

# **The Transition to First-Time Fatherhood Through Adoption**

Susie Gordon-Jones

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of  
East London for the Degree of Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

May 2018

Word count: 28942

## **Abstract**

Becoming a parent for the first time is a significant transitional life event (Johns & Belsky, 2007). The transition to fatherhood is starting to receive more attention in the research in the context of changing societal attitudes towards fatherhood. Becoming an adoptive father is different in many tangible ways to biological parenthood and yet this is a neglected area of research in the United Kingdom. This study sought to explore the experiences of men in the process of becoming fathers for the first time through domestic adoption.

Semi-structured interviews were completed with eleven adoptive fathers regarding their experience of the adoption process and early first-time fatherhood. A thematic analysis was conducted. Four key themes were found: 'Adopting was a challenging time', 'Becoming an adoptive father requires adjustments', 'Finding ways to cope' and 'The rewards of adoption'. A number of challenges were experienced across the time period including the distress of turning down children for adoption as well as being turned down themselves and a lack of power in the process. This research also highlighted the significant adjustments men felt they needed to make throughout the process and after placement, predominantly in regards to approaches to parenthood. Contact with other adoptive parents was highly valued by the fathers. The findings are discussed in relation to discourses around masculinity and fatherhood. Clinical and policy implications are explored from a clinical psychology perspective.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would firstly and most importantly like to thank the men who took part in my research. I feel honoured to have heard their stories which they shared with me so generously. I would also like to thank my previous employers for their enthusiasm in my research and help in recruitment. Thank you to my Director of Studies, Dr Paula Magee, for her help in developing a research project in an area I am passionate about. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their support and interest as well as providing plenty of distractions. Finally, thank you to Seb for having faith in me when mine waivered and for his invaluable support every step of the way, whether he was near or far.

## Table of Contents

<b>The Transition to First-Time Fatherhood Through Adoption .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Definitions .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1. Overview .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2. The Transition to Parenthood .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.2.1. The transition to biological fatherhood .....	2
<b>1.3. Adoptive Parenthood .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.3.1. Overview of Adoption in the UK.....	5
1.3.2. The Transition to Adoptive Parenthood.....	8
<b>1.4. The Transition to Adoptive Fatherhood.....</b>	<b>16</b>
1.4.1. Review of the literature on the transition to first-time adoptive fatherhood .	17
<b>1.5. Research Questions.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>2. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.1. Overview .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.2. Epistemology .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.3. Methodological Approach.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2.4. Procedure .....</b>	<b>31</b>
2.4.1. Recruitment.....	31
2.4.2. Inclusion Criteria .....	31
2.4.3. Demographic Details of Participants .....	33
2.4.4. Data Collection .....	33
2.4.5. Data analysis.....	35
<b>2.5. Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>36</b>
2.5.1. Ethical Approval .....	36
2.5.2. Informed Consent .....	36
2.5.3. Confidentiality and Anonymity.....	37
2.5.4. Managing Distress .....	37
2.5.5. Research Safety .....	38
2.5.6. Supervision .....	38
2.5.7. Dissemination.....	38
<b>2.6. Reflexivity.....</b>	<b>38</b>
2.6.1. Researcher Position.....	38
2.6.2. Reflective Diary .....	39
<b>3. Results.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>3.1. Overview .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>3.2. Adopting was a challenging time.....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.2.1. Feeling powerless.....	41
3.2.2. Feeling responsible for children’s loss .....	45
3.2.3. Difficulties developing paternal relationships.....	46
<b>3.3. Becoming an adoptive father requires adjustments .....</b>	<b>49</b>
3.3.1. Adjusting to a different way of having a family.....	49
3.3.2. Adjusting to unexpected challenges .....	53
3.3.3. Adjusting parenting scripts.....	56
<b>3.4. Finding ways to cope.....</b>	<b>58</b>

3.4.1.	Formal support not meeting their needs .....	58
3.4.2.	Protecting from emotional pain .....	60
3.4.3.	Making sense of their children .....	62
3.4.4.	Valuing shared experiences in peer support .....	63
<b>3.5.</b>	<b>The rewards of adoption .....</b>	<b>67</b>
3.5.1.	Personal transformations .....	67
3.5.2.	Strengthening relationships .....	68
3.5.3.	The joy of parenting .....	69
<b>4.</b>	<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>4.1.</b>	<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>4.2.</b>	<b>Situating the analysis .....</b>	<b>71</b>
4.2.1.	Adopting was a challenging time .....	72
4.2.2.	Becoming an adoptive father requires adjustments .....	75
4.2.3.	Finding ways to cope .....	78
4.2.4.	The rewards of adoption .....	80
4.2.5.	Reassessing family stress theory .....	81
<b>4.3.</b>	<b>Implications .....</b>	<b>81</b>
4.3.1.	Future research .....	81
4.3.2.	Clinical practice .....	82
<b>4.4.</b>	<b>Critical Review .....</b>	<b>86</b>
4.4.1.	Limitations of the methodology .....	86
4.4.2.	Sample .....	86
4.4.3.	Quality of the research .....	87
4.4.4.	Researcher reflections .....	89
<b>4.5.</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>References .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>6.1.</b>	<b>Appendix A: Participant Information letter .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>6.2.</b>	<b>Appendix B: Participant consent form .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>6.3.</b>	<b>Appendix C: Debrief Letter .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>6.4.</b>	<b>Appendix D: Interview Schedule .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>6.5.</b>	<b>Appendix E: UEL Confirmation Of Ethics Approval .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>6.6.</b>	<b>Appendix F: Application For Research Ethics Approval Form .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>6.7.</b>	<b>Appendix G: Change Of Title Confirmation .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>6.8.</b>	<b>Appendix H: Example Transcript Extract .....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>6.9.</b>	<b>Appendix I: Coding manuel .....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>6.10.</b>	<b>Appendix J: Mind maps .....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>6.11.</b>	<b>Appendix K: Reflective Diary Extract .....</b>	<b>136</b>

## Definitions

I have used some commonly used terms in adoption literature as follows:

**Adoption Order:** the court order which gives prospective adopters full parental responsibility for the child.

**Family Finding** (also sometimes referred to as matching in adoption literature): the process of identifying a suitable adoptive family for a child. This term is also used in this thesis to refer to the period of time and process after which the prospective adopters have been approved and are waiting for them to be matched with a child or children.

**Placement:** the initial period in which a child with a placement order moves to live with prospective adopters before the adoption becomes legal.

**Placement Order:** the court order which gives permission for a local authority to place a child with prospective adopters.

**Prospective adopters:** adults who have been assessed and approved to become adopters but who have not legally become the parent yet. This term can therefore be used to mean prospective adopters who do or do not yet have children placed with them for adoption.

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. Overview**

In this chapter, I will introduce the concept of the transition to parenthood as a multidisciplinary research area and consider issues pertinent to fatherhood. I will then summarise the context and processes of adoption in the UK before considering the transition to parenthood by adoption. Finally, I will summarise the findings of a literature review conducted to determine the current research into the transition to adoptive fatherhood.

## **1.2. The Transition to Parenthood**

Becoming a parent for the first time is understood to be a major transition period in the life of an individual and of a couple requiring a period of adjustment (Belsky, Lang, & Rovine, 1985; Johns & Belsky, 2007). The field benefits from multidisciplinary interest including sociology, where it originated as a field of research, as well as family therapy and developmental, social and clinical psychology. A full inspection of the expansive research and theory development around the transition to parenthood is beyond the scope of this chapter. Of importance is the consistent finding that becoming a parent for the first time is associated with increased risk of declines in individual psychological well-being (Cowan & Cowan, 1995) and couple relationships (Demo & Cox, 2000).

Informed by systems theory, the family life cycle model conceptualises the transition to parenthood as one of the main stages in the family life cycle during which time stress in the family increases whilst it rebalances (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). The family is seen as a system comprising of subsystems which become more complex and greater in number with the arrival of a baby.

The transition to parenthood is also understood in regards to changes in roles for the individual and couple. For example, social role transition theory postulates that perceived role strain determines how the transition to parenthood is experienced and that balancing multiple roles leads to greater strain (Burr, Leigh, Day, & Constantine, 1979).

Family stress theory (Patterson, 1983; Patterson & Garwick, 1994) posits that the transition is impacted by the interaction between the specific challenges the new parents face and the factors which facilitate the transition. The transition to parenting therefore is more likely to be experienced negatively if the demands outweigh the resources. This is supported by research linking perceiving partner support as effective with less anxiety and overall better psychological well-being (Rini, Schetter, Hobel, Glynn, & Sandman, 2006).

Although the term “transition to parenthood” is used extensively in the literature, there is no universal definition. There is a general consensus in the literature that the transition to parenthood refers to a period of change from not being a parent to being a parent. Historically, this has assumed parenthood is achieved by biological conception and the majority of research around the transition to parenthood has focused on biological parenthood. Consequently, the transition period is often seen as the time from conception to the first few months after giving birth (Goldberg, 1988), although some studies consider the transition to continue for varying times after this. Historically the way in which the transition to parenthood has been defined and the associated research has overlooked the many different ways in which people can become responsible for children including insemination, surrogacy, fostering, step-parenting, caring for younger siblings and adoption.

#### 1.2.1. The transition to biological fatherhood

In recent decades there has been a growing interest in males’ transition to parenthood although it is argued that this continues to be lacking (Kowlessar, Fox, & Wittkowski, 2015). This research has been influenced by a cultural shift from hegemonic masculinity narratives of fathers solely as the ‘breadwinner’ to



that of the 'involved father'. This coin, termed in the 1980s, refers to fathers playing a nurturing role, taking more responsibility and providing more co-parenting (Ranson, 2001; Wall & Arnold, 2007). This is a development that the feminist movement has sought. Through challenging patriarchal views of fathers as the 'breadwinner' and mothers as the caregivers, parents can move towards more equality in the division of labour rather than having gender prescribed roles (Hearn & Collinson, 1998).

Despite these changes, societal norms of the man as being the 'breadwinner' role generally continue to linger and that this can greatly influence men's sense of worth (Riggs, 1997). A number of studies have found that the expectations that fathers may have of taking up the 'involved' father role are often not fully realised in the reality of early fatherhood (Machin, 2015; Ranson, 2001). In a small study of first time fatherhood in the UK, factors associated with fathers' lived experience of first time fatherhood which differed to the desired experience included societal attitudes, economic barriers, lack of support from healthcare practitioners and governmental policies which were not felt to provide a realistic context for fathers to be involved (Machin, 2015). In addition, this research reflected previous studies which have found many men experience a tension in trying to balance their professional and family roles (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009). This can include feeling guilty for leaving their partner to carry out the child care when they go to work and guilt for resenting the need to carry out childcare themselves after returning from work. It is acknowledged that many women may also experience such conflicts. It has been argued that the experience for many men is impacted by the negotiation required between narratives of traditional fatherhood as being more detached from parenting and the more contemporary and developed ideas of equality in parenting (Johansson & Klinth, 2008).

Challenges such as these have also been linked with fathers' wellbeing. The mental health of mothers has more traditionally been attended to during the transition to parenthood, however, there is growing research into that of fathers. According to one systematic review, prevalence rates of anxiety in men whose partners are pregnant ranges from 4.1% - 16% and postnatally from 2.4% - 18%

(Leach, Poyser, Cooklin, & Giallo, 2016). Prevalence of antenatal and postnatal depression was also found to range between 1.2% - 25.5% for fathers (Goodman, 2004). Factors associated with higher levels of poor mental health during the transition period include a desire to be able to “do it all” (Giallo et al., 2013) and the gap between the expectation and the reality of how involved they will be in parenting (Buist, Morse, & Durkin, 2003; Machin, 2015).

Despite these developing narratives of the “involved father” and struggle that many face with transitioning to first time fatherhood, the support provided for first time fathers in the UK is generally demonstrated to be lacking (e.g. Deave & Johnson, 2008; Kowlessar et al., 2015; Lee & Schmied, 2001). In a small study in the South West of England, men reported wanting to be more involved with antenatal support and feeling they have few support systems which they could use to help them face the challenges of the transition and generally felt isolated (Deave & Johnson, 2008). Whilst the small sample size does not allow generalisation of these findings, it is interesting to note that the men in this study did not refer to their own fathers as sources of support which is in contrast to many new mothers for whom their own mothers are often named as providing important support.

Pregnancy and labour are seen as significant phases in the transition to fatherhood. One review of the literature reported that the post-natal period can be the most challenging time inter and intrapersonally as men cope with the reality of being a father for the first time (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009). It is important that the experiences, challenges and psychological impact of becoming a parent through alternative means which do not involve pregnancy and labour in this manner are also understood.

### **1.3. Adoptive Parenthood**

Whilst the literature on the transition to biological parenthood has been wide and varied, the research around the transition to parenthood through adoption is sparse (McKay, Ross, & Goldberg, 2010). Historically the focus in the general

adoption literature has been on the outcomes of the children (Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988). However, the transition to adoptive parenthood is very different from that of biological parenthood and therefore likely to involve a different adjustment period (Levy-Shiff, Goldshmidt, & Har-Even, 1991). In order to consider the specific transition to adoptive parenthood further, I will provide the context of adoption in the UK.

### 1.3.1. Overview of Adoption in the UK

#### 1.3.1.1. *Defining adoption and the adoption process*

Triseliotis, Shireman and Hundleby (1997) define adoption as “a legal procedure through which a permanent family is created for a child whose birth parents are unable, unwilling or are legally prohibited from caring for the child” (p. 1). They also view it as a complex process for both the child and the adoptive parents which goes beyond the single point in time at which the legal transfer of full parental responsibility to the adoptive parents occurs.

Those wanting to pursue domestic adoption in the UK are required to apply to a voluntary adoption agency or local authority adoption agency. If this is accepted, the agency then starts an assessment. At end of this process the agency makes a decision whether to approve the individual or couple as prospective adopters. If the decision is to approve, the agency or the couple (depending on the type of agency) can start seeking potential children or wait for a child to be ‘matched’ with them before this goes to panel to be approved. If a child or children are placed with prospective adopters, they remain in the care of the local authority and are placed under a court Placement Order (or with consent from birth parents). After the child or children have been placed for a minimum of 10 weeks, the adoptive family can apply to the court to complete the legal adoption. If the final adoption order is granted, adoptive parents gain full parental responsibility. This means that when a child is legally adopted full legal parental responsibility is given to the adoptive parents and no other party has parental responsibility. Adoption in this sense is distinct from special guardianships in which a legal link is maintained between the birth parent and the child and step-parent adoptions where at least one birth parent maintains parental responsibility, neither of which are considered in this research.

Adoption following surrogacy is another form of adoption which is also not a focus of the current study.

To seek an intercountry adoption, individuals or couples also have to be assessed and approved under UK law, as well as complying with the adoption law of the country they are adopting from. As the current research project focuses on domestic adoption the process of intercountry adoptions will not be explored further.

