. These risks therefore need to be balanced against the value that searching may have for the adoptee (Cubito and Obremski Brandon 2000). Cubito and Obremski Brandon (2000) identify that the literature is inconclusive as to whether or not psychological distress causes people to search or whether the actual process of searching causes an element of distress and additional psychological challenges.

The studies by Affleck and Steed (2001) and Triseliotis, Kyle and Feast (2005) present a clearer picture of the impact of search and reunion and determined that reunions can bring healing and gains in self-esteem. One of the issues that seems particularly pertinent though is the timing of when gains in self-esteem and/or improved emotional and psychological wellbeing may be experienced post reunion. This is demonstrated in the work of Aumend and Barrett (1983) who studied the psychological characteristics of adult adoptees that searched for birth families and those that did not. Both found the non-searching adult adoptees reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem than those who did search, but that adoptees self-esteem may improve following reunion in the long term. There is also evidence that a supportive adoptive family may act as a buffer against negative psychological outcomes (Kelly et al 1998). Cubito and Obremski Brandon (2000) identified that although there may be stress involved in the process of searching, a feeling of control also emerged and that in many cases reunions had lasting positive psychological and social effects.

The findings of a longitudinal study of forty-eight adoptees conducted by Howe and Feast (2001) also concluded that most reunion experiences, whatever the outcome, are found to be positive, satisfying and worthwhile, leading people to feel more complete. They identified that reunions are as much to do with resolution of identity and loss as they are for new family relationships. In addition, adoptees appeared to feel more in control of their life and meeting face to face with their birth family enabled them to meet someone who looked like them establishing a biological link. Even those that were no longer in contact with their birth families said that following reunion they felt more at home with their adoptive family. Negative adoptive relationships did not predict ongoing contact with birth families, but a negative evaluation of adoption experience did have an impact leading to increased positive contact. In total 84% of participants found reunion with birth families a worthwhile experience (Howe and Feast 2001). In the earlier work of Triseliotis (1973 p.140), interviewees speak of the importance of putting together *the missing links* and of being able to connect one's own children's physical appearance to those of one's antecedents. Similar findings were published by Triseliotis, Kyle and Feast (2005) who found that 85% of the adopted people studied reported that the contact and reunion

experience was positive and that it had enhanced their sense of identity enabling them to ask and answer significant question such as *who am I?* and *where do I come from?* The positive outcomes of reunion are further explained by Carsten (2000) who identified that those adoptees that seek out birth families are both asserting their own agency and are also through this process, able to construct a more cohesive and continuous identity that links their past, present and future.

Much of the literature, as discussed above, has identified that the motivation to search may be as much to do with resolving issues of loss and identity as it is about a desire for new relationship, and reunion may be a starting point of a long process of re-adjustment. In terms of the process of reunion, Pacheco and Eme (1993) identified that there were distinct phases. Firstly, the initial phase of getting to know the birth family, followed by the adopted person beginning to accommodate the birth family into their everyday network of family and social relationships, and finally, contact becoming less frequent, and in some cases the adopted individual and the birth family may disengage and contact ceases. Pacheco and Eme (1993) identified that there may be significant class and cultural differences between the adopted individual and their birth family which have the potential to present barriers to forming long term, meaningful relationships.

2.3.7 Adoption and Attachment

There has been a large volume of research on adopted children and attachment (Pace and Zavattini 2010; Howe 2006, 2003). Much less attention though has been focused on adopted adults and attachment issues. Farr, Grant-Marsney and Grotevant (2014) identified that adult attachment issues include: the relationship between openness in adoptive families and attachment patterns; problematic attachment issues in adulthood for adoptees and the resolution of problematic attachment issues.

The longitudinal, comparative study conducted by Levy-Schiff (2001) identified that there was some evidence that adopted persons fare worse than non-adoptees on various psychosocial variables, including relational adjustment, with adoptees scoring lower on measures of self-esteem and higher on pathological symptomatology. Adoptees also scored their families lower on all three dimensions of family environment, which included

relationships, personal growth and system maintenance than non-adoptees (Levy-Schiff 2001). However, there is limited research that has comprehensively explored the impact of adoption on attachment security and relationship outcomes in adulthood and also the extent to which family and search/reunion experiences play a moderating role between the experience of adoption and attachment patterns.

The studies by Carizey (2004) and Jones (1997) identify the early loss of a primary object as being a factor that has the greatest influence on the adoptee's life cycle. This highlights the possible relationship between this early loss, or *primal wound* (Verrier 1997) and the adult adoptee's ability to form secure relationships. Though Verrier's work has assumed some prominence in adoption literature, critics have pointed to the idealisation of *real* parents rooted in biology and the lack of attention given to the place of birth fathers in adoption narratives, as omissions in a complex and multi-faceted experience (Clapton 2019).

Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2007) also investigated the relationship between the adopted status and attachment but discovered a far more complex picture than that put forward by Carizey (2004). The comparative study by Feeney et al (2004) shows that the adopted sample (N=131) exhibited less security than the comparison sample (N=124). It is important to note though that those who had not searched did not differ from the comparison group. For adopted persons, attachment security was related to perceptions of childhood relationships with adopted parents and to a lesser extent, relationships with birth mothers. In this first phase of the research conducted by Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2004), adoptees scored lower on confidence in self and others and higher on all five scales measuring dimensions of insecurity. The complex nature of the relationship between adoption and attachment is demonstrated by the findings put forwards by this study, where it was identified that attachment security was more strongly associated with relationship outcomes (e.g., loneliness, relationship quality, particularly with regard to relationships with adoptive parents), than with the adoptive status. Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2004) also identified that relationships with adoptive parents continue to play a significant role in adoptee's experiences of birth family contact into

adulthood, whereby adoptees were more satisfied with birth family contact when there was an open sensitive relationship with adoptive families.

The study by Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2004) built on research conducted by Borders, Black and Pasley in (1998). This study of adoptees aged thirty-five to fifty-five, also had a comparison group constituting friends of the adoptees. The overall aim of the study by Borders, Black and Pasley (1998) was to investigate whether adult adoptees exhibit greater psychosocial dysfunction than non-adopted adults with attachment and connectedness having been identified as a significant factor of psychosocial well-being. Borders, Black and Pasley (1998) used the four-category typology of adult attachment scale devised by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) to classify the attachment and relationship features of the participants from both the sample and the comparison groups. This typology identifies the internal working models of self and others, each of which may be positive or negative, which yields four attachment styles. The four attachment styles are classified as: a) secure; b) pre-occupied; c) fearful/avoidant and d) dismissive (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991). The factors leading to the identification of the attachment styles most dominant with each participant were self-reported. The study concluded that in many ways the success with which adoptees negotiated adult years was no different to non-adoptees. There were some differences though, specifically in that adoptees are less likely to categorise themselves as secure in terms of adult attachment. This is consistent with other findings from the study, where adoptees identified as having less social support and also lower family support. The adoptees also reported having lower self-esteem, which has been identified as a feature of insecure attachment. Borders Black and Pasley (1998) acknowledged that the differences between the adopted group and the comparison group were relatively small. It is also significant when exploring the attachment behaviours of adult adoptees to consider the range of factors that have the potential to impact on a person's lived experience. For example, in his study of adult attachment and adoption, Howe (2001) identified the age at placement as being a contributory factor in the increased incidence of insecure attachment behaviours of adult adoptees.

Phase 2 of the study by Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2007) was longitudinal in design and involved following participants over a period of 6 months, again using a comparison group. This study put forwards two main aims, firstly to assess the extent to which adoption represents a risk factor for insecure attachment in adulthood and secondly to investigate whether family experiences (with adoptive families and birth mothers), are likely to have an impact on negative working models. In relation to the first aim, Feeney Passmore and Peterson (2007) identified that as a result of early life experiences adult adoptees may have negative working models of attachment. Early experiences of adoptees were shown to bring with them the perceptions that the self is not worthy of love and attention and/or other people are unavailable, uncaring and rejecting. These can lead to a negative working model of attachment whereby the adoptee is not worthy of love and other people are not available to provide love. The results from this study suggest that insecure attachment may be more widespread amongst adoptees than among non-adoptees. Non-adoptees scored higher than adoptees on avoidance and anxiety. They were also over-represented in the insecure attachment categories, particularly the fearful style of attachment. This style is generally recognised as representing the most problematic pattern or working model as it involves negative perceptions of self-worth and the fear of others not being available and responsive in times of need (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991).

With regards to the second aim of the study, Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2007) investigated both the experience of search and reunion and the nature of adoptive family relationships. They identified that these two areas of relationships impacted on perceptions of acceptance and rejection, which may shape the working models of self. In summary Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2007) conclude that adoption may represent a risk factor for relational difficulties in later life, specifically with family relationships. Risks were also identified as a result of general perceptions of intimacy and belonging and the adoptees reactivity to relational stressors. The amount of variance as a result of the adoptive status was small though (7%). Adoptive status appeared to lead to increased perceptions of loneliness, but this was seen to be greater in younger than older adults which Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2007) suggest could be a result of natural maturation or of increased relational experience, leading to increased social connections. The

results from the study by Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2007) clearly indicated that attachment security was not a function of adoptive status alone and that parental bonds seen as very important with perceptions of parental care and affection from adoptive parents, may be more important than adoptive status. This study provides evidence of the importance of the relational aspects of the adoptee's life throughout the lifespan, both the relationships with adoptive parents and reunions with birth mothers.

The complex nature of the relationship between attachment and adoption is further demonstrated by the findings in the study by Feeney Passmore and Peterson (2007) regarding reunion with birth mothers. Where contact had been made, dissatisfaction with this reunion was associated with higher levels of avoidance and anxiety. This raises the question of whether anxiety colours reports of the reunion experience, or whether the anxious style of attachment causes the relationship with the birth mother to be unsatisfactory. One significant feature of the picture of the impact of adoption on attachment, is the impact as experienced by the adoptive parents. With the recognition that attachment is a two-way process, the question needs to be asked *in what way does the adoptive child not being born to the adoptive parents' impact on the adoptive parent's ability to bond with the child?* This question assumes particular relevance when the issue of contact with birth parents, or open adoption is also considered. Triseliotis (1991) states that questions need to be asked about whether an adoptive parent can successfully parent a child and develop deep attachments to it without what he describes as a feeling of *entitlement*. In practice terms, this would more often be described as the adoptive parent *claiming* the child. Though some studies have shown that many adoptive parents are sympathetic towards the birth parents, they felt that they were unable to cope with the complex emotional demands of contact between their adoptive child and the birth family (Lambert et al 1989). Tizard (1977) put forwards the view that the concept of being *entitled*, may in fact come from a need to be in charge, secure and *in control*. Triseliotis (1991) puts forwards the view that this need to feel a sense of belonging and to be legally secure is also of importance to adopted children and that being legally secure and feeling a sense of belonging to the adoptive family and

at the same time maintaining some form of contact are not contradictory or mutually exclusive (Triseliotis 1991).

Along with other theorists, Triseliotis (1991) recognised that the relationship between adoption and attachment is worthy of investigation given that the maintenance of meaningful links with birth families, however arranged, appear to be beneficial to children, their sense of identity and self-esteem. Studies regarding attachment and adult adoptees though are few in number, and at present perhaps ask more questions than they answer. What is presented through the literature is a complex picture of experiences specific to adoptees interwoven with numerous other life experiences, which may or may not be related to the adoptive status.

2.3.8 Conclusion

One of the most significant issues to emerge from the literature is that adoptees are not a homogenous group. Issues such as emotional and psychological well-being, reunion, searching and attachment are interrelated. What is evident is that researchers and practitioners alike need to be attuned to the unique narratives of individuals and exercise caution in terms of over-pathologising or under-pathologising the issue. Alongside this, a number of methodological concerns have been raised regarding research in the field of adoption with sample sizes being frequently small and cross-sectional research design being most commonly used. It is important though that the value of exploratory research is not dismissed (Crosby et al 2009; Bryman 2000). The literature discussed in this chapter presents a mixed picture of the impact of the adoptive experience on individuals as well as differing motivations for, and experiences of, search and reunion. One of the more significant studies, that of Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle (2005) provides more conclusive findings regarding the positive outcomes of search and reunion for adult adoptees. The impact on a person's sense of belonging and through this, on their identity formation are key areas taken forwards in this grounded theory as they resonate with the narratives provided by the respondents in this study.

2.4 An Engagement with Extant Theory – Towards Theoretical Sensitivity and Transparency

Charmaz's position on the use of extant theory is in line with her position taken with regard to engagement with the Literature (Charmaz 2006). Charmaz states that engaging with relevant theoretical concepts and areas of knowledge throughout the research process enables the demonstration of transparency regarding knowledge that the researcher has already been exposed to. Consideration of extant theory throughout the research process also enables the researcher to become increasingly sensitised to the conceptual elements of the data as they emerge. Kelle (2007) stresses the importance of previous theoretical knowledge being based on a sound methodological and epistemological framework which enables researchers to distinguish between theoretical perspectives that force the data and perspectives that can be drawn on to support the emergence of new categories. Charmaz (2014) recognises the potential danger of using extant theoretical concepts as starting points for the inquiry and suggests that the researcher should be mindful of bringing pre-conceived ideas into the study. However, exposure to these sources of information if handled correctly, rather than being problematic and something to be avoided, should be actively encouraged. In CGTM, the resulting theory
...depends on the researcher's view; it
does not and cannot stand outside of it
(Charmaz 2014, p239).

This approach is particularly pertinent to this thesis as is explained in the acknowledgement of my positionality in relation to the inquiry, alongside the epistemological and methodological position adopted. This section of the thesis therefore sets out to identify and discuss relevant theoretical frameworks and concepts in order to provide context to the previous engagement with literature and for consideration alongside the data gathered from interviews drawing on the principles of abductive analysis.

2.4.1 An Introduction to Significant Areas of Extant Theory

In the initial stages of this inquiry, a broad range of extant theory was considered and explored. However, subsequent to the initial stages of data collection and analysis, it became apparent that there were two main areas of theory that had particular relevance for this study, those of identity and attachment. These are concepts that have been widely written about, but

this chapter sets out to extrapolate that which is most relevant to this study, examining fundamental key concepts as well as more recent and particular understandings. The aim of this chapter is therefore to provide a *bespoke* narrative on these two areas of theory that is intrinsically linked to the main body of the study. Specific aspects of theory in relation to the data will be returned to in chapter 12.

2.4.2 Concepts of Identity

For any person the question *Who am I?* forms a central part of emotional and psychological well-being and affects all aspects of our life (Vignoles, Swartz and Luyckx 2011). The concept of identity has great significance in the study of adoption and many adopted persons report experiencing ongoing problems with identity (Korff and Grotevant 2011; Grotevant 1997). For those that have been adopted, both the questions and the answers regarding identity are complex and often problematic (Treacher and Katz 2000). As a starting point, traditional understandings of identity theory holds that we have both an individual and a social identity. In the literature the terms individual and personal identity are used interchangeably. For the purpose of this thesis, the term individual identity will be used. Social identity comes through the categories into which we fit and individual identity theory, through the roles that we hold. One of the major topics to be examined in this thesis will be the ways in which both of these domains have particular significance for the adoptee.

2.4.3 Individual Identity

Over the centuries philosophers have struggled to define individual identity. In his 1690 work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke proposed that one's individual identity only extends as far as their own consciousness. The consciousness that Locke refers to can be equated with memory and memory was therefore seen as a necessary condition of individual identity formation. This view of individual identity therefore suggests that we identify ourselves as persons by forming and operating with remembered autobiographical narratives (Fivush et al 2011). This internalised role sees the self as being disconnected and unique from the circumstances in which it operates (Marcia 1988). This approach to identity focuses on the internal structures of ego development. It is through these internal structures, which provide psychological filters that the individual is

able to interpret and give meaning to their life experience. Through the life course, the individual does not just add information gained through experiences but uses the experiences to change the basic meaning thereby forming structures themselves. New experiences are absorbed and incorporated into the individual's fundamental experience of themselves and their place in the world, while past events can be re-imagined and an individual's sense of who they are will evolve over time (Kroger 2002). These self-schemas can be organised in ways which are congruent and harmonious or fragmented and incongruent. A fragmented organisation of self-schemas will lead to a sense of internal chaos and a loss of emotional governance and regulation (Horowitz 2012).

2.4.4 Social Identity

The main body of current literature and research holds that there is also a social dimension to the concept of identity, which leads to our sense of who we are in the world in which we live. In opposition to individual identity theory, internal, intrapsychic processes are not seen as the primary force in shaping our identity, but it is the culturally and socially contextual processes that have the greatest impact (Jacobson 1997). Social Identity theory holds that we identify with what we do and also our roles in society (Hogg, Terry and White 1995). Identity is also constructed through social interaction through which we receive guidance regarding our and other's behaviours and the relationships that we form are reciprocal and negotiated (Billig, Abrams and Hogg 1991). Such socio-cultural approaches emphasise not just the social context but the ways in which people's identity is dictated and ascribed by others. Social identity theory holds that our identity is formed as a result of belonging to a social group (Hogg and Reid 2006). An important aspect of social identity theory is the concept of self-categorisation (Turner et al 1976). The social category or group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification. They view themselves as members of the same social category. The consequence of this self-categorisation is an emphasis on the perceived differences between the self and the *out group*. Identification with *in-group* characteristics and distinction from those that are seen as *other* requires a sense of continuity whereby there is a need to incorporate historical knowledge which includes both biological and cultural origins (Billig, Abrams and Hogg 1991).

2.4.5 The Impact of Culture on Identity

As already discussed, social identity has often been conceptualised as a sense of identification with, or attachment to, a group that one is a member of, as distinct from those that are out with the group or *others* (Hogg and Reid 2006). It has been demonstrated that a single distinctive criterion can be sufficient to create a basic interpretation of a social group. Viewing social groups in such one-dimensional terms though leaves our interpretation as being culturally empty. Even within the boundaries of social groups are in-trait attributes that reflect cultural identity. These attributes reflect values as guiding principles, meaningful symbols and lifestyles that individuals share with others. These attributes do not necessarily lead to recognisable groups in themselves (Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett and Ybarra 2000).

This position was previously examined by Cote (1996) who put forwards the view that culture and identity are inter-related. He proposed that these two dimensions of identity can be understood using three levels of analysis, the macro, micro and psychological concepts of *identity capital*. He described identity capital as a collection of personal assets from which we build ourselves over time. Through this framework, macro-sociological factors are linked with micro-interactional and individual psychological factors. This framework is known as the culture identity link. Cote (1996) holds the view that the three levels are inter-related and can be seen in terms of the social structure, interaction and personality. Cote (1996) also put forwards the proposition that social identity formation is impacted by the historical context whereby it tends to be ascribed in pre-modern societies, achieved in early modern societies and managed in late-modern ones. There is clear relevance here in terms of the historical period during which those who have been adopted started their adoptive journey and the historical period that they live in now (Baumeister and Muraven 1996; Cote 1996).

2.4.6 Erik Erikson – The Modern Day Father of Identity

Any discussion on the concept of identity would be remiss if it did not include the work of Erik Erikson. Though critiqued by many, Erikson's psycho-social theory of personality development and identity has served for many years as a useful frame of reference to interpret individual experiences in the context of identity development and to negotiate the meaning, purpose and direction of life (Berzonsky 2005, 2003; Erikson 1978)). Through his

developmental framework, Erikson brought together the individual and social domains through consideration of the interrelatedness of social structures and demands and individual internal forces of development which are expressed through a series of identifiable stages (Erikson 1978). Central to Erikson's theory is the concept of ego identity whereby the conscious sense of self develops through social interaction. He saw ego identity as constantly changing due to new experiences and information that we gather through our interaction with others. Erikson proceeded to describe how identity is shaped by the interaction of three elements: biological characteristics, unique psychological needs and the cultural milieu in which one resides. The challenges at each of the eight stages of development that he identified can help further develop or hinder this development of personality. For Erikson, self-esteem and identity development were inextricably linked. Erikson argued that at the end of each major *crisis*, self-esteem is developed if a positive outcome has been achieved. This enables an individual to have confidence that they are moving towards a tangible and fulfilling future and that the personality that is developing is formulated in a social reality that is understood (Stryker and Burke 2000).

Waterman's (1999) commentary and explanation of Erikson describes a continuum with respect to identity through the eight stages of development. For example, the first stage of basic trust versus basic mistrust encompasses *syntonic* to *systolic* poles within which there is a continuum from identity certainty and coherence (*syntonic*) to identity diffusion (*dystonic*). To be closer on the continuum to the *syntonic* pole brings about a greater sense of psychological well-being and significantly a better foundation for subsequent epigenetic development. Post adolescence though, Erikson believed that there is an increased sense of continuity throughout the remainder of life's stages and multiple contexts (Erikson 1978).

2.4.7 Further Examination of the Relationship Between Social and Individual Features of Identity Theory

Traditional studies and theories regarding the concept of identity tended to focus on the differences between the concepts of individual and social identity theories. A substantial body of work now exists though that

examines the ways in which they are interrelated, with a focus more on the process of identity formation and issues of continuity and salience across the different domains.

Stets and Burke (2000) advance the idea that any differences in the concepts of individual and social identity are more to do with emphasis than the fundamental aspects of the concepts themselves. They present the idea that the aim of the individual identity process is to understand and accept who one is, and the aim of the social identity process is to understand and accept what one does, therefore *being* and *doing* are both being central features of one's identity. The theory put forwards by Stets and Burke (2000) states that these domains attend to both macro and micro processes involving self-categorisation and social comparison.

2.4.8 The Process of Identity Formation - Self Determination

For the past five decades, most investigators of the process of identity formation have been conceptualised in terms of Marcia's (1966) status model. This work focuses on social-cognitive processes that an individual's identity formation are classified within. Central to Marcia's status model is the identification of different status categories (see diagram 1). Different status categories are drawn on when individuals need to process self relevant information, negotiate identity issues and make personal decisions (Berzonsky and Papini 2015). The three identity processing styles identified are: diffuse-avoidant, informational and normative. A diffuse-avoidant style is characterised by an individual procrastinating and avoiding making decisions. The informational style involves actively seeking out, evaluating, and making use of self-relevant information and the normative identity style involves conforming to the expectations of significant others. The primary focus is on defending and preserving the existing identity structure and maintaining the status quo. The informational identity style has particular relevance for this inquiry as it involves individuals negotiating their construction of identity by engaging in active seeking, processing, evaluating, and selective utilisation of self-relevant information (Marcia 1966.) With this identity style, self-constructions are tested and revised when confronted with information from another perspective (Berzonsky and Adams 1999; Nurmi et al 1997; Berzonsky and Sullivan 1992).

The theoretical framework developed by Marcia (1964) focused on two elements involved in the development of a person’s sense of identity:

1. The search or exploration of alternative potential identity elements; and
2. The forming of a potentially durable commitment to some subset of the identity alternatives being considered and negotiated.

Diagram 1 - The diagram below illustrates Marcia’s identity paradigm of exploration and commitment (Marcia 1966).

	COMMITMENT	NO COMMITMENT
EXPLORATION	Achievement - the state of having developed well-defined personal values and self-concepts. Their identities may be expanded and further defined in adulthood, but the basics are there. They are committed to an ideology and have a strong sense of ego identity.	Moratorium – adolescent has acquired vague or ill-formed ideological and occupational commitments, he/she is still undergoing the identity search/crisis. They have not fully committed to an identity but are still developing it.
NO EXPLORATION	Foreclosure - means that the adolescent blindly accepts the identity and values were given in childhood by families and significant others. The adolescent’s identity is foreclosed until they determine for themselves their true identity. The adolescent in this state is committed to an identity but not as a result of their own searching or crisis.	Identity Diffusion - the state of having no clear idea of one’s identity and making no attempt to find that identity. These adolescents may have struggled to find their identity, but they never resolved it, and they seem to have stopped trying. There is no commitment and no searching.

Marcia’s identity-status paradigm considers the two dimensions of identity crisis: choice or exploration (choosing alternative occupations and beliefs) and commitment (personal investment in an occupation or belief) (Berzonsky and Adams 1999). Marcia proposed ego identity as not being a *once and for all* phenomenon. He viewed it as a dynamic process with no end or fixed point. It is through the identity status paradigm that Marcia contended that a person’s individual progress through the phases of identity formation could be tracked through the two phases or developmental tasks of exploration and commitment (Kroger 2002; Marcia 1966).

Though Marcia discusses identity formation as a process affected by sociocultural influences, he emphasised the significance of internal drives, explaining that

Self-constructed, dynamic organisation of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history, sometimes appear to put much of the developmental responsibility upon the individual, and despite it occurring in a cultural context, the environment is passive in relation to the internal drives (Marcia 1980 p.160-161).

These two elements are also central to Erikson's work on identity. The early observations of Marcia (1964) regarding the 4-fold identity typology are not referred to in Erikson's writings but essentially lay the groundwork for Erikson's theoretical framework and though published prior to the seminal work of Erikson, can be seen as adding to the developmental framework already discussed. In addition to developing a 4-fold typology, Marcia also developed the identity status interview, which was essentially an operational development. Marcia (1966) focused primarily on the domains of occupation and ideology. Subsequent theorists have added the domains of gender roles, attitudes towards sexuality, perspectives on marriage and parenting (Archer and Marcia 1993). Marcia was selective in his review and development of Erikson's work with a focus on exploration (crisis) and commitment. Continuing the debate, Waterman (1999) questions whether any one aspect of the identity construct is more central than others or, in fact, whether continuity is more important than considerations of exploration and commitment.

2.4.9 The Role of Narrative in the Process of Identity Formation

A significant feature of identity theory is focused on identity statuses that involve the assessment of current conceptions and of exploration that will lead to future commitments. In contrast, narrative identity theorists have primarily focused on reconstructions of past events. Within this process is the development of our autobiographical selves. Our autobiographical narratives give a sense of self and others as we link the past, the present and the future which brings coherence to our lives. The use of a narrative approach in the field of identity studies is seen as both a tool used to examine identity development as well as the vehicle by which identity is

constructed (Dunbar and Grotevant 2004; McAdams 1993). Narrative approaches focus on the importance of developing a sense of personal coherence and continuity via the construction of a life story (Chandler et al 2003; Fivush 2001; Habermas and Bluck 2000; McAdams 1988, 1993).

McLean (2010) identifies the processes of meaning making through narrative work as involving the degree to which people can connect past events to the self, and the understanding of the self that is developed through reflecting on the past. Past behaviours and interactions serve as markers of autonomy and connectedness and predict important aspects of identity. It is through the process of narrative that individuals are able to make meaning out of these interactions and to incorporate them into their identity.

There is a significant body of work on adult narratives showing that those adults who are able to make meaning of past events have better outcomes in terms of self-esteem, depression, psychological well-being, physical health, psychological maturity, and life satisfaction (Pals 2006; Bauer, McAdams and Sakeda 2005; Bauer and McAdams 2004; Pals and McAdams 2004; McAdams et al 2001). Much of this research has focused on challenging and disruptive life events, and research has shown that the ability to engage narrative processes to manage and resolve negative experiences is significant in the achievement or maintenance positive functioning (Breen and McLean 2009; Pals and McAdams 2004; King 2001).

2.5 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is a very specific term with specific meanings, underpinned by an ever-increasing body of knowledge and research. John Bowlby first proposed the idea in his trilogy of books, entitled *Attachment and Loss* (Bowlby 1969, 1973, 1980). Bowlby developed the theory that infants developed relational patterns based on the quality of interactions that they have with their caregiver. The importance and impact of this body of work cannot be overestimated, particularly within the field of social work and more specifically that of adoption. Through these first interactions, children develop a sense of self in relation to others and this results in future expectations regarding the support and nurture that they can expect to receive in times of need (Gibson and Gibson 2016). The concept of the

secure base underpins this theoretical model, with the understanding that having a secure base is vital to developing a sense of trust in self and others (Holmes 2014; Bowlby 2012; Holmes 1993). This enables children to gain confidence and to explore the world around them. When there is a sense of threat experienced, thoughts and behaviour regarding proximity to attachment figures are triggered (Gibson and Gibson 2016; Bowlby 1951). The quality of early significant relationships leads to a recognition that attachment styles were either secure or insecure. Secure attachment styles are indicative of healthy interpersonal styles whereas insecure attachment styles, both anxious and avoidant, are indicative of less healthy interpersonal relationships and poorer emotional and psychological well-being. (Ainsworth 2015; Levy and Blatt 1999; Ainsworth et al 1978). Insecure attachment styles serve a purpose though in ensuring that needs are met in whatever way possible (Gibson and Gibson 2016; Goodman 2013).

Underpinning attachment theory is the concept of *mutuality*, the two-way interaction between child and caregiver (Bowlby 1980, 1973, 1969). The relationship between the two is based on much more than the physiological needs of the child (Gibson and Gibson 2016). Spitz (1945) first identified that it was the *quality* of these early relationships that impacted on both psychological and physical development rather than the physical environment in which the child is cared for. It is through these first interactions that children develop a sense of self in relation to others and this results in future expectations regarding the support and nurture that they can expect to receive in times of need (Rutter 1991). Alongside the concept of mutuality, the concept of the *secure base* underpins this theoretical model, with the understanding that having a secure base is vital to developing a sense of trust in self and others (Gibson and Gibson 2016; Bowlby 2012; Schofield and Beek 2005). Bowlby identified the two key facets in the development of secure attachments, that being that the self is worthy of love and attention, and that others are viewed as warm and responsive (Bowlby 1973). The development of a secure attachment enables children to gain confidence and to explore the world around them (Ainsworth et al 1978). When there is a sense of threat experienced,

thoughts and behaviour regarding proximity to attachment figures are triggered (Rutter 1991).

These attachment relationships help people to anticipate events and the reactions of others (Rutter 1991). From the experiences of attachment relationships, a person develops a *blueprint* for life, what Bowlby describes as an *internal working model* (Bowlby 1969). This is described by Bowlby as a mental representation of our relationship with our primary care giver that becomes a template for future relationships and allows individuals to predict and control their environment in an attempt to ensure that their needs are met (Bowlby 2012, 1969). Bowlby further identified that even when relationships are damaging or not meeting the needs of the child, the relationship with the caregiver remains highly significant with strong biological and psychological drives to maintain the relationship. Understanding and researching these early relationships, including those that are pre-memory, has led to a major shift in childcare policy and practice over the last 30 years, particularly in the fields of fostering and adoption.

Studies have shown that these attachment styles are carried forwards into adult life and manifest as adult attachment styles (Holmes 2014; Bifulco and Thomas 2013; Howe 2011; Fonagy 2004). Further studies have shown that despite this continuation of attachment styles into adulthood, they have the potential to change, specifically insecure attachment styles can become secure through the formation of trusting and secure adult relationships (Bifulco and Thomas 2012; Paley et al 1999; Pearson et al 1994). Given the focus of this inquiry, it is the format and maintenance of adult attachment styles, their implications for emotional and psychological well-being and future attachment relationships that are identified as having specific relevance.

2.5.1 The Relationship Between Childhood Experiences and Adult Attachment

The interplay between childhood and adult attachment styles and behaviour is complex. In very simplistic terms, securely attached adults tend to raise securely attached children and similarly parents with insecure attachment experiences tend to raise children with a similar attachment style (Smith et al 2016). As explained previously one of Bowlby's key observations was

that the strength of an attachment bond is unrelated to the quality of the attachment relationship (Gibson and Gibson 2016; Henderson et al 2005). A child that experiences a secure and consistent relationship with a primary care giver will form an internal working model that leads them to develop trust in themselves, in others and in the wider world. Similarly, a child that experiences an abusive relationship with their caregiver can retain a strong attachment and need for proximity to an abusing parent. This may ultimately result in adult abusive relationships having resonance with the internal working model of the adult bringing about patterns of strong attachments to abusive partners (Bowlby 1973; Bowlby and Fry 1953). Bowlby (1973) explains that this is in part because both threat and fear activate the attachment system which can serve to strengthen the attachment bonds, even when it is the attachment figure that is the source of threat. The prospect of leaving an abusive partnership can therefore be hampered by the strength of attachment present but also by an expectation of similar abusive treatment in subsequent relationships (Bifulco and Thomas 2012). There is an increasing body of longitudinal research that has confirmed the presence of a relationship between insecure attachment in infancy and later deficits in social and emotional competence during childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Sounders 2011; Thompson 2008; Sroufe 2005; Roisman 2002). In addition, studies have also shown that socio-economic, intergenerational, household dysfunction and psychological factors may also impact on the development and maintenance of adult attachment patterns (Smith et al 2016).

2.5.2 Adult Attachment Styles

Attachment styles are observed to become the foundation for later social competence and confidence and secure attachment styles have been associated with improved emotional self-regulation and self-reflective capacities by increasing the capacity to manage difficult and challenging events in life (Stein et al 2002; Fonagy 2001).

When considering insecure adult attachments, two main dimensions have been observed, attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991; Hazan and Shaver 1987). These two dimensions can be combined to form four regions that represent four styles of adult attachment: *Secure, pre-occupied, dismissive and fearful*

(Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991; Bartholomew 1990). Theorists have suggested that the concept of two continuous variables is more helpful in understanding attachment than the four discrete categories, as use of the four categories can lead to an overly simplistic and fixed view of observed attachment behaviour (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991; Hazan and Shaver 1987). When adults are faced with stressful situations, those with secure attachments will draw on the positive elements of their internal working model (Gibson and Gibson 2016; Bretherton 1999). Through this they have trust in themselves, the world and people around them, they are able to view the world as reasonably predictable and do not see negative situations as a reflection of their own worth (Bretherton 1999). When experiencing stressful events, those with insecure attachments will trigger associated events that in the past were drawn on to ensure that their needs were met (Gibson and Gibson 2012; Bretherton 1999). They do not assume that others can be relied on. Attachment and anxiety have also been found to be associated with worry (Carmel et al 2017). Worry is defined as a cognitive phenomenon reflecting negative, recurrent thoughts concerning the future, which lead to feelings of anxiety. Worry brings about an intolerance of uncertainty and it can affect how a person perceives, interprets and responds to uncertainties at behavioural, cognitive and emotional levels (Buhr and Dugas 2006; Ladouceur, Talbot and Dugas 1997). Excessive worry has been associated with psychological distress and poor quality of life (Dugas, Swartz and Francis 2004). In particular, Ladouceur, Talbot and Dugas (1997) observed that social interactions can be particularly problematic for people with an intolerance of uncertainty as such situations are often ambiguous and outcomes uncertain (Carmel et al 2017).

The perception of the self is also viewed as a part of an individual's internal working model and one that is directly connected to that governing attachment style and perception of others (Bretherton 1999). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) identified the styles most related to positive or negative views of self or others. Within this scheme, the fearful attachment style has a negative perception of both self and others, with anxious attachment style displayed through a negative view of self alone and an avoidant attachment having a negative view of others alone (Bifulco and

Thomas 2013). Conversely, secure attachments result in positive views of self and others (Bifulco and Thomas 2013).

Insecure attachment styles in adults have been found to be associated with low self-esteem (Doinita 2015; Passanisi et al 2015). Negative evaluation of self is indicated in being highly related to the onset of depression (Brown 1986; Brown et al 1986). This is a particular risk when coupled with a high level of stress (Suzuki and Tomado 2015). Low levels of self-esteem are linked closely to the self-concept that an individual has. When others respond positively to an individual, it suggests that they are valued and loveable. Where responses are less consistently positive, or negative, an individual may draw the conclusion that they are not worthy of love and are not valued (Bylzma, Cozzarelli and Sumer 1997).

2.5.3 The Impact of Attachment on Adult Relationships

The ability to make close supportive relationships in adult life is a critical task of attachment (Bifulco and Thomas 2012). This has relevance to not just partner relationships, but also friendships and adult relationships with the *original family*. The formation and maintenance of adult attachment relationships is highly complex, in some ways more complex than that of childhood attachment due to the potential for continuity with childhood attachment styles alongside the potential for adaptations and external factors that can impact on the manner in which an adult acts in times of stress and the relationships that they may seek out (Bartholomew 1994).

A key concept of adult attachment theory is that an insecure style will impede the ability to make supportive, close relationships in adult life (Bifulco and Thomas 2012). Distortions of the internal working models developed from childhood inform expectations of mistrust, rejection, hostility or unreliability of other people (Bartholomew 1990). These internal working models influence the individual's perception of others and exist in tandem with the internal working model of the self. The experience and internalisation of worry leads to further activation of the attachment system, which triggers the use of proximity-seeking strategies, similar to those seen in young children (Bartholomew 1990). For individuals with high attachment anxiety this may involve the use of hyperactivating strategies whereby an

individual becomes hypervigilant regarding perceived threat and attachment related cues. The impact on the individual is that they feel the need to constantly seek reassurance and close proximity with significant others (Shaver and Mikulincer 2004; Mikulincer and Erev 1991). Such behaviour may bring about the opposite response to that which is desired, with the outcome of having a negative impact on their relationships therefore creating a vicious circle of the maintenance of attachment-related distress and worry (Shaver and Mikulincer 2004).

An observation of insecurely attached adults is that they are prone to denying their own needs for attachment and may project their unsafe feelings on to others, perceiving others to be untrustworthy. Adults with insecure attachment patterns have been observed to worry about being abandoned, which may limit their ability to form secure attachments (Mikulincer, Shaver and Pereg 2003). As a consequence, such attachment difficulties are associated with significant distress and a variety of psychological difficulties (Mikulincer and Shaver 2012). Unlike children, adults do not require daily contact for their relationship to confer security. The secure adult can hold feelings of security internally in the knowledge that the attachment figure is available if needed (Bifulco and Thomas 2012). To be truly a supportive relationship though, the attachment figure needs to be available when any perceived threat or feelings of fear are genuinely felt. Adults need to be able to draw on *behavioural evidence*, which arise from genuine behavioural responses that have previously been exhibited in times of need (Bifulco and Thomas 2012).

Numerous studies have identified that individuals with insecure attachment styles often have poor marital functioning, poor communication and poor skills in problem solving. This is demonstrated through low flexibility and reciprocity in confiding in others and low support-seeking in situations where there is experienced increased anxiety (Mikulincer and Nachson 1991). Though these studies are significant in terms of identifying links between insecure attachment styles and adult relationships, it is recognised that other factors, such as partner behaviour, addictions and mental health issues may also have a significant impact on adult relationships (Bifulco and Thomas 2012). However, the presence of an insecure attachment style is

more likely to escalate stress through lack of mutual support, poor emotional relation and poor coping strategies (Bifulco and Thomas 2012).

Brown, Bifulco and Harris (1987) go on to explore the potential consequences of poor support from partners or significant others as being a vulnerability to major depression. They put forwards the view that deficiencies in support from close relationships, brings about reduced resistance to the impact of major stresses and hastens episodes of depressive disorders. This is seen to work through two identifiable routes: first the longer-term erosion of self-esteem through the ongoing lack of close supportive others, and second through the acute lack of support at the time of crisis, which is correlated with reduced coping opportunities (Brown, Bifulco and Andrews 1990; Brown, Bifulco and Harris 1987).

2.5.4 Continuity and Change in Adult Attachment Styles – The Concept of Earned Secure Attachment

According to Bowlby (1973), people tend to assimilate ongoing experiences into the working models that they already developed. Bowlby also believed though that working models can be responsive to ongoing relational experiences. If experiences in adult life sufficiently challenge an individual's expectations, those experiences have the potential to lead to changes in attachment behaviour (Cozzarelli et al 2003). Events such as major life transitions also have the potential to expose people to new information and experiences. Through this, opportunities are created for core beliefs and assumptions to be challenged. Such experiences may lead an individual to reflect upon or re-evaluate the assumptions that they hold about themselves, their partners and other relationships. Less anticipated events such as war-related trauma have also been demonstrated to have the potential to lead to long-term changes in attachment styles with accompanying pathogenetic effects (Fraley, Gillath and Deboeck 2020).

Following on from the ideas put forwards by Bowlby regarding the adjustment of internal working models in adult years, research has been conducted on the concept of *earned security*. Research on earned security was first conducted by Pearson et al (1994). This attachment pattern was viewed as being exhibited by individuals who had experienced harmful parenting experiences and who had been able to break the intergenerational

cycle and earn security. Saunders et al (2011) in their longitudinal study in Austen, America, explored the possible pathways to achieving earned security. They examined the role of alternative support figures and therapy in predicting whether individuals who self-identified as having adverse childhood experiences and insecure attachment patterns were subsequently identified as insecure or earned secure adults. They identified that emotional support from an alternative support figure was far more important than receiving what is described as instrumental support in predicting women's abilities to overcome memories of negative relationships with parents (Saunders et al 2011). These earned secure adults were more likely than insecure adults to feel that their alternative support figures would be available to care for them when needed, to be responsive and available. Data from this study further suggested that the quality of support received from alternative supportive relationships is more important than the number of supportive relationships available. The results of the study identified that supportive relationships from both within and out with the family can offer support that can lead to earned security (Saunders et al).

The findings from the study conducted by Saunders et al (2011) support the idea that therapy can help insecure adults to reframe negative childhood experiences. The experience of receiving empathy and care in times of need, may lead to the development of a sense of trust and therefore the revision of the internal working model of attachment by ensuring that insecurely attached adults learn to engage in reflective functioning (Steele 2008). Adults who have experienced unloving and/or inconsistent parenting are enabled to reflect on their own internal states and those of others. Through this, they may gain insight into why their parents behaved as they did and an understanding that their own negative self-views came from feeling unloved (Main Hesse and Hesse 2011; Saunders et al 2011). Taylor et al (2014) expanded on this idea and identified that through therapy it has been observed that attachment related anxiety has a tendency to decrease, but that findings were less clear with regard to avoidance. However, research also demonstrates that retrospectively defined *earned secures* may still exhibit vulnerabilities in the form of depressive symptomatology similar to those with insecure attachments (Roisman et al 2002; Pearson et al 1994). The rate of depressive symptomatology in the

earned-secure group suggests that reconstructions of past difficulties may remain emotional liabilities in times of stress despite a current secure working model (Pearson et al 1994).

2.5.6 Conclusion

It was evident from the very early stages of this inquiry that these two areas of theory had particular resonance for understanding of the lived experience of adult adoptees. The challenge in the early stages of the research was to avoid developing preconceived ideas with regard to their relationship with the data and potential theory development that did not emerge from the data itself. For this reason, links with theory and literature have generally been avoided at this stage of the thesis. Specific aspects of theoretical frameworks will be returned to in the development of the theory and its engagement with literature and extant theory in chapter 12.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

Having explored the rationale and the context of the thesis, this chapter will explore the methodological underpinnings of the research and explicate the process that led to the decision to adopt a Constructive Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM). Given my positionality in relation to the study, an ethnographic methodology was considered in the very early stages of the research. Ethnography was closely aligned to the methodological approach of this thesis because of its emphasis on its emic or insider perspective (Paillet 2012). However, it was discounted as though there were some elements of having an insider perspective in relation to the experience of adoption in that I am an adoptive parent, the specific area that I was drawn to investigate was not one that I had direct first-hand experience of. Phenomenology was another consideration but given that this is an area of inquiry that has not received a great deal of attention, the aim was to go beyond providing an account of the experiences of adult adoptees and to develop theory in this field of study. My positionality in relation to the inquiry also led me to adopt an approach that promoted co-construction of knowledge between myself and the participants.

The foundations of a constructive ontology and interpretative epistemology were adopted for this inquiry, drawing on principles of phenomenology and pragmatism. This research paradigm will be explained and defended, leading to a justification for the use of CGT. Following this, a critical discussion of CGTM and an exploration of the theoretical underpinning of symbolic interactionism is presented. This chapter will address issues of quality, rigour and transparency in relation to qualitative research and CGT in particular.

Prior to exploring the specific ontological and epistemological positions adopted for this inquiry, it is important to underline the case for setting out these positions and to highlight the importance of adopting a consistent approach with regard to epistemology, ontology, methodology and method. Though various approaches and positions were considered in the early stages of the research process, the need for methodological clarity became apparent to ensure rigour and transparency. This chapter sets out the process by which methodological decisions were arrived at. The discussion

presented in chapter 4 regarding my positionality in relation to the study has significance throughout all stages of the processes and decisions discussed here. This section is written in the first person as it relates directly to my perspective and relationship to the subject area. As explained in chapter 1, the key decisions for this thesis in terms of what to research, how to research and where to research were all driven by professional and personal curiosities.

3.1 Epistemological and Ontological Position

The foundations on which I have based my research are its ontological and epistemological position. In this exploration of methodological approaches, the intention is to clarify each part of the research paradigm including a brief explanation of its historical development and to then provide a rationale and justification for the chosen approach. A research paradigm is described by Jonker and Pennink (2010) as being a set of fundamental assumptions and beliefs that explains how the world is perceived, which then serves as a framework to guide the aim and process of the research study. It enables a justification of the theoretical assumptions and fundamental beliefs underpinning the research. The two main philosophical dimensions used to distinguish research paradigms are *ontology*, the nature of knowledge and *epistemology*, the development, understanding and use of that knowledge in a manner that is acceptable and valid (Mills, Bonner and Francis 2006; DeVault, Denzin and Lincoln 1995). In addition to these two philosophies, a further two basic beliefs guide the way in which reality can be investigated, namely axiology and methodology. The former is concerned with ethical considerations which provides guidance for the rules and values in the research. This includes my positionality in relation to the chosen subject and the model or models for the process of conducting the research in the context of the chosen paradigm.

The approach and design of the study falls within a naturalist paradigm, where the assumption is that reality is not fixed and can only be known indirectly through people's interpretations. There is therefore no one truth to be identified. Naturalistic inquiry is typically categorised by research that is undertaken in natural settings as opposed to a laboratory and from which there will be, as Lincoln, Guba and Pilotta (1985) describe, the tentative application of findings (DeVault, Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Within this

paradigm, real world situations or phenomena are examined as they unfold naturally and the researcher is looking for and exploring the existence of multiple constructed realities valuing complexity and context (Jones, Torres and Arminio 2013; Bowen 2008). The assumptions inherent in a naturalistic approach have provided guidance for the way in which the research is conducted, the role that I take as researcher and for the standards to be aimed for in evaluating the quality of the research. Without nominating a paradigm as the first step, there is no guidance or justification for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or analysis (Raths, Heller and Morrone 2004).

3.1.1 The Philosophical Foundations of Interpretivism and Constructivism

Within the naturalist paradigm, one school of thought is interpretivism. Constructivism and interpretivism share a general framework for human inquiry though differ in their understanding of the purpose and aim of social inquiry though differ in their understanding of the purpose and aim of social inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Swandt 1999). They are unique, however in the manner in which each answers the questions of what we are about when we inquire into the world of social agents and historical actors (Swandt 1998 p. 222).

Interpretivist thinking is built on ideas that emerged from the German tradition of hermeneutics and the *verstehen* tradition within sociology (Berg and Bruce 2007). This school of thought holds that the essence of understanding is learning what people make of the world around them and how they interpret various phenomena. The aim is to study subjective and context specific meanings. Dean (2018) depicts interpretivism as an umbrella term, which includes within it different schools of thought, including those drawing on phenomenology, hermeneutics, some aspects of critical theory along with symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology (Bryant and Charmaz 2019).

Historically, the origins of interpretivism can be traced back to the work of Kant (1724-1804) who set out to provide a foundation for all knowledge (Ryan 2018). Kant formulated the categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality as being equally applicable to all areas of inquiry. It was eighty years later that the German historian, Droysen (1808-1884) challenged

Kant by naming two types of knowledge: *Erklären* (explanation), and *verstehen* (understanding). In many ways, *verstehen* is an everyday process through which we make sense of verbal and non-verbal communication and behaviour. Taken to another level though it can be used as a data collection method, which is systematic, explicit and self-conscious (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007).

Another influential 19th Century thinker was Dilthey (1833-1911). Dilthey believed that human beings are not just biological creatures but are defined by their subjectivity. In a direct challenge to Kant, Dilthey developed his own categories, those of purpose, meaning and value. He positioned that it was through these categories, that the researcher could identify patterns that shape how humans both experience and make sense of the world (Tan, Wilson and Olver 2009).

Constructivism shares many of the concerns addressed by interpretivism, particularly with the interpretivist's emphasis on the world of experience as it is lived and experienced by social actors (Swandt 1999). The constructivist turn is in relation to objectivism, empirical realism, objective truth and essentialism (Cruikshank 2011; Swandt 1999). Swandt (1999) positions that constructivists are of the view that what we understand as objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. In this way, truth and knowledge are constructed, not discovered by the mind.

One of the complexities involved in developing an understanding of the interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm is brought to the fore by the task of extrapolating an understanding the difference between the terms *constructivism* and *constructionism*. In research literature they are often used interchangeably, despite there being identifiable, though subtle differences in their conceptual meanings. The difference lies in the idea that a constructivist paradigm views reality as constructed by the individual whereby there is an emphasis on phenomenology and on the individual's cognitive processes and viewpoints. The constructionist paradigm views reality as being constructed through interaction and through language (Charmaz 2008). In both concepts it is suggested that the world is constructed but constructivism assumes some bottom-line realities i.e. that

there exist cognitive processes and a conceptual framework, which enables the individual to construct the world. In contrast, constructivism makes no such bottom-line claims, and suggests that the concept of cognitive processes is itself a social construct. Charmaz, in her earlier work uses the term constructivist (Charmaz 2006) but by 2008 draws more on the concept of constructionism. For the purpose of this inquiry the term *constructivist* is used, as it aligns more closely to the interpretation of the way in which meaning is created.

3.1.2 The Relevance of Interpretivism and Constructivism to this Study

Given the nature and aims of the study, I have taken as a starting point an interpretivist approach. This is in recognition that there is no single reality regarding the experiences of adult adoptees. Instead, multiple realities are constructed and can be altered by the knower.