#### 1.3.1.2. *The historical and geographical context of adoption*

Adoption trends and practices in the UK have undergone many changes since the first adoption law of 1926 (Keating, 2008). A detailed inspection of this is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, there are some key points which relate to the experience of the transition to adoptive parenthood and therefore a brief summary will be provided<sup>1</sup>.

A major change in the adoption context in the UK has been a shift from the adoption of babies considered 'voluntarily relinquished', often by unmarried mothers, towards the adoption of older children from care. In 2017 only 7% of adoptions were of children under the age of one (Department for Education, 2017). This has been a consequence of societal changes regarding family and marriage and the reduction in babies being 'relinquished' as well as associated medical advances including contraception and abortion. There has also been a shift in the focus of adoption from meeting the needs of couples unable to conceive biological children, to meeting the needs of children in care for whom adoption is considered the most secure way of providing a permanent home for a child for whom it is not considered safe to remain with birth families. There has been increased recognition of children's rights and welfare for example in The Children Act 1989 and then in the 2002 Adoption and Children Act. This, along with developments in research and theory around child development, led to more children being taken into care and placed on permanency planning.

---

<sup>1</sup> See O'Halloran (2015) for a more in-depth analysis of the changing context of adoption.

As well as being older, children adopted from care have considerably more complex needs than the infants of adoption in the earlier decades. Medical advances have meant that more children survive who have considerable physical disabilities. The most common reason for children being looked after in England in the year ending March 2017 was abuse or neglect by the birth family. Other reasons included family dysfunction, family in acute stress, absent parenting, parent illness or disability and child disability (DfE, 2017).

In the earlier decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century adoption was usually not disclosed to either the child or anyone outside the immediate family. This was shaped by the conflictual nature of adoption with societal discourses of the 'normal' family unit. The term 'matching' originated from this time where prospective adopters sought infants that were biologically similar to themselves and could be perceived as a biological member of the family. Although 'family finding' is also used now, the use of 'matching' remains. In recent decade adoptions have become more 'open' in terms of contact (either directly or indirectly) with birth families. This is often court ordered as a condition of the adoption or organised informally by the adoptive parents. Where contact with birth families does not happen, adoption is more openly spoken about with the children than previously, with life story books being provided by local authorities to help the child to understand their family and history.

In 2002 the law was changed so that unmarried couples could jointly adopt as well as married couples and single people (The Adoption and Children Act, 2002). This consequently meant that gay and lesbian couples, who at that time could not legally marry, could also jointly adopt where previously they had only been able to do so individually. This led to many more gay and lesbian couples seeking to become parents by adopting. Despite this, it has been suggested that some professionals may still hold heteronormative views about the "perfect" family (Selwyn, 2017).

There has been increased recognition in recent years of the effects of trauma and abuse on the children and the support that adoptive families may require

and that simply placing the child in a permanent, more suitable environment is not necessarily enough as previously thought. The 1976 act introduced the requirement that local authorities have to ensure the provision of post adoption support and the recent initiation of the Adoption Support Fund facilitate access to therapeutic services post-adoption. In addition, the government's Innovation Fund support agencies in developing new ways of working.

These changes demonstrate the complex and continually changing context of adoption in the UK which impacts the experience of the adopters. These changes also demonstrate how the current context of adoption, and therefore the experiences of those involved, is greatly impacted by societal, economic, political and historical contexts.

### 1.3.2. The Transition to Adoptive Parenthood

It is important to further understanding of the specific challenges faced by adoptive parents during their transition to parenthood in order to improve adoption support and increase the stability of adoption placements (Selwyn, Wijedasa & Meakings, 2015). Doubt regarding the placement's success after one year was predictive of placement disruption indicating the importance of the early placement stage in future placement stability (Rushton & Dance, 2004). As part of the transition, it is important to include experiences before the adoption placement as factors associated with this time are also linked with adaptation of the family post-adoption and risk of placement breakdown (Selwyn et al., 2015).

Some research indicates that adoptive parents do not show increased difficulties with psychological adjustment to parenthood compared to biological parents (Bassett-Gunter et al., 2013; Ceballo, Lansford, Abbey, & Stewart, 2004; Levy-Shiff, Bar, & Har-Even, 1990). It has been suggested that this may be due to adoptive parents being older and more financially secure as well as having more developed coping resources (Ceballo et al., 2004). Increases in marriage satisfaction have also been found, contradictory to some of the transition to parenting literature regarding the negative impact on the

relationship (Ceballo et al., 2004). The authors suggest that couples may deal with distress and potential conflicts prior to the child being placed through the adoption process. Whilst these seem reasonable hypotheses, it is also important to note that many of these studies are based in the USA where many adopt infants through private agencies. In addition, adoptive parents may feel they need to minimize difficulties after placement (Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988). Some have contended whether these studies sufficiently explored the challenges specific to adoption (Quinton, Rushton, Dance, & Mayes, 1998).

#### *1.3.2.1. Post-adoption depression*

As with biological parenting, one way in which adaptation to parenthood has been conceptualised is through a medical model lens and looking at rates of post-adoption depression. A review of the literature on adaptation to parenthood during the post-adoption period concluded that post-adoption depression was “relatively common” (McKay et al., 2010). However, the same review also acknowledges that the majority of samples consisted of women and that the psychological distress for men in this time period is under researched. A qualitative study exploring adoption professionals’ views of post-adoption depression in fathers reported that they perceived adoptive fathers who were experiencing post-adoption depression as more likely to present as angry and frustrated than their female partners (Foli & Gibson, 2011). They were also perceived as being more likely to disengage from the family.

#### *1.3.2.2. Family Stress Theory*

It has been suggested that family stress theory (Patterson, 1983; Patterson & Garwick, 1994) can be applied to the transition to adoptive parenting (McKay & Ross, 2010). In a small qualitative study in Canada of eight women and one man, all of whom had come to adoption after attempting to conceive, McKay and Ross developed a theory of the transition to adoptive parenthood. The theory conceptualised the ease of adjustment as resulting from the interaction between distinctive challenges and facilitators of adoption. The authors liken this to family stress theory. Challenges included fear and anxiety regarding their

new parental responsibilities and lack of information or experience with children. Lack of social support was also a challenge which was found to be exacerbated in adoption as parents were older than biological parents. Participants also perceived friends and family as having an expectation that they should be happy with their parenthood status which further isolated them. Facilitators included accessing support, particularly from others with experience of the adoption system, a sense of accomplishment of fulfilling the aim to become a parent and observing children reaching important developmental milestones. The lack of men in this sample, as well as the location, mean that these findings cannot be generalised to adoptive fathers in the UK.

### *1.3.2.3. Adoption after attempting to have biological children*

Many couples who choose to become parents for the first time by adopting, may do so after attempting first to have biological children. This is particularly the case for heterosexual couples but same-sex couples may also try to have biological children before considering adoption. Although the research regarding 'infertility' has focused on heterosexual couples, one study comparing lesbian and heterosexual couples found that 65% of both had utilised assisted reproduction techniques (Shelley-Sireci & Ciano-Boyce, 2002).

Research has linked 'fertility problems' (as is often referred to in the literature) with increased stress, decreased self-efficacy, decreased life satisfaction and compromised self-esteem. In addition, this experience can impact the couple relationship such as increasing conflict, increasing negative perceptions of couple communication and decreasing levels of intimacy. (Abbey, Andrews, & Halman, 1991). The medical procedures involved and the hormone treatments may also cause distress (Daniluk, 2001; Daniluk and Hurtig-Mitchell.)

The process of coming to terms with not being able to have biological children and deciding to adopt has been identified as a key theme for many in the transition to adoptive parenthood literature (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003). Generally, adoption agencies in the UK require prospective adopters to wait six months after the last fertility treatment or miscarriage before commencing the



adoption assessment procedure (First for Adoption, 2017). There is a narrative of prospective adopters needing to have “processed their reactions” (Crawshaw, 2010, p. 87) before adopting. However, the adoption process may raise difficult conflicts for adults who have experienced this. The adoption process may reflect aspects of In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) which may raise difficult memories including loss of privacy, feeling scrutinized and feeling that the authorities hold the power regarding their parenthood (Cudmore, 2005). People seeking to adopt may also worry that there will be an expectation that they have resolved their grief around not being able to have biological children. This could lead them to conceal their feelings around this from adoption professionals. It has also been suggested that for some couples grief about infertility may only start once adoption placement is made (Tollemache, 1998) and therefore it is important for adoptive couples to continue to receive support to manage feelings around this after adoptive children are placed (Cudmore, 2005).

Stigma and pejorative language like ‘barren’ are associated with problems conceiving (Madsen, 2005). There are also less obvious but still judgment-laden terms such as ‘achieving’ pregnancy present in the literature and media. This is reflective of a societal discourse in which biological families are seen as the norm. It is argued that this normative discourse is starting to change as society becomes more accepting of alternative ways of having families (Letherby, 2010). However, it is likely that adoptive parents’ experiences of fertility problems and of choosing adoption are still influenced by these normative narratives. For men in particular undergoing fertility treatment or IVF can be associated with shame in regards to the experience of producing sperm for testing and a feeling that their identity as men is undermined (Cudmore, 2005). Some males have been reported to experience continued desires to have a biological child in order to continue their ‘bloodline’ and have children who look like them (Jennings, Mellish, Tasker, Lamb, & Golombok, 2014). The male experience regarding the transition to adoption following infertility is considered further in section 1.4.1.

It is suggested that those who chose adoption for alternative reasons to fertility problems, sometimes known in the literature as preferential adopters, may be more psychologically resilient to the stresses associated with becoming an adoptive parent (Goldberg, 2010). Prevalence of depression during the pre-adoption stage was higher in heterosexual and lesbian couples who had pursued IVF previously than those who did not (Goldberg & Smith, 2009). This lends some support to this claim, however, there does not appear to be any further empirical support.

#### *1.3.2.4. Adoption stigma*

The context of cultural preferences for biological families may also impact adoptive parents during the transition into parenthood. Adoption stigma can include beliefs that adoptive families are not as closely bonded to each other (Miall, 1996; Wegar, 2000) and that adoptive parents are not 'true' parents (Miall, 1987). Such beliefs can cause adoptive families to feel devalued and marginalized (Kline, Karel, & Chatterjee, 2006). Internalised stigma has been associated with high levels of depression post-adoption (Goldberg, Kinkler, & Hines, 2011). This study also found that men were as likely as women to experience internalised stigma.

#### *1.3.2.5. The adoption process*

One UK study regarding the experience of the adoption process found that the average time from application to approval of their sample was 18 months (Dance & Farmer, 2014). This was considerably longer than the recommended time set by the government at that time of six months. The average time from application to actual placement of a child was 26 months. However, there was a large range in the length of the process and it varied greatly for different couples, with some couples being approved and matched at the same time. The delays also happened at different points and for different reasons. For example missing a preparation group and needing to wait for the next group before the process could progress to the next stage delayed the process for some. Delays in completion of paperwork was another source of lengthy waits for prospective adopters. Those prospective adopters who experienced multiple reasons for

delays expressed particular frustration.

Despite these potentially long waits for parenthood, adoptive parents may also experience the transition to parenthood as rapid with many parents having less than 9 months warning for the start of a placement and some having a few weeks or even 1 day (Weir, 2003).

The adoption process also involves a huge number of decisions which are not required of those transitioning to parenthood biologically. Decisions about the adoption path include choosing intercountry adoption or domestic adoption, choosing between local authority agencies or voluntary adoption agencies (VAA), and then choosing which individual agencies to register with. In the USA it was found that gay and lesbian prospective adopters spent more time and effort researching potential adoption agencies and the perception of how 'gay friendly' the agency was played a significant role in their choice (Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2008). Research in the USA also considers the decisions regarding private and public adoption, however, this is not relevant to the UK where private adoption is no longer legal.

Prospective adopters are also required to make decisions regarding the child or children that they would be willing to adopt. This includes number of children, age, ethnicity and disability. There is an idea in the literature that prospective parent's preferences regarding their adoptive children are 'stretched' by the professionals. Whilst Dance and Farmer (2014) did find that approximately two thirds of their sample changed their view regarding the characteristics of the children they would adopt through the processes, most reported this was a result of a change in their perceptions and expectations regarding the availability of children rather than the professionals "stretching" their preferences.

There has been very little research around the specific time during which the child or children come to live with the prospective adopters. One study in the UK found that this was an anxiety-provoking time for parents in which they found it

difficult to stay attuned to the emotional needs of the children, often interpreting compliance of the children as them being 'fine' (Boswell & Cudmore, 2017).

The adoption process is experienced as a time of uncertainty for prospective adoptive parents (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003). Fear of loss of a child through rejection in the assessment phase or through termination of the process after a child is identified were themes in a Finnish study (Eriksson, 2016). The author concluded that this can lead parents who are seeking to adopt, to withhold their feelings from professionals.

#### 1.3.2.6. *Child characteristics*

Characteristics of the child have been shown to impact how parents experience the transition to adoptive parenthood. Older age at the time of placement, behavioural problems, history of abuse or neglect and multiple previous placements are all associated with poorer adjustment for adoptive parents (Brooks, Simmel, Wind, & Barth, 2005). The number of risk factors associated with the child is a particular predictor of family adjustment, more so than the individual risk factors (McDonald, Propp, & Murphy, 2001).

Adopting sibling groups may pose specific challenges for new adoptive parents. Drawing on systems theory, there is an existing subsystem of the sibling group to which the subsystem of the parent or parents needs to adapt to as well as the individual children (Tasker & Wood, 2016). This may lead what Tasker and Wood described as colliding family scripts, in which new parents' expectations of how they will parent and what the experience will be like are at odds with the subsystem dynamics. This can include sibling competitiveness and exclusion of the adoptive parents. At least some of the children in the sibling groups are also more likely to be older than individual children with adoption orders and therefore may have more complicated histories (Boddy, 2013). Despite these complications, siblings group adoptions have actually been found to be at lower risk of adoption breakdowns than adoptions of individual children (Rushton & Dance, 2004).

#### 1.3.2.7. *Unmet expectations*

The extent to which the adoptive experience matches or contrasts with adoptive parents' expectations can impact the experience of the transition to adoptive parenthood. Realistic expectations of children's behaviour have been linked with adoptive parents' positive feelings about parenting and the impact on the couple and family in what are considered special needs adoptions<sup>2</sup> (Reilly & Platz, 2003). In a qualitative study in the UK, adoptive parents felt unprepared for the range of ways in which the child may have learnt to cope in response to experiences of abuse and neglect (Tasker & Wood, 2016). Unmet expectations may be particularly stressful when adoptive parents lack support or feel unable to "mould" their child (Moyer & Goldberg, 2015).

Unmet expectations have also been linked with post-adoption depression in a qualitative study with adoptive parents who acknowledged being depressed after the child was placed and adoption professionals (Foli, 2010). Common themes of unmet or unrealistic expectations regarding the self as parent, the child, friends and family and the wider society were felt to contribute to depressive symptoms.

#### 1.3.2.8. *Social support*

It is well documented that social support can facilitate the transition to adoptive parenthood and that insufficient support can hinder adjustment (Levy-Shiff et al., 1991; McKay & Ross, 2010). Higher levels of social support were predictive of lower levels of parenting stress for adoptive parents (Bird, Peterson, & Miller, 2002). It has been indicated that some lesbian and gay adoptive parents may rely less on their families for support than heterosexual couples (Kindle & Erich, 2005).

---

<sup>2</sup> The authors note that special needs children in this case can include children who are older, part of siblings groups, have particular emotional, behavioural, developmental or medical problems or who are from a racial or ethnic minority.

#### 1.3.2.9. *Contact with birth families*

Navigating contact with children's birth families may pose a particular challenge for new adoptive parents. It is legislated that Local Authorities are required to explore contact issues prior to making adoption orders. However, adopters in the UK have reported feeling that they were not supported to anticipate their feelings towards birth families or consider how they may manage issues arising in relation to contact (Logan, 2010).

#### 1.3.2.10. *Gay and lesbian adoptive parents*

A proportion of the literature on the transition to adoptive parenting has specifically considered the experience for gay and lesbian parents. Gay and lesbian adopters in the UK have reported feeling that they have to conform to binary views of sexuality and essentialist views of gender (Wood, 2016) which impacted how they presented themselves to social workers. For example not feeling able to disclose bisexuality. In addition, some men felt they had to prove to social workers that they were capable of nurturing children and that they had females in their lives who would have contact with the children. I explore the experience of gay fathers who become parents through adoption in more detail in the literature review section.

### **1.4. The Transition to Adoptive Fatherhood**

Adoptive fathers' experience is neglected in this area of research (McKay et al., 2010). Much of the literature referred to above did not consider the male experience specifically and showed biases towards the number of females in research samples. Freeark et al., (2005) noted that "adoption is a highly feminized social institution" (pg. 98) and that interventions, practices and policies are all skewed towards the female experience. Freeark et al. also suggest that becoming parents through adoption may lead to couples taking up less gender prescribed roles. This is particularly the case for heterosexual couples where gender prescribes certain aspects of the transition to biological parenthood for many in relation to pregnancy and breastfeeding and that the pre-adoptive and early adoptive parenthood can require a more equal

involvement of both parents (Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009). A study in Chile reported that men experienced feeling they could only stand by and watch during assisted reproduction, but experienced equality with their partners in involvement in the adoption process (Herrera, 2013).

#### 1.4.1. Review of the literature on the transition to first-time adoptive fatherhood

A literature search was conducted in order to identify existing research relevant to the transition to first time adoptive fatherhood. As previous research into the transition to adoptive parenthood has more generally highlighted the many decisions and challenges faced in the pre-placement period, the search was carried out in a way to find research that was relevant to male experiences during this period as well as the early placement period. Combinations of the search terms “adoption”, “adoptive parent”, “father”, “dad”, “man”, “male”, “masculinity” “transition” and “becoming” were used as keywords, subject terms and words in abstract. The databases used were Psyc Info, CINAHL plus, Academic Search Complete, Science Direct and Scopus. Scopus was also used to identify relevant articles which had cited key papers. Finally, reference lists were manually checked for any further relevant articles.

Search results were limited to only peer-reviewed articles which were available in the English language. Only papers published from the year 2000 were included in order to ensure the relevance to contemporary adoption. A minority of papers although published since 2000 referred to experiences prior to this time and so were also excluded.

A three tiered screening process was used in order to find relevant studies from these results. This involved screening out irrelevant results by first looking at the title, then the abstract and finally the main body of the text. This method was used to identify articles that met the following criteria:

1. Attended to the male experience: This included studies which had all male samples and those that had mixed samples but made reference to the fatherhood experience in particular. Therefore, studies which

included all female or mixed samples but did not acknowledge gender, where screened out.

2. Attended to the transition period into first-time parenthood: Articles were deemed relevant if they referred specifically to the transition to first-time parenthood (or the first time nature could be inferred) or attended to any part of route to adoption including deciding to adopt, the adoption assessment process, family finding or the early stages of a child or children being placed with the parent. I did not limit the post-adoption phase to a specific time frame due to the minimal research and the unfixed nature of the transition period.
3. Attended to non-kin adoptions and non-step parent adoptions.

Of the resulting 19 studies, 8 were specifically about male experiences alone, all of which were qualitative studies and whose samples consisted of gay men from the USA or Canada. The remaining 11 studies specifically attended in some way to the male experience although they also included females in the sample.

#### *1.4.1.1. Studies which focus solely on male experiences of the transition to adoptive fatherhood*

One qualitative study explored the transition to adoptive fatherhood for eight gay couples in New England in the USA (Gianino, 2008). This identified themes which were similar to those for heterosexual couples becoming adoptive parents including negotiating the decision to adopt, fears about adopting, powerlessness in the process, using internal resources to buffer the challenges such as collaborative decision making, mixed emotions following the placement of a child and shifting into new roles. It also identified ways in which the intersectionality of being male and gay resulted in unique experiences, particularly those resulting from a social context of homophobia and sexism. At the pre-adoption stage, this included internalised homophobia which impacted men's attitude towards themselves as parents. At the adoption process stage, men faced challenges including homophobic and sexist practices such as being rejected by agencies for being gay and male. Another theme during this stage



unique to gay couples was decision making regarding disclosure of sexuality particularly in the international adoptions in which some social workers actively discouraged men from disclosing their sexuality to the professionals and families. Finally, in the adaptation and transformation stage these men described a heightened sense of their sexuality being visible and needing to be more vigilant. They also described evolving roles which were different to heterosexual couples and not constrained by social norms and stereotypes of gender. They also experienced a change in how they perceived their primary identity from that of being gay, to seeing their primary identity as being a father. Gianino identifies a number of ways in which the fathers buffer or cope with the challenges. Many of the men specifically targeted agencies they felt had positive attitudes towards gay people. Their strong desire to be a parent, perceptions of their relationships with their partners as strong and close, their level of maturity and ways in which they complemented each other served as protective factors to face the challenges.

Of note is that couples in this study were described as mainly “Caucasian” and “middle to upper class”. Of the 10 children adopted, only two were adopted domestically, with the remaining all through international adoptions from a range of ethnicities. For some couples, only one person could officially adopt and for others where co-parenting was legal, one person was still required to be the primary parent.

Another study on gay men becoming adoptive fathers did not specifically label itself as looking at the transition but explored issues relating to the transition period (Wells, 2011). This explored the experiences of 10 adoptive male couples in the San Francisco Bay area in the USA. As in the previously described study (Gianino, 2008), experiences were also impacted by anti-gay and anti-male practices and beliefs and in becoming parents, men were required to challenge societal conventions such as beliefs that men are not able to parent without a female. Other themes included perceiving adoption as emotionally and financially exhausting, personal growth and challenges such as the impact on the couple relationship. This study utilised a grounded theory approach and developed a theory of gay adoptive fatherhood; the three

incongruous identities of father, gay and male each bring their own challenges in terms of negative dominant societal discourses regarding infants which impact fathers' transition into adoptive parenthood. Resilience is positively impacted by high socioeconomic status and privilege.

Berkowitz (2011) also identified the role privilege (in relation to being white and having high socioeconomic status) in shaping gay father's experiences of adoption in a further qualitative study of adoption by 22 gay men in the USA as well as the challenges that their sexuality posed in adoption. In doing so this paper also highlighted how experience is impacted by intersectionality.

Another qualitative study about 10 American adoptive fathers' experiences of adoption identified adoption as transforming men's identities through reducing internalised homophobia, creating new narratives of masculinity as a gay man and the change in how they construct their identities from being gay as the central aspect of being a father (Armesto & Shapiro, 2011). Other themes relevant to the transition to fatherhood included the significance of seeing a photo of the child for the first time and how this facilitated a turning point in the identity as a father and how the first meetings with children symbolized an accomplishment of a dream but also lead to feelings of doubt, fear and hope.

Vinjamuri (2015) also considered themes in gay fathers' experiences of adopting which are relevant to the transition. Men in this sample were either in couples or single from 20 families in the USA. Themes included feeling impacted by heteronormative discourses in society such as feeling judged about their parenting and the structure of family. Men in this study also highlighted how adoption led to the need to make decisions about disclosing about adoption and sexuality to others.

Richardson, Moyer and Goldberg (2012) focused on the experiences of 35 gay couples and the early stages of a child being placed with them. They concluded that family balance was positively or negatively impacted by certain resources and demands respectively, some of which were similar to those identified in other research for heterosexual men including socioeconomic status improving

access to resources and balancing desires to be an involved father and keep professional identity. Others were identified which seemed to be unique to gay men and facilitated by narratives which deviated from dominant masculinity ideologies which emphasise being the main breadwinner and having career success as being part of being a good father. These included egalitarian gender role ideologies, no gender role strain, successfully balancing work with family.

Two studies focused on the pre-adoptive stage for men, both in the USA. One considered the factors which influenced 32 gay couples' decisions about their adoption (Downing, Richardson, Kinkler, & Goldberg, 2009). This concluded that while some factors were similar to those for heterosexual couples such as the race and age of the child they would adopt, there were also factors unique to them as gay men. Discrimination for being gay impacted many of the couples' decisions, for example being turned away from some agencies or difficulty with international adoptions as a result of being gay and a man. For some men, these factors lead them to pursue adoption paths which were not in line with their ideal preferences. This research, therefore, echoes the previous studies described in terms of the impact of discrimination both for being gay and male.

Another study focused on the motivations for men in 35 couples to become adoptive fathers (Goldberg, Downing & Moyer, 2012). The decision to become parents was shaped by factors such as the desire to teach a child tolerance. One factor which delayed the timing of becoming parents was wanting to move to a neighbourhood which was deemed to be more accepting of gay men.

#### *1.4.1.2. Studies about the transition to adoptive parenthood which refer to male experiences*

Daniluk and Hurtig-Mitchell (2003) used qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of 39 heterosexual couples who adopted after unsuccessful fertility treatments. Powerlessness was a theme particularly for men who expressed more anger regarding perceived lack of rights and inability to challenge perceived injustices within the adoption system. Couples were interviewed

together and the authors note that they often felt they had to invite men to offer their own thoughts during the interviews rather than deferring to their wives. This research was undertaken in North America and just over half the sample had adopted privately and almost all had adopted children under the age of 1 year old.

Other studies also considered the impact of infertility prior to adoption on men's experiences. Goldberg et al. (2009) interviewed 30 men and 30 women in heterosexual relationships and 60 women in same-sex couples in the USA about their experiences of choosing adoption to become parents for the first time after attempting to conceive a biological child. Whilst the analysis focused to some extent on the female experience, the authors inferred some important themes regarding the male experience. Overall the authors concluded that men and women initially constructed parenthood and families in terms of biological relationships which were reconstructed over time to shift away from a biological focus. Men in particular placed importance on physically resembling their children or on the "bloodline" being continued. The men for whom this was more important, were disappointed when their wives wanted to stop attempting to have biological children. For both men and women in heterosexual relationships, they constructed infertility as a failure and felt themselves to be 'less complete' as men or women. The authors interpreted that masculinity was more constructed in relation to being able to procreate and femininity in terms of being pregnant. Men and women were facilitated through various processes to make the transition to considering and then starting the adoption process. Factors which appeared to facilitate this transition included wanting to stop the negative impact of fertility treatments, feeling they had exhausted all options, feeling they had reached parameters they had defined before starting the process. It is important to note that as with a number of the studies, the majority of couples in this research were pursuing private adoptions.

In comparing 39 men in Italy who were seeking to adopt with non-adoptive fathers, Pace, Santona, Zavattini and Di Folco (2015) found differences in attachment classifications and relationship patterns. Pre-adoptive fathers in their sample were more likely to show secure attachment classification with

respect to their partners compared to non-adoptive fathers and that adoption seeking couples showed better perceived quality of the marital relationship.

A qualitative study used a focus group and interviews to explore New Zealand parents' experiences of developing relationships with their newly adopted children from Russia (Johnstone & Gibbs, 2012). Six of the 15 participants were fathers. Sexuality was not stated. The researchers noted that fathers, as well as mothers, were actively engaged in building attachments with their children. Both mothers and fathers found close physical proximity and quality time with their children facilitating factors in building a positive relationship. In this sample the majority of the mothers were off work for the first six to 12 months whereas fathers returned to work relatively quickly and prioritised time with their children at bedtimes and the weekends. Using adoption peer support and partner support were also facilitating factors for both fathers and mothers. High levels of commitment to their children was also a theme for all parents in the sample.

As with the transition to biological parenting, some studies have focused on the impact of becoming an adoptive parent on couple relationships. Goldberg, Kinkler, Moyer and Weber (2014) interviewed a large sample of 84 first time parents from 42 couples who had adopted children from foster care three months prior. The sample consisted of same-sex couples, heterosexual couples and males and females in the USA. General findings across genders and sexuality included perceived declines in relationship satisfaction over the transition. Some of these were similar to those for biological parents but others were deemed to be unique to adoptive parenting, such as the stress imposed by legal insecurity and the requirement to find state approved child care. This study also found that stress on the relationship as a consequence of role imbalance and of child preference for one parent over the other featured more for parents of older children. Parents also reported positive effects on the relationships as a result of working towards shared goals. The only reference in this study regarding the male experience was that gay men were least likely to identify differences in parenting roles between the members of the couple as placing a strain on their relationships compared to heterosexual and lesbian

couples. The authors hypothesised that gay couples draw less on gender prescribed roles during parenthood.

Another publication which used the same sample, considered how parents responded to an unexpected characteristic of adopted children using thematic analysis informed by family stress theory (Moyer & Goldberg, 2015). This study noted the gender and sexuality of the participants for which each theme was applicable to. Themes for men included feeling there was a lack of formal support, finding that formal support helped them to manage unanticipated special needs and finding informal support including from family and friends helped them adjust to unmet expectations. Men also experienced stress and disappointment when the children were older than they had hoped as they were not able to influence their personalities and early memories as much as they wished to. Some also found that the unexpected characteristic ended up being more positive than initially thought for example the age or gender of the child. Some men also reported feeling just happy to have a child however much the expectations were met or not although interestingly this theme was most present for gay men. In general, numbers of men for each theme were much fewer than for women, particularly heterosexual men. The authors did not comment on this so it is not possible to know why this may have been. One could hypothesise that there could have been slightly different themes for men which were not attended to. Alternatively or, in addition to this, less in-depth data may have been gathered in the interviews with men.

A further study interviewed the same sample 2 years after the placement began about their relationships with the children (Goldberg, Moyer, & Kinkler, 2013). Approximately half said they felt their relationships with the children had been strong from the start of placement and some said whilst a bond was not immediately felt, it grew over time. The research stated that men, in particular, attributed their growing bond to developmental changes observed in their children and that bonds with infants were difficult due to the infants' level of demandingness. The researchers hypothesized that fathers may be perceived

as the more playful parent who can find it easier to engage with older, less dependent children.