Interpretivists believe that reality is constructed by social actors and people's perceptions of it (Wahyuni 2012. p71).

The reality as adoptees see it and as they conveyed to myself as researcher, needs to be interpreted in the search for underlying meanings. Individuals come with their own diverse backgrounds, assumptions and experiences which contribute to the ongoing construction of reality as it exists in a broader social context (Wahyuni 2012). In terms of axiology, the interpretivist researcher takes the stance of the inside perspective. This entails studying the social reality by drawing on the experiences and values of both research participants and researchers (Wahyuni 2012). This position states that it is not possible to make objective statements about the real world because there is no such thing as the real world. The world is both socially and discursively constructed (Norman 2015; Carson et al 2001; Hudson and Ozanne 1988). The knowledge acquired during this inquiry is socially constructed and perceived rather than objectively determined (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). As the world is socially constructed, so too are the social phenomena of adoption and re-engagement as they have both a legal definition but are also social constructs with very individual experiences for each person.

3.1.3 The Double Hermeneutic - Resolving the Paradox

This account of the epistemological position taken identifies, as others have done, the unresolved tensions that interpretivists have in maintaining the opposition of objectivity and subjectivity, objectification and engagement (Timmons 1998). Traditionally, interpretivists have highlighted the importance of the real world, subjective experience, yet also sought to disengage from that experience and to objectify it. This has resulted in an ongoing struggle to draw a distinction between the object of investigation and the investigator. Traditional interpretivist research is therefore a paradox of how to develop an objective, interpretive science of subjective human experience (Moini 2011; Timmons 1998).

Contemporary interpretivists have taken different approaches to resolve this paradox. The response of most relevance to this inquiry is one which denies the opposition of subjectivity and objectivity by fully accepting the hermeneutical nature of existence (Milligan 2001). This interpretivist position assumes that the defining characteristics of an ontological hermeneutics is that *linguisticity* and *historicity* are essential to being human. That is, we do not just live out our lives in time and through language, rather, we are part of our history. The fact that language and history are both the condition and the limit of understanding is what makes the process of meaning construction hermeneutical (Milligan 2001).

Constructivists and interpretivists tend, overall, to focus on the processes by which these meanings are created, within a specific context of human action. Within such an interpretivist approach the participant's accounts of their experience cannot be examined by sheer recording and observation as it does not exist independently of my own interpretation. Nor is it possible to develop an understanding of the participants' worlds without dialogue and interactions throughout the research process (Wahyuni 2012).

3.1.4 The Impact of Pragmatism

As is the nature of most research, the epistemological position underpinning the inquiry does not always neatly sit within one research paradigm.

Alongside the epistemological underpinnings of interpretivism and constructivism, other research paradigms also have relevance. Within the methodological framework of grounded theory and abductive reasoning, the

epistemological position of pragmatism is of particular significance, being associated with action, intervention and constructive knowledge, features which are of particular use and relevance to this study. According to Wahyuni (2012), instead of questioning ontology and epistemology as the first step, researchers working within a pragmatist paradigm, are advised to begin with a research question to determine the most appropriate research framework. Within a pragmatist framework research philosophy is viewed as a continuum rather than a specific option. Within this reflexive paradigm, pragmatists believe that objectivist and subjectivist perspectives are not mutually exclusive and a mixture of ontology, epistemology and axiology is acceptable when trying to understand particular social phenomena. The emphasis instead is on what works best at different stages of the research process.

There is a strong case to support the argument that pragmatism as a research paradigm lends itself to the use of a mix of different research methods, modes of analysis, specifically that of abductive analysis. It also has as a central aim the production of socially useful knowledge (Feilzer 2009). Along with interpretivists/constructivists, pragmatists hold the position that research does not necessarily need to accurately represent reality for it to be useful. The primary aim of pragmatism is to interrogate a particular question, theory or phenomenon with the most appropriate research method (Rodopi 2012). Feilzer (2009) states that this raises questions about the concept of utility and how it can be defined. He argues that the notion of utility calls for reflexive research practice. Questions of *What is it for?* and *Who is it for?* need to be answered, rather than the focus being on an attempt to *mirror reality* (Feilzer 2009 p. 8).

Morgan (2014) warns against the tendency to understand pragmatism as focusing on the practical rather than the philosophical aspects of the paradigm. He argues for a broader application of pragmatism than is often presented and proposes a move away from the overly simplistic question of *what works*. Though pragmatism is often allied closely to mixed methods research, Morgan argues that pragmatism can serve as a philosophical paradigm for social research regardless of whether the research is quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. As a paradigm in its own right, Morgan argues that pragmatism brings with it a philosophical system,

alongside practicality for issues such as research design (Morgan 2014). Morgan's position is further clarified by Denzin (2012) who proposed that classical pragmatism is not a methodology per se. It is instead a doctrine of meaning, a theory of truth (Denzin 2012 p 81). Underpinning this understanding is the argument that the meaning of an event cannot be given in advance of the experience (Denzin 2012).

This position puts forwards pragmatism as a philosophy that goes beyond problem solving, though one of the many functions of the approach is the analysis of problem solving as a research activity. This position leads us back to the work of John Dewey and his work on the concept of inquiry (Johnston 2008). Dewey sought to explain and develop the concept of pragmatism by re-orientating philosophy away from abstract concerns and looked instead at focusing on human experience (Dewey 1997). According to Dewey, experience is built around two questions: *What are the sources of our beliefs?* and *What are the meanings of our actions?* He argued that experiences create meaning by bringing beliefs and actions together. According to Dewey (1997), experiences always involve a process of interpretation with inquiry being a process of self-conscious decision making as opposed to a sub-conscious or unconscious habit. This brings with it a need for careful reflection as experiences take place within a specific context. This emphasis on context entails the ability to draw on our prior experience, historically and culturally located, to predict the outcome of current action. In essence, Dewey viewed research as a form of inquiry that is performed more carefully and more self-consciously than everyday inquiry. He argued against the tendency to confuse inquiry with a purely rational process of logical reasoning and believed that emotions, preferences and experiences are central to the process. According to Miettinen (2010) Dewey,

asserts that hypotheses are drawn from observations, from the hypothesis and conceptions that directed the observations and, if necessary, from the totally new cultural resources and conceptions that are mobilized to interpret the observation data (Miettinen 2010 p. 64)

Pragmatism, in many ways is therefore a commitment to uncertainty and an acknowledgement that any knowledge produced through research is

relative. It brings with it an understanding that relationships, structures and events that follow distinguishable patterns are subject to change. The relevance of adopting a pragmatic research paradigm in a study such as this which draws heavily on abductive analysis, is consistent with a constructive grounded theory methodology, as illustrated through the following quote from Feilzer (2010 p.14)

...the acknowledgement of the unpredictable human element forces pragmatic researchers to be flexible and open to the emergence of unexpected data... pragmatism reminds researchers of their *duty* to be curious and adaptable.

3.1.5 Summary

The identified research paradigm of interpretivism and constructivism and constructive grounded theory methodology facilitates and drives this study. This study set out to explore the experiences of adult adoptees who re-engage with birth families, to enter their world and with them to explore their experiences of being adopted and of the process of re-engagement. The research paradigm identified allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomena and the process of re-engagement, exploring through active and reflexive processes, with the role of myself, as researcher, being central to the process of investigation.

3.2 Methodological Considerations: A Justification of Constructive Grounded Theory

A range of methodological options were available within the research paradigm discussed above. Through consideration of the two main key drivers, to seek to impact directly on practice and policy and to give a voice to adult adoptees, the available options were narrowed to two, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Constructive Grounded Theory. The aim of phenomenology is to focus solely on the lived experience of the phenomena being studied. Though this focus on the lived experience would be of value in giving voice to the participants, this inquiry sought to expand on theoretical understandings of the experiences of adult adoptees. For CGTM the concern is to develop an explanatory theory, co-constructed with myself as researcher, of the social process, informed by the lived experience of the participants. Within phenomenology, the only legitimate

source of information is the views and experiences of the participants, whereas CGTM has potentially multiple sources of data. After careful consideration, the primary methodology adopted was CGT, though alongside this, concepts and principles inherent within phenomenology were utilised to retain focus on the lived experience of the participants.

3.3 The Phenomenological Attitude

This study has adopted what Finlay (2008) refer to as a *phenomenological attitude*. Adopting a phenomenological attitude or approach to the research offered much to both myself and participants within this study. This element of duality was of central importance given the explicit commitment to give a voice to adult adoptees. The triangulation of the two approaches of phenomenology and CGTM. provided a more holistic view of the phenomena of concern (Lee 2017). The starting point of phenomenology in this research is the lived experience of adult adoptees in searching for and re-engaging with birth families. The centrality of the participants in adding to an understanding of the nature and impact of adoption in adult years is consistent with the underlying principles of phenomenology in that it is an approach holds that true meaning can only be gained from those that have experienced it (Mapp 2008).

Understandings of phenomenology have developed over time and different phenomenological approaches are now recognised (Hopkins, Regehr and Pratt 2016). Husserl is regarded by many as the father of phenomenology (Stapleton 1983). The concept arose through his beliefs in the limitations of the natural sciences and in particular their limitations in measuring and encapsulating lived experiences (Lavery 2003). He identified the importance of an individual's perception of external stimuli and the extent to which this would impact on their reaction to the stimuli (Lavery 2003). The emphasis is on *how* people experience the outside world as opposed to *what* they experience. Husserl believed that each perception carries meaning and not behavioural intention. In its origins, this is a descriptive approach used to convey the richness of experience. Central to this approach is the concept of *epoch*, otherwise known as phenomenological reduction or bracketing. Through this the researcher aims to achieve a state of non-involvement with the *life-world* by suspending their own

preconceptions and presuppositions regarding the phenomena (Lavery 2003). This is to avoid interpretations or data collection being influenced by the researcher's own knowledge and experience.

A non-Husserlian alternative to phenomenology was proposed in 1927 by Heidegger. Heidegger asserted that phenomena could only be truly understood in regard to:

attending, perceiving and thinking about the world (Lavery 2003 p. 24).

He emphasised the importance of interpretation, or hermeneutics, rather than understanding the phenomena in isolation. Within this framework, it is believed that the positionality of the researcher is something that adds value, rather than being something to *set aside*. For this reason, Heideggerian phenomenology is the approach that has influenced the methodology for this investigation with an explicit account of my positionality in relation to the inquiry and an explicit acknowledgement of knowledge and experience drawn on (Mapp 2008).

By the inclusion of a Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the research, this study been able to produce *thick descriptions* of the participant's experiences and perspectives for the investigation of the impact on adult adoptees of re-engagement with birth families. The aim of the study is to develop a better understanding of the unique perspectives of the participants as observed and understood by myself. Through taking this approach one has to assume the existence of essential meanings and to draw upon a shared familiarity with the world in order to jointly explore the phenomena (Lindseth and Norberg 2004).

This study does not seek to solve a problem but to explore how a better understanding of the experience of adult adoptees searching and re-engaging with birth families can be developed through asking those who have lived through the experience. Nothing within this inquiry has been taken for granted; including the relevance of various areas of extant theory and previous research which have been identified to provide context to the enquiry and are reconsidered in relation to the grounded theory developed. Through all stages of the research process though, the aim has been to

adopt a phenomenological attitude with a commitment to maintaining a focus on the experiences of the participants (Lindseht and Norberg 2004).

As is often the case with research within the domain of phenomenology, the study is based upon a relatively small-scale sample. This feature of phenomenological research has given rise to concerns and criticisms about its generalisability to other situations (McLaughlin 2012). The aim of the research though is to seek meanings and to explore the significance that these meanings hold in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of adoption and re-engagement with birth families can have in adulthood. Rather than generalising the findings they are used to create impact and change in both knowledge and practice (Marsh 2010). Issues of reliability validity and the potential for impact are further discussed in chapter 13.

3.4 Looking Back: The Development of Grounded Theory Methodology and its Key Concepts

There are four identifiable approaches to conducting Grounded Theory: *Inductively Oriented Grounded Theory* with the key theorists being Glaser and Strauss (Glaser, Strauss and Strutsel 1968); *Classic Grounded Theory*, developed by Strauss and Strauss and Corbin (Ellis, Strauss and Corbin 1992; Corbin and Strauss 1990); *Code Oriented Grounded Theory*; (Smith and Biley 1997) and *Constructivist Grounded Theory* as developed by Charmaz and Bryant (Bryant 2017; Charmaz 2016; Bryant and Charmaz 2010).

The seminal text *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* written by Glasser and Strauss in 1967 was a reaction against the extreme positivism evident in most social research of the time. Glasser and Strauss aimed to facilitate the emergence of theory from data, and to provide heuristic guidelines for data driven theory construction. Glasser and Strauss disputed the view that the social and natural sciences dealt with the same subject matter. They also challenged the prevailing view that the purpose of social research was to uncover pre-existing and universal explanations of social behaviour (Suddaby 2006; Glasser and Strauss 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that scientific truth comes from both the act of observation and the understandings of the observers as they strive to make sense of what is

being observed. They proposed grounded theory as a practical method for conducting research that focuses on interpretive processes by analysing

...the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings (Gerhardt 2004 p.457).

They rejected the positivist notion of hypothesis testing to ascertain truth and instead described an organic process of theory emergence based on how well data fits conceptual categories that have been identified by the researcher. The aim, as they described it, is to analyse how well the identified categories explain or predict ongoing interpretations and how relevant these categories are to the core issues of what is observed. Glaser and Strauss identified inductive reasoning as being an essential element of any grounded theory study with theory emerging directly from the data. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's there was a divergence in the stance taken by Glaser and Strauss which centred on the use of abductive reasoning as opposed to inductive reasoning (Kenny and Fourie 2014). Reichertz (2007) argues that GTM was to some extent abductive from the start and has become more and more abductive in its more recent iterations. Reichertz (2007) explains abduction as essentially an iterative process whereby the researcher does not just land on a new or novel idea but considers and examines data against other relevant theoretical concepts.

Following on from the work of Glaser and Strauss, are the developments presented by Strauss (1987) and Corbin and Strauss (1990). Their model of grounded theory involved a move towards a constructivist approach underpinned by their relativist position (Mattley, Strauss and Corbin 1999). This approach was based on the premise that the researcher constructs theory as an outcome of their interpretation of the participants' stories.

Strauss and Corbin put forwards the view that the aim of GTM is to

...uncover and understand what lies behind phenomenon about which little is known (Strauss and Corbin 1990 p. 19).

They acknowledged the importance of multiple perspectives and truths and believed that there was also a need to draw on a range of theoretically sensitising concepts when analysing human action and interaction (Byrne 2001). This perspective includes relating participants' stories to the world in which they lived; alongside ongoing interpretation of meaning produced

by individuals (researchers) engaged in a common project of observation (Suddaby 2006).

Subsequent theorists have developed the core aspects of this approach further, with writers such as Suddaby (2006) identifying the two concepts of constant comparison and theoretical sampling as essential processes in the move away from the total separation of data collection and analysis. Suddaby (2006) proposed that grounded theory was essentially developed as a practical approach to help researchers understand complex social processes and that it involves a need to take a pragmatic approach with regard to data collection, saturation, coding and analysis

After careful consideration of the different approaches to GTM, this study has drawn primarily on the constructivist grounded theory (CGTM) as proposed by Charmaz (2006, 2008), (Bryant and Charmaz 2010, 2019). This approach reflects the epistemological and ontological foundations of the study along with my own positionality in relation to the study. The approach encompasses themes of intimacy, reciprocity, open exchange of ideas and negotiation (Charmaz 2006). These themes are evidenced through the arrangement and process of conducting interviews with participants, enabling the co-construction of meaning between the participants and myself.

3.5 An Introduction to Constructive Grounded Theory Methodology

CGTM starts with a concern to develop an explanatory theory of an identified social process, but in addition to this seeks to lift the data to a higher level of abstraction, generating new theoretical perspectives, potentially drawing on multiple sources of data. The development from classic grounded theory represents an epistemological shift from positivism to constructivism, (Charmaz 2017; Bryant and Charmaz 2007), whereby researchers do not deny the existence of an objectively true world, but focus more on the

...world made real in the minds and through the words and actions of it's members (Charmaz 1990 p. 523).

Charmaz (2006) put forwards the view that CGTM has the potential to develop conditional theories that enable the researcher to contextualise certain realities. It is a methodology appropriate to inquiries that have a

symbolic and/or an interactional element to them and as Charmaz explains, it is an approach that involves going beyond the surface in the search to seek meaning from the data with implied and implicit meanings questioned and examined (Bryant and Charmaz 2019; Bryant and Charmaz 2010; Charmaz 2008). There is an underlying assumption within CGTM that it is the interaction between the researcher and participants that produces the data and through that interaction, the researcher is able to both observe and define meanings (Charmaz 1995). The discovered reality is a result of this interactive process and its *temporal, cultural, and structural contexts* (Charmaz 1990, p. 524).

The subjective epistemology that underpins this methodology assumes that researchers are not separate from the research and that knowledge and the theory that is developed are co-created (Charmaz 1990). Throughout the following chapter, further linkages to the earlier discussions regarding the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of the research will be made and congruence with those underpinnings will be demonstrated.

Though Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original conception of grounded theory assumed a social constructivist approach to the empirical world, they adopted a more limited form of social constructivism than the one advocated by Charmaz. Glaser and Strauss did give consideration to the ways in which the researcher affected the research process, produced the data, represented research participants, and positioned their analyses (Charmaz 2008). Charmaz though goes further and separates the viewer and the viewed, the researcher and the participant and it is through the interaction of the two that meaning emerges (Charmaz 2006).

Another significant feature of CGTM is the emphasis that Charmaz places on writing creatively, with a more literary style than a scientific one. She argued that though there was a need to be analytical in terms of process, the style of writing should be used as a tool to be evocative of the lived experience of research participants (Charmaz 2001). In this way, the researcher's voice should not transcend the experience of participants but

...re-envisage it ... bringing fragments of fieldwork time, context and mood together in a colloquy of the author's several selves—reflecting, witnessing, wondering, accepting—all at once (Mitchell and Charmaz 1996 p. 299).

Using CGTM, the aim of this inquiry was to construct a theory that reduces the complexity found in the data, works with the data iteratively, and is an independent entity, situated out with the lived experience of the participants of the study.

The data influences how the researcher constructs the emerging theory and the emerging theory influences how the researcher interprets the data, and all of this process is influenced by societal structures (Levers 2013 p.5).

In this way, emergent theory is influenced by the way in which I interpreted the data, and the interpretation of the data is influenced by the emerging theory (Levers 2013). As the researcher, I was part of the research situation, and my position, perspectives and interactions with the participants have a direct impact on it (Charmaz 2006, 2000; Clarke 1987). Rather than assuming that theory simply emerges from data, constructivists assume that researchers construct categories of the data with an emphasis on action and process. The researcher therefore plays an active role in this process. In terms of the process of conducting an inquiry using CGTM, Charmaz (2006, 2000) viewed the methodology as one that had a set of flexible principles and practices and she warned against being overly prescriptive and rigid in the desire to clearly articulate the process followed.

Following consideration of these approaches to grounded theory, this study purposively chose to adopt CGTM. The choice of this methodology placed me at the centre of the research process, actively engaged in all aspects of the process from gathering and interpreting the data, translating the participants' lived experiences and understanding the social and interpersonal processes involved. This method of grounded theory involves rigour, transparency and reflexivity (Bryant and Charmaz 2019). These principles are present throughout data collection, interpretation and theoretical construction within this inquiry.

3.6 Abductive Reasoning as a Central Feature of Grounded Theory

Coffey and Atkinson, amongst others, put forwards the view that abduction is a key feature of grounded theory stating that:

Abduction allows for intuitive interpretations of empirical observations and creative ideas that might account for them (Coffey and Atkinson 1996 p.157).

This is a view shared by Charmaz (2008) who proposed the idea that grounded theory starts with inductive logic but naturally moves to abductive reasoning as the researcher seeks to understand emergent empirical findings.

Thornberg (2012) outlines the abductive strategy as being both selective and creative. It is an approach that enables the researcher to discover new concepts, ideas or explanations, often through the identification of surprising and unexpected events which cannot be explained by pre-existing knowledge. It is therefore an appropriate strategy to use in an area of inquiry where there is limited previous research. Thornberg (2012) also highlights the importance of the researcher having the ability to draw abductive inferences, a task that is dependent on the researcher's previous knowledge and willingness to adopt a reflexive approach to gaining understanding. This was consistent with my own positionality in relation to the study based on previous knowledge and professional and personal understanding and practice skills.

The concept of abduction was formulated some 400 years ago by Epicurus, however, in modern times it was Charles Peirce that developed the theory of abductive logic (Tavory and Timmermans 2014; Peirce 1998). Peirce had a particular fascination with the concept of *genius* which came from his interest in philosophy, combined with his interest in the nature of human creativity (Haag 2014; Tavory and Timmermans 2014). Peirce's interest in genius developed into an in-depth analysis of hypothesis formation, which became known as *Peirce's Logic of Abduction*. He proposed that it was the only true knowledge extending means of inferencing and that it was distinct from other types of logical conclusion, namely induction and deduction. Inductive logic aims to create new knowledge and is a process of logic by

which the starting point is a collection of given cases which the researcher proceeds to examine their implied results, looking for patterns in the data in order to develop an inference that some universal rule is operative. Deduction, conversely, uses a top-down approach, whereby there is a process of hypothesis testing in order to verify a theory. Peirce (1998) argued that abduction serves a unique function in the movement of thought that neither induction nor abduction on their own can perform. Abduction essentially proceeds from a known quantity (result) to two unknowns (rule and case). Using abductive reasoning, a new idea, or a hypothesis is added to two given properties, the rule and the result (Richardson and Kramer 2006). In essence Peirce proposed that abductive logic is the process of studying facts and devising a theory to explain them following a three-stage approach, that of abduction, deduction and induction (Peirce 1998).

The primary focus of abduction is on finding explanations from the observed facts, i.e., the data. Peirce (1998) did not see abduction as a form of logic to replace induction and deduction, but instead put forwards the view that they all refer to different stages of the inquiry. The explanations put forwards for observations from the data are hypothetical. Strategies then need to be employed to test these hypotheses and seek further plausible hypotheses that are comparative, interactive and analytical (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). This approach runs throughout the whole process of coding, memo writing and theoretical sampling in this inquiry. Abduction leads us to look for meaning creating rules from potentially valid explanation of these surprising facts, which results in the creation of a hypothesis. Once a hypothesis has been formulated, a multistage process of checking begins (Reichertz 2007). The specific benefit of abduction in grounded theorising is that it helps

...to explain new and surprising empirical data through the elaboration, modification, or combination of pre-existing concepts (Kelle 1995 p. 34).

Theoretical knowledge and preconceptions therefore serve as "*heuristic tools*" for the construction of concepts which are elaborated and modified on the basis of empirical data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Kelle 1995).

The premise of the methodological approach for this study is therefore that grounded theory is based on abduction and the role of theory in this process

is not a hindrance but a heuristic tool. The important ideas are not found in in the data per se but come from the process of analysis and theorising. There needs to be an imaginative and intellectual working of ideas, in parallel with the process of managing the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Charmaz (2008) concurs with this view, further explaining that theory is used to give meaning to experiences and to provide reference points for learning.

It has been argued that one of the deficiencies of abductive logic, is that it cannot be formalised in terms of quantified logic. It has been suggested that Peirce struggled to clearly articulate how this could be done, particularly in his early work (Paavola 2004). Niiniluoto (1999) identified that in Peirce's later work he does outline principles by which the process of developing an abductive hypothesis can be judged and formalised. According to the later work of Peirce, hypotheses must meet three interlocking standards. They must be explanatory, parsimonious and testable. This therefore moves abduction reasoning beyond mere perception (Haag 2014). Haag (2014) argues that once the scope of logic is broadened beyond the deductive-inductive dyad, abduction reveals itself as logical.

Further to this Reichertz (2004 p.5) puts forwards the view that

...it helps the researcher to make new discoveries in a logically and methodologically ordered way.

Following on from consideration of the role of logic in abductive reasoning, the next question to be asked is: *Can abduction be formalised without losing the essence of creativity and imagination?* Creativity and imagination are seen as essential for the process of abductive reasoning in order to successfully create an environment for an intellectual process which is not hampered by but is facilitated by logical rules (Richardson and Kramer 2006). Richardson and Kramer (2006) argue that rather than being mechanistic, abductive inferences and the processes followed, contribute to creative thinking using theoretical insights that have not been identified before.

Taking all of the previously discussed debates regarding the nature and process of abductive reasoning into consideration, the approach used as a

starting point for the methodology for this study is based in part on the work of Tavory and Timmerman (2014). They propose a three-stage approach of theory construction. Firstly, a Peircean pragmatist approach to theory construction is followed whereby I examined potentiality in the data fields that can be turned into theoretical generalisations. The second stage rests on the ability to recognise any findings as surprising or unexpected in the light of existing theories. This therefore assumes in depth knowledge of a range of possible theories, rather than a focus on a favourite theory. The third stage identified by Tavory and Timmerman (2014) is based on the classic grounded theory tradition of a meticulous, methodological approach of iterative rounds of coding and memo writing. It is at this point that this inquiry moves away from the approach proposed by Tavory and Timmerman (2014) and instead the more flexible and fluid approach outlined by Charmaz was drawn on to facilitate theory construction (Charmaz 2006, 2014). Attention was still paid though to issues of transparency and rigour in terms of data management and theorising through the process of coding and constant comparison.

3.7 The Contribution of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism plays a significant role in CGTM. George Herbert Mead, a social psychologist from the Chicago Sociological tradition, laid the foundations for symbolic interactionism in the early 1900's (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993). Mead was directly influenced by American pragmatism, in particular the work of John Dewey who identified that contemplation was a key factor that enabled individuals to go through the process of adaptation in a constantly changing social world. Symbolic interactionism holds that meanings are represented in actions between or among individuals and that these meanings can only be understood through the process of interpretation (Denzin 2012). To fully understand social processes, *meanings* as experienced by individuals within a particular context are explored. The aim of social interactionism is therefore to understand the

...complex world of lived experience from
the point of view of those that have lived
it (Swandt 1994 p.118).

In this way social interactionism has much in common with phenomenology whereby the emphasis is on lived experience and understanding the inner world as experienced by individuals (Swandt 1994).

To fully understand the aim and process of symbolic interactionism, the concept of the *self* requires exploration (Charon 1989). It is only through taking the role of the other, that one can view oneself from different perspectives and bring these perspectives to make meaning of one's own world (Manning 2005). Mead held that the self is a product of social interaction and is developed through the process of participation in society. From Mead's viewpoint the self consists of the subjective me, spontaneous and natural, and the objective me that sees self as a reflection of what others see (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills and Usher 2013). Mead introduced the idea of the *inner conversation* whereby human beings formulate meanings that things have for them and these meanings are derived from social interactions, which are mediated through an interpretative process (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills and Usher 2013).

Recent theorists make reference to the underlying linguistic foundations of human group life (Denzin 2016). These linguistic foundations are present in the process of interaction whereby people do not act *towards* one another but interact *with* each other. The focus on language has been further considered by contemporary symbolic interactionists such as Naples, Holstein and Gubrium (1998), who examined the place of language and multiple meanings in interactional contexts. One direction that symbolic interactionists take is the focus on narratives, suggesting that it is through narratives that coherence and meaning is brought to everyday life.

Consistent with this approach, symbolic interactionism is also understood to involve action, whereby experiences are

...reflexively meaningful to people and agency, the locus of action, whether in the person, in language or in some other structure or process (Denzin 2016 p.82).

This understanding has specific relevance for this inquiry in terms of explaining how participants interpret their concept of *self* within the context of developing an understanding the impact of adoption and engaging in search and reunion activities. Denzin (2016 p. 98) explains that

Interactionists do not believe in asking *why* questions. They ask instead *how* questions.

Drawing on principles of symbolic interactionism it was essential that I was able to actively interact with the participants and see things from their point of view, and in their natural context. The concept of the self is implicit in all of the essential grounded theory methods and in this inquiry, it is in the act of memoing and in developing theoretical sensitivity that the symbolic interactionist concept of self is developed (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills and Usher 2013).

3.8 Addressing Criticisms and Misconceptions of Grounded Theory

Criticisms of grounded theory mainly come from misconceptions about the methodology, but it is also important to recognise that as a theory and a methodology it has evolved and developed (Lehn and Gibson 2011). Grounded theory has been widely misinterpreted, or at the very least, the term has been used very loosely, in what Suddaby describes as *methodological blurring* (Suddaby 2006). Tavory and Timmerman (2012 p.160) also describe the frequent

...lackadaisical, incomplete, or inaccurate
application of grounded theory principles

that they contest have stifled the development of this methodology and have led to the lack of theoretical breakthroughs using this methodological approach. Suddaby (2006) believed that adopting a grounded theory approach has often been used as an excuse to ignore the literature relevant to the phenomena being studied. This misconception appears to come from the desire to produce something new, not recognising that new interpretations and new insights of recognisable theories are in themselves a crucial addition to the body of knowledge in a particular field. According to Tavory and Timmerman (2012), discovering new theories depends on the ability to frame findings in existing theoretical frameworks as well as to re-imagine existing theories in novel ways. Similar views are expressed by Goldkhal and Cronholm (2010) who contest the common perception that in grounded theory theories emerge by themselves from the data without any theoretical input or active actions from the researcher. There is though, as Dey (1993 p. 63) highlights *...a difference between an open mind and an empty head.*

Suddaby (2006) identifies another misconception of grounded theory as arising from that fact that in some instances research has been presented

as incomplete or *undigested* data. This view potentially arises from what he understands as a confusion between grounded theory and phenomenology. In phenomenological studies, data is often presented in a *raw form* to demonstrate authenticity, placing an emphasis on the subjective experiences of research participants in order to gather rich data of the lived, subjective experiences of those being researched. Suddaby (2006) expands that although grounded theory can draw on phenomenological assumptions and techniques, grounded theorists in general are less focused on the subjective experiences and are more concerned with how these subjective experiences can be abstracted into theoretical statements that highlight causal relationships in the phenomena being studied. This study starts from the premise that the in-depth representation of subjective experiences and the aim to lift these experiences to a higher theoretical and conceptual level are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, rather than grounded theorists simply having *sympathy* for the underpinning concepts of phenomenology, the two can operate fully within the same methodology, with a phenomenological approach being adopted to provide a clear account of the lived experience of the participants and the data from these subjective experiences being abstracted into new theoretical insights. Within this study, in-depth interviews were conducted, with detail and nuance being of central importance to demonstrate subjective understandings. However, the primary interest is not limited to the narratives themselves. These subjective understandings are subject to processes that identify a higher level of abstraction - higher than the data itself (Charmaz 2000, 2008; Martin and Turner 1986).

3.9 Rigour, Quality and Transparency

Consideration of issues of rigour, quality and transparency acknowledges the specific meanings of these terms within the context of CGTM. It is important as a starting point though to acknowledge the relevance of more general guidelines for qualitative research to ensure quality (Charmaz 2016). Corbin and Strauss (1990) identified a general set of criteria for ensuring quality in qualitative research. These criteria include methodological consistency; clarity of purpose; self-awareness; sensitivity to participants and data and methodological awareness. These conditions had resonance for this inquiry and were adhered to throughout.

Beyond this, the unique features of CGTM lead to it developing its own set of criteria for evaluating quality and rigour. Charmaz and Thornberg (2020) identified the four criteria of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. These criteria were used to evaluate this inquiry and are explained further in relation to this inquiry in chapter 13. Issues of transparency were also addressed throughout this inquiry. My positionality in relation to the research and the explicit use of relevant literature and extant theory demonstrated a rejection of theory neutral observation and an explicit acknowledgement of the personal, academic and professional knowledge that were drawn on throughout the research process.

3.10 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, the move towards using CGTM as a chosen methodology for this inquiry comes from the aim of retaining the lived experience of adult adoptees along with the perspectives and experience as myself as researcher as central to the aims of the study. In accordance with this epistemological position, this inquiry is concerned with exploring the world of lived reality and situation specific meanings as constructed by social actors. Extant theory, previous research, personal and practice experiences have been used as sensitising devices to view the world in a certain way (Urquhart, Lehman and Myers 2009). The underpinning principles of rigour and transparency have been explored and will be returned to in terms of their use throughout the research methods used (Chapter 4) and evidenced throughout Chapter 5. Alongside this though the importance of creating a research process that allows for creativity and reflexivity has been explained with the aim of bringing new insights to an under researched area (Albrecht 2019).

CHAPTER 4 – METHOD

This chapter presents an account of the actual process of conducting the enquiry. The chapter is divided into four sections namely: positionality; consideration of access and ethical issues; data collection; and data analysis and theory development underpinned by issues concerned with rigour, validity and transparency. In practice, the demarcation between the different stages is somewhat arbitrary, given that the process was inherently iterative, drawing on the principles of abductive reasoning, with constant movement between the different aspects of the research process. Drawing primarily on the method of CGT attributed to Charmaz (2006) and Charmaz and Bryant (2017), my prior knowledge, understanding and experience in the field of adoption was instrumental in supporting an interpretive understanding of the rich data collected in the study. The collaborative nature of the relationship between myself and participants was of central importance with the overall aim of co-constructing knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

4.1 Positionality

As indicated in chapter 1, consideration of my own positionality in order to both provide context and to interpret the data, is of central importance to this study. Coming from the position that I do in terms of both personal and professional experience, my concern is very much with understanding people's experiences in relation to the social, policy and practice context and through this to consider the impact that the findings of the inquiry can have. It has been essential therefore that I conduct a thorough exploration and explanation of my positionality with regard to this area of research, from research design, to my first contact with agencies, initial contacts with participants, interviews, ongoing analysis and the final discussion. Alongside this, CGTM, as used in this study, is based on the notion that as a researcher, I am well informed and able to make decisions about the data as it emerges (Bowen 2006).

Though I have made reference to my positionality in general terms, it is important at an early stage of this thesis to be more explicit about the experience and knowledge that I bring with me to the study. My training

and practice as a local authority social worker is central to my professional identity. My main area of practice was in mental health where I had the opportunity to work with a number of adults who were affected by issues from their own childhood adoptions. Though I now recognise that my knowledge of this area of practice was limited, what I observed and attempted to work with at the time, was the evidence that adoption is a lifelong event. That irrespective of the circumstances of the adoption, or the quality of relationships with adoptive and birth families, some individuals struggled with ongoing psychological and emotional issues centred on the concepts of identity and attachment (Feeney, Passmore and Peterson 2007; Passmore et al 2005). Having worked for twelve years as a social worker, I took unpaid leave from work and adopted siblings, aged eleven months and two years old. Drawing on the knowledge that I had, I brought my children up to know as much about their birth families as possible and aimed to foster an atmosphere of communicative openness to ensure that the door to conversations about their birth family and their experiences was always open (Brodzinsky 1996). I believed that this would help mitigate against possible emotional and psychological difficulties associated with their early life experiences and their dual identities. As time progressed, my children have chosen to make contact with birth families and have continued on this path, managing complex, rewarding and sometimes painful experiences. At this point my professional and personal lives began to merge. I became a member of the Adoption and Permanence Panel for Aberdeen City Council and started to undertake court work for adoption and permanence cases. Once I moved into academia, I began research into issues of identity resulting from the adoption experience.

My positionality is also situated within a context that views knowledge as political and that I, as a researcher am not neutral since my key aims, both professionally and personally, include advocacy and action. I hold the strong belief that the needs of adult adoptees are in general not met and that there is a need for ongoing support and advice as people continue to live with their adoptive status. I also hold the view that there is a need to promote developments in practice with regard to the support and guidance given to adoptive parents. This then is my position in relation to this study, and with it comes motivation, knowledge and experience, as well as emotional

responses that are not static. In order to manage these responses, I chose to make use of reflective logs, particularly in the early stages of the inquiry, to identify issues that I could take to my supervisor for discussion, or that I could reflect on myself throughout the research process. The aim was not to discount emotional responses, but to identify them and make sense of them in the context of my role as a researcher (Jukes 2008). In line with core social work practice, I drew on theories of reflection, to reflect both in and on action (Kolb 2014; Wilson 2011).

4.1.1 Impact of Positionality on the Research Process

Drawing on my knowledge and practice wisdom as an experienced social worker, I was aware of risks to myself and others and the potential issues that could arise, ranging from technical and logistical ones, to personal and professional ethical dilemmas. In order to address these, I made use of the reflective logs throughout the research process. These reflective logs and the subsequent use of memos also enabled me to gain new insights when reflecting on the data. This approach is consistent with the application of CGTM and abductive analysis as discussed previously in chapter 3 of this thesis.

When considering one's own positionality within a study such as this, it is important to recognise and understand the dynamics between researcher and participant. Whether a researcher is an *insider* or an *outsider* is an epistemological matter given that the researcher's position in relation to their participants has a direct impact on the knowledge that is co-created between them (Hayfield and Huxley 2015). Adopting the position of an insider in relation to the research process has generally been reserved for discussions of observation, field research, and ethnography, particularly in the fields of feminist/gender-based studies and cultural studies. However, there is a strong case for these considerations being given priority within other areas of qualitative research. Familiarity with the insider status can bring about an increased awareness of the lives of the participants taking part in the study, placing the researcher in a strong position to conduct ethical research, which places participants at the top of the research agenda and presents a clear and true representation of their voices. This is particularly so with regard to marginalised groups of people (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). There are also recognised potential drawbacks in holding an

insider position though. Participants may have very high expectations of a researcher due to them having shared experiences. Alongside this is the possibility of the blurring of boundaries, which may cause ethical dilemmas if the participant sees the researcher as a friend or counsellor. Being seen as an insider in the research process may also lead the participant to disclosing more information than they feel comfortable with (Birch and Miller 2000). This study has attempted to mitigate against this concern by drawing on professional values and ethics (BASW 2020), and Codes of Practice (SSSC codes of practice 2020). Alongside the professional guidelines and codes, I have utilised knowledge and skills that draw on and uphold the principle of transparency and an awareness of the power imbalance between researcher and participant. Not being an adopted person myself though, I did not consider myself to be fully an *insider* in relation to the experience of adoption that the participants had but being an adoptive parent gave me some insight into their experiences, albeit second hand. In this study the position of *partial insider* was therefore adopted. Personal and professional experience allowed me to have perspectives of the world of adoption that those with no experience would not have.

Kanuha (2000) further expands that though the insider position can facilitate the collection of rich data the researcher needs to be aware of the potential for assumptions being made about shared understandings, which may or may not be valid. Further to this, Hayfield and Huxley (2015) contend that being an insider in the research process does not guarantee that there will be any greater understanding of the participant's perspectives than that of an outsider, as there may be as many differences as similarities in experiences and perspectives (Brannick and Coghlan 2007). These issues were addressed and reflected on throughout the research. Roberts (2018) clarified the epistemological and methodological features of an insider interview as being one where there is *diversity in proximity* through which, as an interviewer, the researcher is better able to recognise what it is that connects us and what at the same time divides (Roberts 2018).

Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) further examined the complexities and the blurring of boundaries inherent in occupying insider/outsider positions and

suggest that as researchers we can only ever occupy the *space between*. They contend that though we may be closer to the insider position or closer to the outsider position, our perspective is shaped by our position as a researcher (which includes having knowledge of extant theory and relevant literature) and we cannot fully occupy one or the other of those positions. They state that to present the concepts of insider and outsider in a binary manner is overly simplistic (Corbin, Dwyer and Buckle 2018). A more pragmatic approach reflects of the complexity of similarities and differences.

In conclusion then it is acknowledged that although my knowledge is based on my positionality in relation to the inquiry, within the context of qualitative research and specifically CGTM, there needs to be an understanding of the multi-layered complexity of human experience (Acker 2000). Belonging to any group in society does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference (Acker 2000). In addition, it is important to recognise that the categories of insider and outsider are not static and may change during the research process. There is a need for reflexivity in the research process as each research context reflects a specific set of social relationships and each is unique.

4.2 Ethics and Access

Ethics in research involves much more than gaining the Institution's ethical approval and a more detailed consideration of my understanding of ethical issues in relation to this inquiry was required. Though my positionality in terms of professional identity has been placed at the centre of this inquiry, it is recognised that

social workers are not in a position to claim ethical superiority (McGlaughlin 2011 p.50).

Acknowledgement of this point of view was of great importance to me and ensured rigorous attention to the ethical issues inherent in the inquiry throughout all stages of the research. Arising from an awareness of the limitations of some ethical codes, Butler (2002) identifies a framework for social work research. This framework is based on the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-malevolence, justice and scope (the process for deciding who the moral obligation belongs to). These principles were

examined and adhered to throughout the research process, with reflective logs and meetings with supervisors being utilised to work through any dilemmas that presented themselves.

4.2.1 Ethical Considerations

The starting point for consideration of ethical issues was an acknowledgment of the power relationships inherent in qualitative research interviews (Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach 2008; Baez 2002). When participants had expressed a willingness to take part in the research, I ensured that interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient to them. During the process of interviewing, I aimed to shift the balance of power from myself to the participants and aimed for the interview process to be of benefit to participants through them gaining greater insight into their experiences. Through the interpretation of the data and the development of the grounded theory prominence was given to the voices of the participants (Baez 2002).

Skills and knowledge gained over the years from working as a social worker presented me with both advantages and challenges. The ability to work in a supportive and person-centred manner hopefully ensured that interviews were a positive experience for interviewees. It was essential though that my professional boundaries and remit were clear, both in my mind and in the understanding of participants. Use of a reflective diary throughout the research process enabled me to identify and reflect on any potential ethical dilemmas. Issues of my own safety were considered and all necessary steps aligned to safe ethical practice were followed, including such considerations of not divulging personal information such as my address, meeting in a safe environment and alerting a colleague to time and location of interviews. I am registered with the Scottish Social Service Council as a social worker and as such I am PVG registered.

4.2.2 Initial Access and Communication of Ethical Issues to Participants

Accessing all but one participant through a third sector agency enabled me to ensure that appropriate support could be provided to participants after contact with them ended should it be needed. Such issues were discussed with service managers prior to consent being agreed. It was agreed with

the agency that potential issues of child protection or adult support and protection concerns would be discussed with service managers with a plan of action in place to report such concerns. The one participant that was not accessed through a third sector organisation, had previously had contact with an agency that facilitated their search for birth parents and provided support throughout the process. This participant was aware that he could make contact with this agency again in the future should he feel the need. Information, which included limitations to confidentiality, was shared with participants prior to them agreeing to take part in the research study. Guidance on issues of confidentiality were taken from social work codes of practice (SSSC 2020). All identifying details such as name, area of residence and date of birth were fully anonymised both in notes/recordings from interviews and in any subsequent write up of material. Confidentiality was maintained at all times and would only have been breached if it were felt that there was risk to the participant or to someone else.

In order to gather data, interviews were audio recorded. Participants were fully informed of this prior to agreeing to take part in the study. Participants were also informed of arrangements for the storage of interview recordings and transcripts. The audio recordings were stored on a device that was password protected. Transcripts and notes were fully anonymised and stored in secure areas. Participants were informed that all material would be destroyed following completion of the research and final submission of the thesis.

4.3 Sampling Strategy

A sample strategy was decided upon early in the design phase of the research and was informed by the principle aim of the study, methodological principles, existing knowledge about the subject area and identified gaps in knowledge that emerged from the initial literature search. Grounded theory is characterised by theoretical sampling but this requires initial data to be collected and analysed first. Therefore, initial, purposive sampling was undertaken as a first step in the research process in order to access data from participants who were adopted and who were searching for and reengaging with birth families.

In order for the research project to be credible and the findings trustworthy it was essential that participant selection had a clear rationale and that the participants fulfilled a specific purpose that related directly to the research question (Bowen 2008). An appropriate sample is composed of participants who best represent or have knowledge of the research topic. In line with the epistemological approach adopted, the sample was comprised of people who have experienced and who are able to explain their experience of the phenomena of adoption and searching and re-engagement with birth families. This resulted in the most common method of sampling in qualitative research being used, that of non-probability purposive sampling (Bryman 2016; Ritchie and Lewis 2003). The sample was chosen not to be statistically representative but instead, because of the characteristics of the population used to meet a specific criterion for selection.

The sampling strategy aimed to recruit participants that would be able to generate rich, dense and focused data directly related to the research question leading to further discovery about the phenomena of the impact of searching and re-engagement with birth family for adult adoptees. Oliver Robinson (2014) proposes a framework of four pan-paradigmatic points: (1) setting a sample universe, (2) selecting a sample size, (3) devising a sample strategy and (4) sample sourcing (Robinson 2014 p.25). This approach was broadly adopted in this inquiry. The sample universe, otherwise known as the *study population* or *target population* is the totality of persons who could legitimately be sampled in a particular study (Robinson 2014 p. 26). In order to define this sample universe, inclusion and exclusion criteria were decided upon. Together these criteria draw a boundary around the sample universe (Robinson 2014). The specificity of the inclusion and exclusion criteria dictates how homogenous within a particular field the sample universe is. The sample universe also plays an important theoretical role in the process of analysis by specifying what a sample is a sample of and therefore defining who or what the study is about (Robinson 2014). There are varying identifiable types of homogeneity, such as demographical homogeneity, physical homogeneity or life history homogeneity. The extent to which the sample universe is homogeneous within a particular field is influenced by both theoretical and practical factors. Homogenous samples are used to give a detailed picture of a particular phenomenon due to the

similarity of the cases or participants selected (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Studies that are concerned with or are influenced by phenomenology will generally aim for a more homogeneous sample as this works best within the philosophy and analytical approach of this type of research study. In doing this, phenomenological studies are defined by context and generalisations are made cautiously with specific reference to the sample universe. Conversely a heterogeneous approach is often aligned to studies using grounded theory where the aim is to seek evidence that findings are not just related to a particular group, time or place but can be generalised to other contexts, or at least seek to have impact and action in a wider context (Robinson 2014). In heterogeneous sampling there is a deliberate strategy to include cases that vary from each other in order to identify central themes that cut across the variety of cases or people (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). In terms of the second stage of the sampling strategy as proposed by Robinson (2014), a sample size was not identified as within the framework of CGTM, theoretical saturation, not data saturation, is used to determine the need, or otherwise of additional data being sought at various stages of data collection and analysis. This concept is discussed in more detail in 4.6.

4.3.1 Specific Features of Sample

This inquiry starts with the premise that the more clearly and explicitly a sample universe is described, the more valid and transparent the research is. Moravcsik (2013) put forwards the view that in qualitative research, transparency is a recognised marker of quality. In practical terms this means that as much detail as possible should be provided about how the data was collected and how the data was collected should evidence that the sample consists of participants who best represent the research topic. The elements in the sample strategy for this research that are heterogeneous are features such as gender, age at time of study, age at time of adoption, experience of re-engagement and experience of relationship with adoptive families. The sample also has homogeneous features in that all participants have been adopted and have engaged in some form of contact with birth families. Participants were male and female and over the age of 21. All were white, Scottish and were adopted by white Scottish parents. The lower age parameter was chosen to try to mitigate against adding to complexities in

psychosocial development often already challenging for those entering adult life.

4.4 Access

Having defined the sample universe, and the homogenous features that the participants were required to have to meet the aims of the inquiry, the task was then to identify how to access participants to be included in the study. It was identified early on in the research that at the time at which the study was being conducted, there were a limited number of agencies in Scotland providing specialist support specifically to adult adoptees. This support was often focused on contact issues with birth families. A decision was made to initially recruit participants from one of these agencies for both practical and ethical reasons. One further participant made contact with me to express interest in taking part in the study. This participant had had previous contact with a support agency. A second agency was contacted in the latter stages of the data gathering process. Potential participants were identified, and two people expressed willingness to take part in the inquiry.

Unfortunately, these two interviews were not able to proceed due to COVID19 social distancing/travel restrictions.

From a practical point of view, adult adoptees are in many ways a hidden or hard to reach population (Ellard-Gray et al 2015). Adoptees do not generally advertise their status as such and the most practical way of gaining access to people who shared this particular feature of their life history was through their contact with a support group. Therefore, the process utilised for gaining access to participants was in part, a pragmatic decision. The other rationale for this approach came from the awareness that the content of the interviews could be sensitive and emotionally challenging for participants. Knowing that they already had the support of skilled workers ensured that follow on support post interview was available should it be required. The availability of ongoing support was also discussed with the participant that was not currently in touch with an adoption agency.

The first step in the recruitment of the sample was to make contact with the Service Manager of a third sector adoption agency. An information sheet was sent to the Service Manager, (Appendix 1), along with a copy of the ethical approval received from the Institution and a covering email.

Holloway, Brown and Shipway (2010) identified the importance of this initial engagement with gatekeepers to the sample of participants, as they may restrict access or intentionally or unintentionally identify participants with specific experience or knowledge. This was not the case with this research study as the gatekeeper to the service distributed the information sheet to all members of the support group and those interested then self-selected with contact details being passed directly to me. At this point an information letter and consent form was sent to participants (Appendix 2). The Service Manager within the agency was facilitative and supportive throughout the process. This appears to stem from the value that they placed on research in this field and the gaps that they themselves identified in research conducted on the experiences and needs of adult adoptees.

4.5 The Participants

A decision was made to provide limited biographical details of the participants as they are not relevant to the process or outcome of the inquiry. The only information that has some relevance is the age at which the participants were adopted and the age that the search process began. Gender has been identified, as presenting the data in a gender-neutral way proved problematic. It should also be noted at this point that all participants were white Scottish, and all had been raised by white Scottish adoptive parents. Had any participants been part of transracial or transnational adoptive arrangements significant themes with regard to these adoption practices and issues relating to identity formation would have been explored (Darnell, Johansen, and Tavakoli 2017; Lee, Grotevant and Hellerstedt 2006; Noy-Sharav 2005). The complexities of transracial and transnational adoption, for both adoptees and adoptive parents, is outside the scope of this study.

Participant	Age at which adopted	Age at which searching began
Participant 1	Baby (soon after birth)	38
Participant 2	3 weeks	42
Participant 3	6 months	45
Participant 4	2 years	40
Participant 5	10 days	34
Participant 6	Baby	37
Participant 7	2 years	45

4.6 Data Collection - A Justification of the Use of Semi-Structured Interviews

A decision was made early in the research process to use interviews to gather data. Charmaz identifies qualitative interviewing as appropriate to grounded theory methods, because they are both

open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent and paced yet unrestricted
(Charmaz 2006 p.28)

In line with the epistemological and methodological position taken, the aim was to enter into the world of the participants, whilst at the same time using the research space to co-construct meaning. Before the final decision about method was made, other approaches were considered. Focus groups were considered with the advantages being that participants could bring new insights through the discussions between themselves. However, issues of confidentiality were of concern, as was the unwillingness that participants may have had to disclose personal and intimate information in a group situation (Smithson 2000). It is important to note though that some studies have concluded that participants may in fact be more willing to discuss sensitive subject material in a focus group than in a one-to-one interview (Guest et al 2017). Additional drawbacks were also identified with the use of focus groups though, namely the logistics of a number of individuals being available in the same place at the same time, and perhaps, most importantly, the diminished role of myself through the absence of the one-to-one interaction. This would have been at odds with the epistemological and methodological position taken for this study (Smithson 2008). For this reason, semi-structured interviews were identified as a possible method of

both gathering and generating data. Consideration was given to potential disadvantages of this approach. According to Silverman (2013), there is the potential for researcher bias, as there is a significant amount of influence that the researcher can have on the interview situation. It was also important to acknowledge the potential for projection, or prejudice onto respondents or from respondents onto myself. Reflective logs were utilised to mitigate against this, and practice skills of reflecting in and on action were drawn on throughout. On a practical level, a significant amount of time needs to be allocated to both conduct the interviews and to then transcribe the recordings. During all of the interviews for this study, participants spoke at length, providing detailed, reflective responses to the questions asked. Though clearly an asset in terms of the generation of rich data, transcription was a lengthy process. However, it became apparent during the process of transcribing the interviews, that this was an opportunity for analysis and initial theorising. Rather than being seen as a time consuming, instrumental activity, the process of transcribing provided an opportunity to immerse myself in the data. For the reasons detailed above, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data.

4.7 The Process of Conducting Interviews

Embedded in the continuum of structured to unstructured interviews is the idea of how much control the interviewer will have over the interaction. The semi-structured interview, as the name suggests, has some structure imposed by the interviewer, but with flexibility as a core feature that allows for the participant to expand on issues that they feel are of most relevance (Mahat-Shamir, Neimeyer, Pitcho-Prelorentzos 2019; Brinkmann 2016). Set questions and topics were identified and an interview schedule drawn up. Each question contained prompts to be drawn on during the interview process if needed (see Appendix 3). This enabled a conversational and flexible approach to the interview process (Smith 2003). This flexibility allowed for the modification of the way in which questions were asked depending on the participant's verbal and non-verbal responses. During the interview process careful attention was paid to the use of prompts as it was important to get as close as possible to the truth of what the participant thought and experienced without undue influence being exerted.

Semi-structured interviews will often follow a similar pattern in their implementation and have recognisable features that form a basic framework. For the purposes of this study, I drew on the four common features identified by Smith (2003). These four features were:

1. An attempt to establish a rapport with the respondent
2. The ordering of the questions is flexible
3. The interviewer is free to probe interesting areas that arise
4. The interview can follow the respondents' interests or concerns

These features were used to plan and carry out all interviews. The interview schedule ensured that all topics addressed were mapped to the aims and objectives for the inquiry. Pre-preparing questions enabled me to consider how to word sensitive topics and how to approach some complex concepts in a way that was clear and not jargonistic, but at the same time not overly simplified which could be perceived as being patronising. The interview schedule started with factual, biographical questions regarding the circumstances of the participants' adoption. This enabled the contextualisation for subsequent data collected and also allowed both myself and the participant to settle into the interview. Moustakas (1994) suggests that even prior to this section of the interview, there should be a social conversation to create a relaxed atmosphere. This approach was used as and when appropriate, and it was through these initial interactions that other aspects of the participants lives were gleaned. Once the initial, factfinding stage of the interview had passed, more open questions were used. It was important that the questions were sufficiently focused though to enable the participant to know what specific aspect of their experience they were being asked about.

The aim of the interview was to gather thick description, to go beyond the simple description of the phenomena and to seek out interpretations and feelings (Dempsey et al 2016). Denzin (1989 p. 83) describes thick description as *deep, dense, detailed accounts of problematic experiences....* Thick description goes beyond merely factual accounts but also includes theoretical and analytical description both implicit and explicit. In reality, all but one of the interviews conducted contained large amounts of thick

description with minimum prompting from myself. The one interview that required a greater degree of prompting involved the participant that was not currently in contact with a support group (Participant 7). Reflections on this interview surmised that he may not have been as actively engaged in reflecting on his experiences at this time as the other participants were. The remaining participants were engaged with the topic, appeared to be trusting of me as researcher and were highly reflective in their responses. The aim throughout the interviews was to achieve authentic engagement, through use of empathy and congruence and a degree of carefully considered self-disclosure (Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006).

The average time for the interview was fifty-five minutes. Interviews were conducted until all of the information had been collected and saturation of data collection during the interview had been reached. My assessment of saturation point was accurate on all but one occasion, when after the interview ended, the participant started to talk again, to reveal some useful data. On this occasion recording recommenced (with the participant's permission) to capture the additional data. The interviews were audio recorded to enable me to fully focus on the content and process of the interviews as they happened.

A main feature of this study is that it involved gathering *sensitive data*. Dickson-Swift et al (2009) suggest that sensitive research has the potential to impact on all of the people who are involved in it, including researchers. The participants of this inquiry were asked to share their perceptions and views about some intensely personal experiences. There is the possibility that some of the issues that emerged may not have been shared with anyone before. For this to happen, trust and rapport needed to be established to enable data collection, as well as empathy and understanding being demonstrated as a response. At the beginning of the interview I shared information about the nature and aims of the research, encouraging questions from the participants. This went some way to addressing the power dynamic that is inevitable in any interview situation, where the interviewer may be seen as the expert. By adopting this approach, I positioned myself as the learner, with the participant as the expert in regard to their own unique situation. This was particularly important given my

positionality in relation to the research topic and the participants. I was aware that being an adoptive parent, and sharing this fact with the participants, may impact on their view of me and their possible assumption that I may have pre-conceived ideas regarding adoption. In my introduction to each interview, I took time to stress that it was their views, their voice that was of central importance to the inquiry. Throughout the interviews, I remained sensitive to any indication that they may be experiencing discomfort with regard to my position as an adoptive parent and remained aware of this dynamic when writing reflective logs post interview.

As well as sharing information, it was important that I adopted a non-judgemental stance. My positionality in relation to the study was very much apparent at this stage in the research process. I was able to draw on professional experience and knowledge to assess verbal and non-verbal communication throughout the interview, ensuring that the interview was perceived as a safe space in which the emotional content of the interview could be managed. Etherington (2007) describes how within qualitative research, stories told during interviews are relational. In whatever context stories are always to someone and through this the researcher may become involved to different degrees in the interview process - the telling of the story. I was aware that information disclosed by the participants may not have been articulated before. By asking curious questions there is the possibility that participants may reveal information, feelings and views that are subconscious. It was essential that I treated all information shared with respect and was attuned to the emotional content of the interview.

4.8 Addressing Issues of Power in the Interview Process

This section looks in further detail at power issues within the interview process itself. The starting point to addressing issues of power within the interview process is to acknowledge that they exist (Etherington 2007). A continued awareness of the power dynamic throughout the interviews was important. However, even when there is an attempt to address this and to empower the participant as far as possible within the interview, there are still the issues of who owns the data and what the outcome of the research may be (Etherington 2007). Mills, Francis and Bonner (2006) suggest that

researchers undertaking CGTM should ask themselves a number of conscious raising questions to provoke thinking about the power differentials that might exist in the research relationship. Questions such as:

How is this person like me? How are they not like me? How are these similarities and differences being played out in our interaction? How is that interaction affecting the course of the research? How is it illuminating or obscuring the research problem? (Mills, Francis and Bonner 2006 p.5).

Reinharz (1992) identifies a range of other strategies that contribute to a more equal sharing of power. These include adopting a flexible approach during the interview to enable participants to be able to assume more power over the direction of the interview and answering questions and sharing appropriate personal details both during and after the interview to enable intimacy through reciprocity.

4.9 Reflexivity and Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure was an issue that was carefully considered prior to the data collection stage of the research and was reflected on both during and post interview. Wilde (1992) suggests that some form of self-disclosure enables the interviewer to become more involved in the research process which facilitates the sharing of experiences. This is clearly an aid to gaining knowledge, which is the main aim of the interview, but issues such as leading the participant and therefore creating bias, as well as introducing my own emotional involvement in the subject, needed to be closely monitored and contained. Etherington (2007) puts forwards the view that when there is transparency about our presence within a research relationship, there will inevitably be a shift from the voice of the researcher being objective, to the more subjective *I* within the research and for this to happen there needs to be an element of self-disclosure. There is also a need for clarity, fluency and analytical abilities throughout the process of the interview to gather in-depth information (Rossetto 2014; DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). The quality of the data was reliant on myself as the interviewer to be skilled in the use of prompts, encouragement, summarising and reflection, all core social work skills that I had gained through professional practice experience.

4.10 Conclusion

The approach to data collection adopted in this study is consistent with the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, through which I, as researcher and the participants co-construct meaning, rather than an objective verification of an existing hypothesis (Charmaz 2006). Themes of intimacy, reciprocity, open exchange of ideas and negotiation were evident and are consistent with the epistemological approach adopted. These themes were enacted through the arrangement and process of interviews whereby I actively enabled the voice of the participant to be heard and through the reflective logs written by myself reflecting on my positionality.

4.11 Data Analysis and Theory Development

Diagram 2 demonstrates the process of theory development through the iterative process of data collection, coding, writing reflective logs and memos, constant comparison and engagement with literature and extant theory

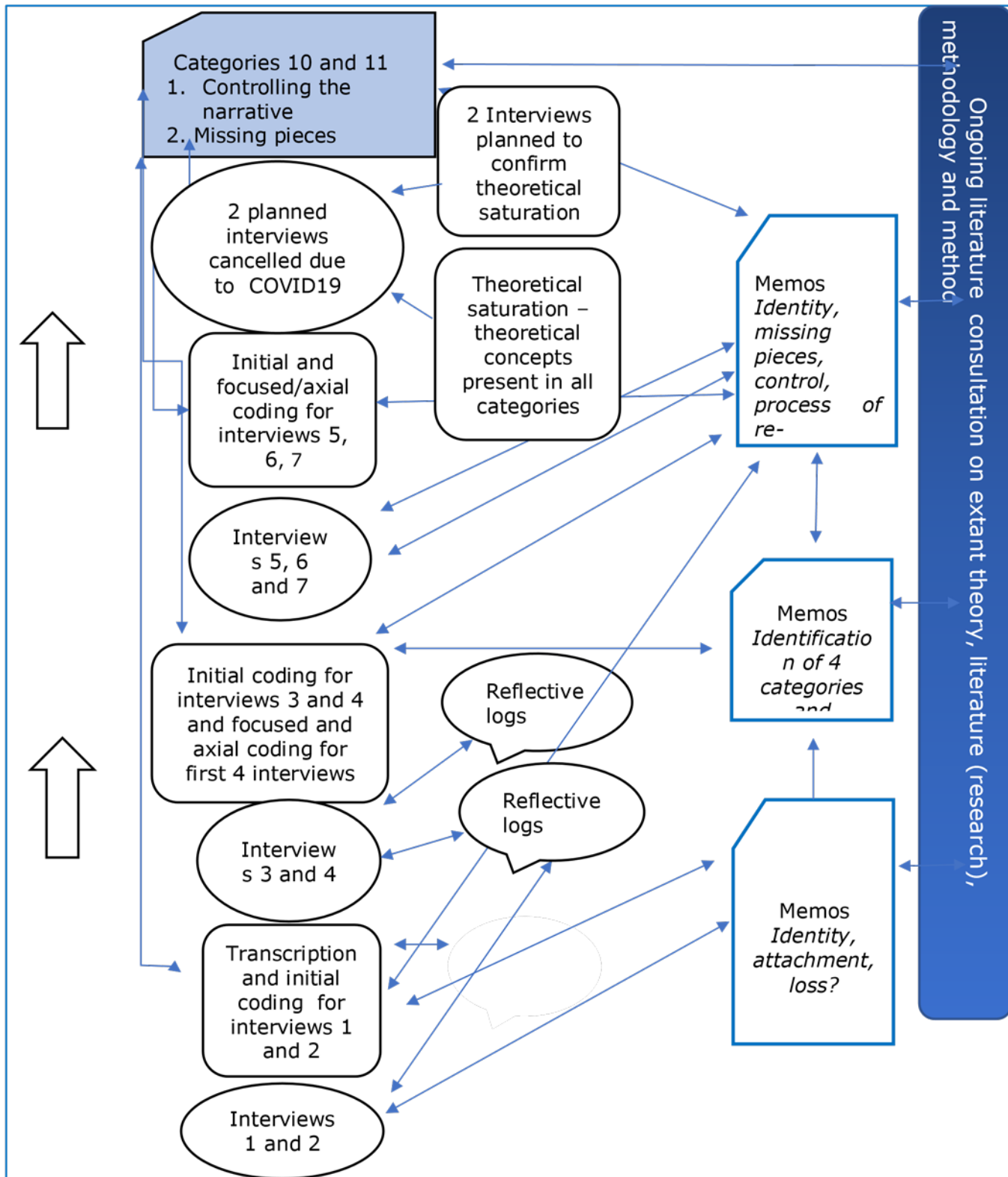


Diagram 2: Theory Development

4.12 The Coding Debate

Within CGT the process of coding and analysis are integrated. According to Charmaz,

Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and the development of an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means (Charmaz 2006 p.460).

Analysis of the data started at the point of initial reflections on the interviews and was continued throughout the various stages of transcription and coding. Within CGTM, three phases of coding are described, initial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding (Charmaz 2014). This is distinct from a classic or traditional grounded theory method, which has two main coding phases: substantive (including open and selective coding) and theoretical coding (Glaser 1998 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967). Both constructivist and traditional grounded theory methods describe open and initial coding in similar terms, with the main aim being to fragment the data to identify patterns and emerging concepts or categories. The emphasis at this initial stage in CGTM is in merging and grouping of concepts (O'Connor, Carpenter and Coughlan 2018; Charmaz 2014, 2006).

These differences in approaches to coding are essentially reflections of the ontological and epistemological foundations used to guide both the coding and analysis. Classic grounded theory method is based on positivist, objectivist assumptions, whereas the constructivist approach is based on interpretivist, subjectivist assumptions. Within CGTM there is a focus on the researcher's relationship with the data evidenced by the process of coding and the use of memos. The discovered reality arises from the iterative process, best explained by the method of abductive analysis. Close attention is paid to the cultural and structural contexts as is consistent with the methodological framework of symbolic interactionism.

Given that the process of coding and analysing, analysing and theorising, are integrated and iterative processes, the presentation of these aspects of the research process into separate headings is problematic and there is necessarily a blurring of boundaries and some cross-over in the artificial distinctions made.

4.12.1 Overview of the Coding Strategy Used

Charmaz (2014) advocates that coding strategies should be considered and used as guidelines rather than prescriptive rules. The strategy used in this inquiry developed over time. Identified codes are presented alongside the transcriptions. This ensured that the identified codes remained grounded in the data (Appendix 4). This strategy was used to ensure that the words of the participants were not lost in the process of coding and data analysis. Charmaz and Belgrave (2018) emphasise the importance of bringing in voices that might otherwise be lost or unknown and therefore left out of our understanding of social phenomena. They identify situations where individuals or groups may not have a voice as including:

- Those who see their experience as beyond words
 - Those who have lost their ability to speak
 - Those who remain silent
 - Those who have been silenced
- (Charmaz and Belgrave 2018 p.9).

The emphasis on representing the voice of the participants of this inquiry is significant given the experiences of the participants of not having been heard, of remaining silent and being silenced and who on occasions have experiences things beyond words. Throughout the process of coding and analysis a flexible approach was utilised, with the consideration and testing out of different strategies and techniques, as is essential within CGTM (Charmaz 2006, 2012).

The following section provides an explanation of methods used, transparently acknowledging theoretical construction as an outcome of working with the data in an intensely personal way to develop meaning.

4.12.2 Initial Coding

Initial coding is one of the preliminary stages of data analysis, though it could be argued that within CGTM, analysis starts to occur even earlier, at the point of data collection. Giving equal attention to analysis within this process ensures that the initial coding is more than labelling and relates to the epistemological position taken, in this instance the position of interpretivism and constructivism. The process of initial coding facilitated attunement to the participant's views of their own realities, rather than

assuming that the participant and myself shared the same views of the world (Charmaz 2012). Initial coding was undertaken to label sections of the data. The aim at this stage was to avoid mere description, but to look for realistic interpretations of the transcribed text. An example of initial coding is presented in Appendix 4. This stage of the coding was conducted in an informal, fluid and reflective way, drawing on academic, professional and personal wisdom, referring back to initial reflections, both textual and diagrammatic. During this process as many ideas as possible were generated inductively from the early data sets. Guided by the principles and aims of abductive analysis, the first step in the coding process for this inquiry, was diagramming which was undertaken after each interview. These diagrams allowed for a visual representation to be made of the prominence of specific features within the interview. Diagramming facilitates the process of imagination and captures initial thoughts and ideas whilst at the same time ensuring that the emotional content of the interviews was not lost. The diagrams produced were returned to a number of times during the various stages of the coding and analysis process to compare these early impressions with later categories and concepts as they emerged from the data.

To ensure that the lived experience of the participants was not lost, *in vivo* codes were also used to give voice to the participants and convey the intensely personal nature of the phenomenon and experiences under examination (Glaser and Strauss 1997). *In vivo* codes were particularly useful in that they clearly represent the participants point of view (Urquhart 2012). These codes can also provide analytic clues, not captured in other aspects of coding (Charmaz 2006). Charmaz (2006) identifies three types of *in vivo* codes: *general terms* that flag significant meanings; *participants' innovative terms*, which capture meaning and/or experience and *insider shorthand terms*. The *in vivo* codes that this inquiry made most use of were the second category identified by Charmaz. A number of participants drew on expressive imagery to explain their experiences and perceptions and it was felt that these codes deserved special attention as they came directly from the participant and had the potential to suggest significant concepts (Urquhart 2012). It was apparent from early interviews that there was a significant amount of emotional content within the narratives, expressed

explicitly by the participants and interpreted by myself. Where expressed emotion was evident in the audio recording, this was also recorded in the process of coding. In vivo codes and the emotional content of the interviews are presented in Appendix 4.

4.12.3 Focused Coding

The next stage of coding involved the identification of categories which were represented as *gerunds*. Charmaz (2006, 2014) identifies the use of gerund codes as being of more value than descriptions as they convey a strong sense of action and sequence and illustrate contextual meanings, as is inherent in the pragmatist paradigm. Gerunds were therefore used to label blocks of text and to synthesise initial codes to highlight action and response to the phenomena of adoption and the acts of searching and re-engagement with birth families. This process required categorisation and grouping to make the process of abduction and concept identification manageable. As with the previous stage of initial coding, focused, gerund coding is an iterative process that seeks to identify the most relevant and prevalent themes within the data and to then subject these codes to a higher level of abstraction (Charmaz 1983).

An approach was taken whereby coding was carried out in distinct stages, with the first two data sets being coded, with concurrent analysis, revisiting the data both visually and audially a number of times. Following this process, a further two data sets were coded, and the process repeated. This ensured the compliance with a core CGTM tenet, that of simultaneous data collection and analysis. Data sets were worked through quickly and spontaneously to prompt analytic thinking and to engage in reflectivity (Charmaz 2006, 2014). The main aim, and indeed challenge, was to avoid forcing the data into pre-conceived codes. This process of line-by-line reflexive coding kept me grounded in the data. The essential principle as espoused by Charmaz is to

...make the codes fit the data, rather than forcing the data to fit your codes (Charmaz 2014 p.120).

Deep immersion in the data enabled a full picture to be gained of the participants' experiences and responses to their adoptive status, childhood and adult experiences and the experiences and reflections on searching and

re-engagement with their birth families. Each transcript was revisited and re-read carefully, contrasting the content against identified categories from data sets, which were identified through the process of focused coding. It was through this process that conceptual categories began to emerge. Through comparison of data against pre-existing gerund codes and gerund codes against newly refined gerund codes within additional data sets, their adequacy and usefulness was considered to assess their worth within the analytical process (Charmaz 2006).

Charmaz (2014) emphasises the importance of staying close to the data and to use simple, precise codes to enable the process of constant comparison between responses and concepts. This approach enabled me to move quickly through the data rather trying to identify the minutiae, which is contradictory to the process of abductive analysis. Concurrent memo writing merged categories, provided explanations of the analysis and built on emerging insights.

As focused coding progressed, it was important to ensure that the concern remained on the central questions of the research as large volumes of data, if not dealt with methodically, can distract and dilute the central concepts that are being examined (Charmaz 2012 , 2014; Gibson 2012). The central question of this thesis was the impact of searching and re-engagement with birth families on adult adoptees. It was apparent from the processes of initial and gerund coding that participants started to develop conceptual awareness of the impact of adoption on their lives as they engaged in the process of seeking information about the circumstances of their adoption and who their birth families were. The personal narratives for each participant were unique in terms of their experiences of growing up within their adoptive families and the circumstances of their adoption. *Personal narratives of adoption* was therefore identified as the first theoretical category with *the motivation to search, the process of searching, the experience of re-engaging and the impact of re-engagement on concepts of self* were identified as subsequent theoretical categories. The final two theoretical categories were identified as *controlling the narrative* and *missing pieces*. Coding was continued alongside constant comparative analysis leading to the process of theoretical coding articulated through the

six theoretical categories and their associated dimensions. Specific concepts and theoretical constructs such as controlling the narrative, the role of self-determination, the need to search for and identify missing pieces were identified in each of the six theoretical categories.

4.13 Constant Comparison Using Abductive Analysis

As already discussed, abductive reasoning was an essential feature of the process of coding and analysis. Abductive reasoning creates an environment where unexpected or surprising findings can emerge (Paavola 2011). Of central importance is the condition that these findings are accounted for through consideration of all possible theoretical explanations to explore some form of test or validation. Potential theoretical explanations need to be explored in order for the most plausible theoretical explanation to be found (Charmaz 2015). The constant comparison method, utilising memos, is a key feature of CGT and is one of the distinguishing features of this research approach. In essence data was sorted, codes compared, and theoretical sensitivity applied as I continued to move between initial and focused codes, focused codes and memos, data and literature and extant theory. This process took place both within and between data sets. Adherence to this process goes some way to countering the argument that constructive grounded theory is a *laissez faire* approach with an inadequate degree of attention being paid to research design and process (Bryant 2002, 2017). There is a need for flexibility and open-mindedness throughout the process but of equal importance is a commitment to research rigour and transparency. The balance aimed for in this inquiry is open mindedness, fluidity and flexibility but all conducted with clearly identifiable processes.

4.14 Memo Writing and Theory Development

In CGTM the constant comparison method as discussed above, is dependent on memo writing as an essential part of the process. Memos are described by Montgomery and Bailey (2007 p. 251)

...a private conversation between the researcher and his/her data.

The process of developing the initial and focused codes aimed to drive the analysis towards theoretical category development.

Examples of memos with links to the identified concepts are presented in Appendices 5 and 6. Theoretical and conceptual memos were differentiated

in this study from the reflective logs that were utilised primarily in the early stages of the study. These reflective logs aimed to address issues of bias and contamination and often drew heavily on my own emotional responses to the research being conducted. Memos were used to record development in understanding of the research process and methodology, theoretical insights and comparisons identified within and between data sets. Through the writing of memos throughout this inquiry, I was able to move beyond description of the data and focused specifically on psychological and social phenomena and assumptions inherent, though sometimes implicit, in the data (Charmaz 2000). As each category was identified and developed, they became increasingly conceptual.

Alongside written memos, mind maps were created. The mind-maps are presented at the beginning of each theoretical category, chapters 6-11 and for the core category, presented in chapter 12. As the research moved towards completion, and theoretical categories came to be saturated, longer memos were written exploring the categories in more detail, with comparisons made between the emergent conceptual ideas. These memos subsequently formed the basis of the core category presented in chapter 12. Goldkhul and Cronholm (2010) warn against jumping to pre-conceived ideas by coding and analysing too much data in one go. The process of memo writing and diagramming was drawn on to avoid this pitfall, though in the early stages of the inquiry I was drawn to make theoretical links without fully exploring the data, and without paying sufficient attention to memo writing and diagramming.

As stated above, the primary aim of memo writing in CGTM is to enable the development of theory. Charmaz (2006) articulates the process of developing emergent theory as theorising, something that is practiced rather than an end result.

When you theorise, you reach down to
fundamentals, up to abstractions and
probe into experiences
(Charmaz 2006 p. 135).

Charmaz expands that theorising in CGT gives priority to demonstrating patterns and connections, rather than linear reasoning that demonstrates causality (Charmaz 2006). Gregor concurs with this view describing theory within the context of CGT as being an abstract entity that aims

...to describe, explain, and enhance understanding of the world and, in some cases, to provide predictions of what will happen in the future and to give a basis for intervention and action (Gregor 2006 p. 616).

This explanation, along with the specific reference that Charmaz (2006) makes to mid-range theory as being applicable to CGTM, demonstrates the appropriateness of this approach precisely because it aims to generate theory in an under-researched field particularly in the mid-range.

4.15 Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is an essential component of theory construction in CGTM (Bryant 2017). The central aim of theoretical sampling is to develop, refine or saturate the properties of the categories that emerge from the data. In CGTM data collection is controlled by the emerging theory and is an ongoing process rather than a one off event, with theoretical sampling therefore being less of a procedure and more of a strategy used throughout the process of conducting the inquiry (Bryman 2004). Another distinction between theoretical sampling and other methods of sampling is that the sample does not consist only of objects (in this inquiry *participants*) and other sources of information and knowledge can be drawn on such as comparative data and extant theory. In this way, identified properties are filled out and hidden features teased out. All possible theoretical understandings of the data are considered, tentative understandings of the data are put forwards, then the data returned to, to check and refine the categories (Richardson and Kramer 2006). The data gathering is driven by the concepts derived from the evolving theory, with the aim of saturating the categories in terms of their dimensions and properties (Bryman 2004). Within a CGT approach, theoretical sampling is undertaken after tentative categories have been identified. It is the emergent theoretical categories that form the basis of theoretical sampling and from which the researcher may be led into new research sites (Richardson and Kramer 2006). For Charmaz, theoretical sampling is concerned with the refinement of ideas and increased conceptualisation from the dimensions within the categories rather than a procedure to boost the sample size (Charmaz 2000, 2015).

Within this approach it is important to consider all conceivable theoretical explanations for the categories that emerge from the data. Richardson and

Kramer (2006) suggest that this should be a flexible approach that is both inductive and abductive.

It is through this process of theoretical sampling that analytic complexity is developed in the researcher's developing theory and this developing theory is kept firmly grounded in the data. Within some inquiries, interviews may be returned to as part of the strategy used for theoretical sampling. This approach was considered in this inquiry but was discounted for the following reasons. Firstly, there were logistical considerations with participants living approximately one hundred and fifty miles away from myself. Secondly, and most importantly, consideration was given to the impact of conducting second interviews on the participants being interviewed. Each interview involved the participant discussing information that was at times emotionally challenging. Drawing on professional social work skills the interviews ended with a sense of closure regarding the process that had just been experienced by myself and the participants. Endings were attended to and I ensured that the participant left the interview room feeling that the experience had been positive and supportive. To revisit the experience with them would have perhaps been of value to the research process but not to the participants. Theoretical sampling was therefore constructed in such a way as to draw on and return to interviews already conducted and transcribed, along with other research findings and areas of extant theory to fill out the identified properties, develop theoretical understanding of the data and reach theoretical saturation.

4.16 Theoretical Saturation

In early explanations of GTM, theoretical saturation was seen as a weakness of the method, though Charmaz (2014) argues that used correctly and with rigour and transparency, it is a strength of the method, as it offers the rationale for claiming to have reached an interim endpoint for the research activity. Theoretical saturation is said to have been achieved when the categories that have emerged from the research process are developed with a complex set of properties and dimensions through the collection and analysis of adequate data, to the extent that additional data provides no additional insights (Charmaz 2006). In practical terms, a pragmatic decision needs to be made about when theoretical saturation has been achieved (Alemu et al 2015). This subjective interpretation has received some

criticism. Dey (1999 p.257) challenges the notion of saturation for two reasons. Firstly, he argues that in grounded theory, theoretical categories are produced through *partial non-exhaustive coding*. He contends that the term saturation is inaccurate as in his view it is incongruent with a procedure that *stops short of coding all the data*. Secondly, Dey (1999), argues that the decision about when theoretical saturation has been reached, relies too heavily on the subjective view of the researcher that the properties of the category are saturated. For these reasons he suggests the more accurate description of this process is *theoretical sufficiency* (Dey 1999 p.257).

Despite it being generally acknowledged that the criteria for achieving saturation is somewhat ambiguous, Charmaz (2015) contends that theoretical saturation involves a greater degree of in-depth engagement with the data and theoretical construction than through the processes of saturation of themes or data. In conclusion theoretical saturation builds precision, density and complexity into the emerging theoretical statements and keeps them grounded in the data (Charmaz 2015). The identification of theoretical saturation is illustrated in the mind-maps presented in chapters 6-12.

4.17 The Core Category

The core category is arrived at after the process of coding and analysis. It is verified once a decision has been made that theoretical saturation has been reached and is developed due to its relevance and workability. The core category is central and relates to as many of the other categories and their dimensions as possible. The key elements of the core category reoccur frequently in the data (Holton 2007). The core category of the grounded theory presented in this thesis is explained in chapter 12.

4.17.1 The Storyline

Whilst she makes no explicit use of *storyline*, Charmaz (2006), stresses the importance of narrative in the presentation of CGT. Dey (2007) makes more explicit reference to the use of a storyline and put forwards the view that narrative has the potential to develop the analysis of actions and interactions. Within the context of this inquiry, the storyline is both a product and a tool to facilitate and convey analytical processes and is used both to integrate and articulate theory to the reader (Birks and Mills 2019).

Glaser argued against the use of storyline, raising the concern that it would lead to the forcing of data to fit predetermined concepts. This thesis contends that adopting a storyline in the early stages of the research process may lead to the forcing of data but its identification and reworking in the later stages of the inquiry brought coherence to the narrative and conveyed the central aspects of the core category to the reader. Dey (2007) summarises this view, asserting that,

...the grounding of a plot is more than just a matter of logical coherence among its various elements: it has to have some narrative or configurative coherence as well (Dey 2007, p. 184).

This is a position that resonates with this study.

CHAPTER 5 – DEVELOPING THE THEORY

The following chapters aim to demonstrate both the theory developed and also the stages or scaffolding involved in the development. The identification of the six theoretical categories form the initial stage of theory development, with aspects of the core category and the concepts leading to the development of the grounded theory appearing within each category. Each of the six theoretical categories are explained drawing on in vivo quotes from the data to represent the voices of the participants. The dimensions of the categories are fully explored to locate them within the lived experience and narratives of the participants.

The core category is then presented in chapter 12, starting with a summary or *storyline*, and moving on to explore the various dimensions of the category. The names given to the six theoretical categories was an important consideration. The chosen names needed to have significance for myself, as the researcher, but also needed to convey meaning to the audience (Urquhart 2012). The names selected were changed many times during the process of coding, memo writing and in the subsequent writing up of the theory.

5.1 Introduction to the Six Theoretical Categories

The data sets from the individual interviews provided coherent narratives. For the purpose of analysis and theory development, these narratives were deconstructed, with specific elements or dimensions identified to form the six theoretical categories. Elements of the core category, in which is articulated the grounded theory, are evident in each of the six categories. As suggested by Charmaz (1991) I have aimed to use simple, vivid words as spoken by participants as a means of capturing the essence of their experiences and their understanding (Charmaz 2014, 1991).

This thesis will now move to a more detailed exploration of the six theoretical categories. The categories and their dimensions are generated from the interview data, with understanding co-constructed from my own academic, professional and personal knowledge. They vary in their degree of conceptual abstraction depending on the content of the dimensions. The first four categories, which are fairly linear in nature, are as follows:

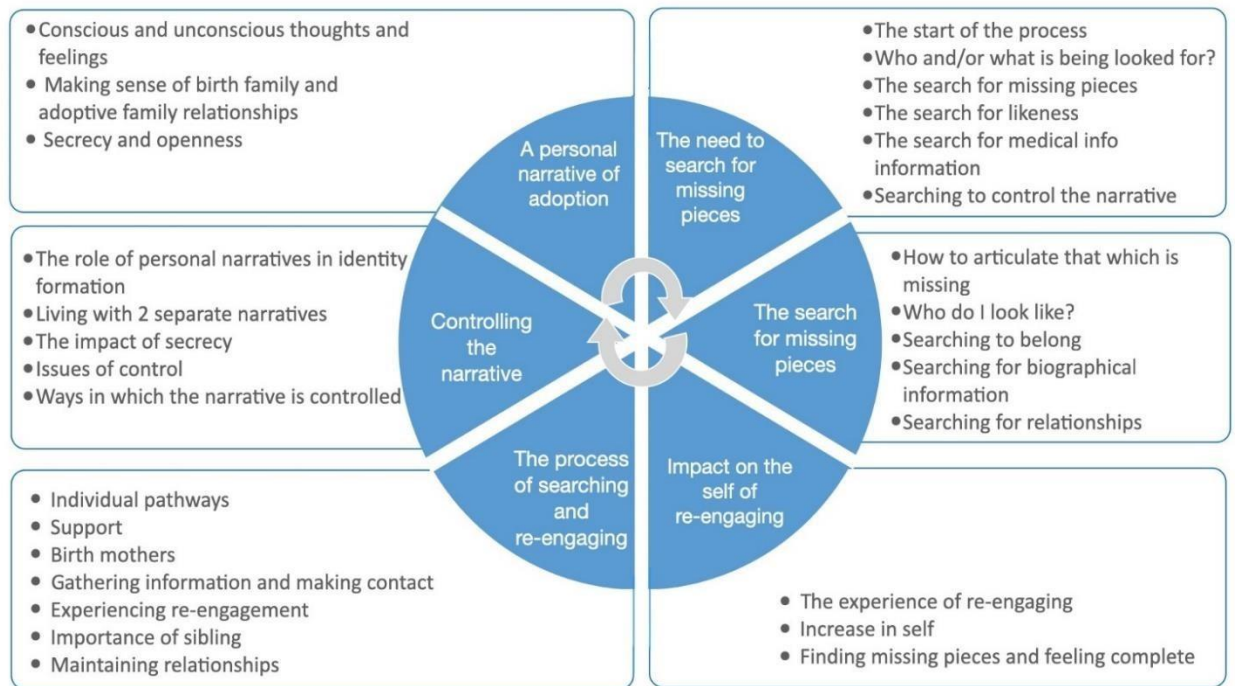
1. A personal narrative of adoption
2. The motivation to search
3. The process of searching and re-engagement with birth families; and
4. The perceived emotional and psychological outcomes of the process of searching and re-engaging

Through the process of working with the data and codes, the categories become progressively more analytic leading to the identification of the final two categories.

The final two categories, *controlling the narrative* and *missing pieces* are more conceptual and draw on specific data from the first four categories that have particular relevance for the development of the core category. As would be expected, sections of the data, often encapsulate more than one category making the delineation between the categories somewhat artificial. This stage of the process is necessary though in order to bring some order to the data.

The diagram below illustrates the six theoretical categories and the dimensions within each category that were identified following the focused coding of the data sets. This representation allows for an overview of the theory as a whole, prior to the identification of significant concepts

Diagram 3. Overview of the six theoretical categories and their dimensions



As is evident from the data presented in the following chapters, each participant had a particular style of communication, both verbal and nonverbal. Careful attention was paid to the words used and the body language and emotional content of interviews. It was apparent that some participants found it easier to express their thoughts and feelings than others. It was important when analysing and presenting the data, to give equal weight to statements made by participants that were more hesitant in their communication as was given to the very vivid statements made by those who were able to articulate their narratives more clearly. Sometimes, small, apparently incidental statements made within the context of an interview that was halting and hesitant in its overall tone, carries as much importance and power in its intent than more vivid accounts. For example, Participant 7 is a quietly spoken man who presented as shy and fairly introvert. Some of the statements made are quite low key and unassuming. However, within the context of the interview and my impression of him as a person I can see how significant some of these statements are. In comparison, Participants 1 and 4 are confident in their communication and are able to express significant issues with clarity and to convey strong emotions. It was important therefore to pay careful attention to the

emotional content of the interview and the style of communication. I have aimed to represent the varied use of language and articulation throughout the following chapters. Charmaz and Mitchell (1996) advocate that though there is a need to be analytical in writing with a CGT study, the writing needs to be evocative of the participant's experiences. This section of the thesis therefore aims not to transcend the experience of the participants but to re-envisage it.

Representing the voice of the participants was one of the primary aims of this inquiry. It is important to state though, that as the researcher, I have aimed to attribute no value judgements to any of the situations described and presented. As discussed in relation to my positionality within the study, I do not come to the research as a blank page in terms of both knowledge and personal experience regarding the phenomena of adoption. My perceptions inevitably and justifiably impact on the cocreation of understandings that emerge from the data. However, having no personal involvement with any of the situations discussed, I have represented the views and feelings of the participants with the knowledge that other people directly involved will inevitably have experienced these situations very differently.

CHAPTER 6 - A PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION

Diagram 4 illustrates the theoretical category *a personal narrative of adoption*, with associated dimensions. Significant concepts that contribute to the emergent theory are highlighted in blue.

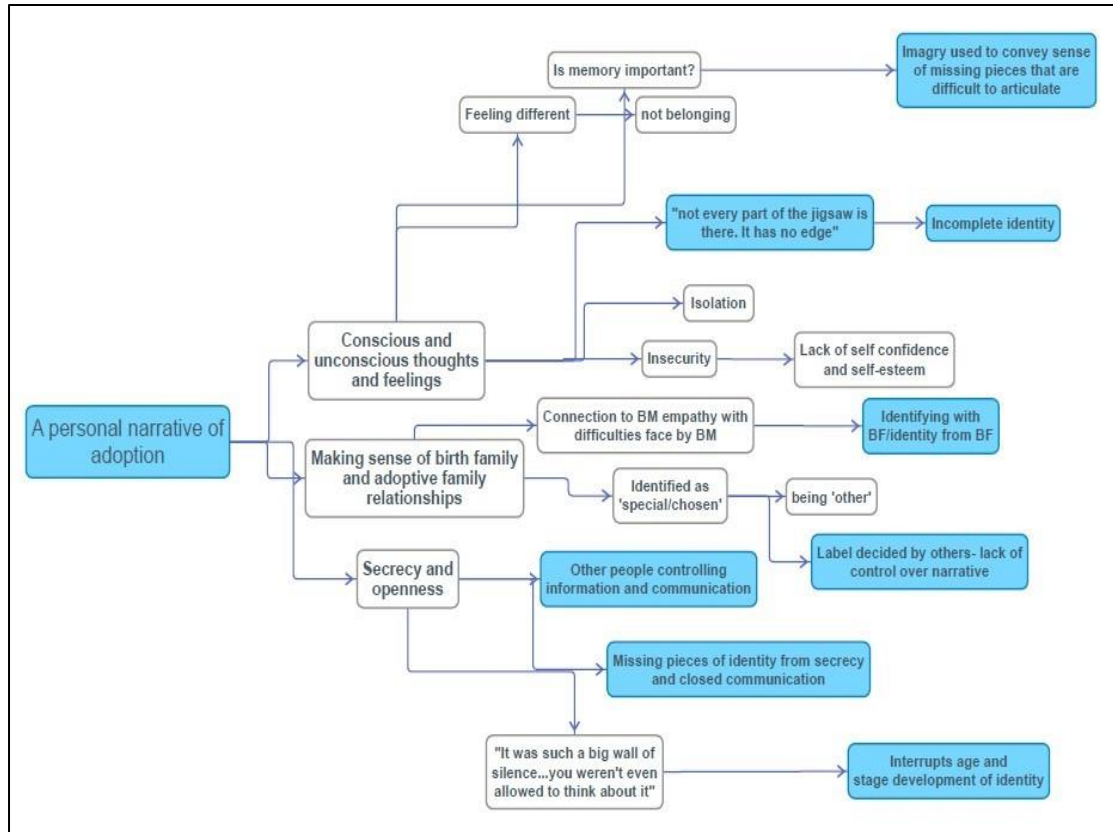


Diagram 4

In general terms, the data for this first theoretical category points to two irrefutable facts regarding adoption. Firstly, adoption is a lifelong event and secondly each person's experience of adoption is unique. The participants provided very clear narratives of their adoption stories. When recounting personal narratives of adoption, they all drew on thoughts and feelings that were from conscious memories as well as pre-memory experiences.

6.1 A Personal Narrative of Adoption – Conscious and Unconscious Thoughts and Feelings

All participants identified that some of the thoughts and feelings that they had regarding their experiences of adoption were conscious and some were unconscious that they became aware of in recent years when they reflected back on experiences. All participants expressed their beliefs that early experiences, even pre-memory ones, had an impact on them in later life.

Some of the unconscious thoughts centred on participants knowing that they were adopted, despite not having been informed by their adoptive parents. Participant 1 had a strong sense that there was a connection to something/someone else but did not know what it was. As a young child she felt certain that she was not a true part of her adoptive family.

I don't know how I managed to put 2 and 2 together and got 4 but I just, there was something, I just kind of knew (Participant 1).

Similarly, Participant 6 stated

...but I always knew in a way (Participant 1).

Participant 5 was also able to reflect on the importance of pre-memory experiences.

I suppose it validates that bit that many people don't get that pre-memory stuff...how important it is and how much it impacts on us (Participant 5).

The role of memory in relation to identity formation is further explored in chapter 12 and clearly has particular significance for adoptees, for whom pre-memory experiences appeared to be as important, if not more important, than conscious memories. Unconscious/pre-memory thoughts and feelings appear to provoke a stronger emotional reaction than conscious memories and led to the construction of some of the more abstract articulations provided by participants. These are evident throughout the six categories.

Participant 5 spoke at length about his thoughts and feelings regarding his birth mother and his awareness that these feelings had been present throughout his life. He described feeling that he had *missed out* on something, specifically regarding his relationship with his birth mother. Further analysis of his words led me to consider whether it was the relationship itself that he thought/felt that he had missed, or what that relationship meant for his self-concept. His continued exploration of this theme was particularly visceral, best portrayed by the words

There is this kind of baby inside, that is almost just like crying for its mother....and um my adoptive parents (Participant 5).

The additional reference to his adoptive parents is confusing in this context, and it is unclear from the interview whether this is a half-finished thought about something else, or if he indeed was also crying for his adoptive parents, who presumably, in this context were unable to meet this primary needs. Participant 6 also explored the theme of the centrality of his birth mother in relation to his personal narrative, stating

I am a believer in the primal wound...I think you go against nature - a woman having a baby, see if you start messing about with that there's obviously going to be some kind of....you cannot mess with nature without..... (Participant 6).

He expanded on this theme, stating that he feels that there needs to be some kind of healing of that relationship, though was unsure how this would be possible. Participant 4 shared similar thoughts and feelings, with similar imagery about crying out for his birth family. Throughout the interview, he demonstrated ambivalent feelings towards his birth mother, a close connection to his now deceased birth father and real warmth towards his birth brother who he was in the process of arranging to meet. He spoke of the distressing feelings he had when social events were coming to a close, which he described as feeling like it was an abandonment.

Yes, it's just the feeling of, you know like I suppose it just makes me think about my mum and dad and stuff, when I am feeling like that you call out for your, even as a grown man, you can still call out for your mammy and daddy when you are struggling, you know, and I guess I am crying out for the biological ones (Participant 4).

Participant 3 also appeared to have a very clear perception of the emotional impact of being adopted and the impact of unconscious feelings and pre-memory experiences. He also recognised the impossibility of articulating in words some of these thoughts and experiences but believed them to be of great importance.

It's all chemicals and feelings that you are trying to put into words...when you are with your mum and dad at such an early age, where everything is feelings. There is no language, just feelings and chemicals (Participant 3).

Other participants focused less on specific relationships when reflecting on unconscious thoughts and feelings, but instead spoke of a more general sense of not belonging and being *other*. Participant 1 spoke of not fitting in with her adoptive family and her adoptive family not fitting with her. She describes that they were

...so, so different (Participant 1).

One of the theoretical concepts that emerged throughout the categories and in various dimensions within this category, was that of something/things being missing and parts of the person not being connected. This is described explicitly by Participant 3, with the use of powerful imagery.

Not every part of the jigsaw is there, or it has no edge (Participant 3).

This concept emerged as a significant dimension of the grounded theory and is further articulated and explored in chapters 11 and 12.

Looking specifically at the emotional impact in their childhood years of being adopted, Participants 7 and 1 spoke of feelings of isolation, a feeling that was compounded by being only children within their adoptive families.

I was an only child. I fought being an only child (Participant 1).

Participant 7 also spoke of feeling alone in the world within his adopted family

There were a lot of strains in those (adoptive family) relationships and that was part of the feeling of isolation...the relationships in that unit were difficult and there wasn't an awful lot of emotional connection (Participant 7).

Feelings of insecurity were evident as a theme within all of the interviews, both in childhood and throughout adult years. Participant 1 spoke of not feeling as good as other people, with friendships not being on an equal level. She felt that she should be grateful for other people's friendship. For some participants these feelings of insecurity were experienced specifically in social situations. These accounts can be understood in relation to adult attachment theory, which is further explored in chapter 12. The participants expressed surprise that other adoptees had had the same experiences, something that had emerged during discussions in the support group. These

insecure feelings were particularly apparent at the end of any social gathering where participants found it hard to leave, to break the connection with the people that they were socialising with. Participant 4 explained that he just

...didn't trust things to carry on
(Participant 4).

Participant 1 reflected

I don't know why, we don't know when to break off from being with friends, it's really the oddest thing and loads of people do it. (Participant 1).

Participant 4 went on to describe social situations ending as feeling like a huge huge loss (Participant 4).

The emotional impact of such situations is vividly described in the following two excerpts.

...it always happens when erm, I have a night out, when it is time to go, erm I feel a great sadness because everyone has all come together and there is all this laughing and joking, then all of a sudden everything just goes...and everything just stops and it is just this, everyone is going home and I have been left and it comes down to abandonment, not rejection but abandonment, feeling that everyone has gone and you are just left on your own (Participant 4).

...I just can't explain what it feels like but it's as if you have spent maybe a year transforming a house brick by brick and it comes all the way up and then, someone says a minute later, do you know what, take that down again one brick at a time, and it's just this terrible feeling of just hurt and anger, and just feeling, you just want to scream a bit, and it's not a sympathy thing, I don't expect anyone to feel sorry for me at all, but it's just a constant cry for help. It's just a fact (Participant 4).

Fear of rejection and feelings of insecurity were also expressed by Participant 2.

...they (adopted people) don't want anyone to dislike them, they have to fit in, but we can't get too close with people because the rejection...I think I have lived a lot of my life

with a mask, I have just got better at it
(Participant 2).

When considering the impact that being adopted had had on her emotional and psychological wellbeing, Participant 2 identified lack of self-confidence as having been present throughout her life.

I...never had great self-confidence, as I am older, I can cover that much better and as a mother, you can put on the mask, you can portray that and people say you have got loads of confidence (Participant 2).

Participant 4 describes the emotional impact of being adopted as coming mainly from society's views about adoption and adopted people, though there is some indication that implicit messages from his adoptive parents have also had an impact. He describes what he sees as a common feeling for adopted children, as always thinking

have I done something wrong...
(Participant 4).

Implicit messages received from adoptive parents and from society in general appear to have impacted on the sense of identity that the participants developed. These implicit messages are significant in that they are difficult to define and recognise. There are specific examples that indicate their presence and their power throughout all of the interviews. When thinking specifically about the messages that he feels that he received from his adoptive parents and the impact that this had on him, Participant 4 reflects that

I always felt quite controlled as an adoptee, I was controlled and it was almost like this indemnity that you had come to us, and you have got to be so thankful all the time, but we will always have a say in what you do (Participant 4).

In what appears to be a contrasting statement, there is a disconnect between the emotions expressed above and his later reflection on his relationship with his adoptive parents

I love my parents to bits and they have given me everything you could ever dream of (Participant 4).

The lack of control and a sense of powerlessness that the participants experienced in the process of their adoption and living as an adoptee is

another significant concept that appears throughout the categories and is explored in more detail in chapters 10 and 12.

Participant 4 went on to explain that he felt that society's view of adoption is ill informed and carries negative connotations. When asked to expand, he explained that he thought the phenomena of adoption was a taboo, but then corrected himself saying that negative perceptions come from ignorance whereby people are not interested in talking or thinking about it if it does not touch their lives.