A quantitative study in America measured depression and anxiety presentations in 90 male and female same-sex couples across various time points in the first year after a child was first placed for adoption (Goldberg & Smith, 2011). This study did not specifically investigate gender differences however it did find that gender did not significantly predict anxiety or depression or changes in these. It can therefore reasonably be inferred that the general findings are applicable for the men in the sample. The analysis revealed that predictors of lower depressive and anxiety symptoms at the start of the placement included higher perceived workplace support, family support and relationship quality. Higher perceived friend support also predicted lower anxiety scores. Lower internalized homophobia scores and higher perceived gay friendliness in the neighbourhood predicted lower depressive scores. Higher internalised homophobia for those who also lived in areas with negative legal climates regarding gay adoption experienced the highest increases in depressive and anxiety symptoms.

A single case study of an adoptive couple in Brazil interviewed the couple in the few years after two girls aged 4 and 5 years old were placed with them (do Amaral Costa & Rossetti-Ferreira, 2009). The father perceived fatherhood as an achievement and something that fulfilled him. He also reported that he rejected authoritarian styles of fathering but in fact when he felt challenged by his daughters arguing back at him he did utilise stricter, authoritative parenting strategies.

Foli, Hebdon, Lim and South (2017) collected survey data in the USA on experiences of adoption for men and women. Although there were no references to the male experience in the study, it did note that statistically significantly less adoptive fathers responded to the survey compared to women.

#### 1.4.1.3. *Summary of the current literature review*

This literature review has revealed the dearth of research regarding male experiences during the transition to adoptive parenthood in the UK. There were no studies which met the criteria for inclusion undertaken in the UK with the majority of the research taking place in the USA. There are a number of contextual differences between the UK and the USA which warrants separate research to be undertaken in this area. A key difference is in the adoption process and the type of adoption. This literature review showed that many North American samples included adults going through the domestic private adoption process, which no longer occurs in the UK. As well as this having financial implications, private adoption in the USA may be more likely to lead to the adoption of infants than through adopting from care. However, some papers did focus on adopting from care which although there are still contextual differences, are more applicable to the UK.

The studies which solely focused on male experiences only included samples of gay men and there were no studies which specifically explored the experience of men regardless of sexuality, or the experiences of transiting to adoptive fatherhood for heterosexual men. In addition, there were no papers found exploring the experience of the transition to adoptive fatherhood for single men.

Studies that looked more generally at heterosexual couples' experiences tended to focus on mothers either purposefully or due to opportunistic sampling. Very few mention male experiences of the transition specifically. One reason research has focused more on women's experiences in such opportunistic sampling may be because women are more willing to be research subjects (Becker, 2000). Those which did refer to the male experience in more detail were mainly focused on the transition to adoption following fertility treatment or after being unable to conceive a biological child.

Whilst the advantage of this is that the analysis can include the couples' co-constructed experiences, a disadvantage could be that one individual in the couple does not get as much of an opportunity to speak or may censor what they say.



The majority of the current research is qualitative and focuses on lived experience. However, there were no papers which considered adoptive fathers' experiences of the transition to first time fatherhood in terms of a more overall time period from the time of deciding to adopt all the way through to early placement. Many of the studies interviewed couples together.

### **1.5. Research Questions**

As there is a gap in the research regarding the transition to first-time fatherhood through adoption in the UK, the overall aim of this research project was exploratory and general in nature. I sought to improve understanding of the experience of men becoming fathers for the first time through adoption and therefore pinned this research on the following research question:

- A. What are men's experiences of becoming a father for the first time through adoption from the decision to adopt through to the early months of the adoption placement?

As social support has been considered an important factor in the transition to adoptive parenthood literature in general, I also wished to consider the following as subsidiary to the main research question:

- I. What support do first-time adoptive fathers access during the transition to fatherhood?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Overview**

This chapter includes a discussion of the epistemological position on which the methodology is based. Ethical considerations are also described. The research design is summarised, including an outline of how participants were recruited, the interview and the process involved in the thematic analysis. This section will also include a section on personal reflexivity involved in this research.

### **2.2. Epistemology**

This research is underpinned by a critical realist position. This stems from an ontological position that material reality exists external to the human experience. However, differing from the realism view, this position also acknowledges that our social reality is constructed by language (Simschouten, Riley, & Willig, 2007). As such our knowledge of reality is relative and mediated by social contexts and language. Therefore, research cannot provide us with a direct reflection of reality through data collected, but that data can further our knowledge of reality when interpreted in context. Regarding the transition to adoptive fatherhood, essential differences between biological and adoptive parenthood are acknowledged, whilst also recognising that experiences of parenting and adopting are impacted by the social, political and economic context in which they occur. Therefore, interpreting the data will involve consideration of the historical, cultural and social context of adoption, gender and fatherhood. The realist element of this position also allows for the acknowledgement of the impact external elements such as professional support has on the fathers' lives. Therefore, the research itself can aim to find the coping mechanisms and support structures that the men found helpful.

### **2.3. Methodological Approach**

This research utilised thematic analysis (TA). This is described by Braun and Clark (2006) as a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. Although originally seen as a process of analysing data to be used with other qualitative methods such as grounded theory (Boyatzis, 1998), it has more recently been developed as a method in its own right (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An advantage of TA is its flexibility regarding an epistemological position as it is not attached to one particular theoretical framework as many other forms of qualitative analysis are. Braun and Clark claim it can be used with either constructionist or realist positions and therefore TA is suitable to reflect the constructed reality constrained by material reality as understood by a critical realist position. TA’s flexibility was also suitable for the exploratory nature of the research question. This approach also acknowledges the active role of the researcher in identifying the themes rather than assuming the themes to exist in their own right in the data. In addition, this approach is facilitated by clear procedural steps which can be followed (Braun & Clarke).

The limitations of thematic analysis were considered. Less literature exists for thematic analysis compared to some other forms of qualitative analysis such as grounded theory and IPA (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The flexibility can lead to a lack of coherence in the ways in which themes are derived (Nowell et al., 2017). As with other forms of qualitative research, there is the risk of interpretation of the data being influenced by the researcher’s own values and conceptualizations (Boyatzis, 1998). The clear procedural steps outlined by Braun and Clark were followed in order to avoid these potential drawbacks of TA. A reflective diary was kept in order to increase conscious awareness of influencing aspects and decrease their potential to impact the analysis. As a consequence of these steps taken to reduce the pitfalls of thematic analysis, it was deemed a reliable method.

Alternative methods of qualitative analysis were also considered before proceeding with thematic analysis. These included Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Grounded Theory (GT) and Discourse

Analysis (DA). An appraisal of these methods which led to the decision to use TA is described below.

IPA focuses on the lived experiences of participants and the way in which participants make sense of their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). TA was deemed more appropriate for this under researched topic as IPA's focus is more specific. IPA has also been criticised for lacking the substance of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and therefore could be seen as a less reliable qualitative approach. TA is also more appropriate to a critical realist epistemological position given IPA's grounding in phenomenology.

GT aims to understand and explain human behaviour and social processes in an inductive data driven manner. It can be well suited to areas with little previous research (Milliken, 2010) and similarly to TA has epistemological flexibility. However, this research was not focused on developing a theoretical account of becoming a father through adoption, rather it was focused on how they experienced it.

DA focuses on the role of language in the construction of reality. However, in this circumstance the research question did not focus on how language constructed fathers' experiences and the constructionist epistemology underpinning this approach was in contrast to my critical realist stance.

Given the advantages of TA, the suitability of the approach to the research question and epistemological stance and the issues with other possible methods described above, TA was deemed the most appropriate and desirable method.

Experiential TA was chosen as a particular lens through which to analyse the data. This focuses on the interviewee's perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and therefore is in line with the research question which focuses on men's experiences of becoming a father through adoption.

## **2.4. Procedure**

### **2.4.1. Recruitment**

The aim was to recruit approximately 12 participants as this is the number of participants recommended by Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) to reach saturation of themes.

Recruitment was conducted by placing adverts in a number of London and nationwide adoption and post-adoption support organisation newsletters and websites. The posts included a brief outline of what taking part in the research would involve as well as the recruitment criteria. Anyone interested in taking part in the research was asked to contact the researcher to get further information. All participants made contact via email and information letters were then emailed in response. A phone call was then set up in order to organise the interview and answer any questions the participant had. For a small number of participants, this was conducted over email due to availability difficulties.

A number of local authority teams were also contacted and ethics procedures were commenced with two who responded. However, due to time constraints and successful recruitment through other means, these processes were terminated.

A snowballing method was also used to recruit further participants. This involved asking participants if they would be willing to forward the information letter to any men who they thought would meet the criteria. It was emphasised that this was entirely voluntary and the potential consequences of doing so were considered with the participant, for example, that it may involve disclosing that they had taken part in the research.

### **2.4.2. Inclusion Criteria**

Participants were sought who met the following criteria:

- identifies as a male
- adopted a child from the care system in the UK (or had a child placed for

adoption) at least 6 months ago and no more than 6<sup>3</sup> years ago. This allowed participants to be able to speak about the initial few months of placement. It was also recent enough for participants to be able to remember details of their experience and for the adoption to have occurred in a context relevant to the current time.

- currently residing in the UK and were residing in the UK at the time of the adoption or placement for adoption
- did not have any previous parenting experience prior to the child being placed for adoption (for example did not have any biological or stepchildren prior to the adoption)

Step-parent adoptions were excluded due to the focus of the research on first-time parenthood and it was assumed that step-parents would have had parenting experience of that child. Men becoming fathers through the foster to adopt scheme were also excluded for the same reason.

As there is currently so little research regarding the transition to adoptive fatherhood in the UK, the sample was kept fairly wide in terms of sexuality, relationship status and type of adoption. In addition, the research focus was on the experience of becoming a father through adoption regardless of these specifics. Only fathers who did not have any formal parenting experience prior to the adoption were recruited as the research question focused on the transition to first-time parenthood through adoption. There was no limitation on whether fathers had any more children following the initial adoption.

Initial recruitment posts included international as well as domestic adoption. However, it was decided to narrow this down to domestic adoptions only due to the differences in the process and to maintain some homogeneity in the sample. At the time this decision was taken, no parents through international adoptions

---

<sup>3</sup> This was increased from no more than 5 years ago in order to facilitate recruitment after a participant whose children had been placed 6 years ago made contact to volunteer.

had made contact, nor did they subsequently.

### 2.4.3. Demographic Details of Participants

Twelve men made contact after hearing about the research. Eleven continued through the interview stage. One man did not respond to follow up communication.

*Table 1. Summary of demographic information<sup>4</sup>*

Pseudo-nym	Age range	Ethnicity	Relationship status when child/children placed	Gender of partner/spouse	Years first child/children has been in adoptive placement <sup>5</sup>	Age of child/children at start of placement in years (gender)
Alex	41-45	White British	Married	Female	2	4 (male) and 4 (female)
Benjamin	61-65	White Non-British	Married	Female	6	3 (female) and 4 (male)
Advik	46-50	Indian British	Married	Female	6	3 (male)
Lucas	56-70	White British	Civil partnership	Male	5	3 (male)
Aiden	41-45	White British	Married	Female	2	3 (male)
Chris	46-50	White Non-British	Co habiting	Male	4	2 (male)
Adam	26-30	White British	Married	Female	2	1 (female), 2 (male) and 3 (male)
Reggie	36-40	White British	Married	Female	6	2 (female) and 4 (male)
John	36-40	White British	Single	-	1	2 (male)
Stuart	36-40	White British	Married	Female	1	1 (female)
Toby	36-40	White British	Cohabiting	male	3	1 (male)

### 2.4.4. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for data collection. Focus group were also considered as they can facilitate the sharing of experiences leading to more in-depth accounts of their experiences (Wilkinson, 1998). However, it was important to provide men with the privacy to discuss confidential issues around

<sup>4</sup> Some specifics of demographics not provided to maintain anonymity

<sup>5</sup> To nearest year

their children's history and other personal aspects of their transition to fatherhood which may have been hindered by the presence of others. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, unplanned questions and for the participant to discuss issues which the interviewer has not necessarily asked directly about (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Also having some structure in the form of a flexible interview schedule with open questions and prompts ensured that the data collected was relevant to the research question.

#### *2.4.4.1. Interview schedule*

A pilot interview was conducted with an adoptive father who had adopted out of the time frame stated in the criteria. This was in order to seek his feedback on the questions and wording of the questions and in order to practice the interview schedule. Following this interview and his positive feedback, the interview schedule remained the same for the next two interviews. This schedule asked specific questions regarding three different stages of the adoption process: the decision to adopt, the time prior to adoption and the early stages of the child or children being placed. After two research interviews, the interview schedule (Appendix D) was adapted to ask one general question about their experience of becoming an adoptive father at the start followed by the original questions as prompts if required. This was done in consultation with the projects Director of Studies reflecting on the previous interviews in which the participants tended to answer the questions before they had been asked. It was also changed to allow participants to focus on those parts which felt most pertinent to them rather than the questions influencing this.

#### *2.4.4.2. Interview Process*

Eight Interviews were conducted face to face. Three of these took place in private rooms on the university campus and five were conducted in a private room at the participant's workplace (at their suggestion). One of these interviews also included a follow-up Skype™ call to complete the interview. Three interviews were conducted entirely using Skype™ video calling due to participants' locations. This was offered as an option in order to ensure equal access to the research sample from across the country, the advantages of



which were deemed to outweigh the potential pitfalls of conducting an interview using video calling (Lacono, Symonds & Brown, 2016). A specific research Skype™ account was set up for the video calling interview and deleted following completion of the interviews. All interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone.

#### 2.4.4.3. *Transcription*

Interviews were transcribed using orthographic methods. This is the recommended approach for TA (Gibson & Hugh-Jones, 2012) and it is not necessary for TA to focus on para-linguistic features of speech as the Jeffersonian approach of transcription provides.

Transcription software Express Scribe and a pedal were used to aid transcription and headphones to ensure confidentiality during the transcription process. Interviews were transcribed in the days following the interview and where possible before the next interview took place in order to allow for development of the interview schedule.

#### 2.4.5. Data analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach was followed for data analysis as outlined below.

Braun and Clark's first step includes familiarising yourself with the data. This was done through transcribing, reading and rereading the transcriptions. During both of these activities, initial thoughts about interesting features on the interviews were noted in the margin. In the second step, transcriptions were transferred to the computer program NVIVO. Initial codes relevant to the research questions were generated at the semantic level considering the the explicit or surface meanings of the data. Codes were also generated at the latent level by considering the more 'hidden' or underlying meanings that shaped or informed the semantic content of the data. Inductive TA was chosen in which themes were data driven and bottom up as opposed to inductive, theory-driven due to the lack of previous research in this area. As new codes were mostly generated for each participant I then collapsed codes together where they overlapped to produce a workable number of codes. At the third

stage, codes were collated into subthemes and all the data relevant to each theme was collated. Subthemes were in turn collated into key themes. The themes and subthemes were then reviewed by checking they worked with the coded extracts as well as the entire data set and adjusted accordingly. In this stage, it was confirmed whether there was enough data to support each theme, whether multiple themes should be collapsed into one or whether individual themes needed to be broken down further. In the penultimate step, themes were defined and labelled. Mind maps were used to facilitate and record this process. In the final step of producing the report, quotes pertinent to the themes were selected to evidence the themes. The analysis was written up in a way where the data continued to be engaged within an active fashion, continually considering the appropriateness of the themes and revising where necessary. An example coded transcript extract, a coding manual and theme mind maps are shown in Appendices H, I and J respectively.