I just think that you are classified as an outsider, you are different, it's like look at adopted ***** over there...did you hear about him? He's adopted, oh right...odd (Participant 4).

Throughout the interview, Participant 4 expressed feelings of hurt and at times anger, that he was seen as different, as *other*. These feelings were compounded by the fact that he was not told that he was adopted until the age of nineteen. He felt a sense of difference but could not speak of it or seek comfort as throughout his childhood it was something hidden and unknown.

Not all of the participants described unhappy, or insecure childhood experiences. Participant 3 reflects on a happy, settled childhood, involving friends and out of school activities. He describes his childhood and early adolescence in the following words

From my point of view, life went on, life was good...it was good, I had a good upbringing, happy times (Participant 3).

I was actually too busy enjoying myself to tell you the truth.... life was irrelevant.....not caring about my roots, I was having a whale of a time through my teenage years (Participant 3).

The impact of the internalised messages about adoption, particularly in relation to both claiming their identity as an adoptee but also in relation to feeling able to explore this strand of their personal narrative and to exercise an element of control in order to do this, is explored further in chapters 10 and 12.

6.2 A Personal Narrative of Adoption - Making Sense of Birth Family and Adoptive Family Relationships

As previously explained in chapter 4, the interview schedule used open questions to collect data. Though none of the participants were asked specifically about the nature of the relationships that they had with birth and adopted families, all spoke about these relationships, some in great detail, others less so. Even those that focused less on this aspect of their experience of being adopted, made reference to the complex nature of the relationships contained in the two narratives of their life. In relation to identity development, this aspect of the adoptees' experience has particular significance potentially leading to a fractured identity as discussed further in chapter 12.

One of the clearest observations made from the data, was that overall, participants focused primarily on the relationship with their birth mother when talking about birth family relationships. This did not necessarily mean that birth mothers were always the main focus for reengagement though. In terms of constructing a personal narrative of their adoption experiences, all participants were drawn to reflecting on the role that their birth mothers played, with birth fathers receiving far less attention and less emotional content in reference to them through the narratives. This raises the question of whether the significance of the mother/child relationship comes from intrinsic very early attachment experiences or is more a reflection of the social and cultural constructs of the mother figure. One of the themes that emerged in relation to participant's thoughts about their birth mother, was the apparent tendency to try to understand the circumstances surrounding them being relinquished for adoption as a child, with a consistent perspective of there being insurmountable difficulties encountered by the birth mother which left her with few choices. Participant 4 recounted that

Mother was a victim of Margaret Thatcher's Britain in the 1980's and she couldn't really cope with 2 children. My brother is a year older. Her and my father weren't seeing eye to eye and there were difficulties in the marriage and it was just too hard for her to cope....But I know that it wasn't a particularly good time when I was adopted and I think my mum thought, well I have got one child growing up in it, I don't want it for 2. That was the reason I think. It wasn't a good time (Participant 4).

Participant 3 talks of his birth mother having had three children in three years, and not being able to cope with the third one. Participant 6 explained that his birth mother was only thirteen when she had him and was told by her mother that she couldn't keep the baby. Similarly, Participant 1 expresses her view that being unmarried, her birth mother had little choice as

There was not so much support in 1969. It was very difficult (Participant 1).

Participant 1's account of her birth mother's circumstances contains a strong narrative of her birth mother having no control and being powerless in the situation. She recounts that the adoption was privately arranged and that through the absence of support from her own family, the birth father and the state, her birth mother had had no choice and the arrangements were made with expedience and secrecy and with no consideration of the wishes of her birth mother. Participant 2 recounted a similar narrative around the lack of choice and support for her birth mother.

I was about 3 weeks old. I was put into the system straight away. I know that my birth mother and father, they were together but he had a wife. He had been married.... They stayed in a caravan for a while and I think he left her and was not prepared to take a child on and basically said deal with it. So I was put up for adoption straight away (Participant 2).

Reflecting on these accounts, it appears that understanding and expressing empathy for birth mothers at the time of their adoption may have been related to the participants' self-concept and to some extent may have been

an attempt to protect themselves from internalising feelings of rejection. This is not to dismiss the social, personal and cultural pressures experienced by the participants' birth mothers. Identification with the narrative of birth mothers also potentially indicates the extent to which the participants draw their sense of identity from their birth families in addition to/instead of their adoptive families. This concept is further developed in chapter 12. Though a sense of empathy and understanding were expressed by participants in relation to their birth mothers regarding the circumstances of the adoption, conflicting feelings sometimes emerged at other points in the interviews. Participant 2 reflected on how she felt when she accessed her birth certificate

I remember getting the birth certificate and it came up with my name and then I was just, I was just devastated. I remember sitting on the bus just crying and thinking how could they? It just brought all those things back. How could they just give me up? How could they do that to a baby? (Participant 2).

Feelings towards birth mothers appear to be conflicted with a number of participants, leading again to suppositions about the fractured sense of identity experienced.

All participants provided some narrative pertaining to their experience of their relationships with their adoptive parents, though this was not a question that was specifically asked during the interviews. The most striking observation is how different these experiences were. Assumptions that I might have made, that the quality of the relationship might be dependent on factors such as the level of communicative openness within the adoptive family, were challenged. There was no identifiable pattern to the satisfactory and less satisfactory adoptive family relationships. A number of participants spoke of having been described as special and chosen. She says she picked me out of 10 cots (Participant 6).

I was special – you know the 'S' word
(Participant 3).

Though these statements may initially appear to be positive in terms of the message that they convey, they were not consistently received as such. For participant 3 in particular such messages appeared to convey a sense of

difference and lack of control for the adoptee inherent in the process of adoption.

6.3 A Personal Narrative of Adoption – Secrecy and Openness

Participants experienced a wide range of attitudes towards their adoptive status from their immediate family, wider family and social networks and also from society in general. Messages about how open communication could be regarding their adoption were expressed explicitly and implicitly, with positive and negative messages being given and received.

Participant 3 was told that he was adopted as a child, but then felt that he could not really talk about his adoptive status. He stated that communication about his adoption was relatively open and that people in the wider social circle all knew, but any further discussion about how he felt about being adopted, or questions that he might have had would have been very difficult to broach. From my own perspective, the scenario described by Participant 3 does not meet the criteria for real communicative openness. The fact that he describes his adoption as having been open is perhaps a reflection of society's views of what is an acceptable level of openness regarding adoption. To be told about the fact of being adopted is seen as acceptable, but discussion beyond this are not encouraged. This has the potential to bring implicit feelings of shame whereby the *adoption* part of someone's identity is not being valued, is *less than*. This concept is discussed further in chapter 12. Participant 7 also presents a narrative of limited openness:

Even as a small boy I knew that I had been adopted and I knew a little bit of the background in the sense that I knew that my birth mother had died. I didn't know very much about the circumstances of why it happened but I knew that and I think I must have been asking questions at one point and I was encouraged to go to the social work department myself at the age of 8 or 9 (Participant 7).

Again, that facts relating to Participant 7's adoption were acknowledged but there appears to be a clear message about any discussion about this aspect of his identity having no place within the adoptive family.

Participant 2 describes a scenario that was common to a number of participants, in that she understood, but was not explicitly told, not to talk about her adoption. No one else within the family would broach the subject. She places value though on the fact that she was told, even the minimum of information. She felt that being told from a young age meant that her identity as an adopted person was very much just a part of who she was.

Yes (I did know), which I think is the best possible thing. I say to people, if I ever come across people that are thinking of adopting, I say please, please, please make it straight away, don't leave it. Because I have grown up knowing that I was adopted from – I couldn't tell you when because it was just a way of life.

(Participant 2)

It has to be questioned to what extent this is true though. How can the part of her identity related to being adopted, be fully integrated into who she was as a person when she had so little information and could not explore the story of her birth family and her place within it? The reflections of Participant 2 raise interesting questions again about the participant's perceptions of openness and the impact that a lack of communicative openness may have had on them, without them being aware of it. The power of such implicit messages again comes to the fore with additional challenges facing the participants through them not being aware of the power of such implicit messages on their sense of self.

The reasons that participants understood for not speaking about their adoption varied, from just sensing that it was a difficult subject, to more specific concerns as expressed by Participant 2.

.....it was just who I was, and I did as the years went on feel less able to talk about it because I felt that I didn't want to upset my parents...even now, I feel she is not a strong enough person to cope with that (Participant 2).

Participant 2 has continued this secrecy within her own family, and though her three children know that she is adopted and know that she has reengaged with her birth family, it is just the factual details that have been shared and there have been no real conversations about it, certainly none that have any emotional content. She further describes how she does not even discuss her adoption with her brother, who is also adopted. Participant

3 also identifies with the scenario of any conversations about his adoption being on a factual level with little or no conversations with emotional content.

Not all participants experienced what they perceived as openness within their adoptive families. Participant 4 provides an account of a far more closed experience of adoption.

I had no information at all, none at all and I only really officially found out I was adopted at 19. That was when I found out (Participant 4).

Following on from having been told at the age of nineteen, Participant 4 states that his adoption has never been discussed with his birth parents and describes the one isolated, information giving conversation as being,

...a very, very, very, very uncomfortable thing (Participant 4).

The impact of this lack of communication and information was compounded by the fact that he later discovered that some people in the neighbourhood knew that he was adopted.

Yeah, so that secrecy feels harder because it doesn't just involve...and I always wonder to this day how many people knew, and I don't know how to really take that... (Participant 4).

The sense of having no control in central aspects of his life, discussed in detail by Participant 4 appears to have been intensified by a number of people, not just within his family, having access to information that he did not have.

The most extreme experience in terms of secrecy was discussed by Participant 1. She described that despite having always know that there was something and having actively asked questions, her adoptive status was denied during her childhood.

It was such a big wall of silence, that it was kind of like, you are not even allowed to think about it (Participant 1).

Participant 1 describes having found her birth certificate in a bureau at home and challenging her adoptive parents, who continued to deny that she was adopted. Her adoptive parents eventually admitted to her that she was

adopted when she was sixteen but still refused to discuss it. This brings in an element not just of secrecy but of denial. She states that it was

absolutely never discussed until I left home the day before my 17th birthday and it was only when I left home that I would be able to put the odd comment in (Participant 1).

The impact of these messages of secrecy and complete lack of openness had a lasting impact on Participant 1. She spoke of being unable to give herself permission to think about her adoption having lived with an essential part of her identity being kept secret and hidden for such a large part of her life. This had a significant impact on Participant 1 in terms of her sense of trust in others and understanding of who she was as a person.

Having looked at the differing levels of openness and information made available to participants, it is apparent from the personal narratives, that different messages about adoption were passed on to them, whether explicitly or implicitly. Communication of these messages comes from both within and out with families. It is evident that others controlled the availability of information and the permission needed to speak of their adoption. This aspect of the narratives is further explored in relation to the impact on identity formation in chapter 12.

It seems apparent, when considering the narratives as a whole, that the different degrees of secrecy, or lack of communicative openness, led participants to internalise the belief that the adoptive family unit was perceived as good and stable, something that should be respected and fostered. Something within which memories should be captured and identities formed, whereas the birth family narrative was uncertain, less secure and therefore less good. When considering the implicit messages communicated to him, Participant 5 identified that the lack of openness regarding his adoption, led him to understand his beginnings as being less stable, more complex than those that were not adopted, describing his identity as being.

...built on shaky ground (Participant 5).

Participant 5 also spoke of his feelings about his adoption being *irrational* with the implied understanding that these thoughts and feelings regarding adoption should not assume any importance in the day-to-day life of the adoptee as the real narrative of their life came from the life they had lived

with their adoptive family. With this separation of the two narratives, there is also the potential separation of the two strands of the adoptee's identity. This concept of the value placed on the different strands of the adoptee's narrative is explored in relation to identity formation in chapter 12.

6.4 Summary

This chapter has drawn on specific sections of the data, along with my own understanding and knowledge to illustrate the unique nature of the adoptive experience. The individual narratives of all participants bear few similarities around issues such as the circumstances of their adoption, relationships with birth and adoptive families, the level of communicative openness within adoptive families and the range of both unconscious as well as conscious feelings that participants experienced. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, it is the differences in experiences that serve to highlight the similarities and conceptual themes that emerge through subsequent chapters. The image of *missing pieces* and not feeling complete as being part of those conscious and unconscious feelings were evident in all narratives and have formed a significant concept for further development. The themes of secrecy and a lack of communicative openness are developed throughout the theoretical categories with possible relationships to identity formation considered in more detail and in relation to the literature and wider theoretical framework in chapter 12. The issue of secrecy and a lack of openness also bring to the fore the *lack of control* that adoptees have over their own narratives. This category also identifies the feelings that participants expressed towards their birth families and the way in which these feelings may impact on their sense of identity being drawn primarily from the links with their birth family rather than from their adoptive family. One aspect of the grounded theory identified within this inquiry is that the *missing pieces* of knowledge and connection with birth families, may contribute to a fractured sense of identity. The imagery used by participants enables articulation of abstract and unconscious feelings and thoughts and appear throughout the narratives.

CHAPTER 7 MOTIVATIONS FOR SEARCHING

Diagram 5 illustrates the theoretical category *motivations for searching*, with associated dimensions. Significant concepts that contribute towards the grounded theory are highlighted in blue.

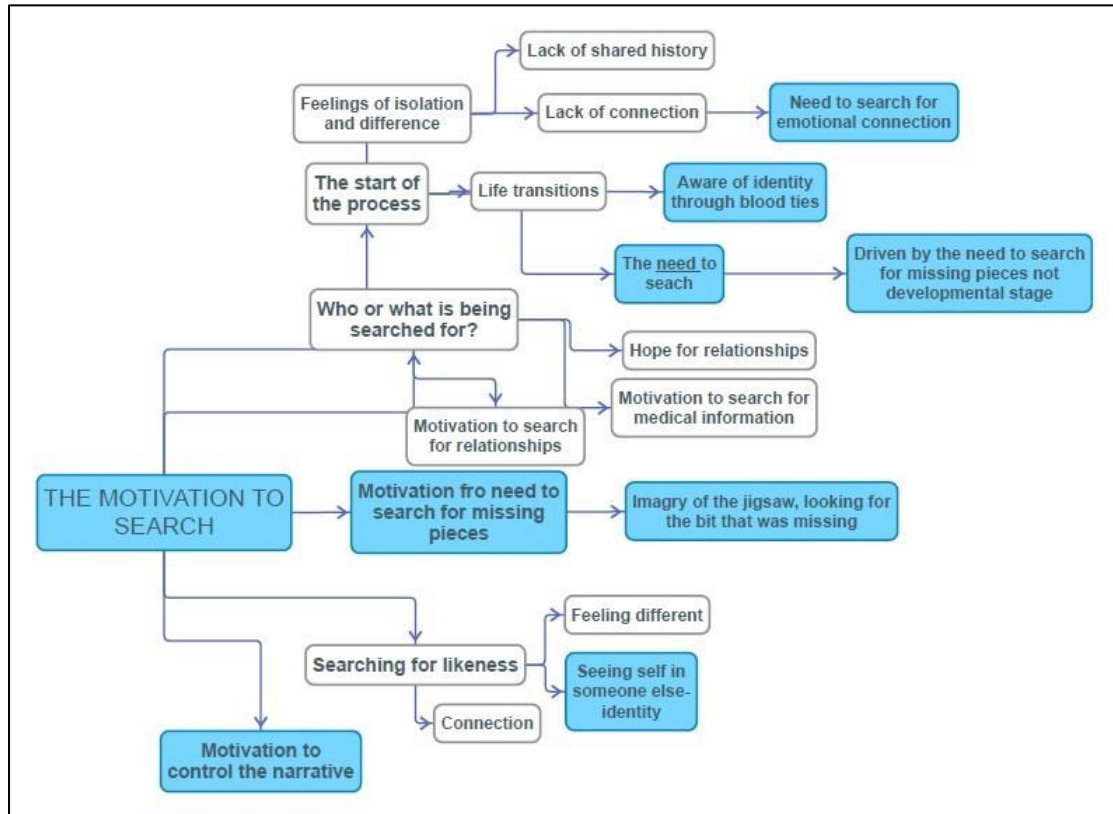


Diagram 5

This chapter examines the primary motivations for searching, as articulated by the participants. *Missing pieces* was a phrase used repeated throughout the narrative and was something that the participants appeared to comprehend on an emotional as well as a cognitive level. What was perceived as being missing was different for each person, though there were some commonalities. Participants identified that the need or motivation to search was a need to *understand and identify* as well as to *find* the missing pieces. The motivation to search is also articulated as an attempt by the participants to begin the process of playing a more active role in the narrative of their lives.

7.1 The Motivation to Search - The Start of the Process

This section focuses primarily on the explicit, conscious motivations for searching as expressed by the participants though also included are some aspects of unconscious motivations. As with all categories examined, the data in terms of the need to search demonstrated a wide range of experiences and perspectives. There were though common strands and threads running through all narratives. Again, the data does not fit neatly within each of the theoretical categories, and there is predictably some overlap between categories. In many ways, for some participants, the motivation to search arose from their understanding of the impact that being adopted had on them, the personal narratives of adoption, as detailed in the previous chapter.

For a number of participants the motivation to search emerged in childhood and was either an unexpressed, hidden need, a spoken request for information from adoptive parents or the beginnings of active searching. This was dependent to some extent on the levels of communicative openness within the adoptive family. Participant 2 states that she had always been curious, and that as a child some basic information had been given to her. Participant 3 also speaks of asking some questions in childhood, to which he was given basic answers. Participant 7 speaks of being curious as a child and approaching his adoptive parents for information.

I can't remember exactly what triggered it but there had certainly been something on the back burner...That feeling of isolation and feeling different and what that is about. Because you have no day today shared history with your birth family and yet there is still clearly a connection (Participant 7).

Though not able to articulate what he needed to search for, or why he needed to search as a child, Participant 7 appears to have been driven to find some answers and was confident about his decision to search as explained in the following words.

...even as a small boy I knew that I had been adopted and I knew a little bit of background in the sense that I knew that my birth mother had died. I didn't know very much about the circumstances of why it happened but I knew that and I think I must have been asking questions at one point and I was encouraged to go to the social work department myself at the age of 8 or 9 that had handled the whole thing from my adoptive parent's side. They had a file on me and the history and the social worker who had actually dealt with it at the time, she was still there and she was quite elderly at that point and she was able to give me a few more...a little bit of flesh on the bones. She had to be quite careful about what she told me because there were elements of the story that were not really suitable for an 8 or 9 year old.... Yes, I can remember when I was at the social work department at the age of 8 or 9 I can remember the social worker saying once I reached the age of 17 I was legally entitled to go and look (Participant 7).

The details of this event raised a number of questions for me as regarding a young child attending the social work appointment and managing the information that he was given unaccompanied. I attempted to look at this event in more depth with Participant 7 but he was unable to recognise there being anything unusual in attending the appointment on his own and could not shed any more light on the reasons why this had happened. This incident could be seen as indicating an unwillingness on the part of participant's adoptive parents to assist him to integrate the two narratives of his life. It seems to indicate that the two entities of his life and his identity were kept separate, even to the extent of there being a physical distance between them with his adoptive parents not accompanying him to the appointment and choosing not to help him to assimilate the information gained. Participant 7 recounts the event in a very matter of fact manner and sees no issue in not being accompanied or supported in his quest for information. This was very clearly for him though, the beginning of the search for his birth family and the missing pieces of his identity.

In terms of when the need to search became apparent, a number of participants described how their motivation to search was something that came and went during their adult years. Participant 3 started searching in early adulthood, then stopped for about twenty years, during which time he got married, had three children and separated. Similarly, Participant 4 came across some information when he was nineteen when his birth brother made some attempts to find him and there was the opportunity for some very limited discussion with his adoptive parents. He then waited thirteen more years before he started to actively search himself. Participant 2 also searched to the point of accessing her birth certificate, then waited another twenty years before she resumed the task. The reasons for these interrupted searches were mixed, with Participants 4 and 3 feeling that other events in their life took over and Participant 2 feeling that she couldn't search as she worried about the impact that it would have on her adoptive mother. Participant 1 felt that she could not search until her adoptive parents had died, given the extent of the secrecy surrounding her adoption and her adoptive parents' unwillingness to enter into any discussion about her being adopted. The timing of when participants started to actively search appears to be partly dependent on an inner, instinctive drive and partly on external pressures either from adoptive parents or other domains of their life, personal, professional and educational.

Significant life events in adulthood appear to have triggered the motivation to search for some of the participants. Participant 5 recounts visiting a friend with a four week old baby as a significant event which triggered his need to search. He felt that the visit and seeing his friend with her baby brought into focus the relationships that he had never had with his birth mother. The birth of her own children also feature in the reasons given by Participant 2 for making the decision to search.

I had my own family and when my son was born I had that woah – this is my only blood line in the world. You know, this is my flesh and blood and I don't have that anywhere else, so the wheels started to go again (Participant 2).

Rather than a significant event or series of events, Participant 3 describes a gradual process whereby the need to search became clearer and clearer and

without actively engaging with this task, he felt as if he could not move on in his life.

The more time went on, the more you think about it in a complicated way...and err, the curves become a straight line, going up and up to the point of asking more questions and yeah, trying to get more information (Participant 3).

Following on from, this Participant 3 described starting to search as ...putting out emotional tendrils (Participant 3).

With all of the participants, there was a sense of urgency in seeking information and searching, not necessarily in terms of the time scale in which they needed to take action, but that it was something that *needed* to be done at some point.

Participant 4 recounted how essential it was for him to search for information and for his birth brother.

I did go to some dark places and did get upset and it was impacting on a lot of my friendships and I guess it goes back to the whole thing that because they were quite ignorant to it they said, just get over it, you can fix it, and I didn't really have a support line and the only people I wanted to speak to was my parents, but I couldn't because they made it perfectly clear that it would always be the elephant in the room, which it still is, so I just felt very, I felt that I had missed out on quite a lot of years that should have been good times and they weren't so I thought well, I have got to do it for me and I did it for those reasons (Participant 4)

For Participant 4 the motivation to search appeared to come from a place of emotional pain. His account demonstrates feelings far beyond a general inquisitiveness and desire for information. He recognised that not searching and not having an understanding of his adoptive identity was having a detrimental impact on his emotional and psychological well-being. Participant 4 further identified that not having information about his adoptive identity had impacted on normal and age and stage development as an adult and that he had not lived the life that he feels he would have done had he resolved issues regarding his adoptive identity sooner. He describes not having enjoyed life as he feels he would have done if he had

searched for information sooner and expressed feelings of regret at having delayed seeking information. A significant barrier to him engaging with searching in his younger years, and consequently a motivating force for his determination to search now, was the lack of recognition that he perceived his adoptive parents gave to his adoptive identity and the secrecy that he felt surrounded his birth family, and his connection to them.

7.2 The Motivation to Search – The Search for New Relationships

All participants were able to articulate some aspects of what or who they were searching for, with some recognising that that the focus of their search changed over time. For some there was the aim to meet birth family and even to potentially form new relationships. Participant 6 explained,

At the start I did think a relationship and getting to know them...Deep down I had the fairy story – here's my 2 children, here's my brother and sister's 2 children – them meeting, cousins, me, having nieces and nephews and brothers and sisters. But I know life does nae work like that. But in the beginning, you are thinking, why not? (Participant 6).

Participant 6 appeared to be searching for a family that he could belong to. His current personal circumstances led to feelings of loss and isolation and he initially saw the chance to connect with his birth family as something that could fill the emotional void in his life.

Participant 1 was more hesitant in terms of seeking a relationship with her birth mother. When asked specifically if that was what she was looking for, or hoped for, she responded,

I don't think I would have allowed myself to go that far – I just thought I would let...yes that would be lovely, it would be fabulous. It would be fabulous, but if it wasn't, if they weren't up for it then, you know, you know – steps (Participant 1).

Though the search for a person/people was discussed by participants, this aspect of the search received less prominence in the narratives than might have been anticipated. Other aspects of the motivation to search permeated through the narratives when participants were discussing the story of their adoption and the impact that being adopted had on them. They were not necessarily aware of the lack of prominence of the need to find birth family

members in their narratives. Most participants articulated though that they saw the culmination of searching as finding their birth mother/other birth family members, though did not consistently express a desire to actually meet with them, or at least expressed some ambivalence about this. What was evident was the way in which participants viewed searching for a person/people as being the gateway to accessing other information.

7.3 The Motivation to Search - The Search for Likeness

Another significant dimension to the participants' motivation to search, was the drive to find someone who had a physical likeness to them. There appears to be two elements to this need, firstly involving curiosity about physical likeness that brings with it a sense of connection and belonging, and secondly a very basic, instinctive need to look for someone who shared their likeness, to see someone who was the embodiment of themselves.

Participant 3 recounts that,

I walked about for years. Walking about and looking at people, thinking...that could be my mum, or that could be my dad. It was constant (Participant 3).

Similarly, Participant 6, when explaining his need to search for and meet his birth family described how essential it was for him to make that physical connection with someone in order to move on with his life.

You can't say, she looks like me, or he looks like me. You can't go like that through life. So there are gaps for you in terms of who you are and who you are like (Participant 6).

Participant 1 described growing up wanting to look at someone that looked like her. When she did meet her birth mother, she was struck by how similar their mannerisms were and felt that they shared personality traits. This was of great significance to Participant 1 as she had previously expressed how different she felt from her adoptive family. She stated during the interview that she needed to know who she was and where she came from. It was evident from her explanations of these feelings, that the need to know who she was could only be partly fulfilled by written information. What she really needed to make sense of herself as a person, was to set eyes on her birth family, specifically her birth mother. Participant 7 also spoke of needing to find people that he had some connection with. He did not initially set out to

meet his birth family but once he had accessed documentary information, he was keen to make direct, face-to face contact.

You know because I certainly grew up with a feeling of being quite alone in the world really so I kind of wanted to reach out and find people who I would have been close to...That feeling of isolation and feeling different and what that is about. Because you have no day to day shared history with your birth family and yet there is still clearly a connection (Participant 7).

The significance of looking like someone, seeing part of yourself in other people is explored further in chapters 11 and 12. For some participants this desire appeared to be an articulation of a need to belong, to feel part of a family unit that was linked to one of the strands of their personal narrative. Alongside this was a need to fill in gaps in their sense of self that they experienced within their adoptive families.

7.4 The Motivation to Search – The Search for Medical Information

A number of participants identified the need to find out medical information from their birth family and adoption records as a reason for wanting to search for either information of the birth family themselves. On a rational level, medical information is important both for the adoptee themselves and also for any children that they had. It was also evident though the interview with Participant 2 that wanting to search for medical information involved a desire to resolve feelings of difference when attending medical appointments. She expressed feeling frustrated and upset when doctors asked for her medical background and described that they would put *adopted* on medical forms. Through this, she appeared to feel that her sense of difference to other people was accentuated. The way in which Participant 2 discussed this issue, suggested that it was symbolic of many other aspects of her life, where she felt that she lacked information that belonged to her, lacked control and a sense of connection. The lack of medical information and the way in which this was recorded in her medical notes appeared to symbolise to Participant 2 that she was in some ways not a complete person.

7.5 The Motivation to Search – The Need to Identify and Find Missing Pieces

The most common reason for searching expressed by participants was to find and/or see the *missing pieces*. It was significant to me how often the phrase missing pieces was used and how strongly participants felt about their need to search for this aspect of themselves.

There is a bit of me that is almost a need to yeah, kind of sort out missing pieces from my life rather than looking for a new relationship (Participant 5).

Participant 3 describes feeling that

not every piece of the jigsaw is there, or it has no edge. So the edges need to be put in so that I thought I could move on (Participant 3).

Participant 3 is not able to articulate what the missing pieces are, but he understands that there is something that needs to be found to make him feel more complete. The image of the jigsaw, with no edge provides an image of not knowing where he ends and others, or his place in the world, begins. When accessing her adoption papers in Edinburgh, Participant 2 recalled saying to her partner,

If they don't want any contact, that's fine you know...and I think I was looking for, well, the bit that was missing...what does everyone else have that I don't (Participant 2).

Again, she cannot articulate what the missing pieces are but knows that other people have something that she does not have. What seems clear is that Participant 2 does not feel that the missing pieces will necessarily be found by re-engaging with her birth family.

It was evident that the missing pieces that triggered the motivation to search were different for each person. For some material objects such as birth certificates, photographs or documentation had particular significance, for others it was seeing someone that looked like them or medical information and for others meeting with and potentially forming a relationship with members of their birth families. At some point throughout all interviews, participants referred to the missing pieces as an abstract concept, that was felt but could not be articulated, or if it was articulated

those articulations did not fully convey the experiences of the participants. This abstract notion appears to relate to core aspects of the sense of self, experienced by the participants, that was related to incomplete or fractured identity formation. The imagery of the edge of the jigsaw being the missing piece encapsulated the experiences of participants and is explored in more detail in chapter 11. The role that each of the features identified in this chapter play in relation to identity formation are further discussed in chapters 11 and 12.

7.6 The Motivation to Search - A Desire to Control the Narrative

In addition to identifying what needed to be searched for, a number of participants also identified that the motivation to search came from a need to control the narrative. Participant 4 spoke at length about issues of control. Though he spoke in more detail and more explicitly about this aspect of his experiences and feelings than other participants, it was a theme that was evident in a number of interviews, though in some narratives it was more implicit. Making the decision to search for information and to re-engage with his birth brother was something that Participant 4 felt that he had some control over.

I always felt quite controlled as an adoptee, I was controlled and it was almost like this indemnity that you have come to us and you have got to be thankful all the time, but we will always have a say in what you do, so this is the only thing that I have ever done, where no-one has an opinion. And I can control it (Participant 4).

Participant 4 expressed a determination to exercise his control over the process of searching and re-engaging with his birth brother by not telling his adoptive parents what he was doing. He was also aware that his birth brother was not telling their birth mother that he had made contact with her son that had been adopted. Participant 4's experience of having no say in significant events that had happened in his life and to some extent lacking power, was returned to a number of times throughout the interview.

I thought, I think I owe myself a bit of respect and closure and something that I can do for myself and I don't have to have people trying to tell me not to do it and what to do and when (Participant 4).

The need to exercise self-determination, to take the lead in something so significant was a strong motivating factor in Participant 4 starting the process of searching and re-engaging.

7.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the motivation, as expressed by participants, as beginning the process of searching and re-engaging. The start of the process has been identified as ranging from early years curiosity to more focused and urgent actions in adult years. It was apparent throughout all of the interviews that participants had reflected upon the decisions made about searching and were able to identify specific times in their lives when the need to search became more apparent, even necessary. For some, external factors such as the opinion of adoptive families, impacted on when they felt able to translate the need to search into action. For all participants the need to search was something that had affected many aspects of their life and was articulated through the various missing pieces that needed to be found. The sense of something being missing, that motivated participants to search, can be understood as things relating to the participant's sense of self as experienced through the lack of connection to the first chapter of their lives. Of particular interest is the apparent significance of material objects as being symbolic of a sense of self and physical likeness as a reflection of the self. Without both of these pieces participants appeared to be missing essential parts of themselves, articulated by Participant 3 as the edge of the jigsaw.

CHAPTER 8 THE PROCESS OF SEARCHING AND RE-ENGAGING

Diagram 6 illustrates the theoretical category *the process of searching and re-engaging*, with associated dimensions. Significant concepts that contribute to the emergent theory are highlighted in blue.

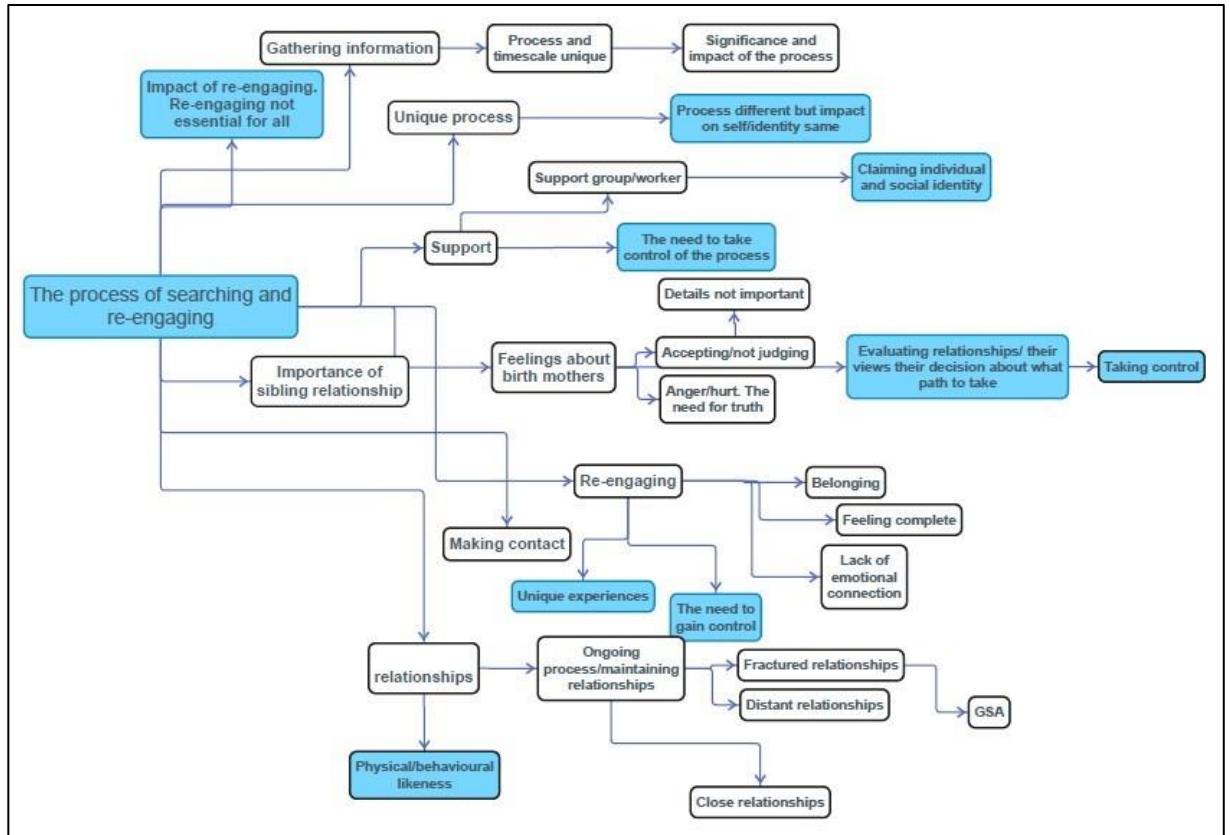


Diagram 6

The theoretical category explored in this chapter relates to the actual process of searching and re-engaging, both the practical aspects as well as the experience of the process as articulated by the participants. As with chapters five and six, the discussion in relation to this category serves to illustrate the differences in the experiences of participants in order to highlight the similarities in emergent concepts. As explained in previous chapters, the act or process of searching started in childhood for all participants, either through directly questioning adoptive parents about the circumstances of their adoption, or more generally searching for something less tangible. This chapter though is concerned with the more focused activity undertaken in adult years, this being a time in their lives when the participants could start to make their own decisions about what information they needed and how they might access it.

At the time of interviewing the seven participants, they were all at different stages of searching and re-engaging with birth families. Some had only recently actively engaged in searching, others had re-started after actively searching many years ago and for some, they had re-engaged with birth families a number of years ago.

8.1 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging - The Need for Support

At the time of interview, all but one of the participants was being supported by the third sector organisation through either the support group, with individual workers, or both. Participant 7 had previously engaged with a different agency and spoke positively about the support, both practical and emotional, that he had received. All participants discussed the importance of the support received, both logistically in terms of enabling them to access information, but also emotionally. Participant 4 stated that the third sector organisation is

...a very, very good thing, the group is particularly good place to be although I do prefer the one to one but I think that it is good that you meet a group of people and everyone is at different levels and journeys and moments in their life...The group is a really good thing because everyone is unified in that common goal of searching for what they are looking for (Participant 4).

He goes on to say,

I think *** (3rd sector agency) has been the saviour because if it wasn't for *** I might not have embarked upon this journey (Participant 4).

Participant 6 explained that hearing other people's stories in the group made him *count his blessings*, and that meeting other people with similar experiences meant that he no longer felt like the odd one out. Participant 1 felt that the group enabled her to take things slowly in terms of making contact and supported her to do things in a measured way. She recognised that she needed support and appreciated the work that the agency did when she hit *brick walls* when trying to find information. Participant 5 felt that he could have received more support from the agency if he had been in the same city and had been able to meet with workers face to face. Progress in

terms of re-engaging with his birth family had been slow for Participant 5, which he felt was partly because of his inability to discuss things face-to-face but was also perhaps due to the apparent reticence on the part of his birth family. Participant 2 expressed some frustration with the speed and focus of the search when supported by the agency and eventually took things *into her own hands* and phoned her birth mother directly when letters were not responded to. She then revisited the agency to gain support with complex and distressing family relationships that developed.

The support provided by the third sector organisation enabled the participants to make sense of their personal narratives. Having the opportunity to identify with other group members enabled them to claim their identity as an adoptee in ways that had not been possible before. It was evident that there was a therapeutic element to the support available in this process and that this potentially had some impact on their ability to resolve identity issues as discussed further in chapter 12.

Each participant had different levels of support from friends and family. Participant 4 described encountering some negativity from other people, specifically his wife, who did not feel that he should be making plans to reengage with his birth brother without telling his adoptive mother. It was evident that the support from workers who were not emotionally involved in the situation was extremely important to him. His views, as demonstrated below, echoed the experiences of others, who felt that having support from someone who was not part of their family was beneficial. This support enabled them to act on their own, in that they could focus on their own needs and choose the pathway that they wanted to take.

I think this is something I have to do on my own. I say, I don't feel guilty, I am not doing anything wrong... I've come here, and it took quite a lot to come through the door and I need help to do this and I think the hardest part is to come through the door and then as soon as you are in, and I have been able to gain control over how fast it is going, how slow it is going, at whatever pace it is, and so the only negative thing about it is certain conversations but I have not let that dwarf what I am doing (Participant 4).

When discussing the support from the agency in searching for and making arrangements to re-engage with his birth family, Participant 4 appeared very comfortable taking advice and guidance from them. Having no emotional attachment to the workers and seeing them as professionals whose job was to support him, appeared to allow him to still feel in control of the process.

8.2 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging – Identifying and Reflecting on Feelings About Birth Mothers.

All participants spoke about the circumstances of their adoption, the actions of their birth mothers and the impact that making contact with their birth mothers might have on their lives now. Participant 1 was very cognisant of what might have been going on in her birth mother's life at the time that she was embarking on her search for information. She was wary of the fact that it might not be a good time in her birth mother's life and that she might be stepping into her birth mother's world at a difficult time. She described how this made her cautious in her approach, relying on the support and guidance from the agency to help with this. When talking about the circumstances of her adoption she expressed a very clear view.

I wasn't interested in the story behind why...I think she felt quite guilty about it but I was thinking, that's in the past (Participant 1).

Participant 2 expressed an understanding of how difficult things would have been for her birth mother at the time of her adoption. She knew that her birth father was married with another child and that he had left her birth mother to cope on her own. Though she provided this rational account of her feelings, her account of gaining access to her birth certificate some years prior to the interview presented a very different emotional response.

I must have been 20 or 21 at the time, and that had a huge impact on me. I remember getting the birth certificate and it came up with my name and then I was just, I was just devastated. I remember sitting on the bus just crying and thinking, how could they? It just brought all those things back. How could they just give me up? How could they do that to a baby? (Participant 2).

Having re-engaged with her birth mother, Participant 2 feels that she never really got *the truth* about what happened. She appeared to believe that her

birth mother presented a sanitised version of the circumstances of her adoption and she was left with questions and gaps in information.

Participant 4 at the time of meeting, had no plans to try to meet with this birth mother. Despite recounting a narrative of an unsupported, stigmatised young woman who had little choice but to relinquish her child for adoption, he had followed the lead of his birth brother in not involving his birth mother or adoptive mother in the process of re-engaging.

All participants, through recounting their adoption narratives, demonstrated some degree of sensitivity to how difficult things might have been for their birth mothers and the limited choices that they had. They all mentioned issues such as their birth mother's age at the time they were pregnant, health and mental health issues, lack of support, social views and judgement and lack of financial security. The extent to which these factors impacted on the participant's feeling towards their birth mothers through the process of searching and re-engaging varied though, and to some extent, like so many other parts of the process their views and feelings have changed over time.

8.3 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging – Gathering Information and Making Contact

For some participants the actual process of finding out information and arranging contact was relatively straight forwards and speedy whereas for others it was more drawn out. As discussed previously, some participants found out provisional, often documentary information, a number of years prior to making the decision to proceed with the search. Participant 4, having been furnished with the knowledge of being adopted and having a birth brother 13 years ago, describes how the process of making direct contact with his birth brother happened very quickly once he made the decision that he wanted to meet him. With the support of the agency, he sent a letter to his birth brother and a response was received within four days. At the time of interviewing, Participant 4 was aware that his birth brother had made arrangements to meet with one of the workers from the agency and he anticipated that they would meet face-to-face in the near future. Participant 2 had initially tried to trace her birth family on her own. She had encountered difficulties in finding information from online searches and had found the costs prohibitive. With the support of the agency, letters

were sent and the support worker tried to phone her birth mother on a number of occasions but with no success. Participant 2 describes becoming frustrated with the process and made the decision to phone herself. She states that she knew that it was the wrong thing to do but she felt that she had no choice. Participant 5 also expressed some frustration at the experience of searching. With the support of the agency, letters had been sent and there had been a response but he was yet to meet face-to face with his birth mother and was not sure if a meeting would ever take place. The first letter sent to his birth mother had been six years prior to the interview with myself.

The varying experiences of gathering information and making contact demonstrate how much of this process was out with the control of the participants. However, being engaged in this process in some way, even when presented with barriers and hurdles, did not appear to impact on their sense of starting to take some *control of the narrative* of their lives. This feeling of regaining control and exercising a level of self-determination appeared to have a positive impact on the participants in terms of self-confidence and self-esteem. Potential connections between these experiences and adult attachment styles are explored further in chapters 11 and 12.

The first letter sent through the agency to Participant 1's birth mother had been opened by her birth father and he had hidden it from her birth mother. The second letter was opened by her birth mother and soon after a phone call was made. Following the phone call, they met face-to-face. Participant 3 also succeeded in accessing information and meeting face-to-face with his birth family within a relatively short space of time. This was upon returning to his search after a gap of a number of years following his initial search for documentary information. He describes a letter being sent which was *well received*. He describes receiving a letter in return, which said

I have thought about you every day... You know, one of they ones....yeah I thought about you every day but I had to leave you (Participant 3).

Face-to-face meetings have since taken place with extended family where he describes them,

...all sitting there smoking, you know, epigenetic smoking, five of us sitting smoking (Participant 3).

For participant 7, the process of searching for information and for his birth family appears to have been straightforward. Following the initial request for information, conducted independently when he was 8 or 9 years old, he became absorbed in other aspects of his life such as attending university.

I pretty much just got the information and went straight ahead and it took a matter of days from seeing the file and getting the information to actually talking on the phone initially (Participant 7).

I just picked up the phone to social work one day and it was only going to go forwards, there was no doubt in my mind about what I was doing. It didn't know if I was going to be successful, but it was. But I was fortunate, it was made slightly easier in that 10 years prior to me making the phone call, my elder sister had written me a letter and had left it with the social work department so that if I ever went looking, then she gave me some info on the family (Participant 7).

These accounts again demonstrate the differences in the participant's experiences, in terms of time scale and responses from members of their birth families. Being engaged in the process appears to be what was of most important to the participants though.

8.4 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging – The Impact of Re-Engagement

For some participants re-engagement has involved face-to-face meetings and for others there have been letters and phone calls, with the possibility of face-to-face contact in the future. It was evident from all of the interviews that there was a sense of anticipation from all participants regarding these first contacts. Their accounts of how this was experienced varied greatly. When meeting with his birth mother and siblings for the first time, Participant 3 explained,

I thought I would be more emotional but I wasn't. I was quite cool....I thought I would be emotional thinking this is a momentous moment in my life...but I was more....I made it, I made it back to you mum (Participant 3).

For Participant 5 letters have been exchanged. He described his anticipation of receiving the first letter and how he felt when he received it.

...like I felt, um like I wanted it to be this amazing thingand it felt like very mundane. Like I guess...I dunno, there was a bit of me that wanted to be like, for her to really reach out and when she didn't, when it felt like she closed off actually (Participant 5).

Both Participants 3 and 5 expressed surprise at how little emotional response there was in these first contacts, either face-to-face or by letter. They had perceived that contact was the end result, the culmination, of the search. Something that they had aimed for and thought about for many years. The lack of emotion felt appeared to indicate that it was not contact with the person themselves that had the greatest impact, but the process of searching and of finding other, less obvious missing pieces.

Following the first few difficult phone calls, Participant 2's birth mother agreed to meet. During the first phone call she had questioned whether Participant 2 was really her daughter and was reluctant to accept the situation that was being presented to her. Participant 2 recounted driving to her birth mother's house with her husband with her for support. The arrangement had been that it would just be the two of them that would meet. She recounted

I walked in her door and it was just like a shrine and she had a wall, and it was all my pictures and she had my wedding photo, she had my kids up and they were all in frames and I thought woah, you haven't even met me and it turned out...she had told everyone. She had gone from I don't think you are, to long lost daughter (Participant 2).

Participant 2 remembers this as being a very stressful first meeting, where she had to go outside at one point for space and time to think. During the evening, her birth mother also phoned her birth brother in America and they spoke on the phone.

I remember thinking, I have lost control here. This was meant to be my journey; this was for me (Participant 2).

Participant 2 felt that her birth mother involved other people in the first meeting to make it easier for herself. She describes conversations with her birth mother as being difficult and was resentful of the way in which she perceived her birth mother as trying to control the meeting. This appeared to add to the emotional distance and ambivalence that Participant 2 felt regarding her relationship with her birth mother. Participant 6 also describes an emotional distance between himself and his birth family. He explains this as being because

...they have grown up together. They have got a bond. I feel like the odd one out (Participant 6).

In contrast, the initial face-to-face meeting between Participant 1 and her birth mother was a positive experience. She describes feeling an instant connection with her birth family, yet at the same time, she was surprised that there was little expressed emotion. Participant 1 explained this lack of expressed emotion as being a result of things feeling so natural.

It was absolutely instant. It was...now I could understand what was missing....It wasn't like there were any floods of tears....it wasn't like, you know, you meet people through life like I am meeting you today, it wasn't like that. It was an instant connection. It was the strangest thing, completely unexpected. I didn't expect to get that, and the same when I met *(birth brother), it was just quite strange, you know err we just got on like a house on fire. We are frighteningly similar (Participant 1).

Of all seven participants, Participant 1 had the most positive experience of face-to-face meetings with her birth family, though ongoing relationships had not been without their challenges. Participant 1 had experienced the greatest degree of secrecy about her adoption in childhood and adolescence and the greatest feelings of difference from her adoptive family. She had indicated a lack of emotional closeness to her adoptive parents and had described situations whereby she appeared to feel that their love for her was not unconditional. These factors may have impacted upon attachment styles, and her need to be claimed by her birth family.

Though Participant 4 was yet to meet his birth brother at the time of the interview, he expressed a strong emotional response to the contact that had been made through letters.

But even having contact with *** (birth brother) through my worker, it's, the revelation and the joy from that is quite incredible, and although it might not look it, it really is. I am just still trying to come to terms with how quickly he responded to me, because I waited 13 years and he waited 4 days. When I had a wee moment, it was of happiness for once, it wasn't happiness, it was my goodness, this is pretty incredible... This is probably the happiest I have felt in the process. It's been a very good process, it's been hard at times, but it has been really good (Participant 4).

The experiences of re-engaging with birth families were mixed, ranging from a sense of familiarity, to feeling disconnected and even annoyance and anger. Significantly though, further evidence from the interviews demonstrated how even negative experiences did not impact on the importance that participants placed on the *process* of searching and reengaging and subsequent positive interpretations of this process.

8.5 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging - The Realisation of The Importance of Sibling Relationships

Many of the narratives above demonstrate the significance of sibling relationships in the process of re-engaging with birth families. For Participant 4 the sibling relationship is the one on which he is focused, with no plans at the time of interview to meet with his birth mother. Participant 1 speaks of feeling a real connection to one of her birth brothers, with the most positive relationship being with her older brother. She felt that this was because he had been aware of her existence for a number of years, and so had already *made space* for her. Participant 6 expressed a very strong desire to be part of the wider family network and spoke of his sadness at feeling like the outsider. Participant 7 had met with his siblings and felt that this has been a positive experience. He explained that as he was adopted when his siblings were nine and ten years old, they remembered the event and had always known about him. His birth siblings have had contact with his adoptive parents and his birth sister has one adopted child and is in the

process of adopting another one. Participant 7 felt that the process of searching and re-engaging with birth family had been a relatively straightforward and positive experience, though he expressed an awareness that for some people this might not be the case.

For Participant 2 all family relationships have been complex and had changed over time. When her birth mother first demonstrated a reluctance to accept her as her daughter, she felt that if it was not going to be possible for her to meet with her birth mother, then she would want to meet with her siblings. She had been unaware of their existence until the phone conversation with her birth mother. Relationships with her siblings had developed and changed over time, with some significant challenges and emotional upset. For most participants (other than Participant 2), relationships with siblings appeared to be less emotionally charged than relationships with birth mothers, though through the narratives a complex picture of constant renegotiation of relationships seemed to be a familiar pattern. The complexities in these relationships appeared to stem from a lack of shared experience with each other and the significantly differing relationships and histories that they had with their birth mothers. For the birth siblings, their personal narratives were complete and not fractured, whereas for the participants, they were attempting to merge the two narratives of their lives, with new information and new relationships filling that gaps in one strand of their personal narrative.

8.6 The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging -Maintaining Relationships

One of the issues to emerge through the interviews, was the way in which the dynamics with and within birth families and adult adoptees changed over time. The above section has provided a picture of initial experiences and feelings that emerged during the process. Public perception is often that this where the story ends. Through exploration of the process of searching and re-engagement, it is significant that this perceived ending to the process is anything but. Even if direct contact with birth family members was not continued, the impact that those relationships has on the lives of the participants continues. For some participants relationships have grown, despite challenges, for others they have become distant, emotional and physical distance precluding long-term connections. For some there have

been extreme difficulties and conflict. Participant 2 faced significant challenges from first contacts and throughout the process of re-engaging. They were still ongoing at the time of the interview, seven years after face-to-face contact first occurred.

It has almost encompassed my life for the last 7 years...it is constantly there. This is still going on. I would say it is extremely difficult and I don't think people realise that. You don't realise what you are going into and they think you either meet them or you don't and that's it. There is so much more. It's your own journey (Participant 2).

Participant 2's initial contact with her birth sister had been difficult, with her birth sister feeling that she may have some ulterior motives with regard to what she wanted to gain from contacting her birth mother. Participant 2 recalls her birth sister making references to *my mum*, which she perceived as indicating a different quality to the relationships that they each had with their birth mother. Relationships with her birth brother, who had also been adopted, were easier and she spoke of feeling that they had a connection. She expressed pleasure at identifying physical likenesses and sharing mannerisms with him. Participant 2 enjoyed seeing what she describes as familiarity with both her birth brother and birth sister. Her relationship with her birth family became slightly more comfortable for a while, with gifts being sent by *granny* to Participant 2's children and even to the point of four of them, (Participant 2, her birth mother, birth brother and birth sister), going away for a few days together

...for us to try to get to know each other, to have that time alone and catch up time. You know, we thought that would be a good idea. But it all blew up. It all went badly wrong and basically I, after that, it broke down communication...

And I basically backed away. I thought, I don't need this, this is not what I need...then over time my birth mother just stopped talking. It was very hurtful because she got in touch with my birth brother (Participant 2)

Participant 2 experienced this as a second rejection by her birth mother.

The second rejection was through choice. How could she say nothing, not even to send a letter? I thought that was unforgivable...to think that she did that for a second time to me, there's no coming back from that. You don't reject my kids... (Participant 2).

Over time, Participant 2 re-established contact with her birth sister and birth brother.

So the siblings are all quite happy. We haven't got baggage, it's less complicated, but my birth mother has never been back in touch, and I always feel she could have at least, if she didn't want to pick up the phone, she could have sent a letter saying, it was really nice to meet you, getting to know your family and really sorry but I can't do this. To have nothing as an adult, I had that as a 3 week old baby (Participant 2).

Without an understanding of the significance of the *process* of searching and re-engaging, this experience, with the lack of acceptance experienced when contact was first made and the second rejection, could be perceived as being negative, an unsuccessful re-union. The reflections provided by Participant 2 contradict this assumption though, which has particular significance for this inquiry. As previously demonstrated, Participant 2 had no regrets about the decision to search and re-engage. She spoke of feeling more self-confident and more settled in her life. This narrative, more than any other, demonstrates the positive impact that the process of searching can have on adult adoptees, irrespective of outcomes.

Towards the middle of the interview, Participant 2 paused and took some time to think about how to proceed. She then explained that through the process of getting to know her birth family, mutual sexual attraction between herself and her birth brother had developed. She took some time to talk about the phenomenon of Genetic Sexual Attraction (GSA), explaining that there was very little information about it, even less support and that she perceived society as seeing it as one of the last taboos. Participant 2 had been uncertain about whether or not she wanted to talk about this experience during the interview but had decided that it was

something that needed to be more *out in the open* and investigated further, with the potential of support available for people affected. She suspected that it was far more common than people would anticipate, as meeting someone that you had no shared history with, who did not feel like a blood relative, but with whom you had a strong connection to, could bring up complex feelings. She described the feelings experienced by herself and her brother, as having *blown the family apart* though did not discuss who, within the family was aware of the situation and what conversations had or had not taken place.

Ongoing birth family relationships have also been complex and challenging for Participant 1, though with less apparent conflict. She described sharing many personality traits with her birth mother and felt that it was possible that the annoyance that she sometimes felt was because it is like someone holding a mirror up to the things about herself that she does not like. She described her birth mother as being insensitive and sometimes saying things to be humorous that can be hurtful. Specifically, Participant 1 felt that her birth mother is insensitive to how insecure she, with her status as adopted daughter, is. She expressed that these feelings of insecurity about her role and place within the family impacted on her relationships with individual members of her birth family. In terms of physical resemblance though, Participant 1 expressed how positive a feeling it was to set eyes on someone that looks like you.

Looking at someone that looks like you and you don't realise, not that it's important but if you have not got it and then you have suddenly got it. You go, that's it! I look very like my youngest brother. It's quite strange, it's just that thing. That family thing (Participant 1).

This sense of connection with her birth mother had enabled them to maintain a relationship. Both appeared to be committed to the relationship, though it was apparent that there was still an element of emotional distance, whereby Participant 1 did not feel able to discuss how she felt when her birth mother acted in a way that was experienced by Participant 1 as insensitive.

Relationships between Participant 1 and her three birth brothers were all experienced differently. Participant 1 felt close to the older brother. He had

previously hired a private detective to look for Participant 1 and as previously discussed, she felt that he had already made *head space* for her when she first contacted her birth family. She felt that he saw her as having always been part of the family, even though he did not always know about her.

...he said, I do not have the gene in me to be the eldest. I am everything except the eldest, so when I found out there was a big sister I just completely understood (Participant 1).

Participant 1 appeared to be reasonably accepting of the relationships that had developed and stated that she would

...go with the flow and see what happens (Participant 1)

Despite this, she later reflected that she felt uncomfortable picking up the phone if she knew that her birth family were all together at her birth mother's house, feeling that she would be intruding.

I know it will be different in the future but I was just like, oh they are down there playing happy families and I'm here and though I said it didn't bother me it really did bother me (Participant 1).

As with other narratives, it appears that the information gained, and the process of searching and re-engaging had had a positive impact on Participant 1, despite the fact that ongoing family relationships had the potential to bring to the fore feelings of not belonging and insecurity.

Participant 3 felt that having met his birth family, it was difficult to maintain meaningful relationships. He questioned whether or not this was because of the physical distance between where they lived. He maintained some phone contact with his birth mother but felt that conversations are awkward and do not flow.

...there was always an edge of pregnant pauses, tension and anxiety and I can sense that because I am tuned in to these sorts of things (Participant 3).

Participant 3 proceeded to recount an incident where he was supposed to visit his brother in London but did not go and his brother felt that he should stay in contact more. Other members of the family, including his birth

mother have become involved in what is perceived by the family as a falling out.

It's awkward when my mother phones or I phone her, so I feel as if there is not an emotional bridge that has been made. It's not a bridge. But I am so used to that in life. Those feelings. So I am not exactly bothered (Participant 3).

Participant 6 spoke at length about his longing to be part of his extended birth family. He wanted his daughters to get to know their cousins and for him to experience sibling relationships similar to the ones that he saw them as experiencing with each other. He described feeling on the outside of this family unit and recognised that he had little control over how these relationships would or would not progress. It has been important when presenting the data from interviews that the focus has remained on the words of the participants, though with some recognition that my own interpretation dictates what words are used and which categories and dimensions of categories to represent them in. However, the wider context of the interview with Participant 6 does appear to have relevance here. I reflected post interview on the sadness and loneliness expressed by Participant 6 during the interview and the strong sense of longing that he expressed to belong to a family unit. Participant 6 shared with me that his adoptive mother, to whom he had been very close, had recently died. The separation from his ex-partner and become acrimonious and he perceived that he was being *shut out* of his daughter's lives and now had very little contact with them. He presented as socially isolated, not able to work and struggling with health issues. These circumstances seemed to permeate through the interview, and he spent much of the time talking about his present life and losses. These factors do not mitigate the strength of feeling he expressed about wanting, but not achieving, meaningful relationships with his birth family, but perhaps the strength of emotion, the sense of hopelessness and longing, could be seen in the context of the significant life events that he had recently experienced.

8.7 Summary

Much of the literature, and certainly the wider public perception, would see face-to-face contact with birth families as the main focus of an adoptees process of searching and to some extent the end point of this process. This

chapter demonstrates that from the perspective of the participants, faceto-face meetings did not always meet expectations, that sometimes expectations were not focused on actually meeting birth families and certainly that these relationships with people with whom there was no shared day-to-day history were complex.

The actual process of searching was relatively straightforward for some, and more lengthy and complex for others. Each stage of the search brought new information and though the need to continue the search might continue, these pieces of information had great significance for the participants making sense of the fractured pieces of their identity. For some, the final missing piece was meeting with birth family members, though for others there was surprise at how insignificant this moment felt. Again, the process of searching and re-engaging, and having some control over this process, appeared to be of most significance to the participants, even if this was not what they had anticipated. Through this and through their involvement with the support group, the participants appeared to have been able to claim both personal and social identities contained within the adoptive experience.

CHAPTER 9 - PERCEIVED EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OUTCOMES OF THE PROCESS OF SEARCHING AND RE-ENGAGING

Diagram 7 illustrates the theoretical category *emotional and psychological outcomes following searching and re-engaging*, with associated dimensions. Significant concepts that contribute towards the grounded theory are highlighted in blue.

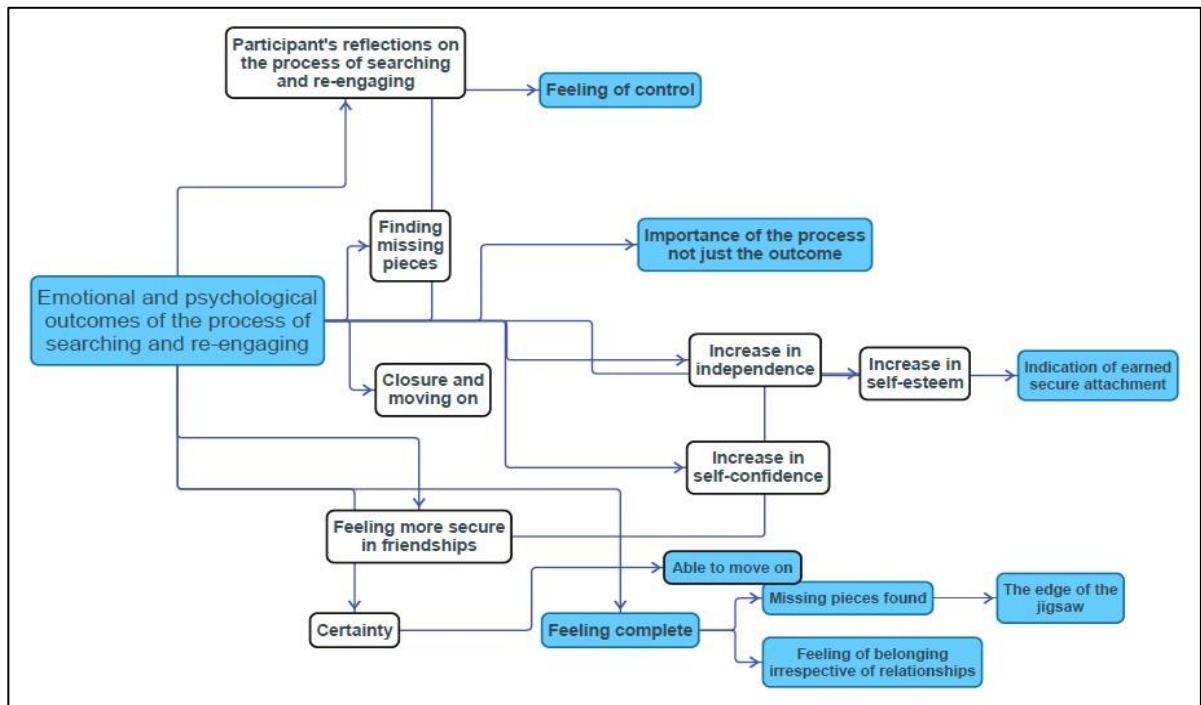


Diagram 7

Consideration of the impact on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the participants as a result of the process of searching and re-engaging with birth family, draws on accounts of face-to-face contact, contact through letters and phone calls. The impact of the actual contact and the impact of the process of gaining contact are both aspects that are considered in this chapter. As discussed previously, participants were at different stages time wise in terms of re-engagement, though this did not appear to impact upon their ability to reflect upon the process, with some who had only recently started on the process being able to articulate in some detail the changes that it had made to their emotional and psychological well-being. Again, it was apparent that the outcome of reengagement did not appear to affect the impact that the process itself has on the participants. This is explored further in chapter 12. In this chapter, the data from narratives, and interpretations from myself highlight significant developments in self-

concept and the resultant change in social relationships experienced by participants.

9.1 Perceived Emotional and Psychological Outcomes - Participants' Reflections on The Process of Searching and Re-Engaging

The concept of regaining control and exercising a degree self-determination is a recurring theme through the interview with Participant 4. When speaking of the process of re-engaging with his birth brother, he states

I can control it and for that reason I feel liberated to be doing something on my own (Participant 4).

This feeling of liberation appears to indicate an ability to free himself from previously constraining narratives that led him to feel that he was not the author of his own story and that his needs and wishes came second to other people's. Emotional freedom and taking control are significant outcomes of the process of searching for Participant 4. Participant 2 was able to identify that her confidence increased as a result of engaging in the process of reengaging herself. She identifies that doing this caused her to become what she perceives as *quite hard*. Through her narrative it appears that she was able to take control of the situation and acted on behalf of herself in a way that she had not been able to before. She recounts a single-minded determination to search for information and expressed the importance of knowing that the notes that she accessed from Register House were *her* notes, that only she could access.

9.2 Perceived Emotional and Psychological Outcomes – Perceptions of Increased Self-Confidence and Feelings of Security

In previous chapters, issues of a lack of self-confidence and feelings of insecurity, particularly with regard to friendship relationships and social situations, have been discussed. When reflecting on the impact of going through the process of re-engaging with birth families and finding out information regarding their adoptions, all participants identified positives, though some participants discussed this in far greater depth than others. Participant 2 recounts shared perceptions of both herself and her husband about the impact of years of searching for information and re-engaging with her birth family.

It's your own journey, and I suppose, learning about yourself, you do learn a lot more about yourself. I think my husband says I have changed remarkably in the last 7 years. He says I am definitely a much stronger person, much more independent. I suppose I have become a bit more, I can stand on my own 2 feet, I have to be able to stand on my own 2 feet, and I don't want to rely on anyone too much. I think that is what happened to me (Participant 2).

The increased feelings of independence that developed through the process of searching by Participant 2, lead to increasing confidence and feelings of security. When discussing the impact of re-engaging with her birth family, Participant 1 also returned to an issue discussed earlier in the interview, that is her feelings of insecurity with regard to friendship relationships.

You can relax into it a wee bit. For example, before, if I hadn't heard from one of my friends, instead of just thinking, oh they are probably hideously busy, I will catch up with them later, I would have been like...I haven't heard from them, obviously we are no longer friends, in my head going, is it me? Instead of being able to say, well, I'm hideously busy, they are hideously busy; we will pick up the phone at some point...I can now say I have been with you for an hour, and hour and a half and now I will go because I know that I will see you again (Participant 1).

Participant 1 appears to feel that friendships are on a more equal footing. Difficulties around relationships with friends and anxiety in social situations are seen as indicators of insecure attachment styles in adults and these concepts are discussed in relation to the wider literature in Chapter 13. Participant 1 was very clear that despite the challenges and some negative experiences, overall there were clear positives in having embarked on searching for and meeting her birth family.

...it changes your confidence level, it's very strange but people now, instead of being like worried about...everyone must like me...I don't give 2 hoots now. It's subtle it's a subtle change but it is almost as if life isn't as frightening any more (Participant 1).

Participant 4 also reflected on his feelings of insecurity about social events ending. He frames the experience in terms of now being able to take some control of the situation, controlling the narrative.

...but now, to counter that I know when it is coming and I just leave a wee bit earlier (Participant 4).

He was able to identify significant changes in the way in which he managed his feelings in social situations and the positive impact that this had on his self-concept.

9.3 Perceived Emotional and Psychological Outcomes – Finding Missing Pieces and Feeling Complete

Participant 1 identified the sense of being incomplete as leading to feeling not *quite as good* as other people. Following the process of searching and re-engaging, Participant 1 felt more complete as a person with the previous incomplete narratives regarding her adoptive identity now more coherent.

This led to increased self-esteem and feelings of security.

...although you might not realise it yourself, you always kind of think that you are maybe just not quite as good, or you are missing something and it is maybe a cliché but it makes you more of a complete person (Participant 1).

Participant 4's sense of feeling complete appears easily defined and is explained as emerging from the contact that he had had with his birth brother and his connection to his birth family.

I now feel that I am part of something, part of the real...I am part of, I guess, my biological family, because there is an identity there. That is my brother and that's all I really needed (Participant 4).

It was evident from further contributions from Participant 4 that the contact that he has had with his birth brother has a number of dimensions to it, with one element being able to access information about his birth family through his birth brother. This was particularly important for Participant 4 in terms of information about his birth father who had been murdered some years earlier. With not choosing to have contact with his birth mother, and there having been very little communicative openness within his adoptive family, Participant 4 had very limited information about his birth family until the months leading up to our interview.

... I now know what my dad's life was like, I know how he died. I know what happened...but I guess I am playing catchup on the years that have gone by, but at least now I have a timeline and I know what happened, and then this thing with *** (Birth brother) just makes me feel part of something...I now feel that I am part of something, part of the real...I am part of, I guess, my biological family because there is an identity there
(Participant 4)

Participant 4 stated that this feeling of belonging and connection, through hearing information about his birth family, brought him a sense of calm, less stress and a feeling of *being settled*.

Participant 3 also identified feeling more complete.

Well, the positives are, it's the edge of the jigsaw (Participant 3).

Part of me wishes that I had done it 20 years ago because it sort of kept me in a wilderness...in a wonder place and I could have done with having that brick put in.
(Participant 3)

Participant 3 felt that if he had searched earlier in his life, he may have made different choices and could have lived his life differently. Participant 5 also spoke of needing to find and sort out missing pieces from his life rather than looking for a new relationship. He recognised that the missing pieces were internal, part of his sense of himself, rather than external relationships with another person.

Like there is a bit of me that is almost a need to yeah, kind of sort out missing pieces from my life rather than looking for a new relationship. Yeah rather than seeking a relationship with her to solve me. It's about looking within and seeing what my relationship is (Participant 6).

9.4 Perceived Emotional and Psychological Outcomes – Closure and Moving On

The final aspect of participant's reflections on the emotional and psychological impact of re-engaging with birth families, is that of gaining a sense of closure. Of all the participants, Participant 6 had found identifying positive aspects of re-engaging with birth families the most difficult. He

explained that the feeling of being *mixed up* had been with him throughout his life and since re-engaging with his birth family he felt even more *mixed up* (Participant 6). He did feel though that in some ways, having some certainty about the situation might be of some benefit.

I think if they turned around and said no I don't want to know you. I don't think it would draw a line under it by far but at least I would have a definite answer (Participant 6).

Other participants spoke specifically about the sense of closure that they experienced. Participant 2 explained that having searched and re-engaged with her birth family, she was able to put things away to be dealt with at another time.

I can put that in a box and move on. Or try and move on (Participant 2).

Similarly Participant 3 explains,

It means that you can allocate that to a room in your mind and leave the door open a wee bit but it's there and you know it's there but you can move on (Participant 3).

Participant 3 further clarified that despite the lack of *specialness and wonder* that he used to have and now felt that he had lost, he felt able to move on emotionally.

9.5 Summary

All participants made clear statements about the emotional and psychological impact that searching and re-engaging had had on them, with very little prompting from myself. There were common themes of an increase in self-confidence, self-esteem and feelings of security. Participants seemed able to separate these feelings out from the sometimes complex emotions regarding their relationships with their birth families. It was this concept that ran through the narratives that seemed to be of most significance and led to further consideration on my part of the impact of the actual *process* of searching and re-engaging and the impact of finding the *missing pieces* of their lives.

CHAPTER 10 CONTROLLING THE NARRATIVE

Diagram 8 illustrates the theoretical category of *controlling the narrative*, with associated dimensions. Significant concepts that contribute towards the grounded theory are highlighted in blue.

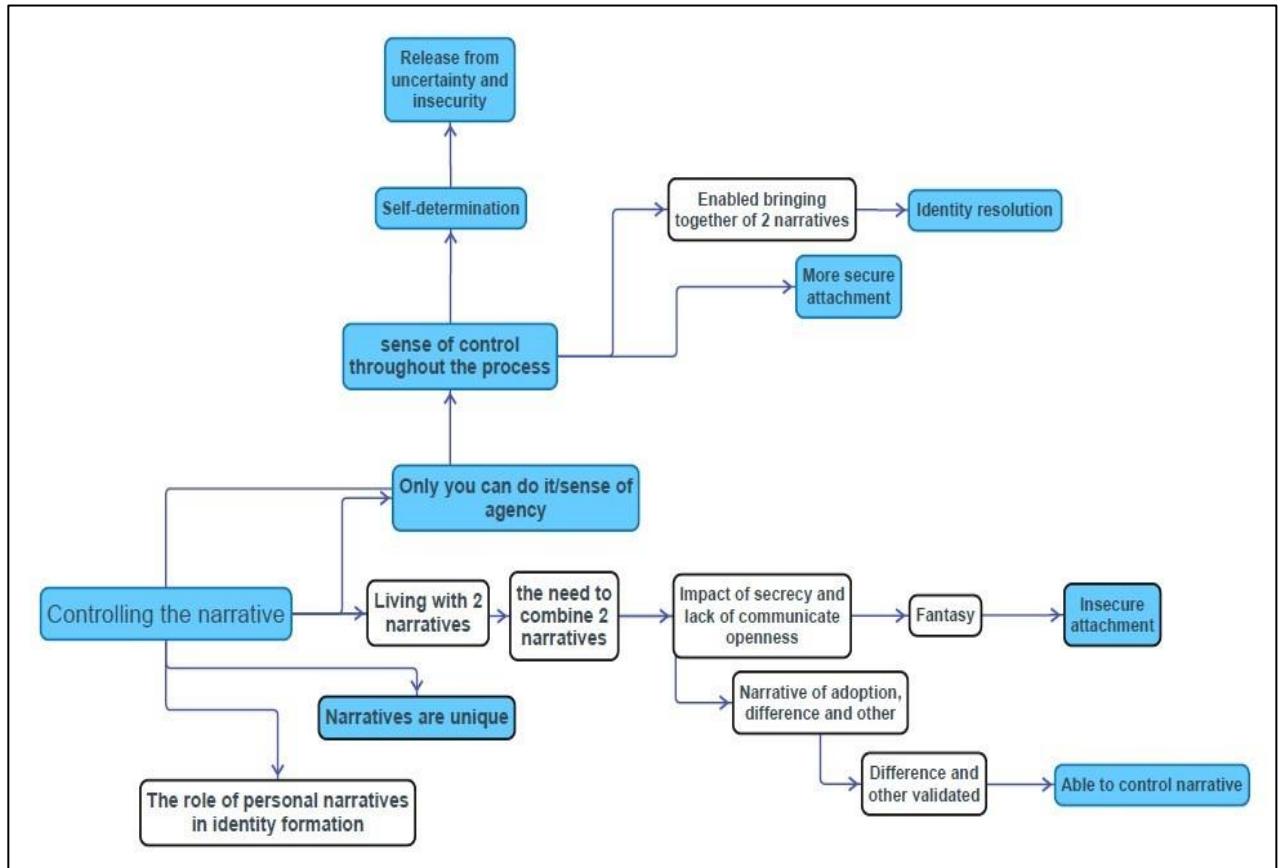


Diagram 8

The final two theoretical categories that have been identified are more conceptual than the previous four. It is in these next two chapters that I further develop analytic and conceptual constructions of the data with the aim of examining how the participants understood and experienced their worlds as they engaged in the process of searching and re-engaging with birth families. These two chapters demonstrate the scaffolding process whereby significant conceptual threads running through the data start to come together to enable more detailed exploration leading to theory development. This process necessarily involves some element of repetition of significant themes and concepts previously identified in the theoretical categories one to four. The two final categories also contain themes and concepts that overlap and interconnect. Presenting them as two distinct categories allows for a more detailed exploration of the most significant

concepts within each. The previous four chapters fractured the data, from coherent narratives to the first four theoretical categories. The final two categories start to weave the narrative back into a coherent whole, developing new understandings in the process.

Participant 4 spoke with emotion about the impact that the process of searching for his birth family had on him.

I can control it and for that reason I felt liberated to be doing something on my own (Participant 4).

The above quotation raises a number of questions: liberated from what; what is it that it is so important to control and what will this sense of control and liberation bring?

10.1 Controlling the Narrative - The Role of Personal Narratives in Identity Formation

When considering the concept of *controlling the narrative*, it is first necessary to explore the nature of the personal narratives that the participants had. In the normal course of events, people who have not been adopted, or had other major disruptions to their childhood, have a clear, coherent narrative of their early lives, which links seamlessly into the narratives of their present life. They have been able to co-construct the narrative from the everyday lived experience of being within the family unit of their origins. Memories are shared with others, gaps in memories are filled in by people who they hopefully have some sense of trust in, photographs add to the richness of the memories and though factual events may sometimes become muddled, there is a constant and coherent narrative that runs through past experiences and relationships. These narratives are part of the process of identity formation, drawing on autobiographical details.

10.2 Controlling the Narrative - Living with Two Separate Narratives

All participants in this study spoke of events and feelings that would indicate fragmented and incongruous self-schemas leading to feelings of low self-confidence, lack of self-worth and insecurity. The incomplete or fractured narratives that adopted people may have about their origins often leads to a reliance on fantasy. These fantasies can be conscious and unconscious

and are usually based on some element of reality. They reveal truths about how families, and the individuals within families, perceive their past, present and future circumstances and relationships. Though fantasies allow for the expression of emotion they can also entrap people and create a barrier for alternative thoughts, feelings and perceptions to occur. Fantasies with regard to adoption are often thought of as being positive, *fairy tale* constructions, but they can also be negative, with themes that increase self-doubt and insecurity and contain within them the message for the adoptee that they are unlovable, or not worthy of being loved. If narratives help us to make sense of life, having incomplete or disjointed narratives, with a reliance on fantasies, have the potential to keep people trapped by the past, through the way in which they understand themselves and the world in which they inhabit. The role of fantasy in the personal narratives of adoptees is explored further in chapter 12.

The following example demonstrates the impact that these narratives can have on an adoptee's life, in major, as well as in everyday and mundane events. Participant 4 recounted his feelings when a social event was coming to an end.

... when it is time to go, erm I feel a great sadness because everyone has all come together and there is all this laughing and joking, then all of a sudden everything just goes (Participant 4).

For a number of participants, the ending of social gatherings brought feelings of abandonment and insecurity regarding their relationships with friends. They felt a need to hold on to the connections made and found it difficult to disengage from people. These fantasies could be generalised as providing a narrative that connections were insecure, that the individual was not worthy of love and attention and might not be able to sustain the friendships with the group of people that they were with. Though this study did not seek to classify the attachment styles of participants, observations of the narratives of their experiences and emotional responses could lead to understanding such reflections as being evidence of insecure attachment, where the main dimensions with regard to adult attachments are attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Certainly, the themes of feeling that others cannot be relied upon, worry and an intolerance of uncertainty were evident in the narratives and would be consistent with

insecure attachment styles. Chapter 13 further explores the possible connections between the adoptive experiences and attachment styles in adult years, drawing on literature and theory to place these observations and understandings in context.

Participant 4 spent years not being able to locate where these feelings of insecurity came from. This study has demonstrated that the process of seeking information from documentary sources and indirect contact with his birth family had enabled him to be released from the constraints of previously held fantasies of abandonment and insecurity. He had now begun the process of re-writing this narrative and chooses to leave social events before they end. Knowing that the feelings that he experienced were shared by other adoptees has provided some reassurance and enabled him to reframe his emotional responses to certain triggering situations. Participant 4 chose to take control of the situation by developing strategies for managing them thus rewriting the negative fantasy that caused him to feel sad, anxious and insecure. Autobiographical narratives also feed into the development of the internal working model. In recent times, theorists have putting forwards the views that internal working models can be subject to change and adjustment in adult years. Challenging previously held negative fantasies and the accompanying personal narrative can lead to an adjustment of a person's internal working model.

As demonstrated above, personal narratives that adoptees construct draw on information available and fantasy where information is not available, to fill in the gaps and to help cope with difficult emotions. The other aspect of the participant's narratives is developed from that which is ascribed by society. In relation to adoption, these narratives are partly derived from society's views about adoption per se. Adoption is a complex social process with numerous significant social actors. It is based on loss; the loss of the birth parents when the child is relinquished or taken; the loss of adoptive parents of not bearing their own child; and the loss of the birth family relationships for the child. Through this, it is a phenomenon that is based on deficit where the themes of loss and difference are inescapable. Added to this is the societal view of family, what is seen as *normal* and what is different or *not normal*. Adoptive families are constructed differently to the

norm and this sense of difference pervaded much of the adoptive experience for all participants.

This picture of adoption may appear contrary to modern day thinking and to policy that is more inclusive and recognises and values difference, but the reality for adoptees is that societies' views, though changing slowly, have not changed as significantly as many would like to believe. These personal and social constructs add to the challenge that adoptees face in attempting to integrate the two distinct narratives for their life, that of their origins and birth family and that of their adoptive family. Because you have no day today shared history with your birth family and yet there is still clearly a connection (Participant 7).

An additional challenge for adoptees is the possible contradiction in not wanting to be treated as different or *outside* in terms of their place within the adoptive family unit, but at the same time needing their difference to be recognised and validated. Being able to access documentary information and attending the support group appeared to have a significant impact on being able to validate their adoptive narrative. Documentary information and birth family details passed on through re-engagement with birth families gave shape and structure to their identity, enabling them to see themselves as a whole person, integrating their past and present lives. Participants spoke very positively about the support group that they attended. It was evident from the interviews that hearing similar experiences and reflections from other group members was reassuring for participants and further enabled them to make sense of their own stories. There was a sense from the interviews of the participants feeling that their experiences were validated through meeting with people who had similar experiences. For some, hearing other people speak enabled them to articulate things which had been previously felt but not spoken of. It appeared to be important to the participants that these two aspects, of difference and similarity being validated, was an essential part of them gaining control over the narrative of their adoption.

In addition to helping the participants in terms of the resolution of individual identity issues, the support group provided a sense of belonging in terms of social identity. The experience of attending the adoption support group

enabled the participants to merge the two strands of their identity and also to draw on social and individual aspects of their identity to bring coherence to their lives. In this way, the support group was able to attend to both macro and micro processes. During the process of self-categorisation through searching and re-engaging, and attendance at the support group, there was an accentuation of perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members. This sense of belonging and of personal narratives being validated appeared to have a positive impact on both their personal and social identity formation. The support group enabled participants to openly discuss their lives and their experiences of adoption. They were able to claim their social identity by ascribing to the central feature of the group, that of having been adopted. The other aspects of people's lives, that led to cultural differences in terms of factors such as educational attainment, socio economic factors, religious affiliations etc., did not diminish the centrality of the core feature of being adopted as being of primary importance in defining and shaping the participant's social identity. Throughout the interviews all participants spoke of feeling positive about their adoptive identity, specifically since attending the group.

The process of resolving both personal and social identity issues draws on issues of agency and reflection, essential components in assuming control of the narrative. The role of agency and self-determination in the process of searching and re-engaging with birth family is discussed in more detail and in relation to the literature and theoretical frameworks in chapter 12.

10.3 Controlling the Narrative - The Impact of Secrecy and a Lack of Communicative Openness

Despite a focus on communicative openness in recent adoption practice and policy, many of the participants, having been adopted in the 1960's and 1970's, experienced a lack of communicative openness with secrecy and even denial permeating their lives. Participant 4 spoke of the *elephant in the room* a symbolic image of something so clearly there, seen by everyone, yet spoken of by no-one. A lack of communicative openness gives the implicit message that the adoptive family is *good* and the birth family is *less good* and to seek information and to search indicates a desire to choose the less good narrative. This can be seen as leading to negative internalisations of their adoptive status. These implicit messages may serve to discourage

adoptees from claiming their story of origin as valid and they are therefore unable to integrate the two strands of narrative.

It is also significant within the context of this inquiry to note that the decision to keep a person's adoption secret, or not spoken about, is not the decision of the adoptee but of their birth families and others. Moving away from secrecy, involves choosing to take the search into the public domain, whether through approaching Register House for documentation, engaging with support services or discussing their adoption with the wider circle of family and friends.

10.4 Controlling the Narrative - Taking Control

Being adopted alters the course of a person's life and is out with the adoptee's control. The adopted person is not part of any decisions made at the time of the adoption. They have no control over the loss of their birth family or the choice of their adoptive family. Beyond that, they often have no control over the information that they may or may not access and the narrative that is constructed by their adoptive family and to some extent by the wider society. The events that take place at the beginning of the adoption narrative, those of being relinquished and chosen or placed cannot be altered, but the act of searching and re-engaging with birth families allows adoptees to take control of the narrative of their adoption, both past and present. Assuming a position of control to claim the identity of being an adoptee with more positive understandings of the birth family narrative, are further explored in relation to the process of controlling the narrative in chapter 12.

For Participant 1 this sense of control was extended to what she felt that she had permission to even think about, and she was only released or liberated from that control when her adoptive parents died

It was such a big wall of silence, that it was kind of like, you are not even allowed to think about it (Participant 1).

Though birth family relationships had been complex, Participant 1 felt able to make decisions about not only the search for her birth family, but also how she negotiated the relationships going forwards. Participant 2 had been proactive in her search for her birth family and in the subsequent

reengagement with them. At points that she felt that she was losing control of the re-engagement process.

I have lost control here. This was meant to
be my journey, this was for me
(Participant 2).

It was evident from other parts of the interview though that she ensured that she regained control in terms of dictating the terms of her relationship with birth family members.

The one participant that did not appear to have developed a sense of control regarding the narrative of his adoption was Participant 6. As previously highlighted, recent events in his life had been difficult and he had experienced a number of significant losses. He did not appear to be the author of his own story in the way that other participants were. His recent life experiences in many ways were replicating the earlier experiences of being adopted. He felt powerless and had little control with regard to reengaging with his birth family. Post interview reflective logs identified that there was the possibility that due to recent losses, Participant 6 did not have the emotional capacity to regain control over his personal narrative through the process of re-engaging with his birth family.

Participants also exercised control over the process of searching and reengaging with birth families through deciding on the timescale for starting and for some, stopping and then resuming the process. The timing was up to them and the priority that they chose to give it at various times of their life was their decision.

10.5 Summary

The theory developed in this category is that engaging in the search for information and for some form of re-engagement, enables adoptees to bring the two narratives of their lives together. It is only the adoptee themselves that can bring these two narratives together, they must be the agent of the process, seeking what is of most significance to them and engaging in whatever way they choose and with whoever they choose. It is an individual path that cannot be taken without the adoptee themselves choosing to take it and controlling where it will go. The significance of this, is that all other aspects of the adoptive narrative has involved other people playing a significant role, with either passive, or no involvement from the adoptee.

Participant 2 recounted,

I remember going... to Register House,
getting your notes that no-one else can
open, they are sealed for a hundred years,
you get them... (Participant 2)

The information was hers, she needed to be the one to open the envelopes. Other participants also spoke of it being their journey. Though they might not specifically mention the word control, the concept of self-determination was evident in terms of making the decision to search and re-engage and proceeding through the process in their own chosen way. What more significant way of controlling the narrative than being the lead actor.

10.6 Case study

The process of identifying the six theoretical categories as they emerged from the data, necessarily involves fracturing the data from the narratives provided. Though this is a central feature of CGT, in doing this a sense of the overall stories of the participants is not conveyed. To address this a case study based on transcript from participant 4 is presented here with specific reference to *controlling the narrative*.

Case study 1. 'James'

James was 2 years old when he was adopted. He is the younger of 2 boys, and was born in the 1980's. He stated that his birth mother was not able to cope with having 2 children with all of the social and financial pressure that this brought with it. He has learnt that his birth mother and birth father had a troubled relationship and his mother felt unable to cope. He was placed in foster care for 9 months directly from hospital and was subsequently adopted. James indicated that he understood the pressure that his birth mother would have been under and seemed not to question the reasons for her placing him for adoption.

Whilst growing up James had no information about his birth family. He only 'officially' found out that he was adopted when he was 19. It was at this time that his birth brother was trying to trace him. Contact was made by his birth brother to his adoptive father through his place of work (James and his father worked together). James was aware that his birth brother had tried to make contact with him but no contact actually materialised and he sat with this new knowledge for 13 years.

James described how he had an inkling as a child that something was 'not quite right'. He recalled an incident, at the time when his birth brother traced him, when his adoptive mother took out a green shoe box with photographs and showed him a photo of his 7th birthday party. She recounted an incident where one of his friends told him that he did not come from his mummy's tummy. He recalls not really understanding what was said to him but something seemed to stick in his mind from then and he always felt that something was 'not quite right'. Being shown that photograph and being reminded of the incident that had taken place had a profound impact on James even though he did not feel able to take any action in terms of searching, or even discussing his adoption with his adoptive parents. James found knowing that other people in the community knew about his adoption before he did particularly difficult and this added to his sense of not having any say or control over the situation.

James has never discussed his adoption with his adoptive parents indicating an absence of communicative openness about the subject. When James decided to try to re-engage with his birth family, he did so without telling his adoptive parents. He has no regrets about this and stated that he felt that he was 'entitled to do it'. There was a strong sense of James making the decision to take control of the situation and to do things completely on his own terms. He was told about the support provided by the 3rd sector adoption support agency by a friend and it was when he made contact with them that he found out more details regarding the circumstances of his adoption and his birth family. Once he made contact with the agency, things happened very fast. He found the support from the agency beneficial and stated that the process was not at all daunting because he was able to take the lead. He stated that he loved his adoptive parents very much but that there is 'a fundamental difference between compensation and the truth'.

James stated that he always felt quite controlled as an adoptee, and that it was almost like he was an 'indemnity'; that he had been given to his adoptive parents and he had to be so thankful all of the time. As a result of this, he believed that his adoptive parents felt that they could always have a say in what he did in life. Searching for his birth family was the only thing that he had done completely without their knowledge or approval. He was very clear that he did not want their opinion and that engaging in the process of searching felt liberating, as it was something that he could control

James described his motivation for searching for his birth family as stemming from a need to find answers and peace of mind. He also felt that he was looking for respect. He appeared to feel that not having what other people had, in terms of certainty about who he was, made him in some ways 'less than', or 'other'. He wanted to be told, 'this is who you are and this is where you come from'. James felt that not having the answers to those questions was having an adverse effect on his life. He describes having gone to 'some dark places', being frequently upset, sometimes bursting into tears, and that these feelings affected his friendships. James felt that he missed out on a lot of years during his adult life, when he should

have been enjoying himself but couldn't. Social events were particularly difficult for James. He described feeling a great sadness when they were coming to an end. He felt that he had learnt to control these feelings to a certain extent by leaving nights out early but still found such situations very difficult, feeling hurt and angry, in need of help and wanting to cry out for his biological family.

James eventually made the decision to search for his birth family for himself. He felt that he owed himself respect and closure. He articulated a number of times that it was something that he could do for himself and that he did not have to listen to people telling him not to do it, or even what to do and when to do it. He felt that there was an urgency to his need to search, not in terms of the timescale, but in terms of it needing to be done at some point. James stated that he was not necessarily looking for a relationship with his birth family, he just wanted information, even basic information such as what his given name was at birth. Finding out his given name caused James to feel that he was not the person that he had grown up thinking he was. This piece of information enabled him to claim one of the pieces of his history that had been missing.

When James was put in contact with his birth brother, he discovered that he also had a nephew and a half-brother. In the same way that James had not discussed searching for his birth family with his adoptive parents, his brother had not told his mother (James's birth mother). James's main focus at the time of interview was on meeting his brother, with no immediate plans to meet his birth mother. Even prior to a meeting taking place, James described feeling that a tremendous weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He recounted that everyday events, such as someone commenting that he looked like his adoptive parents, would remind him of what was different about him, what was missing. He constantly worried about whether or not his birth brother would be angry that he had not responded to the contact made some 13 years before and worried about whether he was OK or not. To know that he was well and bore no ill feeling was a huge relief to James. He described this information as making him feel *more settled, more comfortable and calm*. Of particular importance to

James was the fact that his brother was keen to meet, but that he wanted James to make the decisions about how and when this would happen. He described having feelings of real happiness instead of his usual feelings of doom and gloom.

James explained that just knowing who his birth brother was made him feel that he was now part of something, part of his biological family. He learned through his brother that their birth father had been murdered at the age of 44. He had been told that his birth father had been cremated which he felt was a blessing as if there had been a grave he may have allowed this to 'interfere' with his life, whereas as things were, he had to accept what had happened and just move on. He believed that through his brother he could find out all of the information that he needed that would give him a timeline of significant events, and through his brother, he felt part of something even if he did not have a relationship with any other members of his birth family

CHAPTER 11 - MISSING PIECES

Diagram 9 illustrates the theoretical category *missing pieces* with associated dimensions. Significant concepts that contribute towards the grounded theory are highlighted in blue.

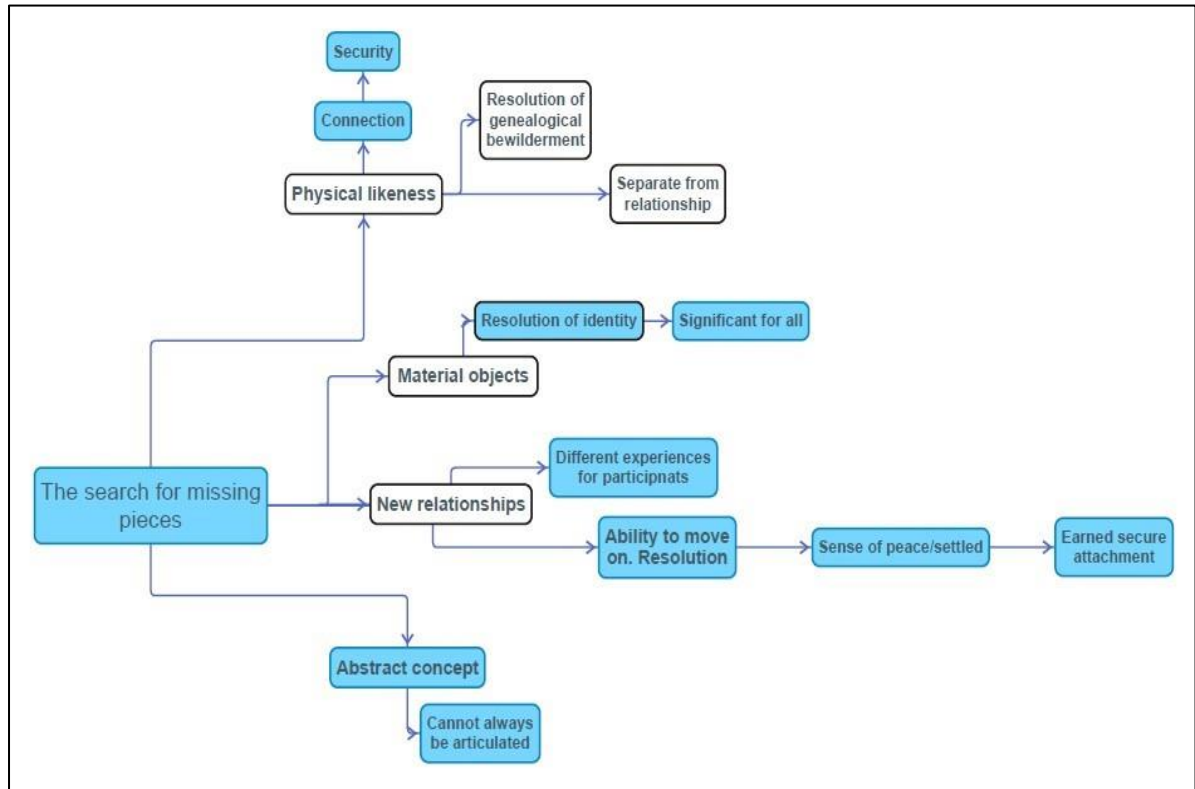


Diagram 9

The final theoretical category brings together the concept of *missing pieces*. This phrase was used repeatedly during the interviews and is understood by participants in relation to concrete aspects of their lives such as information, material objects and members of their birth families, as well as more abstract notions. Various examples of imagery used by participants to articulate this concept have been presented in previous chapters.

Not every part of the jigsaw is there, or
it has no edge (Participant 3).

The words of Participant 3 paint a vivid picture of his experience of missing pieces. The more common imagery would be pieces of a jigsaw missing but for him it is the edge that is not defined leading to his identity being ill defined with the pieces searched for and found forming a boundary around his sense of self. The ways in which this was experienced by each

participant and the manner in which they described it varied, which perhaps indicates the different pieces that were missing for each person and the impact this had on their lives. The need to search was primarily motivated by this need to search for the missing pieces. For some, the aim was to find and meet birth family, often the birth mother, for others the aim was to search for information, which may or may not lead to meeting birth family. Through this, some were searching for similarity, some for medical information, some out of curiosity, some to find what they perceived as being the truth about the circumstances of their adoption which enabled the missing pieces of the narrative of their adoption to be completed.

11.1 Missing pieces - physical likeness

One example of a piece that is missing for many of the participants was the ability to look at someone that bore a physical resemblance to them self. Looking at someone that looks like you and you don't realise, not that it's important but if you have not got it and then you have suddenly go it. You go, that's it! (Participant 1).

You can't say, she looks like me, or he looks like me. You can't go like that through life. So there are gaps for you in terms of who you are and who you are like (Participant 6).

Finding someone that looks like you brings a sense of connection to someone else and to broader genealogical lines which can assist in the resolution of genealogical bewilderment. This concept is explored in relation to the wider literature in Chapter 13. The participants appeared to be searching not just for someone else, but in essence, searching for part of themselves.

Like there is a bit of me that is almost a need to yeah, kind of sort out missing pieces from my life rather than looking for a new relationship. Yeah rather than seeking a relationship with her to solve me. It's about looking within and seeing what my relationship is (Participant.6).

Seeing someone who resembled themselves in terms of physical appearance or mannerisms was in some way confirmation of their own existence. The missing piece was experienced as something core to their very being that could only be understood when seen in the reflection of

themselves in someone else. Meeting someone that bears a physical resemblance had a significant emotional impact on a number of the participants and resolved some of the feelings of something being missing which was separate from the relationship that may or may not develop.

Searching for someone that bears a physical resemblance to themselves was also an indication for some of the participants of their need to belong. The concepts of connection and belonging have similar qualities though belonging denotes a more emotional component. Participant 7 sees connection as being part of meeting people that you can start to form a shared history with. Even though there is no shared history at present, the strands that come from that original connection are still there.

... Because you have no day today shared history with your birth family and yet there is still clearly a connection. (Participant 7)

One of the recurring focused codes that emerged from the data was that of participants needing to belong to something or someone. Though they might not have been clear about what belonging would feel like, they knew what not belonging felt like. This brings to the fore the different concepts of family being those that you share day to day experiences with and those that you have a genetic and very early life connection to and includes being part of a wider family system that has its own unique culture and heritage. The missing piece in this context is the connection that brings belonging to someone or something.

11.2 Missing Pieces - Material Objects

Searching for factual, biographical information could be perceived as a relatively straightforward activity and was frequently explained by participants in rational, logical terms. The need to search for medical information, birth certificates and other significant documentation was expressed as a desire fill gaps with concrete information and documents. What was apparent though was the unexpected significance that finding these missing pieces could have. Participant 2's retrieval of her birth certificate came about almost without planning, though was possibly something that she had thought about or was drawn towards unconsciously for many years. Whilst in Edinburgh, she realised that Register House was just a bus ride away and decided to see if she could access a copy of her

birth certificate. The information contained in the birth certificate, most significantly the name that she had been given at birth, had a huge impact on her. Alongside this, the significance of the document, as a concrete link with the circumstances of her having been relinquished, caused her a great deal of distress and seems to have opened the door to feelings buried for many years.

I must have been 20 or 21 at the time, and that had a huge impact on me. I remember getting the birth certificate and it came up with my name and then I was just, I was just devastated. I remember sitting on the bus just crying and thinking how could they? It just brought all those things back. How could they just give me up? How could they do that to a baby?
(Participant 2)

Material objects such as birth certificates emerged during the interviews as being significant in terms of the missing pieces that participants searched for in terms of resolving identity issues.

11.3 Missing Pieces - The Significance or Otherwise of New Relationships

An assumption that is often made when an adoptee expresses a desire to search is that the missing piece that they are searching for is a person or persons and that the logical conclusion of finding this missing piece is the formation of a relationship with that person. Participants 6 and 7 spoke specifically of wanting to find members of their birth family with the aim of forming relationships with them. For participant 6 in particular these possible relationships were the thing that he felt could fill the gaps in his life. It was evident from the interview that Participant 6 had not had time to process the losses that he had recently experienced. It seemed possible that he was clinging to the hope that new relationships with his birth family could fill the emotional void in his life. Participant 5 reflected that the primary missing piece in his life and his sense of self was not a relationship but something central to himself as a person.