## **2.5. Ethical Considerations**

### **2.5.1. Ethical Approval**

Ethical approval was gained from the University of East London School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (Appendices E and F) prior to commencing recruitment.

### **2.5.2. Informed Consent**

Participants were provided with an information letter (Appendix A) both prior to the interview and again at the start of the interview. This outlined the aims of the research, the steps involved and confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawal procedures. At the interview stage, the participants were also verbally reminded of the confidentiality policy and limits and that the interview would be recorded. Participants were also provided with opportunities prior to the interview date as well as at the start of the interview to ask any questions. Prior to starting the interview participants were asked to sign a consent form which again highlighted the main confidentiality conditions and the right to withdraw (Appendix B). For the interview conducted over Skype™, these steps were still

taken and the consent form was signed electronically and returned via email.

### 2.5.3. Confidentiality and Anonymity

All interviews took place in locations that were deemed to be private enough to ensure confidentiality during the interview. Interviews only took place in the participants' workplace where they had suggested this and the limits to possible confidentiality had been explored with them. For example, exploring with them the possibility of colleagues seeing the interviewer and how they might respond to this. Where video calling was used, the researcher was in a private room with no other people within earshot and it was confirmed that the participants were also in a suitably private room.

Recordings were immediately transferred onto an encrypted memory stick. Transcriptions were completed using pseudonyms and removing other identifying information such as local authority names and job descriptions and were kept on an encrypted memory stick.

### 2.5.4. Managing Distress

A risk analysis for participants taking part in this research was undertaken. Emotional distress during or after the interview was identified as potential harm. In order to reduce and manage this risk a number of steps were taken. Participants were reminded at the start of the interview that they could take breaks during the interview or withdraw at any time. The researcher looked for verbal and non-verbal signs of emotional distress during and after the interview, enquired with the participant how they had experienced it and acknowledged that difficult experiences had been talked about. Appropriate active listening skills and empathy were utilised through the interview. As participants' emotional distress may not always have been picked up by the researcher, a letter acknowledging the possible emotional distress of partaking in the interview was provided to all participants after the interview (Appendix C). This also included signposting to support services.

#### 2.5.5. Research Safety

In order to ensure research safety, a third party was informed when a face to face interview was taking place. A procedure was followed whereby the researcher would contact the third party after the interview to inform them it had been completed. If the researcher had not made contact with the third party by a specified time, it was agreed they would attempt to contact the researcher and if unable to could access the location of the interview and name of the participant using a password as well as contacting emergency services. Where the interview took place over Skype™, the camera was set up to ensure there was only a blank wall in the background to maintain privacy.

#### 2.5.6. Supervision

The research was supervised by a Director of Studies at the University of East London. This included reflective practice regarding the impact of the research on myself and assumptions and values I held relating to the topic.

#### 2.5.7. Dissemination

Executive summaries of the research were offered to all participants at the interview and will be disseminated accordingly. Following successful examination, I will aim to write up this research as a research article and submit for publication in a relevant academic journal.

### **2.6. Reflexivity**

#### 2.6.1. Researcher Position

I am not a parent nor am I adopted or have any close friends or family who are or who have adopted to my knowledge. In these ways, I am not directly impacted by the topic of this research. However, my previous experience working in a post-adoption support agency for two years as an assistant psychologist has influenced my position. Firstly, it influenced my choice of adoptive parenthood as my thesis topic. I worked with adoptive parents, as well as their adoptive children and other members of the family, who were experiencing significant and varied difficulties. They often accessed the

organisation after some time of experiencing these difficulties without any previous professional support or support that they had not found useful. In addition, I conducted assessments with many families who were then unable to access the services provided by the organisation. Adoption, and in particular how adoptive parents can be supported, has therefore been an area of interest for me for some years and one which I have felt could benefit from further research.

#### 2.6.2. Reflective Diary

A reflective diary was kept throughout the research process (see Appendix K for extract). I used this to reflect on the impact the interviews had on my own feelings about parenthood and adoption as well as how my own position on these themes could impact the interviews and analysis research. Therefore, the diary also enabled a more reliable method of analysis. The reflective diary was also a useful way to record initial engagement with the data which aided analysis and the development of the interview schedule.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Overview

In this chapter, I describe the themes and subthemes constructed from the data through the process of thematic analysis as outlined in Chapter 2. The key themes and associated subthemes are summarised in Table 2. Extracts from the interviews are used to demonstrate the themes as being grounded in the data. Removal of speech to improve readability or maintain anonymity is indicated by three full stops and this has been utilised in a limited way that preserves the meaning. Pseudonyms are used for the participants and anyone named within the extracts. Any other potentially identifying information has been excluded from extracts.

*Table 2. Themes and subthemes*

Key themes	Subthemes
<b>Adopting was a challenging time</b>	Feeling powerless Feeling responsible for children's loss Difficulties developing paternal relationships
<b>Becoming an adoptive father requires adjustments</b>	Adjusting to a different way of having a family Adjusting to unexpected challenges Adjusting parenting scripts
<b>Finding ways to cope</b>	Formal support did not meet their needs Protecting from emotional pain Valuing shared experiences in peer support Making sense of their children
<b>The rewards of adoption</b>	Personal transformations Strengthening relationships The joy of parenting

## 3.2. Adopting was a challenging time

This theme encapsulates the extent to which the transition to adoptive fatherhood was experienced by fathers as being fraught with challenges. Although all participants became fathers through adopting children from care in the UK, each had very different stories to tell about the long and complex journey from deciding to pursue adoption to finally having a child placed with them. However, common to all fathers was a sense that at various stages of the journey, both before and after children were placed with them, difficulties arose. The subthemes capture the three main ways in which the transition was challenging for the fathers in this sample.

### 3.2.1. Feeling powerless

The first subtheme related to the powerlessness that participants experienced during the adoption process, both before and after their child or children were placed to live with them. The participants described multiple ways in which aspects of their lives and parenthood were in the hands of the social workers and other adoption professionals and the adoption system. This resulted in a power imbalance in which fathers felt a lack of agency, not just in the adoption process but in their ability to become and stay a father. Some fathers explicitly named this felt power imbalance. For others there was a sense of powerlessness in the way in which they described aspects of the process over which they felt they had no control.

... the power of professionals that makes me very scared and that she, she could have said no, she did have the power to say our children wouldn't be our children. (Adam)

So we had quite a long wait before our prep group after getting sort of initial approval. So that felt like a long wait before we could get started doing anything. And that, you know, it, was frustrating at the time. (Chris)

I think the problem is you make the decision to adopt, you want to adopt, you don't want to spend a year talking about it and

training for it and preparing for it, you just want to adopt.  
(Reggie)

These quotes also demonstrate that felt powerlessness had a direct emotional impact including frustration and fear. There were also emotional consequences of the reality of the lack of power possessed by the fathers in the adoption process. The power held by professionals in the family finding process meant that some men experienced this as being in competition with other parents. This also resulted in some who were not successful in being matched with a particular child as feeling rejected by those making the decisions. This rejection led some men to question their capability as parents as they tried to make sense of it.

...what we found, was that it was very competitive out there.  
Which we didn't know. (Aiden)

We did identify 2 boys, we start the process and then they chose another family. So it was another rejection, and things.  
(Benjamin)

It was actually quite heartbreaking I think. It's like someone's better than us, at being a parent. They're better. (Advik)

The emotional impact of powerlessness in the process was linked for some men with the expectations set by the social workers. Aiden was shocked to find other potential parents were being considered as well as him and his partner for children who had already started to think he could be father to. In contrast, being prepared by his social workers for a long wait to be matched helped John to tolerate waiting without being frustrated.

You're thinking really seriously at this point that this might happen. And we got as far as that, only to find that they weren't just talking to us, they were talking to other families. (Aiden)

I think a lot of people just weren't prepared for that, you know, the expectation was that they were going to be matched with a child as soon as they'd walked out the door and they'd been



approved and, you know, patted on the back. It's not reality and I was prepared for that. I think I had a good social worker who made me prepared for that. (John)

Whilst the lack of autonomy over this aspect of their lives was difficult for fathers, some accepted that this was an inherent nature of adoption. Others, however, felt that the degree of powerlessness was increased by particular actions or lack of actions by professionals and was therefore preventable. Some felt that their process had been unnecessarily held up with bureaucracies, staff turnover and incompetence of staff which exacerbated feelings of frustration that they had to wait for their children. One father who had felt badly mistreated by the local authority adoption felt that the power social workers held was actively used against him:

So that power imbalance gets constantly pushed back on, and you get constantly pushed back in your box. (Alex)

After the children had been placed, the sense of others holding power over the situation continued for several fathers, with some being fearful that the children would be removed. One man labelling this experience as '*adoptive parent paranoia*' (Toby). The sense of being judged continuing into placement impacted some father's mood and resilience to cope, with Toby describing it as making him more 'short-tempered'. Some described coping with this by being selective in what they said or how they presented to the people they felt held this power.

I kind of went through this whole process with a nagging fear in my head that at some point Louis is going to be taken away from us. And because of that, we behaved in a certain way, which meant that we didn't really get to enjoy it anymore. (Advik)

You say something and it gets misinterpreted and it can snowball out of control, very quickly. And so certainly until we had the

adoption order I was, there was no way I was going to tell anyone it was as hard as it was. (Adam)

As these quotes demonstrate, presenting or behaving in a particular way had consequences. A consequence for some participants was that they were unable to express to professionals how hard they were finding it as with Adam above, and thus presented a barrier to support. For Adam, getting the adoption order meant he would regain some power and stability. Toby described the relief in being able to speak honestly to specialists who were external to the local authority adoption agency and therefore did not hold the power to remove his child.

... they were social workers that had nothing to do with the process and of course that was helpful just in case you did want to discuss anything without feeling like you're being sort of judged as well or anything that you said could be taken in some ways. (Toby)

Three men experienced subjugation in relation to other people's discriminatory attitudes towards gay men parenting and biases towards heteronormative values. Lucas experienced overt discrimination by agencies' rejection of their applications to be adopters. Chris held a belief that social workers would discriminate against gay couples by only matching them with the older children. For John however, the discrimination was by non-professionals in their surprise that as a gay single man he was even able to adopt.

... we encountered some really unpleasant homophobia from one agency in particular. Just out right in your face homophobia. (Lucas)

I guess in our heads too that my sense is that young babies were more likely to be given to a heterosexual couple, because they would, I don't, I'm not, it's not true but my sense was, well it's

true to a certain extent. For many social workers that would feel like a more natural fit. (Chris)

But a lot of people have said, oh, I didn't think you'd be able to do that on your own, as if there's a stigma attached to a gay man adopting a child. (John)

### 3.2.2. Feeling responsible for children's loss

This subtheme reflects the sense of responsibility that fathers felt for the loss that their children experienced in taking them from their foster home, or for the loss the children who they chose not to adopt suffered as a result.

Two men described feeling guilty for not continuing the adoption process with children. Feelings of guilt and shame were strongly felt by Benjamin who had proceeded further in the process and had met a child before deciding to not continue with the adoption.

We knew we could actually do a really good job and parent him really well but it wasn't quite right for us so we said no and that felt horrible ... I guess we just felt a bit guilty. (Chris)

... I had the feeling of shame after what happened with the little boy I cried and things, it was quite, quite hard, and I said to myself never again, whatever happens I'm not going to do this again. (Benjamin)

Some fathers also felt responsible for the child's loss of a good foster home. The majority felt the foster parents had provided a safe, nurturing and stable environment for their children. They felt responsible for taking these children away from this and for being the cause of another loss for children who had already experienced a number of losses. This was in conflict with their values of adoption as being an ethical and altruistic way of becoming a parent. This feeling of responsibility for such a loss was experienced as really difficult for these fathers. For some, the sense of responsibility was exacerbated by then

having to manage the children's behaviours which were felt to be as a consequence of the loss.

So we took them from a very good experience, a very good home. That was another element that made it difficult to ...

I: can you say a bit about why that was difficult?

Because the children came from a good-. You didn't take the children from a difficult situation, a bad situation but from a good one. (Benjamin).

It's one of the hardest things about adoption is that you're, you're the last link in the chain of constant disruption in these kids' lives ... it's a really hard one to get your head around because you want to think that you're rescuing them kind of thing. In fact, what you're doing is imposing another awful upheaval on them. (Lucas)

... it's very hard when you've got a crying child and you know you're partly responsible for that change. (Chris)

### 3.2.3. Difficulties developing paternal relationships

This theme reflects the challenges that most participants experienced in building relationships with their children. Many of the fathers experienced difficulties related to becoming a father to a child who had had a life before them and who already had personalities and preferences. There was a sense of having to get to know the children as a challenge which needed to be overcome. Several men also acknowledged that it took time for love for their children to develop.

...I see them as two little strangers in my house. (Benjamin).

...they were just children I'd never met before, and I'd never before and so you know it was quite hard. (Adam)

You don't have particularly strong feelings for them. You have caring feelings and feelings of curiosity and concern and things like that but they are other people's children living in your house and you're building that thing, you're building that bond with them... (Alex)

Participants initial' source of information about the children was through the paperwork about the children. Some experienced this as negative and impersonal and not really revealing much about the actual child themselves who they eventually come to know. Getting more personal information from people that know the child, seeing photos and videos or meeting the child all facilitated getting to know the child beyond the paperwork.

And you get this very thick wad of paperwork which is written, it's the paperwork that's used to justify the adoption order so it's written in a certain way. It's kind of, it's very official, it's a bit negative in some ways. (Chris).

The child report that you get. It was a horror story ... But that's not him. And it would have been lovely to have been told that by someone. (Advik).

It gave us a better picture of what he was like as a person.  
(Chris, talking about hearing information about their prospective adoptive child before he was placed from a social worker)

I actually got a bit of a sense of him. He has a personality now. And you know I can kind of engage with this much more, much more viscerally. (Aiden, about seeing his future son at an Activity Day).

Some men felt that the relationship with their children was hindered by them being a man. They attributed this to the child's previous experiences or lack of experiences with men.

... it just made you sad. Like, because, it wasn't, I used to think she's not not looking at me, she's not making contact with me because I'm a man. (Reggie)

...for the first few weeks to a month when she just didn't want anything to do with me and she was just clinging to Nancy like a limpet, so I was probably quite jealous of that bond which as I say, I, I mean both the foster carers were female I don't think she had much to do with men before. (Adam)

Returning to work had a negative impact on the relationship with their child for some men, even if they had initially felt positive about the bond. Whilst some men also acknowledged a sense of relief and escape being able to go back to work, there was also a feeling of being excluded from the dyad of the partner who remained off work and the child (or group of children) or being rejected by the child when they were at home. The transition back to work had a particularly strong impact for Advik who had the least amount of time off work of all the participants, returning to work after two weeks. Not only did he find it was detrimental to his relationship with his son but also on his own sense of being a father.

I'm not a parent. I'm just some random bloke who turns up in this kid's life. And for me as well it's like you know I have all the semblance of a parent, but it wasn't a deep bond as a parent. (Advik)

Eli was really cross with me, for quite a while. Because suddenly I wasn't around as much. (Aiden)

Time off work and spent with the family facilitated fathers getting to know their children and developing relationships. The amount of time participants took off work varied a great deal, from some who took a year off, some who had flexibility due to nature of the work such as being freelance and some who had two to four weeks leave.

I literally had like four weeks off so it was like, alright then. So I had loads of time and Cam took her maternity off and it was great. It was just playing with Olivia every day. It was great fun. (Stuart)

But actually three months was really good for me ... it was really important for us to both be home with Leo and both to develop a relationship with him. (Chris)

Some fathers linked successful bonding to the extent their children were accepting rather than rejecting of them as fathers. For some this was indicated by how much the child allowed fathers to demonstrate nurture and affection.

I could definitely say that I loved Imogen a long time before loved the other two. (...) cos she was just so cute and she didn't do this sort of pushing away thing that particularly Nat did. (Adam)

I say our bond happened quite quickly. There was no rejection there really or anything like that. So I felt like in his place that he knew that I was dad and things like that. (John)

### **3.3. Becoming an adoptive father requires adjustments**

This theme brings together the psychological adjustments that participants made in becoming a father through adoption. These occurred throughout the process, from making the decision to adopt through to the children living with them. Each subtheme represents a manner in which fathers adjusted their attitudes, beliefs, expectations and actions during this time period.

#### **3.3.1. Adjusting to a different way of having a family**

Many of the men in the sample had attempted to have biological children before moving on to start the adoption process and had to undergo an adjustment to considering forming families in an alternative way. The ease with which men managed the transition to considering adoption as a way to become a parent

varied throughout the sample and appeared to depend on a number of different factors.

Narratives of masculinity and ability to have birth children impacted some men's adjustment to adoption as Reggie described:

... when you're a guy, you probably, you're genetically programmed to, to reproduce and have a son and he'll carry your name on, and it will carry forward for generations to come and all that stuff ... if you're deciding to adopt you're deciding to not have birth children, you have to let go of those things that you've been brought up to believe. (Reggie)

Amongst these men, the cause of not being able to have biological children, or knowledge of this cause, impacted how they experienced this. Stuart felt it was hard to adjust because investigations had revealed that he was able to have biological children but his wife was not. Reggie found that not knowing the reason for not being able to conceive made it even more difficult to accept that he would not be having biological children. Contrastingly for Advik, knowing why IVF was not working facilitated acceptance and subsequent adjustment to considering alternative ways to start a family.

... having the ability to have children and having to put that aside for something else. Someone that's a complete stranger to you biologically as well as an individual, as a stranger, I felt that was hard. (Stuart)

I had to adjust because in my mind I just assumed it would work. And there's, and also genetically there's nothing wrong with us. It's unexplained, we don't know why we can't have children. Which is kind of worse. (Reggie)



... it wasn't working, we kind of knew why it wasn't working and we went sort of well we want to have children, we want to have a family, how are we going to do that? (Advik)

Of those that attempted first to have biological children, some had already considered adoption as a way to have a family, or add to a family after first having biological children. These men were consequently already open to alternative ways of forming families which challenged societal normative discourses about the structure of family. This appeared to facilitate the transition to pursuing adoption after being unable to have biological children.

I had been interested in adopting for some time ... I guess I had at the back of my mind that if I was ever in a position to foster or adopt I would quite like to do that ... and so that was something that we discussed and we were enthusiastic about. (Alex)

The process of turning to and adapting to adoption as a way to become a father was not confined to the pre-adoptive stage but continued for many after the child had been adopted. For example, the importance Reggie placed on a biological family and passing down his genes continued to decrease into the adoptive placement as he learnt through experience about the impact of his parenting on his children's development:

I used to get hung up on, well if he's not my son then he won't have my DNA ... But then I realised well actually that's just rubbish. His DNA would be if he's going to look like me and be the same height, stand like me maybe. That's not going to change how he acts with people and stuff, I'm going to teach him that. (Reggie)

For some men, however, adoption had always been the primary way they would want to form a family and for these men, less adjustment was required. Sexuality was an important factor in this. For most of the men who were gay,

adoption was the first route pursued to become a parent. This was also the case for one man in a heterosexual relationship who described himself as bisexual. For this man, his sexuality, amongst other factors, influenced his decision to adopt.

It was always our route. There was never another option for us.  
(Toby)

I think partly both Nancy and I are bi so we'd always thought it was totally possible that we might end up with same-sex partners and therefore adoption would be logical way to go. (Adam)

Being gay or bisexual however did not totally exclude any adjustments in attitudes about becoming a parent. One man had not even considered that parenthood was a possibility for him before the change in law which legalised unmarried couples adopting in the UK. As this occurred prior to the legalisation of gay marriage, this man felt that it was only when this change in law happened that his partner and he were able to consider the reality of becoming parents. This required a shift in their attitude towards parenting from being a hypothetical idea to suddenly being a reality and lead them to think deeply about whether it was something they wanted to do.

... then, when that legislation went through it suddenly changed from like, this hypothetical idea ... but then it suddenly became a possibility. And that's when it was really like, oh shit, this could actually happen as there's nothing to stop us from doing this.  
(Lucus)

John, who pursued parenthood as a single man, came to adopt after first attempting to have a biological child through surrogacy. John also went through a period of adjustment to the fact he was not going to be a biological father which had been his primary desire.

So when this happened, even though I wished it had still run its course, and, you know, I had my own biological child, I knew at that point I thought, no I don't... Even though I could try again ... I didn't want to pursue that. (John)

For many men, regardless of their sexuality or how they came to adopt, a narrative of adoption as an altruistic way of becoming a parent was important and aided the adjustment to this way of becoming a father.

We were always of the mind that the world's got enough children and actually the last thing the world needs is more kids. (Aiden)

### 3.3.2. Adjusting to unexpected challenges

Many fathers felt that in some way the reality of being a father for the first time was harder than they expected or felt ill-prepared for the challenges. They, therefore, were required to adjust their expectations when faced with the reality of the situation. This was the case even for those who had thought they were reasonably well prepared and were expecting it to be challenging.

I was in no way shape or form prepared. (Advik)

... we weren't emotionally ready. (Reggie)

Expectations of the early placement period were experienced as depending on a number of factors. Men's expectations were influenced by their experience of seeing friends or family with biological families, working with children or their own experiences of being parented. Once they had children placed with them they realised it was even harder than they had expected, with attributing this to particular challenges associated with parenting children from care.

The reality was extremely different to what I had expected, from my experience as I told you before with the child of the friend of mine and with the children I work with, yeah. (Benjamin)

Some men felt frustrated with their agencies for not having prepared them better for these challenges and felt that there could have been more focus on

the emotional impact of becoming a father to an adopted child in the preparation groups. Others acknowledged where being prepared for particular challenges had made the transition easier. However, others felt that nothing could prepare them for the reality. Some attributed this to the gap between learning about something in the preparation groups or through their own reading and the reality.

... we're told to keep them in a distance to encourage the bond between the child and the new parents. So you kind of feel quite, I think, thrown into it on your own, but you're still not surprised because you've kind of been expecting that, I think. (Toby)

I think in a sense whatever preparation you do nothing can prepare you for the reality of it. (Adam)

... there's a big difference between learning that and the lived experience. (Lucas)

A few of the men described the unexpected challenges of becoming a parent to a toddler compared to an infant. For example, some were surprised by the amount of the attention their children required and the stubborn attitude they had. However, one man acknowledged the pleasant surprise of finding that his child slept through the night. He felt lucky as an adoptive father to be able to sleep more than biological parents with a baby would be able to. Despite this and the lack of other difficult child behaviours to manage compared to some of the other fathers, John still found the change in his life and the emotional impact of adopting harder than he expected.

And toddlers are bloody difficult, who knew, you know, I didn't. and, you know, they've got opinions, strongly held. (Aiden)

I didn't realise what it was possibly going to take from me. Like how physically tired I was going to be, how demanding it was, how emotionally tired I was going to be. (John)

Adopting sibling groups presented fathers with further unexpected challenges. This appeared to be in the extent of work that would be required to parent them but also the different dynamics that could occur between the different parents and the different children and also between the siblings themselves.

We thought we were prepared and we, we weren't. Especially with siblings. (Reggie)

... we didn't really understand that the combination of twins and that traumatic background could and would be as volatile and difficult as it is. (Alex)

The extent to which fathers had to adjust to unexpected challenges appeared to be impacted by the behaviour of their children. Several men found that beyond what they saw as the normal challenges of becoming a parent for the first time, they experienced that initial placement period as relatively smooth. However, one man interpreted this as the children's compliance and so did not view it as an exclusively positive experience, highlighting the complexity of looking after children who have suffered abuse and trauma.

Again, I don't think was anything that took us by surprise, but that was not because of our well-preparedness, that was because Hugo at the time was quite straightforward. There was nothing particularly untoward that caused anything, any difficulties. (Toby)

We had a knowledge and a suspicion that that's their survival instincts. They're being compliant because they are so terrified. (Alex)

For most, adjusting to these unexpected challenges occurred after the child was placed, despite there being opportunities prior to this to adjust to possible challenges of parenting a child with experiences of trauma and loss. Some men experienced the preparation they received prior to their children being placed as overly negative. They felt it relayed worse case scenarios and focused on the

impact that the trauma, abuse and neglect could have on the children's behaviour and development. They felt there should have been more positive stories of adoption to maintain enthusiasm and hope. Two men also described receiving warnings from others about how hard it would be and responding in a somewhat nonchalant manner.

... before we did it everyone was saying you don't know what you're letting yourself into, it's going to be so hard and we were saying yeah yeah we know, and so it has been a lot harder than we expected. (Adam)

But a lot of the stories are about the children and the trauma that they have and how that manifests and you don't tend to... I don't think, you don't tend to all the time get out any sort of positive stories. They all seem quite negative. (Toby)

### 3.3.3. Adjusting parenting scripts

This subtheme relates to the way in which participants felt they needed to adjust their parenting scripts in terms of their attitudes towards parenting and the parenting styles they used with their children. There was a sense of needing to let go of what they saw as normative parenting practices passed down intergenerationally in their families, or from seeing how others around them parented their children. Fathers felt that many of these normative parenting styles such as maintaining strict boundaries and the use of consequences were not appropriate for children with experiences of trauma and loss. Being able to recognise when they were using traditional parenting techniques which were not working helped some fathers to make the adjustment. Whilst these adjustments started in the early placement period that the interview focused on, two men also highlighted that the adjustment to a more child-led parenting style continued over the years, suggesting how difficult societal parenting norms may be to overcome. One father, Reggie, felt that adjusting his parenting style to have fewer boundaries had actually been detrimental and made further adjustments regarding parenting as his experience as a father grew.

The main difficulty is, those are the concepts that you've picked up from your parents, your peer group, from all this stuff and they're totally irrelevant to your child. (Advik)

So yes, just making conscious, conscious recognition of what wasn't good and trying to change it. (Adam)

So we had to learn to let go of a lot of these ideas of parental authority and discipline and all the rest of it, which we'd both, we'd both grown up with. ... So that's how we, you know, those are your core scripts or whatever you want to call them. And we had to let go of a lot of that. And that was actually really hard and is still quite hard actually. (Lucas)

We didn't get our boundaries clear enough with the kids early on about certain things. Or, we were too soft with them because they're adopted. (Reggie)

Many of the men that talked about adjusting their view of parenting felt that their pre-adoption preparation had not adequately prepared them for this. Consequently, there was an increase in the strain on their early placement experience in which they needed to find this out for themselves.

The kind of training that we had about parenting was very much along the lines of give these children clear boundaries, consistent you know follow through with any consequences, all of that stuff that really is parenting advice that you'd apply to birth children and is I think completely inapplicable and inappropriate to adopted children. (Lucas)

For some, learning how to parent a child with experiences of trauma and loss lead them to reflect on parenting more generally:

And I've thought very deeply about a lot of this stuff. You know I can see birth parents who parent their children in a certain way

and I'm just thinking well you're actually, you're not giving them the attention you need. (Lucas)

Adjusting parenting scripts also involved adjusting expectations on themselves as fathers. Many came into the process with high expectations of themselves as capable fathers. Discovering that the role was in fact much more challenging than they had anticipated may have put these views of themselves into question. A few men found that adjusting their own expectations of themselves as fathers facilitated moving through unexpected challenges when they first became fathers.

Learning that it's okay to not be that super parent the whole time. That sometimes actually this stuff is happening for a reason and you've got to actually listen to what that anger is telling you and to admit it into your life and not feel awful about it because then you do become blocked and that's not good. (Lucas)

### **3.4. Finding ways to cope**

This theme explores ways in which participants coped with the challenges of becoming fathers by adoption and how they managed without the formal support that many would have liked.

#### **3.4.1. Formal support not meeting their needs**

This subtheme relates to the way that many fathers experienced the formal support offered to them by services as lacking in some way. Some felt that they did not receive enough support at all or early enough in the process. Others felt that the kind of support that was offered or that they accessed was not quite right for what they wanted. The type of support that fathers wanted in the early placement stage varied. Some felt that the support offered to them by social services focused too much on the practical and wanted more emotional support to cope with the early challenges of being a father. Others wanted more practical help regarding parenting and managing the children's behaviours that



they found challenging. Either way, there was a sense of fathers feeling services were not quite getting it right for them.

It was just 20 minutes after finding out and then that was that. There's no real proper... Proper, proper sit-down and say what can be done, you know, to help us with that. No follow-up. (Stuart)

Because I had to go through myself to make sense of what I was doing and start to you know to attach to my children, but I didn't have any support for that to happen. (Benjamin)

But I don't think there's been a lot in the way of support. More so as Hugo's gotten older, but not in those initial periods of time. (Toby)

And actually we needed advice you know. We didn't really want therapy. We wanted advice and instruction. (Aiden)

In contrast to the majority of fathers who felt that there could have been more or better support offered to them, only one participant felt that in general the local authority team he had dealt with had provided him with all the support he needed. For him, even just knowing that there was support if he wanted it was helpful, even if he did not need to take it up.

They were always there for me and I didn't feel at any point that I wasn't supported by them. Even just to know it, whether I used it or not was a whole other thing, but just to know it. (John)

Another participant experienced the specialist support he accessed as successfully meeting a need. He accessed what he described as 'attachment therapy counselling' which was provided by the agency through which he had adopted. This service focused on helping him and his partner to understand their child's behaviour and their own emotional responses to it. This support was invaluable to him, both in terms of their relationship to their son, but also in helping their partner relationship to cope with the strain.