There is a bit of me that is almost a need to yeah, kind of sort out missing pieces from my life rather than looking for a new relationship (Participant 5).

Participant 4 did not begin his search with the absolute need to re-engage with his birth brother but since there had been contact by letter with plans to meet, the impact of re-engaging with him had become a significant part of the search for missing pieces.

I now feel that I am part of something,
part of the real...I am part of, I guess, my
biological family, because there is an
identity there. That is my brother and
that's all I really needed (Participant 4).

He also expressed the view though, that even if he was not able to meet his birth brother and form a relationship with him, just having been provided with information regarding the circumstances of his adoption and his birth family had been a significant step in enabling him to understand more about himself and his place in the world.

Participants 1 and 5 were initially more circumspect in their wish to meet and form relationships with birth family, seeing it as something that would be an added bonus but not the be all and end all of what they hoped to find. Participant 6 had a different perspective and saw the ability to re-engage with his birth family as a means to finding parts within himself. He felt that he needed some connection with his birth family, even if relationships were not maintained, to fill the gaps in his life and his sense of who he was as a person.

11.4 Missing Pieces - The Abstract Nature of the Missing Pieces

For all of the participants, except perhaps Participant 6, the need to directly re-engage with birth family was a secondary motive in their need to search for missing pieces. Though they did not minimise the hurt felt by relationships that had not met their expectations or had caused conflict, they still identified the process of searching and the information that they had gained as being significant and something that had had a positive effect on their emotional well-being through the development of a clearer sense of self.

In many of the narratives, the concept of the missing pieces that needed to be searched for was something abstract but clearly of great importance. Participant 3 used vivid imagery, speaking of the jigsaw with no edge and ultimately finding the edge to the jigsaw.

Not every piece of the jigsaw is there, or it has no edge. So the edges need to be put in so that I thought I could move on (Participant 3).

His use of symbolism was continued in his stated wish that he had engaged in searching at an earlier stage in his life.

Part of me wishes that I had done it 20 years ago because it sort of kept me in a wilderness...in a wonder place and I could have done with having that brick put in (Participant 3).

Even participants that identified some specifics in terms of what they were needing to search for, also identified that they were also searching for missing pieces that could not be articulated.

11.5 Summary

As with so many aspects of this inquiry, comparisons between the different narratives highlighted how different each participant's articulation was of what they were searching for. In spite of these apparent differences, there was a clear central theme of needing to search for something that was missing, that it may or may not be possible to articulate and understand. Sometimes the understanding of what was missing emerged during the search process. Whatever the missing pieces were, or how they were searched for and found, it was through doing this that the participants appeared to be more able to bring the two narratives of their lives together in a way that had not been possible before. With all but one participant (Participant 6) this appeared to bring them feelings of security, made them feel more settled and peaceful and brought greater self-confidence and self-esteem. The experience of adoptees can be viewed in terms of the first chapter of their life being missing. Without the back-story, the rest of the book lacks context and does not make complete sense. This analogy proved useful for me in understanding the experiences of the participants. Each book is unique. The content of the missing chapter is unique. The process of finding the lost chapter is a personal journey and helps to provide context and meaning to the rest of the story.

11.6 Case Study

The second case study (participant 1) presented focuses on missing pieces as explained in this category.

Case study 2. 'Marjorie'

Marjorie is a woman in her mid 40's. She was adopted from birth when her birth mother was 19 years of age. Her birth father was still in contact with her birth mother, but their relationship was not a secure one and he did not feel that he was in a position to support a baby. Marjorie's birth mother was forced to leave the family home when she discovered that she was pregnant and there was no other family support available to her. The adoption was arranged privately by a local GP following her birth mother's brief stay in the home of a couple known to her boss. The couple that adopted Marjorie were friends with the couple that her birth mother was stayed with. Marjorie discovered through discussions with her birth mother in later years, that her birth mother was unaware that the couple that adopted Marjorie were friends of the people that she stayed with when she gave birth.

Marjorie believes that she was placed for adoption due to the lack of support available to her birth mother. Her birth mother believed that a baby needed a mother and a father and that was something that she could not provide. Marjorie was not told that she was adopted by her adoptive parents. She described it as a 'great big secret'. Marjorie always knew that she felt different; that there was something that she was not being told. Marjorie's background is an example of the range of adoptive narratives that the participants in the study had and how unique each narrative was. Hers was one of secrecy and shame with a lack of communicative openness about her adoption.

Marjorie described herself as having been an inquisitive child, and when she was 12 years old she looked inside her adoptive father's bureau and found her birth certificate, which she said didn't look like other people's birth certificate. Having seen the birth certificate and realising that there was a secret being kept from her, she filled in the gaps and worked out that she was adopted. She felt that the process of searching started at a very young age, but was not articulated and had no identifiable aim. She explained that she always felt different, and that she did not feel that she

had a connection to her parents in the same way that her friends had with their parents. She felt that though they loved her, it was not unconditional and was not on the same level as other parent/child relationships that she saw. Marjorie had no siblings growing up. She stated that this never sat comfortably with her and she describes always fighting being an only child. After finding the birth certificate, she confronted her adoptive parents, but they denied that she was adopted. The level of secrecy regarding her background was fiercely guarded and the subject was not open for discussion within the family. However, when she spoke with her friend she discovered that the friend and her mother knew and so confirmed her suspicions. Marjorie left home the day before her 17th birthday. Once she had left home she felt that she was able to be more forceful in her questions. Given the level of secrecy and denial regarding her being adopted, there was no direct or indirect contact with her birth family whilst she was growing up.

When Marjorie's adoptive parents died, Marjorie was in her mid 40's. It was only then that she felt able to instigate a more focused search for her birth family. She describes not being able to even think about her birth family prior to the passing of her adoptive parents due to the wall of silence that surrounded the subject. This seemed to indicate an extreme level of closed communication that impacted not just on what was said, or not said, but also on what she could actually even think about.

The first step that Marjorie took was to get her adoption papers from Edinburgh. This was the first concrete missing piece that she was able to find and was the first step to finding what she felt was missing. These documents confirmed the name that she had been given at birth, which was a significant part of who she really was. She then approached a 3rd sector adoption support agency for advice and support. At first letters were sent through the agency to her birth parents (she later discovered that her birth mother and father were still together). Her birth father hid the first letter from her birth mother. She felt that this was due to how shocked he would have been after such a long time. The second letter that was sent reached her birth mother. Marjorie received support from the adoption support agency at this time.

When Marjory met her birth mother for the first time she describes instantly knowing what had been missing in her life. Another missing piece had been found just by the initial meeting with no expectations of an ongoing relationship. This meeting was far less emotional than Marjorie had anticipated but at the same time she felt that there was an instant connection. She felt the same connection when she subsequently met her birth father and describes being 'frighteningly similar' to both. Marjorie describes having similar mannerisms and personality traits as her birth mother and viewed these observed similarities as additional missing pieces to the incomplete person that she had been. Following these meetings, she also met her older brother and his wife. She found establishing a relationship with her older brother relatively easy, though says that her 2 younger brothers were more reticent. These meetings were all relatively recent when the interview for this study took place.

Marjorie was a little unsure about her motivation for searching and says that she did not expect that there would necessarily be any direct contact with her birth family, but that essentially she was looking for 'that bit that was missing'. She attended the meetings at the adoption support agency after the letters had been sent and before she had any direct contact. She says that she wasn't really interested in the story of why she had been placed for adoption but that she just wanted to see what it was that other people had, 'what makes me, me'. There was a sense of there being something missing that she could not articulate. Marjorie did not realise it initially, but as time went by she felt that she wanted to set eyes on someone that looked like her, to see herself reflected in someone else. At this point she was not necessarily looking to establish new relationships though was open to the idea.

Reflecting on what the benefits have been, Marjorie felt that due to the geographical distance between them, they were not as apparent as they could have been. She identifies the benefits as knowing who she is, including all of the parts of herself that had previously been missing. She felt that she had found out where she came from, a connection to the other narrative of her life and this enabled her to feel more settled in her life. Marjorie spoke of feeling like a different person in that she no longer felt

that she was not quite as good as other people or that she was missing something. In essence she felt like more of a complete person and that life was not as frightening as it used to be. Marjorie also described feeling more confident and less worried about what other people thought of her. Previously she had worried a lot about how other people viewed her and often interpreted everyday interactions in a negative way. She had not felt that friendships were on an equal level and had felt a need to be grateful for any signs of friendship. She indicated signs of previously having insecure attachments, particularly with friendships, which now felt more secure with a higher level of trust in others and in herself. She also worried less about things coming to an end, describing how prior to searching and re-engaging with her birth family she would feel upset and anxious when social occasions were coming to an end. Since searching for and re-engaging with her birth family, she felt more secure that friends will not leave her and that when the time comes for a meeting to end, she knows that they will meet again.

In terms of negative outcomes of re-engaging, Marjorie feels that some of the personality traits that she shares with her birth mother are things that she does not like about herself such as sometimes being thoughtless towards other people. She also feels that she is on the outside of her birth family, particularly at significant times of the year when they are all together. When she phones her birth mother at those times, she feels like an intruder. The positive changes that she observed were more in terms of her own identity and place in the world rather than the new relationships with her birth family that she has. Overall, Marjorie feels that the outcome of re-engaging has been more positive than negative.

CHAPTER 12 THE CORE CATEGORY

Theorizing means stopping, pondering and rethinking anew ... when you theorize you reach down to fundamentals, up to abstractions, and probe into experience (Charmaz 2006 p. 135).

Providing clear identification of the core category is central for the process of theorising in CGT. For clarity, an initial summary of the core category is presented, which is then expanded upon with attention to the main identified areas of missing pieces, the impact of missing pieces on identity development, the process of searching for missing pieces and the impact of this process on adult attachment styles and behaviour.

The mind map below demonstrates the development of the core category, with all its dimensions and contains the two central themes of *missing pieces* and *controlling the narrative*

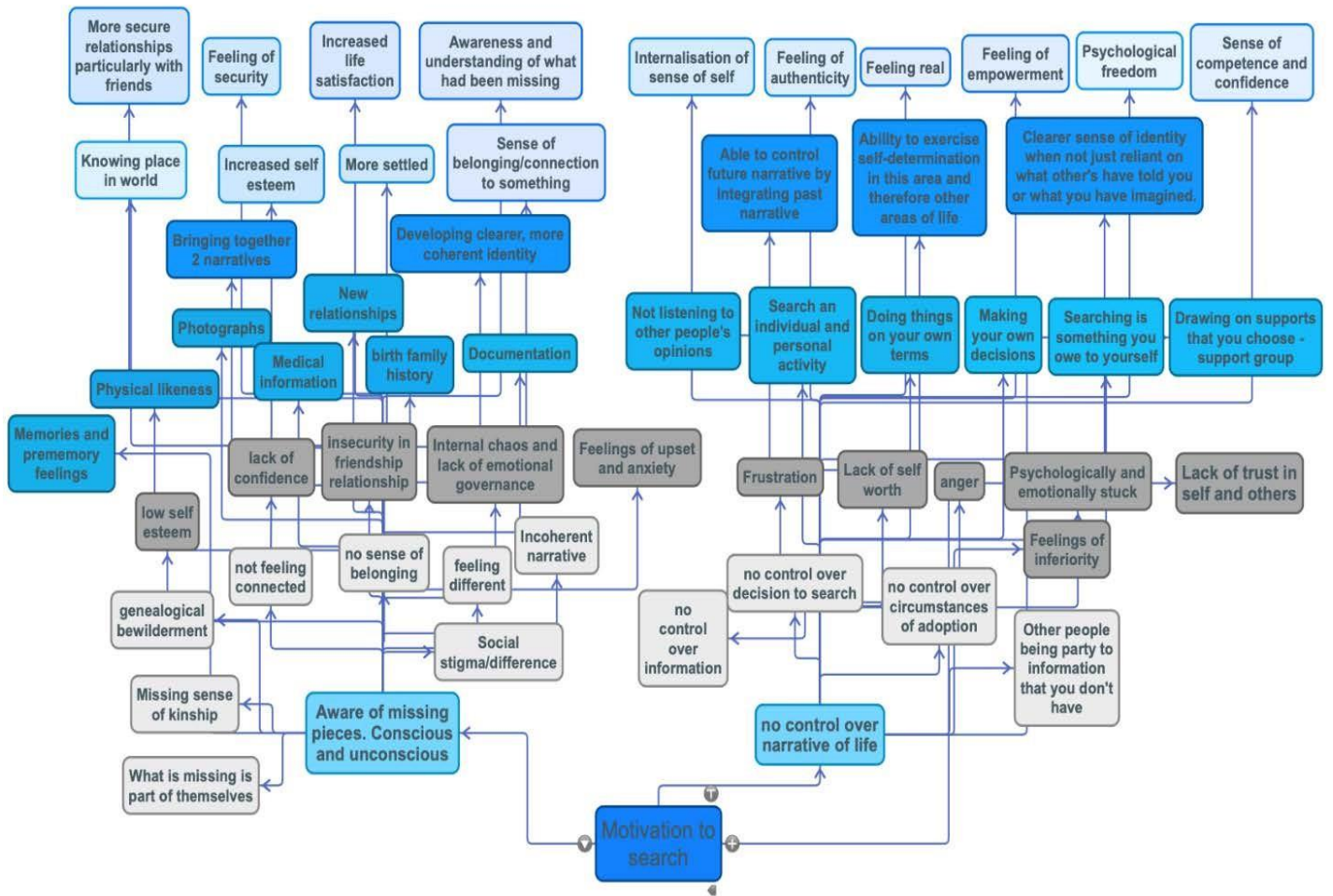


Diagram 10

This second mind map demonstrates the two themes of *missing pieces* and *controlling the narrative* and the impact on the participants when engaging with them. Though not identical, this mind map illustrates the similarity in outcomes from these two processes.

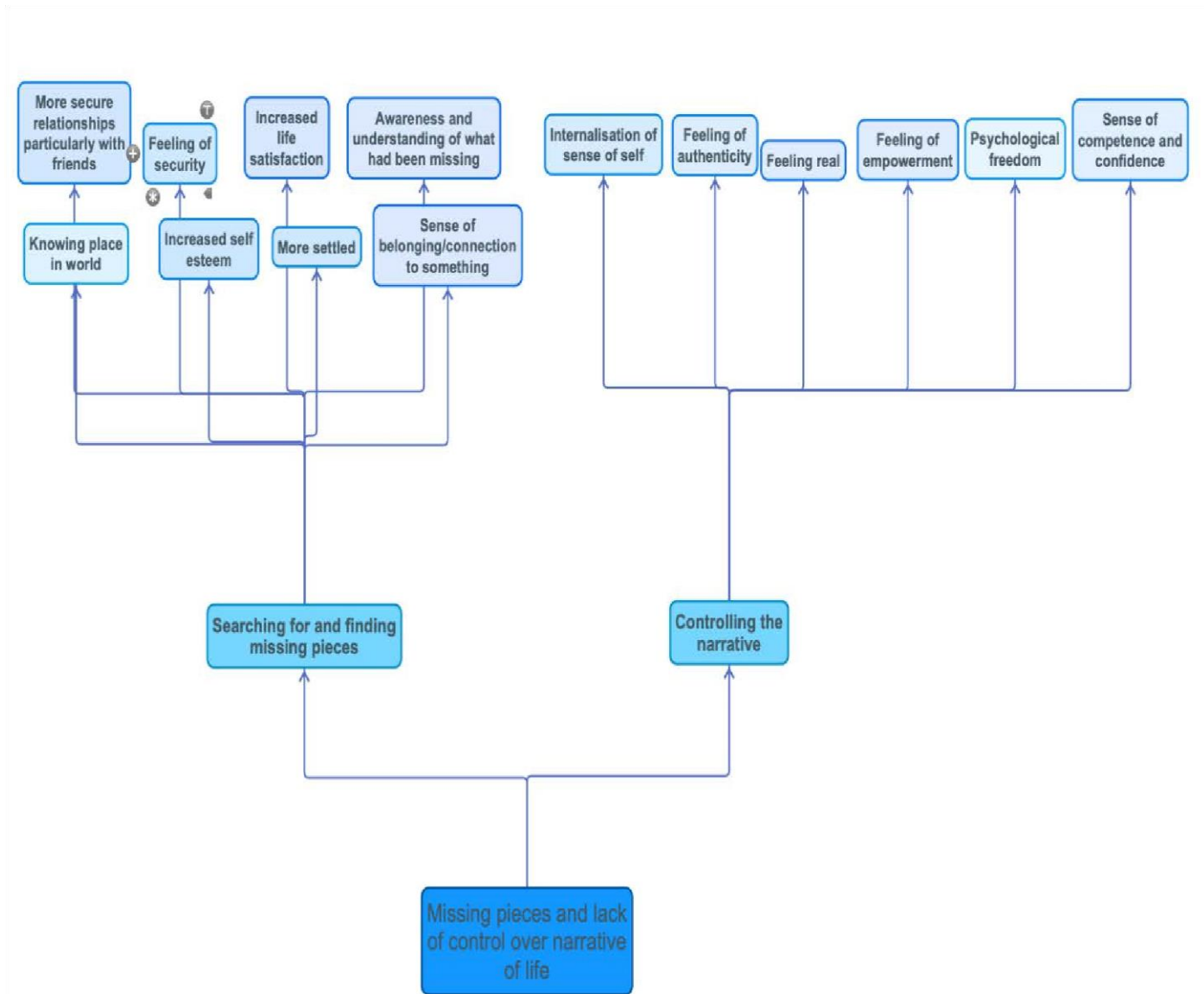


Diagram 11

12.1 Summary of the Theory Contained in the Core Category – The Storyline

The core category of this inquiry focuses on the experience of adult adoptees searching for and re-engaging with birth families. Adult adoptees seek to search and to re-engage with birth families for a variety of complex and interrelated reasons. The central motivation has been identified as the need to search for missing pieces. Missing pieces are understood and articulated

in terms of material objects, people and abstract concepts. The presentation of the six theoretical categories has demonstrated that it is both what is searched for, as well as the process of searching that brings positive emotional and psychological outcomes for adult adoptees. That is, the missing pieces being found and the process of searching, enables adult adoptees to exercise some sense of control over the narrative of their adoption.

12.2 Expansion of the Core Category

The participants in the study all spoke of some forms of searching starting in childhood, whether that being an active search for information and questioning people around them or trying to piece the narrative of their lives together internally. The awareness that starts to develop at this time is a sense of not being complete, of something being missing and through this not quite belonging to their adoptive families. These early search activities were perceived as being essential to their developing sense of self. Emotions and thoughts, whether expressed outwardly, or experienced on a more sub-conscious level, were identified as being significant for later emotional development and identity formation. Each participant spoke of differing experiences of adoptive family relationships and different levels of satisfaction in terms of how happy they were in their childhood. Each participant also identified varying degrees of communicative openness within their adoptive families and the wider community regarding their adoption. Despite these differences, the participants all felt a need to explore their origins further in an attempt to bring together the two narratives of their lives.

This central concept of the missing pieces runs through the whole of this inquiry, from early memories and experiences to the more active, focused searching in adult years. The participants articulated their understanding of this concept differently, some using powerful imagery, some more hesitant, struggling to articulate something which is experienced so profoundly, but having not been part of conversations and discussions, lacks articulation and definition. There were specific recurring themes though: of not feeling complete; of something/somethings being missing; of feeling different; of not belonging and of being aware that there was a connection to something

and/or someone else. The search for and acquisition of these missing pieces provided a sense of resolution for all of these issues.

When more active searching began, the participants viewed what or who was being searched for differently. For some participants, there was a clear desire to find members of their birth family and to form meaningful relationships. For those participants that saw this as the primary aim, the need for information and the significance of material objects was still of central importance and was seen as valuable, even if they had not been able to form and sustain meaningful relationships with birth families. For all participants the central aim of the search was the search for truth. The specifics of what this meant for each person differed but contained some or all of the following: to find out why they were adopted; to understand the circumstances that led to them being relinquished; to see what their birth family looked like and what personalities they had; to see who they looked like in their birth families; to find out whether they had been remembered and finally whether there was any significant medical/genetic information. What is evident again, is that there were as many differences in the focus of each person's search as there were people. What is central to each person though was the sense of the self that is contained within each of these things being searched for. In essence, they were searching for themselves. The missing pieces contained in each of the dimensions of what was being searched for, was parts of themselves.

Alongside the search for missing pieces, is the actual process of searching and re-engaging. In adulthood, the search for information and reengagement with birth families involves agency and self-determination of the participants. Other aspects of the adoption process are controlled by other people. Once the decision to search is made, the adoptee assumes centre stage. They are the only person party to the information contained in official documentation, they make decisions about when to search, whether to keep going with the process or to take time away, they decide what information they want to find and whether or not this includes actually meeting birth families. There are some aspects of the process of reengaging that are out with the adoptee's control: information that is not available; birth families that do not want to be found or do not want to meet; birth families that meet and do not want to maintain relationships. All of these events can

bring difficult feelings of frustration, hurt and rejection, but what was evident from the narratives was the fact that the adoptee then has control over what to do in such situations. To walk away or to keep trying. It was evident that such scenarios had been emotionally challenging for the participants, but they were still able to play an active role in the process, to make decisions in the unfolding situations. All participants expressed views that having searched and re-engaged in one form or another was positive, or maybe better expressed as *necessary*. They spoke of feeling more complete, more settled, more confident and more secure. Through their individual stories, the participants expressed emotional content of hurt, frustration, anger and disappointment, but none regretted their search for information and developing a connection with their origins.

Consideration of the positive outcomes that the participants identified in terms of increased feelings of security and self-confidence have led to a final, more tentative development within the core category. This is in relation to adult attachment and the impact that the process of reengagement appeared to have on attachment styles and behaviour. It is important at this stage to be clear that issues regarding attachment are based on observations and self-reported thoughts, emotions and behaviour. There were no specific questions within the interview pertaining to attachment and no attempt to conduct adult attachment interviews (Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991). This development within the core category puts forwards the proposition of the possible links between the process of re-engagement and adult attachment. All participants indicated in one form or another, feelings of insecurity and low self confidence in their adult years. Some provided explicit examples, others spoke more vaguely in terms of feeling unsettled, uncertain and not belonging. This would indicate insecure attachment styles, either stemming from early childhood relationships with adoptive parents and/or from having been adopted per se and growing up with a sense of difference and disconnection. As discussed previously, the internal working model associated with attachment patterns of behaviour in adult years is not viewed by theorists as having the potential for significant adjustment and change though some adjustments can be made as a result of forming trusting, secure relationships in adult years. When an adult with an insecure style of attachment, develops a more secure attachment style, this is known as

earned security. The literature has thus far focused on the ability for achieving earned security as being achieved through the formation of a secure adult attachment relationship, or potentially through the process of therapeutic interventions that enable the individual to resolve issues of childhood trauma. In such situations, the change in attachment style (the achievement of earned security) is seen as not always being permanent, especially in times of stress. The possibility of the process of searching for and re-engaging with birth families impacting on adult attachment styles, is one that has the possibility for further exploration with a more specific focus on this aspect of adult adoptees' experiences.

The experiences of the participants in this study highlights the significance of the *process* of searching and re-engaging and the acquisition of missing pieces rather than just the formation of new relationships as being most significant in the self-perceived shifts in identity and emotional and psychological well-being. The sense of control and self-determination in this process was of particular significance. Participants spoke of the process of searching and finding the missing pieces, whether or not this included face-to-face reengagement with birth families, as leading them to feeling more self-confident, less insecure and having higher self-esteem. They felt more settled in their relationships and with their own self-concept.

12.3 Locating the grounded theory in the wider literature and relevant areas of extant theory

This chapter examines the grounded theory presented in the previous chapter in relation to both literature and areas of extant theory. Examining this inquiry in context enables an understanding to be developed of the way in which the theory adds to knowledge in the field of adoption and specifically the experiences of adult adoptees. Charmaz (2006) suggests that having developed the theory, as articulated in the core category, it is important to locate, evaluate and defend the position taken. As discussed in chapter 2 specific areas of extant theory and literature were returned to throughout the process of conducting this inquiry, from its earliest inception, through to the final stages of analysis and theorising. This iterative approach is consistent with the process of abductive analysis. The decision to present the grounded theory in relation to the literature and wider theoretical

context in a distinct chapter was made to ensure that the data was not diluted and also, importantly, for clarity of presentation for the reader.

The information presented in chapter 2 was an overview of the broad theoretical framework and literature that provided the lens through which the research was conducted. Specific areas of theory and literature were explored in more detail as it became apparent which areas had most relevance to the grounded theory developed. Consideration was given to locating the theory in the broader context of other grounded theory studies around, for example, concepts of self-efficacy and identity formation. This approach, more consistent with classic grounded theory, focuses on abstract generalisations free from contexts of origin (Charmaz 2009). However, this approach would have the disadvantage of being disconnected from the adoption literature. Given that this is a thesis with strong professional and practice drivers, a decision was made to locate the theory in literature pertaining to the phenomena of adoption, specifically the experiences of adult adoptees, and its associated theoretical underpinnings. This generated an:

...interpretive understanding of the empirical phenomenon with theory construction that was credible, original, useful, and above all resonates and is relative to the historical moment (Charmaz 2009 p.39).

The rationale for considering the grounded theory in the context of relevant literature has been explained in chapter 2. Alongside this though, it is important to recognise the challenges when comparing and contrasting research with varied methodologies, ranging from larger scale clinical studies to more exploratory, small-scale studies. Additional challenges in the contextualisation of this inquiry come from the inconsistent methods of categorisation as to what constitutes concepts such as psychological or emotional difficulties. Alongside these challenges, the fact that adoptees are not a homogenous group and carry with them a wide range of social and relational experiences, potentially makes the process of contextualisation problematic. Leiberman and Morris (2004) confirm the challenges encountered within research in this field suggesting that methodological

constraints such as the heterogeneity of the adopted population, lack of suitable comparison groups and within group differences may account for the mixed findings. It is significant at this point to highlight though, that it is the heterogeneity of the experiences and social and cultural backgrounds of the participants that served to bring to the fore the similarities in their perceptions and experiences of needing to control the narratives of their lives and to search for missing pieces.

This chapter will now follow the structure of the theory developed as articulated in the core category. Selected theory and literature is drawn on to further develop the conceptualisation of this grounded theory. The areas identified for integration with the wider literature are:

- The motivation to search
- The impact of locating missing pieces on identity formation
- The process of finding missing pieces
- The impact on psychological, emotional and emotional experiences for adult adoptees searching for missing pieces and controlling the narrative.
-

12.3.1 Missing pieces – the motivation to search

The starting point of the development of the grounded theory in the core category, both in terms of adult adoptees' need to search for missing pieces and controlling the narrative, is the motivation to start that process. The core category identifies that the motivation to search can be a conscious, focused activity or, especially in childhood, a less conscious activity the emotion and thought process behind which is difficult to articulate. Lifton (2000) states that

.... we could say that the adopted child has been searching from the moment she learns she is adopted (Lifton 2000 p. 211).

This inquiry contends though that the motivation to search often starts before the adoptee learns that they have been adopted and is experienced from a very early age as a feeling of being unsettled, not belonging, being different but with no clear understanding of why this might be.

Early studies identified dissatisfaction with adoptive relationships and/or a symptom of adoption breakdown as being the main motivating factor related to adoptees searching for their birth families (Sorosky Baran and Pannor 1975; Triseliotis 1973). However, this study did not identify the quality or nature of relationships within adoptive families as significant in triggering the motivation to search. Likewise, further recent studies in the wider literature have found that the vast majority of adoptees who search have positive relationships with the adoptive parents (Farr Grant-Marsney and Grotevant 2014; Pacheco and Eme 1993), and that the quality of adoptive relationships (positive or negative) is not associated with the decision to search (Sachdev 1991). Though the quality of relationships with adoptive parents varied in this study, even where there were difficult and unsatisfactory relationships, the motivation to search did not appear to arise from this but was instead more of an internal drive to find that which was missing. Andersen (1989) also states that adoptees may not be consciously aware of their motivation for searching. Anderson challenged the belief that searching reflects pathology or dissatisfaction and suggests that it is more a model of personal growth (Andersen 1989).

One of the consistent themes in the literature is the place that resolution of ambiguous loss has in the motivation for adoptees to search and re-engage with birth families (Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle 2005; Velrhurst 2001; Howe and Feast 2000; Weiss 1988). Though the need to resolve ambiguous loss would seem plausible according to theoretical perspectives and previous studies, this was not something that was identified by the participants in this inquiry. Interview questions did not specifically ask about this potential area of the adoptees' experiences, but neither were participants asked specifically about their sense of belonging, their need to locate and find missing pieces or the sense of agency in the process of searching, yet these were all themes that emerged consistently through the interviews.

What is also evident from the literature is the extent to which feelings of differentness pervade the personal experience of adoption often resulting in a sense of incompleteness (Brodzinsky 1997, 1993). This sense of differentness, along with a high level of secrecy regarding the adoption, appeared to be central in this inquiry to some participants' motivation to search for that which was missing.

Much of the literature focuses on the role that communicative openness has in promoting or inhibiting the adult adoptees motivation to search and reengage with birth families. As with other aspects of the adoptive experience, this is not a straightforward picture where clear correlations can be drawn. Grotevant et al (2010) state that in facing the challenge of developing a coherent identity as an adopted person, individuals must decide what it means have a connection to both an adoptive and birth family and integrate both of these connections into a coherent adoptive identity narrative. They explain that this process does not occur in a vacuum; it occurs in daily social interactions with significant others, especially adoptive family members. Henze-Pedersen (2019), in her qualitative study of fifteen adoptees, identified a link between openness in adoption and identity and concluded that a high degree of openness is important for the development of a coherent identity for adoptees. Of particular significance in the results of the study is the finding that the closer adopted people felt to their adoptive parents, the more they felt a sense of belonging and identity which resulted in higher self-esteem and a general increase in emotional health. However, the study by Henze-Pedersen (2019) also identified some unexpected findings, whereby it was found that *closedness* can bring inner peace and an unbroken life story and that openness can bring troubling thought patterns. These findings are also consistent with those of Sharma McGue and Benson (1996) though are not consistent with the findings of this inquiry whereby participants spoke instead of feeling unsettled and incomplete when they were unable to engage with the process of searching for the missing pieces in their lives due to a lack of communicative openness about their adoption.

Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle (2005) identified a particular pattern of closeness between adoptive parents and their adopted children. They observed that their relationships were close in childhood, fell sharply in adolescence, and went up in adulthood, though they never regained the level achieved in childhood. It could be assumed that a high level of communicative openness leads to adoptees having more information about their birth family and their adoption, in so far as that information is available to the adoptive parents. What is not clear though is the extent to which having access to that

information impacts on the desire to search and re-engage with birth families.

Having identified that communicative openness or lack of communicative openness are not clear motivating factors for searching and re-engaging with birth families, this study, through the narratives of the participants, identified that the central motivating factor was the awareness that *'something was missing'* in the lives of the participants and there was a need to find these missing pieces. Findings published by Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle (2005) identified that 85% of the adopted people studied reported that the contact and reunion experience was positive and that it had enhanced their sense of identity enabling them to ask and answer significant question such as *'who am I?'* and *'where do I come from?'* These could be seen as central questions that require the acquisition of missing pieces to answer them. The work of Carsten (2004, 2000) focus on the nature of kinship and whether this is understood as being given by birth and unchangeable or is shaped by the ordinary interactions of everyday life; whether it is formed by birth or sociological factors and processes. In relation to this inquiry and the theory developed, the concept of kinship would appear to be an important one to consider in terms of the extent to which confusion about this caused adoptees to search for people or things that led to a greater understanding of the nature of their kinship ties. The central theme that Carsten (2004, 2000) examines is the debate around what is natural and what is cultural and the significance that this has in terms of our understanding of kinship. Within the adoption context though, even the cultural is complicated as cultural origins may not just relate to the culture in which someone is raised, but also the culture that they are from, that has been lost or buried.

Kinship is far simply being the realm of the *'given'* as opposed to the *'made'*. It is among other things, and area of life in which people invest their emotions, their creative energy and their new imaginings (Carsten 2004 p. 9).

Further to this, the work of Grotevant (1997) positioned that the layers of unknown personal, genetic and social history often complicate adoptees identity development. Moreover, several studies suggest that most adopted persons' desire to understand the genesis of their biological origins reflects a fundamental interest in reclaiming a missing part of themselves

(Brodzinsky 1987; 1993; Kowal and Schilling 1985; Sobol and Cardiff 1983; Simpson, Timm, and McCubbin 1981; Sorosky Baran and Pannor 1975). This concept of the need to reclaim the biological origins of themselves, resonates with the theory developed in this inquiry. Whilst for some people reunion necessarily involves the formation of new relationships with birth family members, for many, and certainly for the participants in this inquiry, the acquisition of new relationships are not central to the need for missing pieces to be found and is also not central to them gaining new understandings of their biographical selves and kinship ties.

12.3.2 Further consideration of what missing pieces need to be found to achieve a coherent identity

It was evident through the narratives contained in this inquiry, that the participants did not necessarily perceive their identity as coming from their adoptive families. This does not devalue what was for some a positive experience of growing up in their adoptive families or the relationships that they formed, but their articulation of the necessity to search to find the missing pieces from the story of their origins came from the need to give shape to who they were.

The role of consciousness being equated with memory with memory therefore being a necessary condition of individual identity formation was a view expressed by John Locke (1632-1704). This view of individual identity therefore suggests that we identify ourselves as persons by forming and operating with remembered autobiographical narratives (Fivush et al 2011). Though the need to achieve a coherent thread from different narratives would appear to be of central importance in identity formation, the narratives from the participants in this inquiry often refers though to a *sense*, or a *feeling* that something was missing, without a conscious memory of what it is that is missing or when that feeling started. The theory developed through the core category would therefore seem to challenge this perception that identity comes from memories, from a conscious narrative of events and instead identifies the significance of a narrative identity perspective achieving *personal coherence* by drawing on all aspects of a person's personal history, both remembered and pre-memory.

Contradictory to the work of very early theorists such as Locke (1690), as discussed above, the particular experience of adoption appears to bring with it a deep-seated awareness of the ties to original birth families, which though often not remembered, and not always articulated, are keenly felt. As long ago as 1973, Triseliotis recognised the importance of adoptees having a connection with their origins and stated that in his view,

The adoptees quest for their origins was not a vindictive venture but an attempt to understand themselves and their situation better. The self-perception of us all is partly based on what our parents and our ancestors going back many generations. Adoptees, too, wish to base themselves not only on their adoptive parents, but also on what their original parents and forbears have been, going back many generations' (Triseliotis 1973 p66).

To what extent this awareness, not based on memories, of being connected to another family is based on popular culture or an idealised notion of *family* is not known. The participants did not articulate such logical or concrete origins of this sense of connection to either their birth family, or the birth narrative, but expressed it instead as a deep-seated feeling of there being a part of them that belonged somewhere else, or to something else other than the family in which they were raised. Whatever the origins of this awareness, the need to join the two narratives, for which a range of information and the location of missing pieces is needed, enables the adopted person to provide context to their present life and to connect in some way, either directly or indirectly, to their individual histories.

The theory developed through this inquiry identified what it is that we need knowledge of and access to achieve a coherent identity. As discussed above, for any person the concept of identity has particular significance in the study of adoption and many adopted persons report experiencing ongoing problems with identity (Korff and Grotevant 2011; Grotevant 1997), with both the questions and the answers regarding identity being complex and often problematic (Treacher and Katz 2000). For adoptees their *who we are* and *where we come from* is as much part of the narrative as things, events and people that are remembered. It is the act of searching for and locating the missing pieces that enabled the participants to move on with their lives.

What emerged from the stories reported in the study by Carsten (2000), is that reunions only make sense in terms of the whole lives of those interviewed. The reunion with birth family needs to be seen in context with a much wider range of other information and experiences that searching and re-engaging brings. In strongly asserting the positive value of *knowing where you've come from*, adoptees in her study vividly demonstrated the importance of establishing continuities in their own lives, in making sense of the links between their past, present, and future and more specifically, the sense of a past and future in the present (Carsten 2000).

This understanding is consistent with the findings from Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle (2005) who identified in their study that the ability to *fill in the gaps* enabled people to move on with their lives without being pre-occupied with the past and its gaps. Carsten (2000) expands on this idea by likening the missing pieces in an adopted person's sense of who they are to objects in a museum which give historical depth to current versions of identity.

The relevance of achieving a coherent identity on the emotional and psychological well-being of adoptees can be further understood by examining the formation and impact of self-schemas. Self-schemas can be organised in ways which are congruent and harmonious or fragmented and incongruent. A fragmented organisation of self-schemas will lead to a sense of internal chaos and a loss of emotional governance and regulation (Horowitz 2012). The importance of achieving congruent and harmonious self-schemas are demonstrated through various studies that evidence that adults who are able to make meaning of past events have better outcomes in terms of self-esteem, depression, psychological well-being, physical health, psychological maturity, and life satisfaction (Pals 2006; Bauer, McAdams and Sakeda 2005; Bauer and McAdams 2004; Pals and McAdams 2004; McAdams et al 2001). A key component with the identity theories discussed above is that the individual has access to the pieces of their biography to form some resolution in terms of their sense of who they are in the world that they now live in, though as discussed above, the need incorporates aspects of biography not remembered is a contested point. The core category within this inquiry identified the struggle that adoptees face

in merging the two narratives of their lives, that of their adoptive family and that which comes from their birth family. Silverstein and Kaplan (1982) identified that in the process of identity formation adoptees are seen to lose one identity and gain or borrow another. Expanding on this though, a number of studies conclude that the task for the adoptee in identity formation is to *merge* the two narratives of their lives, both birth and adoptive, from what is known and what is partly imagined (Passmore and Feeney 2009; Brodzinsky 2005; Grotevant 1987). The concept of the autobiographical self being at the core of a person's identity, goes some way to understanding the challenges faced by the participants, with one aspect of their narrative incomplete, some participants having very limited information before they started the process of searching and re-engaging. This inquiry identified that the missing pieces of the autobiographical self that need to be searched for to achieve a more complete and coherent narrative are not restricted to clearly identifiable people or objects. The theory that emerges from the core category encapsulates a broad range of missing pieces, or even a sense of something being missing without a clear articulation of what that was.

Though the most relevant theoretical perspectives to this inquiry are drawn from individual, informational and narrative identity concepts, the theory of the search for missing pieces also has relevance to more social or cultural perspectives. Searching for and finding the missing pieces, enables the adult adoptee to identify with a wider social and cultural group as their sense of difference and being *other* is lessened. Adult adoptees have typically reported a sense of feeling different, of being *other* to those around them, even their own adoptive families. Identification with *in-group* characteristics involves a need to incorporate historical knowledge which includes both biological and cultural origins (Jacobson 1997; Billig, Abrams and Hogg 1991). The missing pieces searched for and found form part of the adoptees biological and cultural origins, which the participants knew or sensed were missing. March (1995) positioned that adult adoptees often felt more socially acceptable, particularly through re-engaging with their birth mothers, which he saw as an attempt to neutralise the stigma of being adopted by gaining information about biological kinship ties and thus gaining a sense of generational continuity. Though it was apparent from the

narratives of the participants in this inquiry, that re-engaging with their birth mother was not necessarily the central aim or indeed achievement of their search for what was missing in their lives, the missing pieces that were found contributed in varied ways towards the sense of generational continuity that March (1995) writes of.

Participants in this inquiry identified a range of places in which their individual identity, or the missing pieces, were located. It should be noted that not all of the literature agrees that the finding of missing pieces had positive outcomes for adoptees. Carsten (2000) identified that missing pieces in the form of material objects, are often vivid and painful reminders of the missing threads of continuity between them and serve to document the breaks in kinship as much as the re-established connections (Carsten 2000). Similarly, Lifton (2002) stated that when the missing piece is a person and a reunion takes place, this encompasses the painful knowledge that what has been lost can never be regained, including the *ghost* or fantasy of the birth mother. This inquiry though identified that though painful memories and emotions may be brought to the surface, and these will often bring with them feelings of loss, what is gained through the act of finding the missing pieces subsumes negative experiences and emotions by enabling the adoptee to form a more coherent narrative of their lives.

One of the most significant missing pieces that was searched for and located, appeared to be the physical similarity or personality traits associated with members of their birth family. This self-perception of the adoptee, that they are markedly different in appearance and personality from their adoptive parents, may lead to a desire to find birth family members who resemble themselves. This aspect of the participant's sense of missing pieces of their individual identity appeared to be symbolic of the essence of who they were as a person. Hollingsworth (1998) explains family resemblances, ranging from physical appearance to character traits, and even to intelligence are essential in fully developing a sense of self. Family resemblance was perhaps of such significance to the participants, as it is seen as being part of a family's mythology, serving the function of bonding family members and explaining an individual's behaviour leading crucially to a more developed sense of self. Consideration of the missing pieces spoken about by the participants in this inquiry, identified that though to some extent they can

be identified and categorised into areas such as reunion/relationships, material objects and documents, the reality is that there is a complex interrelationship between each missing piece. This was similarly observed by Carsten (2000) who gave the example of the need for adoptees to find medical information. This medical information clearly has a very practical value and is part of a person's personal biography, but it is also something that is transmitted down generations and encapsulates a history of kinship (Carsten 2000).

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that there is a significant body of work on adult narratives showing that those adults who make meaning of past events are better adjusted in terms of self-esteem, depression, psychological well-being, physical health, psychological maturity, and life satisfaction (Bauer, McAdams and Pals 2006; Pals 2006; McAdams 2001). Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari (2014) further hypothesise that missing a crucial part of their origins affects the identity process for adoptees and that this in turn can impact on personal relationships. Much of this research has focused on difficult life events, and researchers have shown that the ability to engage narrative processes to manage and resolve negative experiences is critical to positive functioning (Breen and McLean 2009; McAdams and Pals 2006). Though the findings from these studies have some relevance in terms of this inquiry, it is important to highlight that it was not just through the recounting of negative experiences that the participants found positive outcomes, but the recounting of all aspects, positive and negative, of their adoptive experience: The exploration of what was perceived as missing and what needed to be found.

12.3.3 The process of searching for and finding missing pieces – Controlling the narrative

Through the interviews, participants described varied activities and emotional responses contained in the process of searching and re-engaging. The issue of not having control in the adoption process was a consistent theme in the narratives and within the theoretical categories and is explored in detail in chapter 10, *controlling the narrative*. It is this concept that forms the backdrop for this dimension of theory as articulated in the core category. What was of most significance and what led to the theory of seeking to

control the narrative was the central concept of the adoptee driving this process, taking centre stage and exercising control. This is not to ignore some of the hurdles faced in terms of accessing information, forming and maintaining relationships which were things out with their control.

As discussed above, the informational identity style has particular relevance for this inquiry as it involves individuals negotiating their construction of identity by engaging in active seeking, processing, evaluating, and selective utilisation of self-relevant information (Marcia 1966.) With this identity style, self-constructs are tested and revised when confronted with information from another perspective (Berzonsky and Adams 1999; Nurmi et al 1997; Berzonsky and Sullivan 1992). It is through this process that adoptees seek to recover a sense of agency over their own pasts. Carsten (2000) explains that those who seek out their birth kin are both asserting their own agency and are engaged in constructing continuities of identity which is in direct contrast to the feeling of powerlessness that adoptees experience from the process of adoption (Modell 1994).

Reflecting on past events can enable the individual to understand the complexity of the self, integrating different aspects of history and experiences. Through speaking with people at the support group participants appeared able to develop understandings of their personal narratives drawing on all aspects of their histories, with a particular emphasis on their narrative in relation to birth families and the story of their adoption. The participants within this inquiry spoke positively about the process of engaging with both individual support workers and the support group. This engagement involved telling their stories, making sense of their personal histories and developing a sense of coherence. It seems apparent from the interviews that all participants found this process helpful, and it can be surmised that it formed part of the process of informational identity exploration.

Marcia's status model of identity formation focuses on social-cognitive processes that an individual's identity formation are classified within, with a range of status categories that are drawn on when individuals process self-relevant information, negotiate identity issues and make personal decisions (Marcia 1966). The data from the narratives in this inquiry, suggests that

not only did the participants perceive their sense of self as being incomplete, but that this sense of who they were as a person, their identity, changed through the process of searching and re-engaging with their birth families. Marcia's status model of identity formation supports this perception, with the belief that ego identity is not a once and for all phenomenon and is a dynamic process with no end or fixed point (Kroger 2002; Marcia 1966). The data in this inquiry suggests though that the catalyst for individual identities to evolve was not as a result of age and stage development, as suggested by developmental identity theorists such as Erikson (1958, 1963), but was specifically as a result in engaging in the process of searching and re-engaging with their birth families. This stage of independence and self-determination would normally be experienced earlier in the psychosocial development than adulthood, but as a result of the specific social-contextual conditions that framed their childhood and adolescence, this process had been undermined (Ryan and Deci 2000).

When considering the process of identity formation, it is helpful to return to the theoretical concept of the informational identity style which involves individuals negotiating their construction of identity by engaging in active seeking, processing, evaluating, and selective utilisation of self-relevant information (Marcia 1966). This process seems to be diametrically opposite to the experience of identity formation prior to the act of searching and reengaging as discussed by participants, whereby they had little control over the 'what, how and when' of seeking, evaluating and integrating information. Once they made the decision to actively search, over however long a period, the participants were able to negotiate their own path in the search for self-relevant information.

Ryan and Deci (2000) further explain the impact that acting with self-determination can have on an individual and that when functioning with autonomy, a person experiences a sense of personal choice, volition and psychological freedom. This basic need for competence, autonomy and relatedness leads the individual to experience an ongoing sense of integrity and well-being or *eudemonia* (Wichmann 2011). Ryan and Deci (2000) illustrate this process as a continuum of highly controlled to highly self-endorsed functioning. Controlled or pressured functioning, something experienced to some extent by all of the participants in the inquiry, can lead

to the individual feeling obliged to meet certain internal or external demands. Self-endorsed functioning leads to the above-mentioned psychological freedom. The adopted status can lead to the adoptee being influenced by both introjected motives and identified motives for the regulation of behaviour (Ryan and Deci 2000). Within this context, introjected motives, or internal pressures, result from the desire to avoid feelings of guilt. With specific reference to this inquiry, the guilt of expressing a need or desire to learn about their birth family and the circumstances of their adoption, could be seen as resulting from introjected pressures. The internalised belief, leading to internal pressures, that the adoptive family is good and the birth family bad and to seek information and make some claim to the identity or their origin, can lead to feelings of guilt.

Participants in this inquiry experienced their narratives as having been controlled by others, with little opportunity for self-endorsed actions. The role of parents in the process of facilitating identity development through self-determination has been identified throughout the identity formation literature. Flamm and Grolnick (2013) write that parents play an important role in encouraging proactive identity processes. This is promoted through a supportive parenting style, versus controlling parental styles. It is through that promotion of autonomy that children and adolescents are enabled to achieve self-initiated and authentic goals and values that they carry with them through into adulthood. When participants were in receipt of implicit or explicit messages from adoptive parents that they could not exercise their autonomy to explore all aspects of their personal narratives, they may have experienced a lack of psychological freedom. Once the participants had engaged actively with the process of searching and re-engaging, they could describe experiencing feelings of self-worth, which could be identified as being activated by a sense of agency and self-determination. Additionally, it may not only be adoptive parents that present a barrier to adoptees exercising self-determination. Carsten (2000) writes of one of the participants in her study who not long after the initial meeting with her birth mother, felt that her birth mother was starting to make demands on her and to provide unsolicited advice. It is perhaps due to the lack of emotional connection that the adoptees in this inquiry felt able to still retain a sense of control in similar situations.

Theorists have identified that the intrinsic motivational tendencies to exercise self-determination require supportive tendencies for their maintenance and enhancement. Non-supportive conditions can readily disrupt these motivations leading them to become subdued and diminished (Ryan and La Guardia 2000). There is an apparent lack of specific research conducted which examines the extent to which parenting is supportive in other areas of a child or adolescent's life, but not supportive in terms of enabling them to assume control and agency with regard to their adoptive status. This inquiry suggests that lack of support to assume control of the adoptive status can impact on the adoptees ability to be autonomous, confident individuals.

12.3.4 Self-Determination Theory and its impact on identity

Self-determination emerged through the narratives as being a central feature of the participant's experiences of identity formation, through their decision to control the narrative and to search for and re-engage with birth families. Lifton (2002) sees the search as a quest for the missing parts of the adoptees', something that is necessary to develop a coherent sense of self. She describes it as

a rite of passage, a chance to take
control of one's destiny, of seizing
power, of finding oneself
(Lifton 2002 p. 212).

Carsten (2000) positions that this assertion of agency over one's own past may perhaps explain the disjuncture between what are often problematic relations which may develop between adoptees and their birth families and the positive terms in which they speak about the results of conducting searches. It is through the process of seeking and engaging in reunions that adoptees are able to activate a sense that they are choosing their kin, or not choosing them, for themselves.

The role of self-determination in identity resolution has received a significant amount of attention in the literature. Self-determination theory puts forwards the proposition that individuals continuously strive to satisfy the complementary basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness

(Lynch et al 2010; Ryan and Deci 2000). The study by Luyckx et al (2009) identified that individuals that achieved a sense of personal identity through the use of proactive exploration strategies scored the highest in all three needs. Consistent with self-determination theory the proposition that although the satisfaction of one's basic needs might promote commitment towards a particular option, need satisfaction is especially critical for the internalisation of the individual's chosen identity such that the adopted identity emanates from one's sense of self.