So, the counselling helped us massively to turn this around and I really think that without that we would have been in trouble. I, I, I mean I don't think the adoption would have disrupted but I think we were, we were struggling at that point. (Lucas)

#### 3.4.2. Protecting from emotional pain

This subtheme reflects how a number of fathers coped with the challenges of the process or the early placement by maintaining a degree of psychological distance from painful or potentially painful emotions. For many, this meant taking pragmatic, problem-solving approaches to resolve various issues including decisions that needed to be made in the process. For some, this logical characteristic was felt to be complementary to their partner's more emotional approach to situations as Adam describes when explaining how he and his wife navigated the matching process.

And I just did a, a did a little mind map thing, you know where's the positives and negatives and just drew it out as a document to try to process all this stuff that was going on so we could come to a decision. (Chris)

I think I saw to a certain extent my role in that matching process, Nancy being the heart of seeing which ones she fell in love with and wanted us to adopt and me being the one that would then look through and see whether it was sensible. (Adam)

For some men, attempting to maintain emotional distance and keep excitement at bay was an active choice to protect themselves from potential future loss or disappointments in the search to find their children. For those who did suffer painful losses, maintaining emotional distance became a learnt behaviour in order to protect themselves from any further loss. This coping strategy was particularly pertinent during the period of time waiting for a child or children to be matched with them.

We don't get too excited this is all going to happen suddenly because it doesn't work like that you know to, you don't start getting excited until your further along because otherwise you're going to get heartbroken constantly. (Chris)

It was actually quite heartbreaking I think... you become very guarded and quite closed off to that emotional side of you.  
(Advik)

For Aiden, an active decision to guard against emotions was not required as he naturally felt that he could not have a connection to any potential children just from looking at photos and reading information about them. He experienced this as protecting him from the loss compared to his wife who he thought had struggled more with this.

I think, it wasn't as hard for me ... because I was always, I think I've got enough self-awareness to know that it was hard for me always to emotionally really engage while the conversation was at the stage of looking at a photo and reading the CPR<sup>6</sup>. (Aiden)

Whilst these ways of maintaining psychological distance from emotion appeared to aid the men in navigating their way through the adoption process, it is also important to acknowledge that some men also found that talking with their partners, spouses or close friends also helped them to either make decisions or cope with painful emotions during the pre-adoption stage. For some this was the main source of support through the process. Although it was not clear from their responses in what way they experienced talking as helping them, it is reasonable to infer that talking may have provided them with a means to acknowledge and process the emotions that they were experiencing at this time as implied by Benjamin when he talked about how he coped with feelings of shame for having stopped the adoption process with a child:

---

<sup>6</sup> Child Permanence Report

What helped me is talking about it. So I talked with my wife, of my sense of feeling ashamed and things. Or my friends, close friend. Yeah that was my coping. (Benjamin)

### 3.4.3. Making sense of their children

This subtheme captures how fathers coped with the transition by attempting to make sense of their children and their behaviours. They did this by understanding the children and their behaviours in relation to the children's past experiences of abuse, trauma and loss. This was a particularly prominent theme for those who experienced difficult or unexpected child behaviours in the early months of placement. Understanding the child's past experiences also helped them to unpick their own responses to their children. For those who adopted sibling groups, understanding the different experiences of the siblings helped them to understand their different responses to their children.

... he's insecure about stuff, he doesn't like being alone because again he was suffered from negligence as a child, as a baby. He doesn't like being alone so you know, and I understand that.  
(Advik)

... he created conflict and he got conflict. And it feeds into his expectations of normality but also his feeling of that's how he should be treated. I imagine there was a lot of conflict in his early life. (Lucus)

So our eldest Nathaniel ... He's quite challenging ... They were removed for reasons of neglect. And Nathaniel and Thomas suffered that. Imogen was only 2 weeks old when she was removed into foster care. So she had a different experience, so she's very different. (Adam)

For some, the reality of the potential abuse the children may have experienced was very difficult to accept and it required effort and work to think about:

If anything the story just scared me you know. And made me want to run in the opposite direction because I just thought how

can anyone go through that experience and not come out again completely damaged and messed up. (Aiden)

#### 3.4.4. Valuing shared experiences in peer support

This subtheme reflects the importance that men placed on accessing peer support. All but one man found that having contact with other adopters helped them through some aspect of becoming an adoptive father. For some, this was something they were able to access early in the placement. Others did not access it until more recently and therefore was outside of the time period of this research. However, many felt it was extremely important and would have liked to have had this support earlier in the process. Routes to peer support differed amongst the participants. Some built up peer support from the pre-adoption preparation or training groups and maintained contact with them into placements. Others were signposted by the adoption agency and some found existing adopters already within their networks. Where signposting had not been provided, fathers were generally quite proactive in seeking out peer support for themselves.

After we adopted we started going to a music group specifically for adopted children ... And that was very helpful. Just being able to talk with other adopters. And that's something we've continued to do and we've continued to find very helpful is talking with other adopters. (Adam)

I think if they made more of that connection, more available that would help, especially at the beginning, you know talking with other [adoptive] parents. (Benjamin)

This peer support was helpful for a number of reasons. Some found hearing other people's experiences helped them prepare for the reality, or would have helped them if they had had it. Others felt that hearing adopters' positive stories would have helped them maintain hope. Many felt that it was helpful or would have been helpful to be able to speak to people who understand because they have been through it themselves. This was linked with the sense that only other people who have been through the adoption process can understand and the

biological parents cannot possibly understand the uniqueness of adoptive parenthood. Toby attributed this to incorrect beliefs held by non-adoptive parents about the adoption process and why children are being adopted.

So if I talk with parents who have adopted, it's like you're talking the same language. You know, they understand you, so I find that really useful. (Benjamin)

... I don't think anyone apart from other adoptive parents understands how that feels to a child and how they can play up and how they can react. (Advik)

I think they still have ideas about relinquished children and that's the kind of route that a lot of it still happens through. (Toby)

Although friends and families provided a support network for many of the fathers, there was still a difficulty in them not really understanding the challenges, at least in the early stages. As described in an earlier theme, fathers themselves underwent a process of modifying their parenting scripts, and many found that non-adopters lagged behind with this, often advising normative parenting practices when the adoptive fathers had already learnt this was not helpful with their children. In describing a family member's response to difficulties getting the child to eat, Lucas said:

[impersonating family member] "oh no child will ever starve themselves, he'll eat you know, you just (inaudible) sooner or later." No he won't, we had tried this, all of these thing by that time. (Lucas)

Although some tried to help their families and friends to understand this was experienced as hard work for the participants and an acceptance that non-adoptive parents were just incapable of being able to understand on the level that they needed.

... they just don't understand that, which again, I don't expect them to, but you just see the difference between people that are not engaged in that world and others that are. (Toby)

In terms of more formal peer support networks, only one man described trying to attend a non-adoption specific parenting group. He experienced feeling excluded in the group in which he felt different as a man in a group of all women and in not being a biological father. This led him to seek adoption specific groups through which he felt able to integrate more successfully into and felt less scrutinized regarding his gender, sexuality and route to fatherhood:

There were always men there anyway and obviously some straight, some gay and it was kind of the norm so it was not about that kind of thing there. It's just a very welcoming arena really. (Toby).

It was not only the shared experience of adoption that was important in peer support. Some sought the shared experience of being a gay father by linking with other gay fathers, and one man sought contact with other Black and ethnic minority adopters. A few of the fathers felt that specifically contact with other male adopters provided another level of understanding and peer support, or would have provided this if they had been able to access it earlier. Many pointed out during the interview that adoptive fathers' voices are often marginalised compared to those of mothers in parenthood. For a few men, this very much linked with the lack of peer support specifically for fathers.

Like Mom's Net's good, but that's Mom's Net. It's like, well, that's the mother's point of view. What about the dad's point of view?  
(John)

Whether men felt the need for access to specific male peer support depended on their experiences and the extent to which they attributed particular traits or experiences to their identity as men. Advik, who returned to work after two

weeks, felt that male peer support would have helped him navigate the roles of husband, father and worker in the early stages of placement.

I wish I'd had that. Just a dads' one. Where dads would go and you know, if another adoptive dad had told me you know ... stop being a complete twat, understand that your wife is going through hell and you have to earn that love from your child. That would have saved me months of being an idiot. (Advik)

Some men also emphasised the need for men to have more access to peer support due to a narrative of men as finding it difficult to talk. These men felt they differed from the norm in finding it quite easy to talk to others but thought that other men may not. They felt that being able to talk about their feelings with others had helped them in the process and wanted other men to benefit from this as well.

Because we're men, you know, you get issues with male suicide rates because guys don't talk about such things because they think in this culture, you shouldn't. You know, and it's like, well, it's good to open up, it relieves tension and you feel better for it. (John)

I'm pretty comfortable talking about all of this sort of stuff but lots of blokes aren't. (Aiden)

In contrast to all other fathers in the sample, John did not access adoptive parent peer support or felt he needed it. John experienced himself as different from the other prospective parents in the group because of identifying as working class and experienced their attitudes towards the adoption process as entitled. This led him to reject them as a source of support.

It came across as if they should be entitled to this kind of contact or this immediate matching or what. You know, as if the social services or whoever was at their beck and call. And so at that point, I just cut ties with all of them. (John)



### **3.5. The rewards of adoption**

Despite the numerous challenges faced by the adoptive fathers, all experienced positive aspects in either the pre-adoption processes or through becoming a father and for many in both these areas. Some underwent positive transformations in themselves and within their relationships and many expressed ultimate pleasure in being a father.

#### **3.5.1. Personal transformations**

Many participants described benefitting from personal changes through the process of adoption. There was a sense of resilience and achievement in overcoming the challenges. Several men acknowledged the adoption assessment process facilitating personal exploration and reflection they would otherwise not have undergone and which actually then benefited them further down the line. Some also experienced being successful in the adoption process or receiving positive feedback from social workers as increasing their confidence in themselves as parents.

We have a lot that we feel very proud of. (Adam)

I think the good thing about it was that the process with the social worker was it was quite long, exceptionally detailed, and quite cathartic in a sense. (Advik)

Obviously looking at any difficulties that you had in your past and how it may actually benefit an adopted child and how you can deal with that as an adoptive parent. (Toby)

... the professionals are saying, are expressing you know happiness that you're in the process, they want you to be in the process, saying they need families like you. So in that sense it's quite affirming. (Aiden)

Some men also found that becoming an adoptive father lead to transformations in their work identity, either through changing careers entirely, changing jobs or making adjustments within the same job. Although for two of these men, these changes happened after being parents for a number of months or years outside of the time period this research was focusing on, these personal developments were pertinent enough to the men that they wished to talk about it and there was a sense of regret that they had not made these changes earlier. These participants perceived these changes to be positive as they allowed the fathers a more balanced life in which they were able to more successfully integrate different roles of father and professional.

So, that's kind of why I made the decision to change jobs and I changed how I deal with stress now. So because also, I wasn't letting me be the type of parent I wanted to be. I wanted to be that hands on, fun dad that did stuff and I was grumpy dad that was tired all the time. (Reggie)

It's very rewarding, very satisfying. (Advik, describing his change in career)

### 3.5.2. Strengthening relationships

Several fathers experienced their spousal or partner relationships as strengthening over the period of becoming a father. For some, these improvements in their relationships stemmed from the process of talking and making multiple decisions throughout the adoption process. Similarly, to the personal developments in the previous subthemes, some also felt that the process of talking more about their pasts and their attitudes towards parenting also lead to better understanding between the couples. As Chris explains below, these benefits were felt to be advantageous for adoptive couples over biological parents who do not have to go through such processes prior to having a baby. The challenges faced after children were placed also lead some fathers to feel their relationships with partners became stronger. Where fathers did experience difficulties in their relationships during the transition periods, there

was also a sense of relationships growing in resilience through surviving the challenges.

But I think on the upside, its, there's a sort of, it's strengthened us. And made the relationship deeper. (Aiden)

I guess if you get pregnant, it just happens. But here you're making decisions all the time ... And the assessment you talk a lot about things that you may not, it's good preparation but you're talking about how you were raised as a child and what kind of parent you want to be ... through all of those emotions and decisions probably made the relationship stronger. (Chris)

I think that at the same time it's made us stronger as a, as a committed couple, because we are very much you know in it together and we're more reliant on each other than perhaps we were before when things were just more. (Alex)

We did have a few blazing arguments in those early months but we stuck together. (Adam)

### 3.5.3. The joy of parenting

This final subtheme reflects how fathers emphasised that despite the challenges, they experienced a sense of joy in becoming parents. These moments of pleasure amongst the more emotionally challenging times helped fathers to remain motivated and facilitated coping with the harder experiences.

... it's a lot of intense learning and adjustment kind of merged with loads of fantastic highs and memories. (Reggie)

...even when things have been tough there's always an incredible amount of joy. (Lucas)

We enjoyed all that time. So even when it was difficult and, that we still had the sense that we had, you know it might have been a day where you're tired because you've been up a lot during the

night, and the end of that day you have a child who's in tears and distraught, but between times you have a really nice time. (Chris)

For some who had found the initial stages particularly hard, their experience as fathers improved over time. From a position of being a number of years into their role of adoptive fathers and looking back with hindsight at the early period, some felt it important to express to me they ultimately did not have regrets in their decision to become an adoptive father.

...my heart absolutely exploded and I was just like, that's when I knew that like, that's when the bond had grown and that's when I knew I loved this child. (Advik, describing going swimming with his son).

I've been talking relatively negatively towards you as, but it's also true that if I could go back I wouldn't change it. (Adam)

It's a happy ending. (Benjamin)

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Overview**

In this chapter, I summarise the results in the context of the existing research regarding the transition to adoptive parenthood and fatherhood. I then consider the clinical and research implications of my findings. I also include a reflective account and a critical analysis of the methodology.

### **4.2. Situating the analysis**

The main research question was exploratory in nature regarding men's experiences of becoming fathers for the first time through adoption. I particularly wanted to consider the transition period in terms of the whole adoption process from the making the decision to pursue adoption. I also aimed to further understanding regarding the support that men did or did not access during the transition.

Four key themes were understood from the fathers' interviews: 'Adopting was a challenging time', 'Becoming an adoptive father requires adjustments', 'Finding ways to cope', 'The rewards of adoption'. These themes branched across all participants but experiences for each varied and demonstrates that men who become fathers through adoption cannot be seen as a homogenous group.

As I have conducted this research from a critical realist position, I offer my analysis and links with current research and theories as ideas and possible ways of understanding this experience rather than truths revealed about a reality. In situating the results in relation to previous research I refer to possible gender differences. However, I acknowledge that whilst this may indicate possible trends, men and women are by no means homogenous groups nor are they discrete binary groups.

#### 4.2.1. Adopting was a challenging time

The first theme captures how becoming an adoptive father was experienced as challenging for participants. This is in line with general transition to parenthood literature which conceptualises this as a stressful event for parents. This theme captured some ways in which the adoption aspect of the transition to parenthood resulted in particular difficult experiences for the men. The specific challenges of adoption have also been found in previous research (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003; McKay & Ross, 2010).