Grotevant (1987) defined identity exploration as the *work* of identity. This view supports the significance identified within the narratives in this inquiry of the importance of the *process* of the search for identity through controlling the narrative of the individual's adoption. Lifton (2002) theorised that adoptees often do not search or begin to search and abandon the process due to feelings of lack of control over what the process will involve or what will be found. She goes on to recognise though that there is potential to exercise some sense of control through what she describes as *control points*: how fast one searches; who takes the lead in the search; what one does with the information found and when to move forwards with reengaging with birth families. This certainly resonates with the theory identified in this inquiry as does Lifton's explanation that once an adoptee has been able to take control of their life, they feel empowered and may even feel *real* (Lifton 2012 p.230). In line with Grotevant's theory of identity exploration, the ability to explore options, something denied to the participants in their earlier years, provides a sense of competence (Grotevant 1987). Similar findings are described by McAdams and McLean (2013) who through their research into the relation between life stories and adaptation found that people who found find redemptive meanings in suffering and adversity, and who were able to construct life stories that feature themes of personal agency and exploration, tend to enjoy higher levels of mental health, well-being, and maturity (McAdams and McLean 2013).

This was alluded to by participants, along with their perceptions of increased self-esteem and self-confidence. It is the process involved, the exploration, that forms a prerequisite for handling the array of possible identity options.

Significantly, Grotevant (1987) also identified that by becoming involved in the process of exploring identity, individuals might start to attract the support of others, which leads to a greater sense of connection. The significance of this aspect of Grotevant's work to this inquiry is evident given the positive experiences that the participants identified when their search for and re-engagement with birth families involved attending the adoption support group and meeting with other adoptees. The connection that they felt to others helped to re-affirm their sense of individual and social identity. Some, though not all, of the participants also received support from family and friends.

12.3.5 The Impact on Psychological, Emotional and Relational Experiences of Adult Adoptees of Searching for Missing Pieces and Controlling the Narrative

The discussion above has identified some of the benefits in searching for missing pieces and controlling the narrative in terms of identity formation. The participants in this inquiry all described positive outcomes in searching and re-engaging, despite some encountering emotional challenges and hurdles in the process. The picture drawn from the narratives given during interviews was that psychological and emotional wellbeing improved during and following the process of searching and re-engagement. The literature regarding this aspect of the adoption experience is less conclusive, though, as with other areas of literature in the field of adoption findings are not consistent. Cubito and Obremski Brandon (2000) states that it is still inconclusive as to whether or not the process of search and reunion causes or alleviates psychological and emotional stress or conversely whether or not psychological distress causes people to search (Border, Penny and Portnoy (2000). The study by Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2007) report that reunited adoptees reported lower self-esteem than non-reunited adoptees and non-adoptees. Cubito Obremski Brandon (2000) also identify that there is a possibility that adoptees with lower self-esteem may be more inclined to seek reunion with birth families.

In conclusion, Cubito and Obremski Brandon (2000) stated that though search and reunion may bring various stressors, the feeling of control over the process experienced by adoptees led to lasting psychological benefits. The study by Affleck and Steed (2001) also determined that reunions can

bring healing and gains in self-esteem as a result of resolution of identity and loss. The benefits of increased self-esteem, self-confidence and feelings of control resonate with the experiences of the participants in this inquiry. This leads us back to the original premise that adoptees are not a homogenous group, and evidence from research into the whole range of the adoptive experience must be viewed cautiously with attention paid to the multiple factors that may impact on the adoptee's experiences.

12.3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has located the findings of the thesis within the context of relevant literature and theory. In conclusion, there are several points to be emphasised. Firstly, that the theory that has been developed finds resonance in the literature, with some aspects of all aspects of the core category being located in existing evidence. The significance of missing pieces in the search for identity and the importance of exercising self-determination in the process of searching for missing pieces, contribute new perspectives to existing knowledge and theory.

A final point to be made is that the developed theory sets the scene for the discussion of the practice implications with both adult and child adoptees. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 13. The fact that whilst much of this thesis finds resonance with aspects of the literature, its strength is in the coherent narrative presented and the developments in theory, beyond what is already known.

CHAPTER 13 – CONCLUSIONS AND POTENTIAL IMPACT

This chapter provides the opportunity to look back and to look forwards. Strengths and limitations of the research are reviewed, followed by a consideration of the potential impact of this inquiry. An evaluation of the thesis is considered within Charmaz's (2006) criteria of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. The chapter ends with final reflections.

13.1 Limitations and Comparisons

One of the most commonly identified potential weaknesses of any small-scale qualitative study is that claims about the generalisability of findings, are problematic. This critique is in line with the general tendency for research using qualitative data to be judged on the basis of an overly simplistic and binary evaluation of such research paradigms in relation to quantitative research paradigms. Sandelowski (2008) stresses the importance of recognising that such apparent weaknesses are actually differences reflective of different approaches with exploratory studies aiming to focus on the interpretation of interactions, and the meanings attributed to them.

In challenging the criticisms of interpretivist approaches Cresswell (2003 p. 11) puts forwards what he views as the four key principles of this approach that have particular resonance with this inquiry.

- Participatory action is recursive or dialectical and is focused on bringing about change in practice
- It is focused on helping individuals free themselves from constraints found in the media, in language, in work procedures and in relation of power in educational settings
- It is emancipatory in that it helps unshackle people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self determination
- It is practical and collaborative because it is inquiry completed *with* others rather than *on* or *to* others. In this spirit advocacy/participatory authors engage the participants as active collaborators in their inquiries.

These challenges to the criticisms of qualitative approaches such as the one adopted in this inquiry, demonstrate why such approaches are particularly useful in social work research, with the focus on research to bring about change, challenge social and cultural power structures, promote emancipation and self-determination and collaborate with participants (McGlaughlin 2012). Focusing on the process of qualitative research paradigms, Birks and Mills (2015) argue that the value and credibility of such inquiries should be judged by the quality of the data and the processes followed.

In answer to such questions about the potential for and the relevance of generalisability in relation to this inquiry, three responses are put forwards. Firstly, the small sample size is indicative of adult adoptees being a hard to reach population. Shaghaghi, Bhopal and Sheikh (2011) identify the terms *hidden* or *socially invisible* as also being appropriate to population samples such as the one used for this inquiry. They argue that conducting research with such populations brings to the fore the balance that needs to be struck between maintaining rigour in the research methods alongside the necessity of conducting studies in populations where inherent barriers exist with regard to issues such as recruitment and sample size. Expanding on the notion of the importance or even necessity of conducting inquiries with such populations, Crosby et al (2009) argue that there is a tendency to overvalue findings derived from large samples, with research conducted with small samples being seen as less rigorous and less significant. This bias will inevitably steer research interest away from studies involving underserved and hard to reach populations who are arguably the very populations with which there is the greatest need to conduct research (Crosby et al 2009). Secondly, and of equal importance regarding the methodology adopted for this inquiry, the sample size is related to having achieved a satisfactory level of theoretical saturation in data collected through the seven interviews. The concepts and subsequent theory of *controlling the narrative* and *missing pieces* were found in all theoretical categories and enabled the decision to be made that theoretical saturation had been achieved. A further two interviews were planned to further confirm that theoretical saturation had been reached but were cancelled due to the restrictions imposed during the lockdown. The third response is related to the aims and methodology of the

inquiry. Within CGTM the aim is to generalise theoretical propositions rather than populations (Bryman 2000). The limited sample size within this inquiry allows for in depth analysis of rich data, enabling detailed co-construction of concepts and theory, with the voice of the participants achieving prominence, alongside my own knowledge and experience. This inquiry was based on immersion in the world of the participants and as previously discussed, in CGTM, all is data, and therefore understandings of what data has been drawn on to develop the theory, includes much more than the transcripts from interviews.

It is also acknowledged that the sample had particular features which may have impacted on the data and the grounded theory developed. All participants in this inquiry were adopted at a relatively young age, the oldest being 2 years old. The experiences of adoptees adopted later in life may be very different to those adopted as infants (Palacios et al 2018; White 2015; Selwyn, Wijedasa and Meakings 2014). Another feature and possible limitation of the sample is the fact that all but one of the participants attended an adoption support group which may have impacted on the content of the interviews. Carsten (2000 p. 688) recognised in her study that interviewees were *strikingly articulate* which may have been a result of the many years spent reflecting on their own experiences of adoption but also the effect of reunions and as with this inquiry, the supports provided during the reunion process that allow for further and more in depth reflection. Though this can only be seen as a positive and in no way deflects from the value of the data, it is a feature that should be taken into account when evaluating the features and potential limitations with regard to the sample.

13.2 Evaluating the Thesis

Strauss and Corbin (1997) identified that the combination of data quality, the research process and empirical grounding of the final theory as being key elements in the evaluation of grounded theory studies. These elements identified the general framework for evaluation of this thesis, with the more specific framework put forwards by Charmaz (2006) of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness used to explore the evaluation criteria in accordance with purpose and context (Charmaz 2014).

13.2.1 Credibility

This condition reflects logic and conceptual grounding (Birk and Mills 2015). Throughout this inquiry, intimate familiarity has been achieved with the phenomena under investigation. My positionality in relation to the inquiry, alongside thorough immersion in the data facilitated this. Knowledge and experience in the field of adoption allowed for triangulation of a broad range of knowledge with data collected from interviews. This process of triangulation was explored in the theoretical memos constructed throughout the process of the inquiry demonstrating the identification of concepts and theory development. Memos and mind maps presented in the body of the thesis and the appendices demonstrate the practice of constant comparison with evidence of links within and between data sets and with other areas of information and knowledge. In this way, it is asserted that this thesis offers a considerable level of credibility.

13.2.2 Originality

This condition includes reference to the significance of the study (Birk and Mills 2015). The issue of the originality of this inquiry is considered in two main areas. Originality of the research method in this field of inquiry and originality of the topic under investigation. Whilst GTM, and specifically CGTM are not new methodologies, their application in the field of social work is limited, though interestingly they feature widely in research studies in nursing. There are many aspects of this approach to research though that are synchronous with the underlying principles and aims of social work practice. Like social work, CGTM focuses on human interactions in social environments. Value is placed on the multiple meanings that can be understood and the multiple dimensions of human phenomena. Reflection and an iterative approach to all sources of evidence are core features of the process and interpretations are grounded in understandings of human behaviour, evidenced through the process of coding and constant comparison (Gilgun 2015).

Gilgun (2015 pp. 107-108) argues that grounded theory methodologies are ...

a good fit with the research agenda of social work because they arise out of the interaction of researchers with research participants, show multiple meanings and multiple dimensions of human phenomena, and, at their best, show connections between concepts and theories and their concrete indicators in the natural world. Social work's emphasis on social justice comes to life when researchers seek the meanings that research participants attribute to social issues that are part of their lived experience.

The above quotation demonstrates how the core features of CGTM fit with the world of social work practitioners, along with the understanding that social workers have, that people and their environments are complex, frequently confusing and sometimes traumatising (Gilgun 2015; Floersch, Longhofer and Suskewicz 2012).

The second area of originality is to be found in the subject of the inquiry. Researchers' interest in adoption-related matters with regard to adult adoptees is a relatively recent phenomenon and there is little research with adult adoptees in which the adoptees themselves are the primary source of information. To the extent that such research exists, it is primarily in the area of search and reunion and focuses on adoptees' motivations for searching (Freundlich and Lieberthal 2001). There has been limited attention paid to how adult adoptees reflect on the meaning of adoption as they traverse through various adult roles and the impact of identity formation, specifically with regard to the process itself of search and reengagement (Palacios and Brodzinsky 2010; Brodzinsky 2005).

Originality can take varied forms such as offering new insights, and a fresh conceptualisation of a recognised problem, which establishes its significance Charmaz and Thornberg (2020). In relation to the focus of this inquiry, it is suggested that the impact of searching and re-engaging with birth families is yet to be recognised as a significant social phenomenon, which brings potential for research to both recognise and then to emphasise the significance of this phenomenon. This inquiry makes a contribution in this field and identifies further areas for exploration.

This inquiry investigates the motivations and processes involved in search and re-engagement, but also explores in depth, issues of identity and attachment and the impact of self-determination on the process, as core elements of search and re-engagement. In addition, the experience of being adopted and the process of search and re-engagement are presented as a coherent whole, with emergent theory developed from different dimensions of the participants' experiences and perceptions. The relative absence of attention to the experiences of adult adoptees in the research literature mirrors the invisibility of adult adoptees in the decisions made in placement decisions and subsequent access to information and knowledge of their origins (Freundlich and Lieberthal 2001).

The research that has been conducted into the experiences of adult adoptees does not appear to be reflected in much needed developments in policy or service provision. This inquiry has the potential to impact on the limited understanding within the social work profession of the consequences for adult adoptees of resolving issues of identity, their general wellbeing and on the resources needed to support this area of work.

13.2.3 Resonance

The third of Charmaz' criteria for the evaluation of CGTM is that of resonance. Birk and Mills (2015 p.148) explain this as

the need for the theory to have meaning and scope for all those for whom it may be relevant.

Charmaz poses the question of whether the theory makes sense to participants or other people who share their experiences. Making confident assertions regarding this aspect of the evaluation is problematic at this stage of the research. However, presentations at an institution level and informal discussion with colleagues with an interest in, or experience of adoption issues, have led to the theory developed being positively received. The interest shown by others in both the topic and the theory suggest that this inquiry has resonance.

13.2.4 Usefulness

The final criteria is that of usefulness in relation to both knowledge development and practical application (Birk and Mills 2015). In terms of

practical application, it is argued that the application of the theory has the potential to contribute to both adoption practice for children and support services for adults. Improvements and developments in adoption practice and an increase in focus on the needs of adult adoptees answer the question posed by Charmaz (2006 p. 183), that is, *How does it contribute to making a better world?*

In conclusion, it is argued that this thesis meets the criteria of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness, and as such has the potential to make a unique contribution to knowledge of the experiences of adult adoptees in the search for, and re-engagement with birth families and through this to the area of social work practice with both adult and child adoptees.

13.3 Implications of This Thesis for Research

Having looked back in order to evaluate the thesis, it is now important to look forwards to explore the implications and potential impact in terms of research and practice. As previously discussed, there is a relative lack of research that focuses on the experiences of adult adoptees. Specifically, research that draws on the experiences as portrayed by the adoptees themselves on the impact of adoption throughout the life course and in relation to understanding and negotiating the processes of searching for and re-engaging with birth families. The impact of the adoption process and the process of searching and re-engaging with birth families on identity formation and potentially on adult attachment is an area worthy of further investigation to both increase our understanding of the adoption experience but also our understanding of factors which can impact on identity formation and attachment adjustment. This wider perspective on issues of identity formation and attachment adjustment in adult years, takes the potential for future research out-with the field of social work and encompasses the broader fields of psychology and counselling.

Retaining a focus on the voice of the adoptees themselves is important in this field to avoid the potential for pathologising this group of people. Through representing the views of adult adoptees in research, differences in their experiences from the wider population can be recognised and valued with difference seen not as something to be avoided but instead something to be harnessed with regard to development and growth.

During the interview with Participant 2 the phenomenon of GSA was discussed. This phenomenon was not included in the core category as it was not present in any other interview and though tentative links could be made with identity formation, it was not considered to be a core feature of this concept. Participant 2 spoke of this being a hidden issue that was taboo with very little available information and research being almost non-existent, beyond the one paper and an online forum that she had accessed. My own searches confirmed the absence of information and research in this area. The impact on Participant 2 of experiencing GSA with her brother had been devastating and had caused ongoing emotional and relational difficulties. Knowledge gained through this inquiry of the impact on adult adoptees of re-engaging with birth families, experiencing a strong sense of connection, yet having no day-to-day history and familiarity with them raises the possibility that GSA may be more common than is reported, though research is needed to confirm the prevalence or otherwise of this phenomenon. Identifying this phenomenon as one that warrants further investigation is done with caution, given that it was only identified by one participant. However, if it were found to be something experienced by even a minority of adult adoptees who re-engage with their birth families, further investigation could be of enormous benefit to those individuals, as well as to those engaged in the process of searching who may benefit from considering that this could be a potential risk to emotional and psychological well-being.

The iterative process adopted throughout this inquiry required me, to revisit the data theory collected from interviews and the wider body of knowledge numerous times. Each time I gained new understandings leading to conceptual and theoretical development. There is potential to draw on the data from this inquiry for the purpose of further research, particularly looking at the broader aspects of identity development and the role of self-determination in the adjustment of insecure attachment behaviour.

To conclude, this consideration of the implications of this thesis for future research suggests that the theory developed opens up the possibility for further exploration of the experiences of adult adoptees per se and the impact searching and re-engaging with birth families on identity formation

and attachment adjustment. This has specific significance in the arena of adoption work but also in the wider arena of identity formation in adult years and attachment adjustment.

13.4 Implications for Practice

The fact that this thesis has had the stated aim of being concerned with practice and professional issues throughout, it is essential that implications for practice are explored in detail. This section will explore implications for practice in two areas, adoption practice with children and adoption practice with adults. Within these two areas implications for direct practice, policy development and education will be considered.

13.4.1 Implications for Practice with Child Adoptees and Adoptive Parents

Though the focus of the thesis was on the experiences of adult adoptees, the implications with regard to adoption practices with children are equally as important. The adoption journey starts in childhood, for many in infancy. Policy and practice now places an emphasis on communicative openness and a move away from the notions of secrecy and the associated stigma and shame (Brodzinsky 2005; Grotevant 2000). The experience of adoption for children is mediated primarily through adoptive parents. Current practice guides adoptive parents to speak openly with their children about both the experience of adoption and of their birth families and their origins. However, alongside this advice and guidance are social and cultural influences that can still portray adoption as being something other, different or even second best (Singley 2018). The model explored by Modell (1997) articulated as the *as if* model, whereby the child as raised *as if* they were a birth child to the adoptive parents is still prevalent, particularly within health professions and amongst extended family and friends. This assertion is based primarily on anecdotal and personal experience but is consistent with the views articulated by Jones (2013). Jones (2013) discussed the environment in which such views can be perpetuated, writing that practice in the field of adoption with regard to true communicative openness has been slow to progress with few developments in recent years. She contends that a commitment to communicative openness is left to individual consideration in relation to individual circumstances with an absence of specific practice guidelines.

The concept of communicative openness itself requires far more discussion both amongst practitioners and between practitioners and adoptive parents. Those participants in this study that had been informed of their adoptive status in early childhood considered that their adoptive parents had been open with them. However, it was evident from the data that they internalised powerful messages of being other, not belonging, and perhaps most significantly not feeling that their birth or original identity was of equal value to their adoptive identity. Though the participants in the study were adopted forty to fifty years ago, views expressed during the interviews reflect their interpretations of what constituted open communication in the here and now. The grounded theory developed through this inquiry highlights the impact that being adopted can have on individuals throughout the life course, and the importance of being able to claim the two narratives that run through an adoptees life and to see both narratives as having equal value. This inquiry has the potential to contribute to evidenced based practice in this field, through demonstrating the importance to practitioners and adoptive parents of developing true communicative openness within adoptive families to enable adopted children to fully claim and value the two narratives of their lives.

Preparation for people planning to adopt has the challenging task of covering a wide range of issues such as specific behavioural issues, contact with birth families and attachment issues. This work is carried out by local authority and third sector adoption agencies and attendance is usually a condition of being approved as potential adopters. There is naturally a focus in social work practice of adoptive parents being supported to *claim* their adopted child and form affectional bonds. The importance of this focus of the work is clear, but this inquiry makes the case that alongside this to be equal focus on the importance of valuing the origins of the child. Negative and insecure feelings of the adoptive parents regarding the child's connection to their birth family may not be explicitly stated but can still be internalised by the child either during their childhood, or during adolescence and adult years. The challenge of balancing these aspects of conveying to the child that they truly belong to the adoptive family, whilst at the same time valuing their origins is challenging both in practical as well as emotional terms. Supporting adoptive parents to understand and accept that the fact

that their adopted child's identity is formed to a large extent from the connections to their birth family does not diminish the attachment that the child has with them as parents. This is an important role for adoption social workers in both pre-adoption training and on-going adoption support. The significance of true communicative openness with adoptive families is central to the process of identity formation for adopted children and is something that practitioners need to foster and support. Findings from research regarding the life-long impact of adoption and the need to support identity issues, from childhood onwards, would assist adoptive parents to understand this important aspect of their role. One of the aims of this inquiry is to make a contribution to the body of research that can be drawn on to support this aspect of adoption practice and to inform future policy and training materials.

13.4.2 Implications for Practice with Adult Adoptees

There are a range of organisations that offer support to adult adoptees, specifically as they engage in search and re-engagement activities. Adoption agencies, both local authority and third sector, along with national organisations such as Birthlink and Adoption UK, offer support when individuals contact them for information regarding their birth families. However, beyond basic practical support in accessing information, more long-term support is not available to all, and is often dependent on geographical location, with more support services available in the Central Belt of Scotland than in other regions.

It was evident through this inquiry that the support group was particularly beneficial to the participants in terms of them being able to make claim to their adoptive status and to develop new understandings of their experiences and emotional responses through hearing other people's stories. It is proposed that the theory developed through this inquiry will strengthen the case for additional resources to be allocated to this area of practice to support adults who have thus far been the passive recipients of decisions made about their lives and who may now require support in making sense of their adoptive experiences. Within generic social work practice there is limited understanding of the complexities of the life-long impact of adoption and a need for an increase of specialist services to support adult adoptees who make contact. Face-to-face support was found

to be of benefit for the participants of this study, but alongside this, resources such as training packs for both support workers and adult adoptees themselves could be of benefit. Research focused on the experiences of adult adoptees, specifically that which draws on the evidence provided by the adoptees themselves as in this inquiry, would both strengthen the case for resourcing such initiatives, raise the profile of this issue in the field of practice and inform the content of materials that could be produced.

13.5 Summary

The key messages from this inquiry are that the experience of adoption, though unique to each individual, have common themes regarding: The concept of the *missing pieces* in the individual's narrative and adoptive identity. This is identified as the first aspect of the central theory in this inquiry. This first aspect of the theory encompasses the following themes:

- The importance of understanding what the missing pieces for each individual may be and the significance of material objects, information, relationships, physical likeness.
- The need for adult adoptees to search for the missing pieces.

The significance of *controlling the narrative*, the second aspect of the theory, demonstrates the significance for adoptees of exercising self-determination and its impact on their psychological and emotional wellbeing. The second aspect of the theory encompasses the following themes:

- The process of searching and re-engaging as a way of regaining/exercising control
- The impact of searching and re-engaging with birth families on identity
- The impact of searching and re-engaging on attachment adjustment, specifically the move towards earned security.

The understanding of these themes, and their presentation within the context of a coherent theory, has implications for both future research and adoption practice and training, involving work with adult adoptees and with children who are adopted and their adoptive families. The methodology used is suggested as being one that is synchronous with essential elements of social work practice with the proposition that it could be used more widely to explore the complexities of human experiences and interaction.

13.6 Final Reflections

This thesis began with a statement regarding my positionality in relation to the inquiry, that of having both professional and personal experience. It seems apt therefore to end with reflections on both the process and the emergent theory, reflection being a core social work activity that necessarily impacts on the personal domain of my life as well.

The use of CGTM was identified as being appropriate to this inquiry at an early stage of this process. This methodology enabled me to stay committed to the central aims of the study, that of representing the voice of the participants, whilst also acknowledging and making use of my own knowledge and experience. These aims have driven the study and have enabled me to develop a theory that it is hoped will be of benefit to people whose needs are often minimised. Throughout this process, my own understanding of the experience of adoption has greatly increased. At the outset, I had concerns about imposing my own ideas on the outcomes of the study. The process of rigorous coding, memo writing and iterative engagement with the literature and extant theory mitigated against this enabling me to remain open to new ideas and insights and challenging my own preconceptions. However, it was ultimately the powerful narratives provided by the participants that had the most impact on me and led to the development of the theory of *The Search for Missing Pieces*.

REFERENCES

Acker, S., 2000. Inside/Outside: Positioning the Researcher in Feminist Qualitative Research. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 28(1-2).

Adelson, J., 1980. *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*. New York: Wiley, pp.159-187.

Adoption (Scotland) Act 1979. S45.

AFCARS 2021 (online) Available at
<<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/afcarsreport-27>> (Accessed 10 May 2021)

Affleck, M. and Steed, L., 2001. Expectations and experiences of participants in ongoing adoption reunion relationships: A qualitative study. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71(1), pp.38-48.

Ainsworth, M., 1978. The Bowlby-Ainsworth attachment theory. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1(3), pp.436-438.

Ainsworth, M., 2015. *Patterns of Attachment*. New York, N.Y.: Routledge.

Albrecht, Y., 2019. The Contemporaneity of Grounded Theory: Data and Emotional Reflexivity. *Sociological Focus*, 52(2), pp.107-116.

Almgren, G., 1991. The Psychology of Adoption. David M. Brodzinsky, Marshall D. Schechter. *Social Service Review*, 65(3), pp.506-508.

Andersen, R., 1989. The nature of adoptee search: Adventure, cure or growth?. *Child Welfare*, 68, pp.623-632.

Aumend, S. and Barrett, M., 1983. Searching and Non-Searching Adoptees. *Adoption & Fostering*, 7(2), pp.37-42.

Baden, A. and O'Leary Wiley, M., 2007. Counselling Adopted Persons in Adulthood. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 35(6), pp.868-901.

Baez, B., 2002. Confidentiality in qualitative research: reflections on secrets, power and agency. *Qualitative Research*, 2(1), pp.35-58.

Baran, A. and Pannor, R., 1993. Perspectives on Open Adoption. *The Future of Children*, 3(1), p.119.

Bartholomew, K. and Horowitz, L., 1991. Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61(2), pp.226-244.

Bartholomew, K., 1990. Avoidance of Intimacy: An Attachment Perspective. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7(2), pp.147-178.

Bartholomew, K., 1994. Assessment of Individual Differences in Adult Attachment. *Psychological Inquiry*, 5(1), pp.23-67.

BASW 2020 (online) BASW.co.uk. Available at https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/SASW_pdf [Accessed 11 June 2020].

Bauer, J., McAdams, D. and Pals, J., 2006. Narrative identity and eudaimonic wellbeing. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(1), pp.81-104.

Baumeister, R. and Muraven, M., 1996. Identity as Adaptation to Social, Cultural and Historical Context. *Journal of Adolescence*, 19, pp.405-416.

Berg and Bruce, 2007. *Qualitative Research Methods for The Social Sciences*. London: Pearson.

Bertocci, D. and Schechter, M., 1991. Adopted adults' perception of their need to search: Implications for clinical practice. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 61(2), pp.179-196.

Berzonsky, M. and Adams, G., 1999. Reevaluating the Identity Status Paradigm: Still Useful after 35 Years. *Developmental Review*, 19(4), pp.557-590.

Berzonsky, M. and Papini, D., 2015. Cognitive Reasoning, Identity Components, and Identity Processing Styles. *Identity*, 15(1), pp.74-88.

Berzonsky, M. and Sullivan, C., 1992. Social-Cognitive Aspects of Identity Style. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 7(2), pp.140-155.

Berzonsky, M., 2005. Ego Identity: A Personal Standpoint in a Postmodern World. *Identity*, 5(2), pp.125-136.

Berzonsky, M., 2003. Identity Style and Well-Being: Does Commitment Matter? *Identity*, 3(2), pp.131-142.

Bifulco, A. and Thomas, G., 2012. *Understanding Adult Attachment In Family Relationships*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Bifulco, A. and Thomas, G., 2013. *Understanding Adult Attachment In Family Relationships*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Billig, M., Abrams, D. and Hogg, M., 1991. Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances. *Contemporary Sociology*, 20(6), p.944.

Birch, M. and Miller, T., 2000. Inviting intimacy: The interview as therapeutic opportunity. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 3(3), pp.189-202.

Birks, M. and Mills, J., 2015. *Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Boell, S. and Cecez-Kecmanovic, D., 2015. On being 'Systematic' in Literature Reviews in IS. *Journal of Information Technology*, 30(2), pp.161-173.

- Bohman, M. and Sigvardsson, S., 1980. A prospective, longitudinal study of children registered for adoption : A 15 year follow up. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 61(4), pp.339-355.
- Borders, L., Black, L. and Pasley, B., 1998. Are Adopted Children and Their Parents at Greater Risk for Negative Outcomes?. *Family Relations*, 47(3), p.237.
- Borthwick, S., 2000. Review: A Long-Term View of Adoption. *Adoption & Fostering*, 24(2), pp.86-87.
- Bowen, G., 2006. Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), pp.12-23.
- Bowen, G., 2008. Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: a research note. *Qualitative Research*, 8(1), pp.137-152.
- Bowlby, J. and Fry, M., 1953. *Child Care And The Growth Of Love*. London: Penguin books.
- Bowlby, J., 1969. *Attachment And Loss*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Bowlby, J., 1973. *Separation*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Bowlby, J., 2012. *A Secure Base*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Brannick, T. and Coghlan, D., 2007. In Defense of Being "Native": The Case for Insider Academic Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 10(1), pp.59-74.
- Bretherton, I., 1999. Updating the 'internal working model' construct: Some reflections. *Attachment & Human Development*, 1(3), pp.343-357.
- Bridges, D., 2001. The Ethics of Outsider Research. *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, 35(3), pp.371-386.

Brinkmann, S., 2016. Methodological breaching experiments: Steps toward theorizing the qualitative interview. *Culture & Psychology*, 22(4), pp.520-533.

Brodzinsky, D., 1987. Adjustment to adoption: A psychosocial perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 7(1), pp.25-47.

Brodzinsky, D., 1993. Long-Term Outcomes in Adoption. *The Future of Children*, 3(1), p.153.

Brodzinsky, D., 2005. *Psychological Issues In Adoption*. Westport, Conn: Praeger.

Brodzinsky, D., Schechter, D., Braff, A. and Singer, L., 1984. Psychological and academic adjustment in adopted children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 52(4), pp.582-590.

Brown, G., Andrews, B., Harris, T., Adler, Z. and Bridge, L., 1986. Social support, self-esteem and depression. *Psychological Medicine*, 16(4), pp.813-831.

Brown, G., Bifulco, A. and Andrews, B., 1990. Self-esteem and depression. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 25(5), pp.235-243.

Brown, G., Bifulco, A. and Harris, T., 1987. Life Events, Vulnerability and Onset of Depression. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 150(1), pp.30-42.

Brown, J., 1986. Evaluations of Self and Others: Self-Enhancement Biases in Social Judgments. *Social Cognition*, 4(4), pp.353-376.

Bruce, L., 2013. *Reflective Practice For Social Workers*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.

Bryant, A. and Charmaz, K., 2007. *The Sage Handbook Of Current Developments In Grounded Theory*. London: Sage.

Bryant, A. and Charmaz, K., 2013. *The Sage Handbook Of Grounded Theory*. London: SAGE Publications.

Bryant, A. and Charmaz, K., 2019. *The Sage Handbook Of Current Developments In Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles, Calif: Sage.

Bryant, A., 2020. *Grounded Theory And Pragmatism: The Curious Case Of Anselm*

Strauss. [online] Qualitative-research.net. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1358/2850> [Accessed 11 June 2020].

Bryman, A., 2000. *Quantity And Quality In Social Research*. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A., 2016. Buhr, K. and Dugas, M., 2006. Investigating the construct validity of intolerance of uncertainty and its unique relationship with worry. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 20(2), pp.222-236.

Buhr, K. and Dugas, M., 2012. Fear of Emotions, Experiential Avoidance, and Intolerance of Uncertainty in Worry and Generalized Anxiety Disorder. *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy*, 5(1), pp.1-17.

Butler, I., 2002. A Code of Ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research. *British Journal of Social Work*, 32(2), pp.239-248.

Bylsma, W., Cozzarelli, C. and Sumer, N., 1997. Relation Between Adult Attachment Styles and Global Self-Esteem. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 19(1), pp.1-16.

Byrne, M., 2001. Grounded theory as a qualitative research methodology. *AORN Journal*, 73(6), pp.1155-1156.

Campbell, L., Silverman, P. and Patti, P., 1991. Reunions between Adoptees and Birth Parents: The Adoptees' Experience. *Social Work*, 36(4).

Careinspectorate.com. 2020. *Adoption*. [online] Available at: <https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/adoption> [Accessed 29 August 2020].

Carizey, J., 2004. Unique Issues in Psychotherapy with adult adoptees. *Praxis*, 4.

Carol J. Singley, 2018. Adoption: Cultures of Ambivalence Past, Present—and Future. *Adoption & Culture*, 6(1), p.50.

Carsten, J. 2000. 'Knowing where you've come from': Ruptures and continuities of time and kinship in narratives of adoption reunions. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2000-12, Vol.6 (4), p.687-703

Chamberlain-Salaun, J., Mills, J. and Usher, K., 2013. Linking Symbolic Interactionism and Grounded Theory Methods in a Research Design. *Sage Open*, 3(3),.

Charmaz, K. and Belgrave, L. Thinking About Data With Grounded Theory. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2018 1077800418809455. (Accessed 12th May 2020)

Charmaz, K. and Mitchell, R., 1996. The Myth of Silent Authorship: Self, Substance, and Style in Ethnographic Writing. *Symbolic Interaction*, 19(4), pp.285-302.

Charmaz, K. and Thornberg, R., 2020. The pursuit of quality in grounded theory. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, pp.1-23.

Charmaz, K., 1983. Loss of self: a fundamental form of suffering in the chronically ill. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 5(2), pp.168-195.

Charmaz, K., 1990. 'Discovering' chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social Science & Medicine*, 30(11), pp.1161-1172.

Charmaz, K., 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage.

- Charmaz, K., 2009. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Charmaz, K., 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Charmaz, K., 2016. Constructivist grounded theory. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), pp.299-300.
- Children's Bureau | ACF. 2013. *Adoption & Foster Care Statistics*. [online] Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars> [Accessed 13 August 2020].
- Clapton, G., 2018. Close Relations? The Long-Term Outcomes of Adoption Reunions. *Genealogy*, 2(4), p.41.
- Clapton, G., 2019. Against All Odds? Birth Fathers and Enduring Thoughts of the Child Lost to Adoption. *Genealogy*, 3(2), p.13.
- Clarke, M., 1987. From practice to grounded theory: qualitative research in nursing. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 24(3), pp.271-272.
- Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P., 1996. *Making Sense Of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Cohen, L., 2012. An identity structure in narrative. *Narrative Inquiry*, 22(2), pp.247-266.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K., 2007. Research Methods in Education. Keith Morrison. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(4), pp.469-470.
- Conrad, C., 1982. Grounded Theory: An Alternative Approach to Research in Higher Education. *The Review of Higher Education*, 5(4), pp.239-249.
- Cooke, M., 2014. The challenges of grounded theory. *Nurse Researcher*, 21(5), pp.6-7.

Copp, M., 2008. Cited in Marshall and Rosman (eds). 2011. *Designing Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

CoramBAAF. 2020. *Looked After Children, Adoption & Fostering Statistics | Corambaaf*. [online] Available at: <https://corambaaf.org.uk/fosteringadoption/looked-after-children-adoptionfostering-statistics> [Accessed 13 August 2020].

Corbin Dwyer, S. and Buckle, J., 2018. Reflection/Commentary on a Past Article:

“The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research”. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), p.160940691878817.

Corbin, J. and Strauss, A., 1984. Collaboration: Couples Working Together To Manage Chronic Illness. *Image: the Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 16(4), pp.109115.

Corbin, J. and Strauss, A., 1990. Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), pp.3-21.

CÔTÉ, J., 1996. Sociological perspectives on identity formation: the culture-identity link and identity capital. *Journal of Adolescence*, 19(5), pp.417-428.

Courtney, A., 2000. Loss and Grief in Adoption: The Impact of Contact. *Adoption & Fostering*, 24(2), pp.33-44.

Cozzarelli, C., Karafa, J., Collins, N. and Tagler, M., 2003. Stability and change in adult attachment styles: associations with personal vulnerabilities, life events. and global construals of self and others. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 22(3), pp.315-346.

Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. and Hardy, M., 2018. Exploring the changing nature of adoption work. Reflections on the 1968 Act. *Social Work Scotland*,.

Cronin, P., Ryan, F. and Coughlan, M., 2008. Undertaking a literature review: a stepbystep approach. *British Journal of Nursing*, 17(1), pp.38-43.

Crosby, R., Salazar, L., DiClemente, R. and Lang, D., 2009. Balancing rigor against the inherent limitations of investigating hard-to-reach populations. *Health Education Research*, 25(1), pp.1-5.

Cruickshank, J., 2011. Positioning positivism, critical realism and social constructionism in the health sciences: a philosophical orientation. *Nursing Inquiry*, 19(1), pp.71-82.

Cubito, D. and Obremski Brandon, K., 2000. Psychological adjustment in adult adoptees: Assessment of distress, depression, and anger. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 70(3), pp.408-413.

Curtis, R. and Pearson, F., 2010. Contact with Birth Parents. *Journal of Social Work*, 10(4), pp.347-367.

Darnell, F., Johansen, A., Tavakoli, S. and Brugnone, N., 2016. Adoption and Identity Experiences Among Adult Transnational Adoptees: A Qualitative Study. *Adoption Quarterly*, 20(2), pp.155-166.

D'Cruz, H., Gillingham, P. and Melendez, S., 2005. Reflexivity, its Meanings and Relevance for Social Work: A Critical Review of the Literature. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(1), pp.73-90.

Dean, B., 2018. The Interpretivist and The Learner. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 13, pp.001-008.

Dempsey, L., Dowling, M., Larkin, P. and Murphy, K., 2016. Sensitive Interviewing in Qualitative Research. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 39, pp.480-490.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln (Eds), Y., 2008. *The Landscape Of Qualitative Research..* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y., 2000. *Introduction: The Discipline And Practice Of Qualitative Research..* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Denzin, N., 1989. *Interpretive Biography.* London: Sage.

Denzin, N., 2012. *Studies In Symbolic Interaction.* Bradford [England]: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Denzin, N., 2012. Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6(2), pp.80- 88.

Denzin, N., 2016. *A Companion To Qualitative Research. Flick, Von Kardorff And Steinke (Eds).* London: Sage.

DeVault, M., Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y., 1995. Handbook of Qualitative Research. *Contemporary Sociology*, 24(3), p.418.

Dewey, D., 1997. *Review of Industrial Organization*, 12(5/6), pp.693-700.

Dey, I., 1993. *Qualitative Data Analysis.* London: Routledge.

DiCicco-Bloom, B. and Crabtree, B., 2006. The Qualitative Research Interview.

Medical Education, 40, pp.314-321.

Dickson-Swift, V., James, E., Kippen, S. and Liamputtong, P., 2009.

Researching sensitive topics: qualitative research as emotion work.

Qualitative Research, 9(1), pp.61-79.

Doinita, N., 2015. Adult Attachment, Self-esteem and Emotional Intelligence. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 187, pp.570-574.

Dugas, M., Schwartz, A. and Francis, K., 2004. Brief Report: Intolerance of Uncertainty, Worry, and Depression. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 28(6), pp.835-842.

Dunn, D., 2003. Teach Me about Your Life: Narrative Approaches to Lives, Meaning, and Transitions. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 22(5), pp.604-606.

Dunne, C., 2011. The place of the literature review in grounded theory research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14(2), pp.111-124.

Dwyer, S. and Buckle, J., 2009. The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), pp.54-63.

Ellard-Gray, A., Jeffrey, N., Choubak, M. and Crann, S., 2015. Finding the Hidden Participant. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 14(5), p.160940691562142.

Ellis, C., Strauss, A. and Corbin, J., 1992. Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques. *Contemporary Sociology*, 21(1), p.138.

Erikson, E., 1978. *Adulthood*. New York: Norton.

Etherington, K., 2007. Ethical Research in Reflexive Relationships. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(5), pp.599-616.

Farr, R., Grant-Marsney, H. and Grotevant, H., 2014. Adoptees' Contact with Birth Parents in Emerging Adulthood: The Role of Adoption Communication and Attachment to Adoptive Parents. *Family Process*, 53, pp.656-671.

Feast, J. and Howe, D., 1997. Adopted Adults Who Search for Background Information and Contact with Birth Relatives. *Adoption & Fostering*, 21(2), pp.8-15.

Feast, J., 2002. Adoption Search and Reunion: The Adoptive and Birth Parents' Perspective. *Adoption & Fostering*, 26(2), pp.64-65.

- Feast, J., 2013. *Adversity, Adoption and Afterwards*. London: BAAF.
- Feeney, J., Passmore, N. and Peterson, C., 2007. Adoption, Attachment and Relationship Concerns: A Study of Adult Adoptees. *Journal of Personal Relationships*, 14(1), pp.129-147.
- Feigelman, W., 1997. Adopted Adults. *Marriage & Family Review*, 25(3-4), pp.199-223.
- Finlay, L., 2008. A Dance Between the Reduction and Reflexivity: Explicating the "Phenomenological Psychological Attitude." *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 39(1), pp.1-32.
- Fitsell, A., 1992. Search and Reunion. *Adoption & Fostering*, 16(4), pp.62-63.
- Fivush, R., Booker, J. and Graci, M., 2017. Ongoing Narrative Meaning-Making Within Events and Across the Life Span. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 37(2), pp.127-152.
- Fivush, R., Habermas, T., Waters, T. and Zaman, W., 2011. The making of autobiographical memory: Intersections of culture, narratives and identity. *International Journal of Psychology*, 46(5), pp.321-345.
- Flamm, E. and Grolnick, W., 2013. Adolescent adjustment in the context of life change: The supportive role of parental structure provision. *Journal of Adolescence*, 36(5), pp.899-912.
- Floersch, J., Longhofer, J. and Suskewicz, J., 2012. Qualitative social work: Research and practice. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*, 11(6), pp.695-696.
- Fonagy, P., 2004. *Attachment Theory and Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac.
- Fontana, A. and Charon, J., 1989. Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, an Interpretation, an Integration. *Teaching Sociology*, 17(4), p.504.

Fortune, A., Miller, J., Reid, W. and Robert L., 2013. *Qualitative Research In Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp.107-108.

Fraley, R., Gillath, O. and Deboeck, P., 2020. Do life events lead to enduring changes in adult attachment styles? A naturalistic longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*,.

Freundlich, M. and Lieberthal, J., 2001. *The Impact Of Adoption On Members Of The Triad*. Washington, D.C.: Child Welfare League of America.

Garber, K. and Grotevant, H., 2015. "YOU Were Adopted?!". *The Counselling Psychologist*, 43(3), pp.435-462.

Gephart, R., 2004. Qualitative Research and the Academy of Management Journal. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(4), pp.454-462.

Gibson, A. and Gibson, N., 2016. *Human Growth, Behaviour And Development*.

Gilgun, J., 2015. Beyond description to interpretation and theory in qualitative social work research. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*, 14(6), pp.741-752.

Gillath, O., Karantzas, G. and Fraley, R., 2016. *Adult Attachment*. London: Academic Press is an imprint of Elsevier.

Glaser, B. and Strauss, A., 1967. *The Discovery Of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.

Glaser, B., 1999. The Future of Grounded Theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 9(6), pp.836-845.

Glaser, B., Strauss, A. and Strutzel, E., 1968. The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research. *Nursing Research*, 17(4), p.364.

- Goffman, E., 1986. *Stigma*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Goldkuhl, G. and Cronholm, S., 2010. Adding Theoretical Grounding to Grounded Theory: Toward Multi-Grounded Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 9(2), pp.187-205.
- Goldkuhl, G. and Cronholm, S., 2010. Adding Theoretical Grounding to Grounded Theory: Toward Multi-Grounded Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 9(2), pp.187-205.
- Goodman, G., 2013. *The Internal World And Attachment*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Greco, O., Rosnati, R. and Ferrari, L., 2014. Adult Adoptees as Partners and Parents: The Joint Task of Revisiting the Adoption History. *Adoption Quarterly*, 18(1), pp.25-44.
- Green, B., Johnson, C. and Adams, A., 2006. Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: secrets of the trade. *Journal of Chiropractic Medicine*, 5(3), pp.101-117.
- Greenhalgh, T., Thorne, S. and Malterud, K., 2018. Time to challenge the spurious hierarchy of systematic over narrative reviews?. *European Journal of Clinical Investigation*, 48(6), p.e12931.
- Gregor, 2006. The Nature of Theory in Information Systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 30(3), p.611.
- Grotevant, H. and McRoy, R., 1997. The Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project:
Implications of Openness in Adoption for Development and Relationship. *Applied Developmental Science*, 1(4), pp.168-186.
- Grotevant, H., 1987. Toward a Process Model of Identity Formation. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 2(3), pp.203-222.

Grotevant, H., 1997. Coming to Terms with Adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*, 1(1), pp.327.

Grotevant, H., 2000. Openness in Adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*, 4(1), pp.45-65.

Grotevant, H., 2003. Counseling Psychology Meets the Complex World of Adoption. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 31(6), pp.753-762.

Grotevant, H., Dunbar, N., Kohler, J. and Esau, A., 2000. Adoptive Identity: How Contexts Within and Beyond the Family Shape Developmental Pathways*. *Family Relations*, 49(4), pp.379-387.

Grotevant, H., Rueter, M., Von Korff, L. and Gonzalez, C., 2010. Post-adoption contact, adoption communicative openness, and satisfaction with contact as predictors of externalizing behavior in adolescence and emerging adulthood. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 52(5), pp.529-536.

Guest, G., Namey, E., Taylor, J., Eley, N. and McKenna, K., 2017. Comparing focus groups and individual interviews: findings from a randomized study. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(6), pp.693-708.

Habermas, T. and Bluck, S., 2000. Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(5), pp.748-769.

Hall, W. and Callery, P., 2001. Enhancing the Rigor of Grounded Theory: Incorporating Reflexivity and Relationality. *Qualitative Health Research*, 11(2), pp.257-272.

Hayfield, N. and Huxley, C., 2015. Insider and Outsider Perspectives: Reflections on Researcher Identities in Research with Lesbian and Bisexual Women. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12(2), pp.91-106.

Hayfield, N. and Huxley, C., 2015. Insider and Outsider Perspectives: Reflections on Researcher Identities in Research with Lesbian and Bisexual Women. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12(2), pp.91-106.

Hazan, C. and Shaver, P., 1987. Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(3), pp.511-524.

Henderson, A., Bartholomew, K., Trinke, S. and Kwong, M., 2005. When Loving Means Hurting: An Exploration of Attachment and Intimate Abuse In a Community Sample. *Journal of Family Violence*, 20(4), pp.219-230.

Hendry, C., 2005. Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice David Silverman Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice Sage 390 £21.99 0761949348 0761949348. *Nurse Researcher*, 12(4), pp.92-93.

Henze-Pedersen, S., 2019. Known and Unknown Identities: Openness and Identity as Experienced by Adult Adoptees. *Adoption Quarterly*, 22(2), pp.135-156.

Hill, M., 2013. Adoption for looked after children: messages from research by Caroline Thomas. *Adoption & Fostering*, 37(4), pp.424-425.

Hoare, K., Mills, J. and Francis, K., 2012. Dancing with data: An example of acquiring theoretical sensitivity in a grounded theory study. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 18(3), pp.240-245.

Hogg, M. and Reid, S., 2006. Social Identity, Self-Categorization, and the Communication of Group Norms. *Communication Theory*, 16(1), pp.7-30.

Hogg, M., Terry, D. and White, K., 1995. A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58(4), pp.255-269.

Hollingsworth, L., 1998. Adoptee Dissimilarity from the Adoptive Family: Clinical Practice and Research Implications. *Child and Adolescent Social Work, 15*(4).

Holloway, I., Brown, L. and Shipway, R., 2010. Meaning not measurement. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management, 1*(1), pp.74-85.

Holman, T., Galbraith, R., Mead Timmons, N., Steed, A. and Tobler, S., 2008. Threats to Parental and Romantic Attachment Figures' Availability and Adult Attachment Insecurity. *Journal of Family Issues, 30*(3), pp.413-429.

Holmes, J., 1993. Attachment Theory: A Biological Basis for Psychotherapy?. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 163*(4), pp.430-438.

Holmes, J., 2014. *John Bowlby And Attachment Theory*. Hove: Routledge.

Hoopes, J., 1982. Prediction in Child Development: A Longitudinal Study of Adoptive and Nonadoptive Families. The Delaware Family Study. *Child Welfare League of America, p.104*.

Hopkins, R., Regehr, G. and Pratt, D., 2016. A framework for negotiating positionality in phenomenological research. *Medical Teacher, 39*(1), pp.20-25.

Horowitz, M., 2012. Self Identity Theory and Research Methods. *Journal of Research Practice, 8*(2).

Howe, D. and Feast, J., 2001. Adoption, Search & Reunion, The Long Term Experience of Adopted Adults by David Howe & Julia Feast. *Human Reproduction & Genetic Ethics, 7*(2), pp.55a-55a.

Howe, D., 2001. Age at placement, adoption experience and adult adopted people's contact with their adoptive and birth mothers: An attachment perspective. *Attachment & Human Development, 3*(2), pp.222-237.

Howe, D., 2006. Developmental Attachment Psychotherapy with Fostered and Adopted Children. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 11(3), pp.128-134.

HOWE, D., 2003. Attachment disorders: Disinhibited attachment behaviours and secure base distortions with special reference to adopted children. *Attachment & Human Development*, 5(3), pp.265-270.

Hudson, L. and Ozanne, J., 1988. Alternative Ways of Seeking Knowledge in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(4), p.508.

Human Reproduction & Genetic Ethics, 2001. Adoption, Search & Reunion, The Long Term Experience of Adopted Adults by David Howe & Julia Feast. 7(2), pp.55a-55a.

Humphrey, H. and Humphrey, M., 1989. Damaged identity and the search for kinship in adult adoptees. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 62(4), pp.301-309.

Jackson, M., 2016. Beyond the adoption order: Challenges, interventions and adoption disruption *Journal of Social Work*, 16(6), pp.763-764.

Jacobson, J., Hall, S. and Gay, P., 1997. Questions of Cultural Identity. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 48(1), p.153.

Johnston, J., 2008. John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 41(3), pp.489-490.

Jones, A., 1997. Issues Relevant to Therapy with Adoptees. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Practice, Research and Training*, 34 (1), pp.64-68.

Jones, C. and Hackett, S., 2007. Communicative Openness Within Adoptive Families: *Adoption Quarterly*, Vol. 10.- Taylor & Francis

Adoptive Parents' Narrative Accounts of the Challenges of Adoption Talk and the Approaches Used to Manage These Challenges. *Adoption Quarterly*, 10(3-4), pp.157-178.

Jones, C., 2013. Openness in adoption: Challenging the narrative of historical progress. *Child & Family Social Work*, 21(1), pp.85-93.

Jones, S., Torres, V. and Arminio, J., 2013. Negotiating the Complexities of Qualitative Research in Higher Education: Fundamental Elements and Issues. *Qualitative Research*, 15(3), pp.407-409.

Jonker, J. and Pennink, B., 2010. *The Essence Of Research Methodology: A Concise Guide For Mast And PHD Students In Management Science*. London: Springer.

Jukes, M., 2008. Practising critical reflection: a resource handbook
Practising critical reflection: a resource handbook Jan Fook , Fiona Gardner
Open University Press 2007 232 978033522107. *Learning Disability Practice*, 11(4), pp.25-25.

Kalus, A., 2014. Methodological findings in studies on adoptive families. *Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, 16(3), pp.19-23.

Kanuha, V., 2000. "Being" Native versus "Going Native": Conducting Social Work Research as an Insider. *Social Work*, 45(5), pp.439-447.

Karnieli-Miller, O., Strier, R. and Pessach, L., 2008. Power Relations in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(2), pp.279-289.

Kelle, U., 1995. *Theories As Heuristic Tools In Qualitative Research In I.Maso, P.*

Atkinson, S. Delamont And J Verhoeven (Eds) *Openness In Research. The Tension Between Self And Others*. Assen, pp. 33-50.

Kelle, U., 2007. Emergence VS Forcing Of Empirical Data? A crucial problem of grounded theory reconsidered. *Historical Social Research*, Supplement 19, pp.133-156.

Kelly, M., Towner-Thyrum, E., Rigby, A. and Martin, B., 1998. Adjustment and identity formation in adopted and nonadopted young adults: Contributions of family environment. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 68(3), pp.497-500.

Kenny, M. and Fourie, R., 2014. Tracing the History of Grounded Theory: From Formation to Fragmentation. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(52).

Kirk, H., 1964. *Shared Fate*. London: Glencoe Free Press.

Kolb, D. and Lewis, L., 1986. Facilitating experiential learning: Observations and reflections. *Directions for continuing education*, n30.

Kolb, D., 2014. *Experiential Learning: Experience As The Source Of Learning And Development*.

Koshy, 2020. [online] Sagepub.com. Available at: https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upmbinaries/36584_01_Koshy_et_al_Ch_01.pdf [Accessed 11 June 2020].

Koshy, E., Waterman, H. and Koshy, V., 2011. *Action Research In Healthcare*. Los Angeles, Calif.: SAGE.

Kowal, K. and Schilling, K., 1985. Adoption through the eyes of adult adoptees. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 55(3), pp.354-362.

Kroger, J., 2002. Introduction: Identity Development Through Adulthood. *Identity*, 2(1), pp.1-5.

Ladouceur, R., Talbot, F. and Dugas, M., 1997. Behavioral Expressions of Intolerance of Uncertainty in Worry. *Behavior Modification*, 21(3), pp.355-371.

- Lahti, J., 1984. Prediction in Child Development: A Longitudinal Study of Adoptive and Nonadoptive Families. The Delaware Family Study. Janet L. Hoopes. *Social Service Review*, 58(1), pp.164-165.
- LaRossa, R. and Reitzes, D., 1993. *Symbolic Interactionism And Family Studies*. In P.G. Boss And W. J. Doherty, R. La Rossa, W Schumm And S Steinmetz (Eds), *Sourcebook Of Family Theories And Methods: A Contextual Approach*. New York: Plenum.
- Laverty, S., 2003. Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(3), pp.21-35.
- Lee, J., 2017. The Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Reflection on the Methodological Assumptions of the Grounded Theory. *Phenomenology and Contemporary Philosophy*, 75, pp.69-108.
- Lee, R., Grotevant, H., Hellerstedt, W. and Gunnar, M., 2006. Cultural socialization in families with internationally adopted children. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(4), pp.571-580.
- Lehn, D. and Gibson, W., 2011. Interaction and Symbolic Interactionism. *Symbolic Interaction*, 34(3), pp.315-318.
- Leon, I., 2002. Adoption Losses: Naturally Occurring or Socially Constructed?. *Child Development*, 73(2), pp.652-663.
- Levers, M., 2013. Philosophical Paradigms, Grounded Theory, and Perspectives on Emergence. *Sage Open*, 3(4), p.215824401351724.
- Levy, K. and Blatt, S., 1999. Attachment theory and psychoanalysis: Further differentiation within insecure attachment patterns. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 19(4), pp.541-575.

- Levy-Shiff, R., 2001. Psychological adjustment of adoptees in adulthood: Family environment and adoption-related correlates. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 25(2), pp.97-104.
- Lewis, J., 2004. ADOPTION: THE NATURE OF POLICY SHIFTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES, 1972-2002. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 18(2), pp.235-255.
- Lieberman, M. and Morris, J., 2004. Long-Term Effects Of Adoption: An Empirical Study Of Adult Adoptees. *The Internet Journal of Academic Physician Assistants*, 4(1).
- LIN, J. and LI, L., 2015. Autobiographical Reasoning: The Thought Process of Self Identity Formation. *Advances in Psychological Science*, 23(7), p.1160.
- Lincoln, Y., Guba, E. and Pilotta, J., 1985. Naturalistic inquiry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9(4), pp.438-439.
- Lindseth, A. and Norberg, A., 2004. A phenomenological hermeneutical method for researching lived experience. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 18(2), pp.145-153.
- Ludvigsen, A. and Parnham, J., 2004. Searching for Siblings: The Motivations and Experiences of Adults Seeking Contact with Adopted Siblings. *Adoption & Fostering*, 28(4), pp.50-59.
- Luyckx, K., Vansteenkiste, M., Goossens, L. and Duriez, B., 2009. Basic need satisfaction and identity formation: Bridging self-determination theory and processoriented identity research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(2), pp.276-288.
- Lynch, M., Vansteenkiste, M., Deci, E. and Ryan, R., 2010. Autonomy as Process and Outcome: Revisiting Cultural and Practical Issues in Motivation for Counseling. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 39(2), pp.286-302.

Mahat-Shamir, M., Neimeyer, R. and Pitcho-Prelorentzos, S., 2019. Designing indepth semi-structured interviews for revealing meaning reconstruction after loss. *Death Studies*, pp.1-8.

Main, M., Hesse, E. and Hesse, S., 2011. Attachment Theory and Research: Overview With Suggested Applications To Child Custody. *Family Court Review*, 49(3), pp.426-463.

Manning, P., 2005. Reinvigorating the Tradition of Symbolic Interactionism. *Symbolic Interaction*, 28(2), pp.167-173.

Mapp, T., 2008. Understanding phenomenology: the lived experience. *British Journal of Midwifery*, 16(5), pp.308-311.

March, K., 1995. Perception of Adoption as Social Stigma: Motivation for Search and Reunion. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57(3), p.653.

Marcia, J., 1966. Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3(5), pp.551-558.

Marcia, J., 1988. Common Processes Underlying Ego Identity, Cognitive/Moral Development, and Individuation. *Self, Ego, and Identity*, pp.211-225.

Marmarosh, C. and Tasca, G., 2013. Adult Attachment Anxiety: Using Group Therapy to Promote Change. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(11), pp.1172-1182.

Marsh, P. and Thoburn, J., 2002. The adoption and permanence debate in England and Wales. *Child & Family Social Work*, 7(2), pp.131-132.

Marsh, R., 2010. Measuring the impact of research. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 7(1).

Marshall, C. and Rossman, G., 2011. *Designing Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

- Martin, P. and Turner, B., 1986. Grounded Theory and Organizational Research. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 22(2), pp.141-157.
- Mattley, C., Strauss, A. and Corbin, J., 1999. Grounded Theory in Practice. *Contemporary Sociology*, 28(4), p.489.
- McAdams, D. and McLean, K., 2013. Narrative Identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22(3), pp.233-238.
- McAdams, D., 2001. The psychology of life stories. Review of General Psychology 100–122. *Review of General Psychology*, 5, pp.100 - 122.
- McGhee, G., Marland, G. and Atkinson, J., 2007. Grounded theory research: literature reviewing and reflexivity. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 60(3), pp.334-342.
- McGrath, S., 2016. Revisiting insider–outsider research in comparative and international education. *Educational Review*, 69(1), pp.134-135.
- McLaughlin., H., 2012. *Understanding Social Work Research*. London: Sage.
- McLean, K. and Breen, A., 2009. Processes and content of narrative identity development in adolescence: Gender and well-being. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), pp.702-710.
- McWhinnie, A., 1967. *Adopted Children*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Miall, C., 1996. The Social Construction of Adoption: Clinical and Community Perspectives. *Family Relations*, 45(3), p.309.
- Miettinen, R., 2000. The concept of experiential learning and John Dewey's theory of reflective thought and action. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 19(1), pp.54-72.

Mignot, J., 2017. Full adoption in England and Wales and France: a comparative history of law and practice (1926–2015). *Adoption & Fostering*, 41(2), pp.142-158.

Mikulincer, M. and Erev, I., 1991. Attachment style and the structure of romantic love. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 30(4), pp.273-291.

Mikulincer, M. and Nachshon, O., 1991. Attachment styles and patterns of selfdisclosure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61(2), pp.321-331.

Mikulincer, M. and Shaver, P., 2012. An attachment perspective on psychopathology.

World Psychiatry, 11(1), pp.11-15.

Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. and Pereg, D., 2003. Attachment theory and affect regulation: The dynamics, development, and cognitive consequences of attachmentrelated strategies. *Motivation and Emotion*, 27(2), pp.77-102.

Milligan, F., 2001. The concept of care in male nurse work: an ontological hermeneutic study in acute hospitals. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 35(1), pp.7-16.

Mills, J., Bonner, A. and Francis, K., 2006. The Development of Constructivist Grounded Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), pp.25-35.

Mitchell, K., 2017. Academic voice: On feminism, presence, and objectivity in writing. *Nursing Inquiry*, 24(4), p.e12200.

Mitchell, R. and Charmaz, K., 1996. Telling Tales, Writing Stories. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 25(1), pp.144-166.

Modell, J. and Dambacher, N., 1997. Making a "Real" Family. *Adoption Quarterly*, 1(2), pp.3-33.

Modell, J., 1994. *Kinship With Strangers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Moini, G., 2011. How participation has become a hegemonic discursive resource: towards an interpretivist research agenda. *Critical Policy Studies*, 5(2), pp.149-168.

Montgomery, P. and Bailey, P., 2007. Field Notes and Theoretical Memos in Grounded Theory. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 29(1), pp.65-79.

Moravcsik, A., 2013. Transparency: The Revolution in Qualitative Research. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 47(01), pp.48-53.

Morgan, D., 2014. Pragmatism as a Paradigm for Social Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(8), pp.1045-1053.

Moustakas, C., 1994. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Moyer, A. and Juang, L., 2011. Adoption and Identity: Influence on Emerging Adults' Occupational and Parental Goals. *Adoption Quarterly*, 14(1), pp.1-17.

Naples, N., Gubrium, J. and Holstein, J., 1998. Traversing the New Frontier of Qualitative Methodology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 27(4), p.345.

Neil, B., 1997. Something for Everyone: Adoption: Theory, Policy and Practice. *Adoption & Fostering*, 21(2), pp.68-69.

Neil, E. and Howe, D., 2004. *Contact In Adoption And Permanent Foster Care*. London: BAAF.

Niiniluoto, I., 1999. Defending Abduction. *Philosophy of Science*, 66.

Norman, Z., 2015. Reflection on Social Construction of Reality. *SSRN Electronic Journal*,

Noy-Sharav, D., 2005. Identity Concerns in Intercountry Adoption-Immigrants as Adoptive Parents. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 33(2), pp.173-191.

Nrscotland.gov.uk. 2020. *Adoption Records | National Records Of Scotland*. [online] Available at:

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/adoption-records>
[Accessed 29 August 2020].

Nurmi, J., Berzonsky, M., Tammi, K. and Kinney, A., 1997. Identity Processing Orientation, Cognitive and Behavioural Strategies and Well-being. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 21(3), pp.555-570.

O'Connor, A., Carpenter, B. and Coughlan, B., 2018. An Exploration of Key Issues in the Debate Between Classic and Constructive Grounded Theory. *The Grounded Theory Review*, 17(1).

Paavola, S., 2004. Abduction as a Logic and Methodology of Discovery: the Importance of Strategies. *Foundations of Science*, 9(3), pp.267-283.

Paavola, S., 2011. Diagrams, iconicity, and abductive discovery. *Semiotica*, 2011(186).

Pace, C. and Zavattini, G., 2010. 'Adoption and attachment theory' the attachment models of adoptive mothers and the revision of attachment patterns of their late adopted children. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 37(1), pp.82-88.

Pachecho, F. and Eme, R., 1993. An outcome study of the reunion between adoptees and biological parents. *Child welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice and Program*, 72(1), pp.53-64.

Paillet, A., 2012. The ethnography of 'particularly sensitive' activities: How 'social expectations of ethnography' may reduce sociological and anthropological scope. *Ethnography*, 14(1), pp.126-142.

Palacios, J. and Brodzinsky, D., 2010. Review: Adoption research: Trends, topics, outcomes. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 34(3), pp.270-284.

Palacios, J., Rolock, N., Selwyn, J. and Barbosa-Ducharne, M., 2018. Adoption Breakdown: Concept, Research, and Implications. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 29(2), pp.130-142.

Paley, B., Cox, M., Burchinal, M. and Payne, C., 1999. Attachment and marital functioning: Comparison of spouses with continuous-secure, earned-secure, dismissing, and preoccupied attachment stances. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 13(4), pp.580-597.

Pals, J., 2006. Authoring a Second Chance in Life: Emotion and Transformational Processing Within Narrative Identity. *Research in Human Development*, 3(2), pp.101-120.

Passanisi, A., Gervasi, A., Madonia, C., Guzzo, G. and Greco, D., 2015. Attachment, Self-Esteem and Shame in Emerging Adulthood. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 191, pp.342-346.

Passmore, N. and Feeney, J., 2009. Reunions of Adoptees Who Have Met Both Birth Parents: Post-Reunion Relationships and Factors that Facilitate and Hinder the Reunion Process. *Adoption Quarterly*, 12(2), pp.100-119.

Passmore, N., Fogarty, G., Bourke, C. and Baker-Evans, S., 2005. Parental Bonding and Identity Style as Correlates of Self-Esteem Among Adult Adoptees and Nonadoptees*. *Family Relations*, 54(4), pp.523-534.

Pearson, J., Cohn, D., Cowan, P. and Cowan, C., 1994. Earned- and Continuous security in adult attachment: Relation to depressive symptomatology and parenting style. *Development and Psychopathology*, 6(2), pp.359-373.

Peirce, C., 1998. *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Penny, J., Borders, L. and Portnoy, F., 2007. Reconstruction of Adoption Issues: Delineation of Five Phases Among Adult Adoptees. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85(1), pp.30-41.

Penny, J., Borders, L. and Portnoy, F., 2007. Reconstruction of Adoption Issues: Delineation of Five Phases Among Adult Adoptees. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85(1), pp.30-41.

Pratt, M. and Fiese, B., 2004. *Family Stories And The Life Course*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, pp.135-161.

Prynn, B., 2020. *The Adoption Triangle Revisited: A Study Of Adoption, Search And Reunion Experiences*, * John Triseliotis, Julia Feast And Fiona Kyle, * London, BAAF, 2005.

Raths, J., Heller, M. and Morrone, A., 2004. Contemporary Issues on Methodology: Introduction. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 98(1), pp.3-4.

Reichertz, J., 2007. Reichertz, Jo . 2007. "Abduction: The Logic Of Discovery In Grounded Theory." Pp. 214–28 In *Handbook Of Grounded Theory*, Edited By Bryant, A., Charmaz, K. London, England: Sage Publications.. London: Sage.

Richardson, R. and Kramer, E., 2006. Abduction as the type of inference that characterizes the development of a grounded theory. *Qualitative Research*, 6(4), pp.497-513.

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J., 2003. *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide For Social Science Students And Researchers*. Thousands Oaks. CA: Sage.

Roberts, E., 2020. *The 'Transient Insider': Identity And Intimacy In Home Community Research | Emerald Insight*. [online] Emerald.com. Available at:
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/S104231922018000016008/full/html> [Accessed 8 May 2020].

Roberts, J., 2001. Dialogue, Positionality and the Legal Framing of Ethnographic Research. *Sociological Research Online*, 5(4), pp.37-50.

Robinson, O., 2014. Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11:1, pp.25-41.

Rodopi, E., 2012. Contemporary Pragmatism. *Contemporary Pragmatism*, 9(2), p.322.

Roisman, G., Padron, E., Sroufe, L. and Egeland, B., 2002. Earned-Secure Attachment Status in Retrospect and Prospect. *Child Development*, 73(4), pp.1204-1219.

Rosenzweig-Smith, J., 1988. Factors associated with successful reunions of adult adoptees and biological parents. *Child Welfare*, 67(5), pp.411-422.

Rossetto, K., 2014. Qualitative research interviews. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 31(4), pp.482-489.

Rushton, A., 2007. The Adoption Triangle Revisited: A Study of Adoption, Search and Reunion Experiences. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 12(2), pp.101-101.

Rushton, A., 2014. Early years adversity, adoption and adulthood: conceptualising long-term outcomes. *Adoption & Fostering*, 38(4), pp.374-385.

Rutter, M., 1991. *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*. London: Penguin Books.

Ryan, G., 2018. Introduction to positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. *Nurse Researcher*, 25(4), pp.14-20.

Ryan, R. and Deci, E., 2000. Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), pp.68- 78.

Ryan, R. and La Guardia, J., 2000. What is being optimized?: Self-determination theory and basic psychological needs. *American Psychological Association*, pp. 145-172.

Sachdev, D., 2015. Can I tell you about adoption? A guide for friends, family and professionals. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 33(1), pp.64-65.

Sachdev, P., 1991. Reunions between Adoptees and Birth Parents: The Adoptees' Experience. *Social Work, Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice and Program*(71(1), pp.56-68.

Sachdev, P., 1992. Adoption reunion and after: A study of the search process and experience of adoptees. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy. Practice and Program*, 71(1), pp.53-68.

Saiz and Main, 2004. A Comparison Of The Early Recollections Of Adults Who Were Adopted As Children And Adults Who Were Not Adopted. *Journal Of Individual Psychiatry*, 60 (2) pp.175-190.

Sanchez-Burks, J., Nisbett, R. and Ybarra, O., 2000. Cultural Styles, Relational Schemas and Prejudice Against Outgroups. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2000(1), pp.G1-G6.

Sandelowski, M., 2008. Justifying qualitative research. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 31(3), pp.193-195.

Saunders, R., Jacobvitz, D., Zaccagnino, M., Beverung, L. and Hazen, N., 2011. Pathways to earned-security: The role of alternative support figures. *Attachment & Human Development*, 13(4), pp.403-420.

Schofield, G. and Beek, M., 2005. Providing a secure base: Parenting children in longterm foster family care. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(1), pp.3-26.

Schultheiss, D. and Blustein, D., 1994. Contributions of Family Relationship Factors to the Identity Formation Process. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 73(2), pp.159-166.

Scirp.org. 2019. *Randolph, J. (2009) A Guide To Writing The Dissertation Literature Review. Practical Assessment, Research, And Evaluation*, 14. - References - Scientific Research Publishing. [online] Available at: [https://www.scirp.org/\(S\(351jmbntvnsjt1aadkposzje\)\)/reference/ReferencesPapers.asp?ReferenceID=1915668](https://www.scirp.org/(S(351jmbntvnsjt1aadkposzje))/reference/ReferencesPapers.asp?ReferenceID=1915668) [Accessed 16 December 2019].

Scotland's Adoption Register, 2018. *Scotland's Adoption Register 2018*. [online] Available at: <<https://scotlands-adoption-register.s3-eu-west1.amazonaws.com/sarAnnual-Report-2017-2018-1.pdf>> [Accessed 1 July 2020].

Scotland's Adoption Register, 2020. [online] Scotlands-adoption-register.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com. Available at: <https://scotlands-adoption-register.s3-euwest1.amazonaws.com/sar-Annual-Report-2017-2018-1.pdf> [Accessed 1st July 2020].

Scott, J. and Glaser, B., 1971. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. *American Sociological Review*, 36(2), p.335.

Seglow, J., Pringle, M. and Wedge, P., 1973. Growing Up Adopted. *Psychological Medicine*, 3(2), pp.261-261.

- Sharma, A., McGue, M. and Benson, P., 1996. The emotional and behavioral adjustment of United States adopted adolescents: Part I. An overview. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 18(1-2), pp.83-100.
- Shaver, P. and Mikulincer, M., 2004. Attachment in the later years: A commentary. *Attachment & Human Development*, 6(4), pp.451-464.
- Shireman, J., 1987. A Second Chance for Families: Follow-up of a Program to Prevent Foster Care. By Mary Ann Jones. Washington, D. C.: Child Welfare League of America, 1986. 161 paper and Identity Formation in the Adopted Adolescent: The Delaware Family Study. By Leslie M. Stein. *Social Work*, 32(2), pp.173-174.
- Silverman, D., 1993. Research Methodology. *Social Work Research and Abstracts*, 29(2), pp.73-76.
- Silverman, D., 2013. *Doing Qualitative Research*. 4th ed. London: Sage.
- Silverman, P., Campbell, L. and Patti, P., 1994. Reunions between Adoptees and Birth Parents: The Adoptive Parents' View. *Social Work*, 39(5), pp.542-549.
- Silverman, P., Campbell, L., Patti, P. and Style, C., 1988. Reunions between Adoptees and Birth Parents: The Birth Parents' Experience. *Social Work*, 33(6), pp.523-528.
- Silverstein and Kaplan, 2020. *Grief Silverstein Article - American Adoption Congress*.
 [online] Americanadoptioncongress.org. Available at:
https://www.americanadoptioncongress.org/grief_silverstein_article.php
 [Accessed 29 August 2020].
- Silverstein, D. and Kaplan, S., 1982. *Lifelong Issues In Adoption*. [online] Available at:
http://www.adopting.org/silveroaze/html/lifelong_issues_in_adoption
 [Accessed 6 August 2016].

Simpson, M., Timm, H. and McCubbin, H., 1981. Adoptees in Search of Their Past: Policy Induced Strain on Adoptive Families and Birth Parents. *Family Relations*, 30(3), p.427.

Skinner-Drawz, B., Wrobel, G., Grotevant, H. and Von Korff, L., 2011. The Role of Adoption Communicative Openness in Information Seeking Among Adoptees From Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood. *Journal of Family Communication*, 11(3), pp.181-197.

Smith, J., 2003. *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide To Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Smith, K. and Biley, F., 1997. Understanding grounded theory: principles and evaluation. *Nurse Researcher*, 4(3), pp.17-30.

Smith, M., Williamson, A., Walsh, D. and McCartney, G., 2016. Is there a link between childhood adversity, attachment style and Scotland's excess mortality? Evidence, challenges and potential research. *BMC Public Health*, 16(1).

Smithson, J., 2000. Using and analysing focus groups: Limitations and possibilities. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 3(2), pp.103-119.

Smyer, M., Gatz, M., Simi, N. and Pedersen, N., 1998. Childhood Adoption: LongTerm Effects in Adulthood. *Psychiatry*, 61(3), pp.191-205.

Sobol, M. and Cardiff, J., 1983. A Sociopsychological Investigation of Adult Adoptees' Search for Birth Parents. *Family Relations*, 32(4), p.477.

Social Service Review, 1951. Maternal Care and Mental Health. John Bowlby. 25(3), pp.423-424.

Social Work, 1991. Reunions between Adoptees and Birth Patents: The Adoptees' Experience.

Sorosky, A., Baran, A. and Pannor, R., 1975. Identity conflicts in adoptees. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 45(1), pp.18-27.

SSSC.uk.com. 2020. *SSSC Codes Of Practice - Scottish Social Services Council*. [online] Available at: <https://www.sssc.uk.com/the-scottish-socialservicescouncil/sssc-codes-of-practice/> [Accessed 18 August 2020].

Statistics, P., 2020. *Statistics*. [online] Careinspectorate.com. Available at: <https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/publications-statistics/19public/statistics> [Accessed 11 June 2020].

Steele, H., 2008. Day care and attachment re-visited. *Attachment & Human Development*, 10(3), pp.223-223.

Stern, P., 1980. Grounded Theory Methodology: Its Uses and Processes. *Image*, 12(1), pp.20-23.

Stets, J. and Burke, P., 2000. Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), p.224.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J., 1997. *Grounded Theory In Practice*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Stryker, S. and Burke, P., 2000. The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), p.284.

Sturgess, w. and Selwyn, J., 2000. *Supporting The Placements Of Children Adopted Out Of Care - Wendy Sturgess, Julie Selwyn, 2007*. [online] Sage Journals .Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1359104507071051> [Accessed 29 August 2020].

Suddaby, R., 2006. From the Editors: What Grounded Theory is Not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), pp.633-642.

Suzuki, H. and Tomoda, A., 2015. Roles of attachment and self-esteem: impact of early life stress on depressive symptoms among Japanese institutionalized children. *BMC Psychiatry*, 15(1).

Swandt, T., 1994. *Constructivist Interpretivist. Approach To Human Inquiry. Handbook Of Qualitative Research. Denzin And Lincoln (Eds) The Landscape Of Qualitative Research: Theories And Issues*. London: Sage.

Swandt, T., 1999. On Understanding Understanding. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5(4), pp.451-464.

Tan, H., Wilson, A. and Olver, I., 2009. Ricoeur's Theory of Interpretation: An Instrument for Data Interpretation in Hermeneutic Phenomenology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(4), pp.1-15.

Tavory, I. and Timmermans, S., 2014. *Abductive Analysis. Theorizing Qualitative Research*. London: The University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, P., Rietzschel, J., Danquah, A. and Berry, K., 2014. Changes in attachment representations during psychological therapy. *Psychotherapy Research*, 25(2), pp.222-238.

Thornberg, 2019. [online] Available at:
<https://www.academia.edu/2063552/Thornberg_R._2012_.Informed_grounded_theory._Scandinavian_Journal_of_Educational_Research_56_243-259>
[Accessed 16 December 2019].

Thornberg, R., 2012. Informed Grounded Theory. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 56(3), pp.243-259.

Timmons, M., 1998. Expanding epistemology. *Social Epistemology*, 12(3), pp.253-265.

Tizard, B., 1991. Intercountry Adoption: A Review of the Evidence. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 32(5), pp.743-756.

Treacher, A. and Katz, I., 2000. *The Dynamics Of Adoption*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Treacher, A. and Katz, I., 2001. Narrative and Fantasy in Adoption. *Adoption & Fostering*, 25(3), pp.20-28.

Trinder, L., 2000. The Rights and Wrongs of Post-Adoption Intermediary Services for Birth Relatives. *Adoption & Fostering*, 24(3), pp.19-25.

Triseliotis, J., 1973. *In Search Of Origins*. London, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Triseliotis, J., 1985. Adoption with Contact. *Adoption & Fostering*, 9(4), pp.19-24.

TRISELIOTIS, J. 1991. Maintaining the Links in Adoption. *The British journal of social work*, 1991-08, Vol.21 (4), p.401-414

Triseliotis, J. P.; Feast, J.; Kyle, F.; 2005. The adoption triangle revisited : a study of adoption, search and reunion experiences British Association for Adoption & Fostering.

Urquhart, C. and Fernández, W., 2013. Using Grounded Theory Method in Information Systems: The Researcher as Blank Slate and Other Myths. *Journal of Information Technology*, 28(3), pp.224-236.

Urquhart, C., 2012. *Grounded Theory For Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.

Urquhart, C., Lehmann, H. and Myers, M., 2009. Putting the 'theory' back into grounded theory: guidelines for grounded theory studies in information systems. *Information Systems Journal*, 20(4), pp.357-381.

Verrier, N., 1997. The primal wound: a transpersonal view of trauma, addiction, and growth. *Choice Reviews Online*, 35(02), pp.35-1210-35-1210.

Vignoles, V., Swartz, S. and Luyck, K., 2011. Introduction: Towards an Integrative View of Identity. *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*,

Von Korff, L. and Grotevant, H., 2011. Contact in adoption and adoptive identity formation: The mediating role of family conversation. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25(3), pp.393-401.

Wahyuni, D., 2012. The research design maze: Understanding paradigms, cases, methods and methodologies. *Journal of Applied Management Accounting Research*, 10(1), pp.69-80.

Waterman, A., 1999. Identity, the Identity Statuses, and Identity Status Development: A Contemporary Statement. *Developmental Review*, 19(4), pp.591-621.

Wegar, K., 2000. Adoption, Family Ideology, and Social Stigma: Bias in Community Attitudes, Adoption Research, and Practice. *Family Relations*, 49(4), pp.363-369.

White, K., 2015. Placement Discontinuity for Older Children and Adolescents Who Exit Foster Care Through Adoption Or Guardianship: A Systematic Review. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 33(4), pp.377-394.

Whittemore, R., Chase, S. and Mandle, C., 2001. Validity in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 11(4), pp.522-537.

Wichmann, S., 2011. Self-Determination Theory: The Importance of Autonomy to Well-Being Across Cultures. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 50(1), pp.16-26.

Wilson, G., 2011. Evidencing Reflective Practice in Social Work Education: Theoretical Uncertainties and Practical Challenges. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(1), pp.154-172.

Wright, C., Clark, G., Rock, A. and Coventry, W., 2017. Intolerance of uncertainty mediates the relationship between adult attachment and worry. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 112, pp.97-102.

Yvonne Feilzer, M., 2009. Doing Mixed Methods Research Pragmatically: Implications for the Rediscovery of Pragmatism as a Research Paradigm. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(1), pp.6-16.

APPENDIX 1

To whom it may concern,

I am currently working towards my PHD at The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, and am writing to request your assistance with my research. I am undertaking primary research with adult adoptees and my topic of research is '*What is the potential impact of engagement with birth families for adult adoptees?*' The aim is to examine the following three areas:
What are the motivating factors for adult adoptees in seeking (re) - engagement with birth families?
What are the benefits of re-engagement?
What are the risks of re-engagement?

It has long been recognised that for all those in the 'adoption triangle', adoption is a lifelong event and the need to understand the consequences of re-engagement between adoptees and their birth families is evident.

This study aims to examine potential psychological risks for adoptees following contact with birth families, and also long-term benefits in terms of resolving potential long standing psychological and emotional difficulties.

Of central importance to this study is that it is the voice of the adoptees themselves that is heard. Many previous studies have focused on the views of adoptive parents or also increasingly, that of birth families. It is the adoptees themselves though that are required to straddle both worlds, that of their birth families and that of their adoptive families and it is from them that the most valuable insights come.

In collecting the necessary data, I am seeking the participation of adult adoptees over the age of 21 who have made contact with adoption agencies to access support regarding contact with birth families. Participation would consist of face-to-face interviews lasting up to 1 hour's duration. Once collected, data will be transcribed, and key themes analysed. In protecting anonymity and confidentiality, no identifying details or names will be referred to in the research.

This study has received ethical approval from RGU. To ensure that confidential information regarding the contact details of potential participants is not shared, I would suggest that if participants are identified, an information sheet, containing my contact details could be passed to them for them to make contact with me.

Thank-you for taking the time to read this. If you feel that you would be able to assist in identifying potential participants please feel free to contact me and I can give you more information on my research and my own

professional and personal background that led me to undertake research in this field,

Kind regards,
Clare Hancock-Fraser
Senior Lecturer
The Robert Gordon University

APPENDIX 2

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear.....,

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research study. Before you agree to proceed, I would like to explain the nature of the study and what it will involve.

The aim of this study is to gather your thoughts, views and experiences of (re)engagement with your birth family. Of central importance to this study is that it is the voice of the adoptees themselves that is heard. I would like to interview you for up to one hour, and with your agreement, audio record our conversation.

This study will form part of my submission for a PHD for which I am studying at The Robert Gordon University.

Thank you for your interest in this study.

Consent form

I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that participation involves attending an interview of approximately one hour.

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand that in any work based on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be directly in academic and published work.

I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a secure place by Clare Hancock-Fraser until after the exam board.

I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher

APPENDIX 3

Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me about the circumstances of your adoption?

(How old were you? What year was it? what were the reasons for you being adopted?)

2. What, if anything, did you know about your birth family as you were growing up?

What information did you have? How much communicative openness was there with your adoptive family regarding your adoption and your birth family? Was there any form of contact with your adoptive family?)

3. Has direct contact with your birth family been (re) - established? If so, how did this come about?

(Who instigated contact? What contact has there been, has it been face to face, phone, electronic or letter? Was it facilitated by a 3rd party? Did you receive support? What was your experience of this? Has it been ongoing contact or a one off?

Which members of your birth family have been involved?)

4. If you initiated contact, what was your motivation for doing this? *(What did you want to happen at/following contact? Were you motivated by curiosity, medical reasons, a desire to fill in gaps, a desire to establish a relationship, or other reasons?)*

4. If contact with birth family was made, were there any benefits that you could identify?

(Were meaningful relationships formed? Was uncertainty reduced? Do you have a clearer sense of who you are and where you belong?)

5. If contact with birth family was made, were there any negatives that you could identify?

(Problematic family relationships, issues such as alcohol, drugs or domestic violence? Revisiting of issues of trauma and abuse? Feelings of disappointment and rejection?)

6. Overall, do you feel that this was a positive or a negative experience. Have your views on this changed over time?

7. If contact with birth family wasn't established what was the reason for this?

(Your decision? Birth family decision? Difficulties in tracing family? Any other reason? Future plans for contact?)

9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX 4

TRANSCRIPTION AND CODING PARTICIPANT 6 PP.1-10

<p>years ago so I found out from her - from the horses mouth.</p>	<p>Gaining factual information →</p>	<p>RE-ENGAGING Text - line by line Participant 6</p>			<p>Missing-pieces</p>
<p>She had 2 children before me and she fell out with her husband and she didn't feel that she could handle another one. You know, 3 children in 3 years</p>	<p>Reason for adoption - Mother unable to cope with another child.</p>	<p>SEEKING AND SEARCHING Circumstances of adoption. Reasons – understanding of BM situation</p>	<p>She had 2 children before me and she fell out with her husband and she didn't feel that she could handle another one. You know, 3</p>	<p>No anger - Acceptance</p>	<p>Missing-pieces understanding why adoption happened is a significant missing-piece that mitigates negative internalised feelings</p>
			<p>children in 3 years</p>		
<p>So understand that her reason why she don't it was because she felt she couldn't handle it.</p>	<p>Stated view of participant that he understood the reason why</p>	<p>SEEKING AND SEARCHING Reasons for adoption – understanding of BM situation</p>		<p>Understanding , empathy</p>	<p>Missing pieces - Challenging the negative messages</p>
<p>I know I was adopted at 6 months so I she left in the hospital and I don't know where I she for 6 months.</p>	<p>Lack of information about what happened pre-adoption.</p>	<p>SEARCHING AND SEEKING Complete gaps in early years history. What does that do to you?</p>	<p>"I don't know where I was for 6 months"</p>	<p>Confusion and uncertainty</p>	<p>Missing pieces 275</p>

TEXT	INITIAL CODE	CATEGORY FOCUSED CODE DIMENSIONS	IN VIVO CODE	INTERPRETATION OF EMOTIONAL CONTENT	
it was quite in a way.	Participant's view of AP's - positive comment	SEARCHING AND SEEKING BUT ALSO ADOPTION NARRATIVE All about others feelings	So it was quite heroic in a way	Admiration and respectful of decision	Missing pieces About others but own internalised feelings
So they adopted me.	Firm statement made about adoption	ADOPTION NARRATIVE	So they adopted me		Control – things done to him
3 or 4 horses old in **** then out to ****	Biographical details known post adoption. Change in circumstances post adoption.	SEARCHING AND SEEKING			Missing pieces Biographical they is important – it is part of the first chapter of the book
	Some memory of being told at a young age. Strong statement about being described as 'Special'	NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION Told was special aka different	I think I was told belonging – claimed old at same time "special" was different – tension between these 2 things when I was about 5 or 6 that I was "special"- The "S" word	Uncomfortable — 'special' label	Belonging and not

<p>of that?) Erm its' hard to explain because it's all chemicals and feelings that you are (What trying to put into words.</p>	<p>Feelings and thoughts about having been adopted. Hard to articulate - indefinable elements The are felt old can't be described.</p>	<p>NARRATIVE ^{belonging} claimed Hard to articulate – people don't have the words. Something very central though – at the core</p>	<p>"...it's all chemicals and feelings that you are trying to put into words"</p>	<p>Searching for meaning</p>	<p>MISSING PIECES But hard to articulate</p>
<p>always how I had eyes and hands and and body but I reckon core gap would have been filled by pheromones and stuff</p>	<p>Thoughts about how he is who he is. Emphasis on ^{reason} physical aspects of being</p>	<p>NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION Trying hard to make sense of it</p>		<p>respectful ^{situation} meaning and identity. Lost</p>	
<p>am trying rationalise feelings</p>	<p>Aware of the difference between what is rational and what is experienced and felt.</p>	<p>NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION Feels a need to rationalise – but why?</p>		<p>Struggling to understand what it means</p>	<p>MISSING PIECES Thinks can only come from rational thoughts words</p>

I reckon because there must have been a gap in my emotional development left at a young age	Awareness of having missed out on something The "5" very early stage. Some sense of reason impact of this going forwards	NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION A gap in emotional development			MISSING PIECES What are they?
So then when I sort of get a bit of 'sentience' about 5 or 6, when I was told that I sort of still wondered about life obviously.	Being told things I didn't remove questions and general uncertainty about life	NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION MOTIVATION TO SEARCH Comes from sentience – subjective awareness		Feelings of uncertainty wondering	MISSING PIECES f the age of sentience
Where I came from, perfectly natural, but I reckon the other people in the class, have never between to jump that, you know...so	Wondering where he is from Feelings of difference from classmates who have that certainty that he doesn't	NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION In some ways these 2 categories are very close MOTIVATION TO SEARCH Difference	...but I reckon the other people in the class never had to jump that, you know	Uncertainty. Feeling tension	MISSING PIECES That other people didn't have
felt different	into of being different from others	NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION Feeling, perception	"I felt different"	Feeling tension	MISSING PIECES Gaps in history, emotional development, emotional connections

don't know if they are meant to dad, information	Not having proper they ^{uncertainty} the norm. Institutionalised secrecy.	SEARCHING AND SEEKING Institutionalised/ socialised secrecy		Absence of attention as his rights. Passive acceptance	MISSING PIECES Social construct. CONTROL Even AP's, might not have had control
being things have changedI think going back then people had less information. It was older,streamlined.	Lack of information ^{reason} norm Things wrong , kept 'simple'	NARRATIVE OF ADOPTION AND SEARCHING AND NOT SEARCHING Society had control over information	I think things have changed...I think going back then people had less information. It was more streamlined	Encouraged to be accepting of situation	MISSING PIECES You had no right to information. Society and those in power in CONTROL
(Why did you want information?) You had putting out him . people tendrils aren't you?	Emotional needs seeking a way to be met.	MOTIVATION FOR SEARCHING SEEKING AND SEARCHING A sense of needing to do it. Something within. Looking for emotional connection	You are putting out your emotional tendrils aren't you?	Searching. Looking for connection.	BELONGING AND BELONGING MISSING PIECES Reaching out
Seeking answers ^{to} these questions that you dad, got.	Needing they - sense of practical ^{acceptance} turned intangible	MOTIVATION FOR SEARCHING Seeking answers to questions		Searching. Looking for certainty	MISSING PIECES
chains they weren't really pressing	Lack of urgency at this stage (what age?)	SEARCHING AND SEEKING Dimension - when? Comes and goes		went attending to ^{tuation} needs	MISSING PIECES not always urgent

APPENDIX 5

REFLECTIVE LOG MARCH 2017

Reflection on interview with P 28.9.17

This interview took place at RGU and so felt like a very different experience to previous interviews. In general I felt less prepared mentally and less focused on the task.

It did not feel like a very easy interview. The participant was quite reticent. I am undecided until I transcribe the interview whether this was because he had such a straightforward journey through the reengagement process or whether it is just his style of communication. Answers were not expanded upon and I found myself having to probe a lot for more depth to the answers.

Do participants at the group have more to say and are more reflective in their answers because they have experienced difficulties...hence why they have made contact with Barnardos, or because they have had the opportunity to reflect more on the process?

The participant focused on the positive relationships that had been formed with his birth family. The motivation for making contact was presented in a very matter of fact manner. He did state that he felt 'isolated, that he didn't belong, that something was missing'. This is significant but he didn't want to elaborate on these feelings.

He alluded to difficulties in adoptive family relationships but despite some gentle probing from myself, did not want to elaborate.

I am unclear what I will get from this interview. I feel that I talked too much in an attempt to put him at ease and to get more detailed information.

APPENDIX 6

MEMO – 20TH JANUARY 2020.

Reflection of process of coding

My understanding of the coding process and the reasons for it is developing. I understand that earlier coding is more thematic analysis rather than growing the theory and seeing emergent theory come from the data. I was moving too quickly to concepts and theory already known. This brings into the discussion the role of extant theory and the dangers of focusing on it too much.

I understand now that I need to focus much more identifying theoretical categories and their dimensions and the multiple understandings of words and phrases, social and cultural context. Sometimes difficult to differentiate between open codes and focused codes – does this matter? Do I go straight to focused codes as I am instinctively identifying initial codes as I present the transcription in the table?

I need to ensure that I don't move too quickly past focused codes. Concepts need to be grounded in the data.

Need to re-visit these as I become more skilled at coding.

Overview of Interview 6 (following revisit of audio and transcript) This was a challenging interview. It is evident from the transcript that there was a lack of structure. Our discussion brought up difficult issues for P 6? . Grief following the recent death of his mother and being excluded from the lives of his children. Struggles emotionally and cognitively. I needed to take some control of the discussion and allow him to talk about these issues. This brought up ethical and

professional challenges – there was a therapeutic element to the interview.

Themes of the impact of adoption on his well-being were evident but much less so than his desire to resolve identity issues through reengagement with BF. Did the grief that he was experiencing impact on his sense of identity? Muddying the waters. What it does perhaps show at a very basic level is that these interviews are not a series of 'happy stories' where re-engagement with BF is not the end of the story.

Key themes and concepts from this interview centre of connection and not being connected. Searching for missing pieces. Knowing that he belonged to something else and needing to belong to something else. The focus is on BF and not AF. His needing to understand something about why he was adopted, why he was relinquished, leads to thoughts about rejection. If the BP's had no control, if socially and culturally they had no choice, or if they did have choice did this lead to feelings of being cast out from this new family that was formed, of being the one that didn't belong.

He feels a desire and a need to belong to something bigger, less insular, less controlled.

Looking for physical things that connect him. Connection is with BF and not AF.

Claiming identity of adoptee. This is where he finds common ground – sense of who he is. Not finding it as yet through re-engaging but finds it through adoptive identity and meeting others with similar experiences.

Still in the middle of prolonged process of re-engaging. No chance to reflect yet, many unanswered questions including what is his place in the BF. What is he to them? Many unanswered questions.

Belonging:

Where does our sense of belonging come from? Shared experience, genetic ties, likeness, attachment bonds, cultural ties?

It is a basic human need, the same as the need for food and shelter.

Belonging brings acceptance.

Feelings of not belonging -being outside, can bring about loss of selfcontrol.

To belong is to matter.

Why is belonging to family so important? "need to belong" the pervasive human drive to form positive, close attachments. But what if those attachments are formed with the AF? Is there still a need to belong to the BF?

Is it possible to have positive relationships, thereby satisfying a general need for positive social relationships, but this does not guarantee the subject experience of belonging?

Belonging brings us meaning in life. It is the attainment of unconditional bonds.

Cultural dimension of family and familial bonds – is it relevant to explore these or is this an unnecessary tangent?

Belonging comes from shared understandings. Also has the dimension of owning – things/people also belong to you.

Family belonging encompasses feelings of inclusion within one's own family – being understood, being paid attention to. Something deeply rooted.

Feelings of belonging are conceptually distinct from the quality of an individual's relationship with each family member.

Family is something that is 'there', that you grow to be 'part of'.

Why is he not the author of his own story and other interviewees seem to be? This needs to be explored through different data sets. Constant comparison may shed light on this.

Need to also compare with visual representation of first reactions on interview – are the main issues the same or different. Explain....

Biography– My impression is that P6 has had challenges in life. Lives in social housing, doesn't work, alluded to drug related problems outwith interview. Evidence of some drug-related issues. Does this have relevance in terms of how he sees himself and his experiences? Looking for solutions for his own life circumstances.

General Reflection

At the start of the research I was looking for issues around possible negative impacts of re-engaging with troubled families due to the changing nature of adoption – coming from child protection measures rather than through baby's being relinquished. The sample that I have accessed are older than originally anticipated and all have been relinquished as babies. What has struck me, and what I didn't expect was the impact that adoption has on adult adoptees per se. The reengagement part of the picture is still really important as a focus of my research, but of equal importance is the issues of identity that comes from being adopted. Not necessarily a representative sample as these are on the whole people that have accessed support but certainly evidences a need in this population, a need that is hard to access support for.

What am I bringing from my professional and personal experiences to the interview and the analysis? Understanding and knowledge of issues of identity, belonging. He feels lost, not claimed by anyone, trying to hold onto any connections available. 'Fantasy' of BF, what it might be, how he might be claimed. Concern about the impact that life's experiences have had on him. Limited his life choices and impacted negatively on emotional well-being. He seems hurt and fragile. My own desire to make the interview a positive therapeutic experience. Gathering information but also validating his feelings and him as a person. Giving him full attention. Trying to somehow compensate for the sadness and feelings of regret he has.

Key issues

Categories identified and to be explored further: Family connections, being the outsider, missing pieces, belonging and not belonging, Needing to belong to BF, not AF, internalisation of self-concept from reasons why adopted, Personal identity and where it comes from. Who has control? (everyone but adoptee), searching for identity from BF. Does he need to 'belong' to them for this to happen or is information and understanding enough?

Appendix 7

CONCEPTUAL MEMO – 18TH JAN 2017

(need to annotate to specific data sets and memos)

Memo following coding and initial analysis of 4 interviews.

The following categories have emerged:

1. Motivation for searching
2. Feelings during childhood
3. Relationships with family during childhood
4. Sense of self/belonging during childhood and pre – searching
5. Process of searching and re-engaging
6. Relationships with birth family post re-engagement
7. Sense of self/identity and belonging post engagement

These are some of the emergent dimensions:

1. Curiosity (about self and also what happened), feeling of not belonging, wanting to belong to something.
2. Disconnected, not belonging, happy and loved but something missing, love not unconditional, Loss? How much is this relevant.
3. Secure, insecure attachment in adulthood.
4. Pieces missing, not -belonging, sense of difference,
5. Identity through connection or...
6. Complete, pieces missing, secure in all aspects of life
7. New relationships - Complicated, excitement at first, but hard to sustain

Some of the dimensions cut across a number of categories, eg... 'feeling disconnected and not belonging. This is OK though as it indicates the different emphasis and contexts that the interviewees see them as.

Narrative – the narrative at the start of this study was focused on the impact of re-engagement and possible re-exposure to trauma.

Emergent theory...?

“In search of missing pieces – the edge of the jigsaw”

The significance of ‘visual’ representations?

What I hadn’t expected to find was the emotional impact of having been adopted through adult years and how much this impacted on people’s lives, sense of self and relationships. This has become a major theme of the study in itself, aside from the impact of re-engagement and could warrant a study all of its own. I had a vague notion of there being negative consequences of being adopted, but nowhere near the extent that was expressed during the study.

How representative is this in that these are people that have sought to search and re-engage? Are there many others who don’t have these issues? In line with GTM – not looking for emergent theory to be generalised.

None of the interviewees made comment about the differences in their lives with BF even though they were apparent to me. Seeking areas of commonality rather than difference.

Where does GSD fit in? Only one person.

Tentative theoretical categories:

Adoption impacts on identity

Adoption leads to insecure attachment

Re-engagement is an attempt to resolve identity issues

Re-engagement impacts on identity in a positive way

More positive and complete sense of self leads to more secure attachment behaviour

Lack of self determination as a result of being adopted.

Searching and re-engagement leads to increased sense of self determination

Does SD lead to more secure attachment?

In terms of method, I am working through the concept of theoretical sampling.

It seems appropriate when examining the data from the perspective of people's personal narratives of adoption, to consider the impact of the Adoption Support Group that all but 1 Participant had, attended or were still attending.

How useful were initial codes – did they say much more than text? Maybe because I put text in table. Either the same or descriptive. Is this because I am quickly moving to focused codes/categories and theoretical concepts? Still useful though to ensure I don't miss anything. Battle with methods – in part to meet fulfilment of PHD but more than that responsibility to do justice to the data.