The felt powerlessness presented a particular problem for the participants in this study. The adoption system and social workers were felt to hold power over such an important life event in these men's lives has been found in previous research with both gay and heterosexual adoptive fathers (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003; Gianino, 2008). This is perhaps to some extent an unavoidable aspect of the adoption process due to the nature of the decisions that adoption professionals are required to make during the process.

It is interesting that this was such a pertinent theme for a male sample for whom such powerlessness is at odds with hegemonic masculinity discourses in the UK regarding power and authority (Courtenay, 2000). Daniluk and Hurtig-Mitchell (2003) also found that men particularly struggled with a sense of powerlessness in the adoption process after infertility in terms of perceived lack of rights and inability to challenge this during the process and expressed more anger regarding this than their female partners. This research indicates that feeling powerless can be difficult for adoptive fathers who have also not first attempted to have biological children. Further to this previous research, this study also found that the perceived powerlessness spanned across into the time period in which the child was placed as fathers continued to feel this power held by the social workers and continued to fear that their opportunity to be a father could be taken away.

In order to gain some autonomy back and avoid judgment, participants presented a particular image of themselves to social workers. This study also echoed a previous UK study in which being subjected to the 'professional gaze'

lead prospective gay and lesbian adopters to present themselves in a certain way to professionals to counteract perceived heteronormative preferences by social workers around parenting (Wood, 2016). This is also in line with a Finnish study in which straight couples withheld their feelings from adoption professionals for fear of being rejected as adopters or the adoption process being terminated (Eriksson, 2016). It may be that men in particular feel the need to show a particular image of themselves to adoption professionals given narratives around the need for children and babies to have 'maternal figures' (Gianino, 2008).

This research has also emphasized the difficult experiences of the loss of hoped for children during the adoption process. A previous study with American gay adoptive fathers also found that men struggled with uncompleted attempts at adoption (Gianino, 2008). In that particular research, the unsuccessful adoptions were attributed to discriminatory attitudes of the countries they were trying to adopt from. Previous research has also focused on the loss of hoped for biological children. The current study, therefore, contributes further to the adoption literature in the finding that both gay and straight adoptive fathers experience rejection and loss in being turned down for children they would like to adopt in domestic adoption in the UK. This was compounded by the perception of the adoption process as competitive.

This study also demonstrated that some fathers feel a sense of responsibility for the loss of their adopted children's foster carers who they generally saw as important attachment figures for the children. This is also a new finding in the transition to adoptive parenthood literature. It is also in contrast to a previous UK study in which couples were negative about foster carers and felt the need to rescue the children (Tasker & Wood, 2016). In the current study, adoptive fathers generally showed positive attitudes towards the foster carers and some specifically commented on how they facilitated successful introduction periods. However, this then left some fathers with a sense of guilt for removing the children from a safe, nurturing home or even for just being the cause of one more transition for the child. This may be particularly difficult for those whose decision to adopt was informed by core values of wanting to help children.

A further challenge experienced by participants as they became adoptive fathers was in the difficulty developing a relationship with their child or children. This study, similar to those with women or couples, highlighted the challenge for adoptive parents in developing relationships with children who have started their development and experienced a life prior to coming to live with them. Tasker and Wood (2016) described this as script collision. Reflecting previous research there was variation in the development of bonds with their children (Goldberg et al., 2013). Some experienced their bond with their child as strong from the start and for others this grew later. For those fathers who experienced very positive bonding with their children early on in the placement or even during introductions, this could instead be interpreted as the child's compliance, an attachment behaviour to cope with the transition to living with a new family. In a recent study regarding the introductions period in adoption, Boswell and Cudmore (2017) report that this can be such an anxiety-provoking time for adoptive parents, they are likely to misinterpret compliance in the children as them being 'fine'.

This research has also highlighted that returning to work after adoption may pose a particular difficulty for adoptive parents who experienced rejection or a sense of feeling left out. There was variation in the sample of fathers who took leave akin to more traditional paternity leave of two weeks, those who took longer leave, those who took up more of a primary or secondary caregiving role and those who had more shared caregiving roles with their partners. One participant who took the shortest leave of two weeks found that time away from his son when he returned to work particularly hindered the relationship. This raises an important issue regarding how the transition to adoptive parenthood is experienced for the parent who takes the shorter leave. Other participants found that time spent with the child at the start of placement by having extended leave from work aided the relationship development. Spending time with the adopted child has been reported in a previous adoption study to facilitate the parental bonding (Johnstone & Gibbs, 2012).



A further significant new finding of this study is that some men understood difficulties in their relationships with children as being compounded by their gender and the children's previous experiences or lack of experience with men. It is not possible in this study to distinguish to what extent this may be attributed to internalised discourses of men as abusive figures and children as needing maternal figures and to what extent this may indeed be children's responses to trauma and maltreatment by previous men in their lives, or a lack of experience with men.

#### 4.2.2. Becoming an adoptive father requires adjustments

This study found that fathers made adjustments in their attitudes, thinking and behaviour regarding parenthood during the transition to fatherhood. A major adjustment many men made was towards considering adoption as a way to start a family. This occurred mostly for men who had first attempted to have biological children which included one gay man as well as heterosexual couples who had differing degrees of fertility treatment. This reflects previous research which understood mothers and fathers who adopt after first trying to have biological children as going through a complicated process of 'revising the family' (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003). The adjustment was a complex and fluid process for the men in the current study impacted by social discourses regarding parenthood and family. For some of the men, hegemonic masculinity discourses regarding the male role in passing down genes through having biological children meant more adjustment was required. This echoes previous research in the USA in which men who adopted after infertility treatment placed more value on continuing the family bloodline than their female partners (Goldberg et al., 2009). This may indicate increased difficulty in adapting to the possibility of not having biological children and considering alternative ways to have a family. This may be a challenge in the transition to adoptive fatherhood which is particularly pertinent to some heterosexual men for whom societal and internalised expectations regarding having biological children may be particularly strong and may not have previously needed to be challenged to any great extent.

The current research notes that a previous open attitude to adoption seemed to aid the adaptation, or require less adaptation. Internalised adoption stigma has been associated with higher levels of depression following adoption (Goldberg et al., 2011). This may indicate that the men in this sample who had considered adoption prior to trying to have children by other means, or for whom adoption was the first choice, may have less internalised stigma which facilitates the transition.

The need to continue making adjustments about parenting approaches continued into placement as the men faced unexpected challenges and found they needed to update their parenting scripts. This links to previous research which has found that adoptive parents often experience unmet expectations (Tasker & Wood, 2016). As with other types of adjustments, this also appeared to be linked with normative discourses about parenting as fathers' expectations were often founded in their experience with other children or their experience of seeing their friends or relatives with their own biological children.

Unmet expectations about the self as a parent, the child and wider networks have been linked with post adoption depression (Foli, 2010). Expectations about themselves as fathers and about the parenting experience were influenced by others' experiences of biological parenting and many parents found they were required to adjust their scripts regarding parenting in order to fit with the unexpected challenges of adoptive parenthood.

The extent to which fathers felt unprepared was impacted by particular characteristics about the children, for example the particular needs of toddlers or of siblings. The additional complications of adopting sibling groups were highlighted in the Tasker and Wood study which considers the additional subsystems present when a sibling group is adopted and that sibling groups may have more complex pre adoption histories. This can be considered in terms of existing theory regarding social role transition (Burr et al., 1979). For those that struggled with the unexpected demands of a toddler or siblings, this could be understood as a greater perceived role strain as fathers experienced a focus on the father role to the detriment of other roles.

Fathers also found they needed to shift their parenting scripts to suit being an adoptive parent which in turn helped them to adjust to the challenges. Parenting scripts, or schemas as they have been conceptualised in previous research, impact parenting styles and strategies but can be maladaptive in some situations (Azar, Nix, & Makin-Byrd, 2005). The men in this sample found they needed to adapt to alternative ways of approaching parenting that felt more suitable for their adopted children. This included more child led, attachment focused parenting.

Children who are adopted from care are likely to have suffered neglect and abuse, and therefore not received what Winnicott (1956) coined “good enough” parenting prior to adoption. Theories of child development and attachment hypothesize that infants require attuned parenting where initially their impulses and needs are immediately recognised and met by the primary care giver. After time only “good enough” parenting is required in which the infants experience a delay in their need being met, allowing them to develop a concept of the external world (Winnicott, 1956). Children who have not been provided with a safe environment in which their needs were attuned to are more likely to develop insecure attachment patterns (Gauthier, Fortin & Jeliu, 2004). They therefore require particularly attuned and attachment focused parenting when adopted or fostered (Hughes, 1997). This may have been in contrast to fathers’ own experiences of being parented and exposure to parenting narratives through peers and media representations of biological parenting.

The narrative of adjusting parenting scripts is reflective of John Bingham-Hall’s ideas about family scripts, defined as “the family’s shared expectations of how families are to be performed in various contexts” (Byng-Hall, 1995). Byng-Hall also writes that replicative family scripts, those that are based on those experienced in one’s family of origin, can be adjusted by parents through the concept of corrective parenting scripts (Byng-Hall, 2008). The changing societal discourses of fatherhood over time from ‘breadwinner’ to ‘involved’ (Ranson,

2001; Wall & Arnold, 2007) may mean that some fathers require additional adjustments in their parenting scripts to mothers.

#### 4.2.3. Finding ways to cope

Despite the challenges and the adaptations required as in the first two key themes, this study indicated that men were able to find ways to cope. The subtheme of formal support being experienced as not meeting fathers' needs may have increased fathers' needs to find other ways of coping. However, of interest is that access to formal support was prevented for some men by their response to the power held by the social workers in presenting what they thought social workers would want to see. This may then have resulted in fathers experiencing the support as insufficient to their needs.

Participants possessed internal resources to cope with the transition to parenthood which included the subthemes '*protecting from emotional pain*' and '*making sense of their children*'. The former has not been indicated in previous studies of the transition to adoptive parenthood which suggests it may be particularly relevant to men. However, previous studies have found that complementary styles in couples facilitates the transition (Gianino, 2008) and therefore regardless of gender it may help couples if one takes a more pragmatic approach and the other a more emotional approach. Conscious decisions to protect themselves emotionally for example by not getting their hopes up or unconscious or consequential emotional distancing may also link to hegemonic discourses of masculinity regarding not showing weakness or vulnerability.

This research also indicates that being able to make sense of the children and their challenging behaviour enabled fathers' coping with parenthood after the child came to live with them. This stresses the importance of having knowledge of the children's past experiences before coming to live with them in order to be able to make sense of their behaviours. Previous research has indicated that histories of abuse and behavioural problems are associated with poorer

adjustment to adoptive parenthood (Selwyn et al., 2015). The ability to make sense of children's behaviour in relation to their past experiences and attachment strategies as the men in this sample endeavoured to do, may facilitate adjustment to parenthood. However, some men felt that adoption preparation groups and paperwork about the children were too negative suggesting that it may be difficult to confront the trauma and loss the children may have experienced and potential consequences of this in the adoptive placement.

This study reinforced previous findings of the importance of adoption peer support in the transition to adoptive parenthood (eg. Johnstone and Gibbs, 2012). Research has also found social support in terms of friends and family to aid the transition (Mckay & Ross, 2010) and adjust to unmet expectations (Moyer & Goldberg, 2015). Although some in this sample did acknowledge how friends and family were a resource, they emphasised the role of other adopters in terms of being the only other people who really understood this unique experience. It is hypothesised that peer support may be particularly useful for men who may be reluctant to access physical or mental health professional support as they benefit from the sense of camaraderie (Neukrug, Britton, & Crews, 2013). The gender difference of men as being more reluctant than women to access help for mental and physical health problems and delays in doing so is well documented (Courtenay, 2011; Hoy, 2012). This has been linked with hegemonic masculinity in western countries as emphasising power and authority and denying weakness, vulnerability or need for help. This may be further compounded by the desire to demonstrate coping to social workers in adoptive parenthood prior to adoption orders being made, as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, of note is that another theme in this study was the experience of professional support as lacking, and many men in fact felt that more specialist support could have helped them during the transition period. This has also been found in research in the USA in which men as well as women felt there was a lack of formal support during the transition period (Moyer & Goldberg, 2015) . The way in which both men and women's experiences are impacted by constructs of masculinity will vary, and therefore some men may be more willing to seek or accept help for difficulties in the

transition to adoptive fatherhood than others. In addition, despite some fathers wanting more support, there were also many stories of resilience and learning through experience in coping with the challenges during the transition to adoptive fatherhood.

#### 4.2.4. The rewards of adoption

The general picture of positivity around becoming and being adoptive parents evident is a common finding in the transition to adoptive parenthood literature despite the many challenges that are faced (Ceballo et al., 2004; Levy-Shiff et al., 1990; McKay et al., 2010; Tasker & Wood, 2016). As found in previous research, although the adoption process and early fatherhood can put a strain on adoptive parents' relationships, it can also result in the feeling that the relationship has in fact been strengthened. Ceballo et al., (2004) hypothesised that an overall increase in perceived marriage quality for adoptive parents in the USA compared to biological parents may be a result of being required through the adoption process to make decisions and deal with conflict and other issues before the child is placed. This research lends some support to this hypothesis regarding adoptive fathers who felt that their relationships with their spouses or partners had strengthened through the process.

The adoption process also held intrapersonal benefits for some fathers as well as interpersonally, with some reporting making adaptations in their professional lives which allowed for role balance but also enabled greater satisfaction with their lives in general. Aspects of the adoption process itself also facilitated intrapersonal transformation for some. It may be that the adoption process provides men with the opportunities to talk about their past experiences, thoughts and feelings that they may not have accessed previously. Whilst this was seen as a cathartic and beneficial process in itself, for some it also had the direct benefit of aiding parenting children with behavioural and/or attachment problems. Personal transformation has been a theme considered in the adaptation to adoptive parenting in gay men in relation to identity (Gianino, 2008). This current research also demonstrates that regardless of sexuality,

adoptive fathers undergo personal transformations of different kinds which may enhance and facilitate the transition to parenthood.

#### 4.2.5. Reassessing family stress theory

The findings of this research to some extent map onto the conceptualisation of the transition to adoptive parenthood in terms of ongoing negotiation of challenges and facilitators which impact the experience (McKay & Ross, 2010). The key themes of '*Finding ways to cope*' and '*The rewards of adoption*' map onto 'Facilitators' in McKay and Ross' conceptualisation and both studies noted particular challenges. However, this study has identified additional challenges and facilitating factors as well as noting the adjustments that are required in adoptive parenting. This may be a consequence of sampling differences, either by virtue of cultural and geographical location and also by gender. I have also considered ways in which the challenges and adaptations may be influenced by family and societal context and in particular discourses regarding masculinity which family stress theory does not account for. This demonstrates how in considering the transition to adoptive parenthood we need to look beyond the individual level.

### **4.3. Implications**

#### 4.3.1. Future research

This research was exploratory in nature and had a heterogeneous sample. Experiences appeared to be impacted by whether men's sexuality, in couples or single, adopted single children or sibling groups, had good relationships with social workers or difficult relationships, had extended time off work at time of placement or not, or were the main care giver or not. All of these areas require further research in order to be able to offer men (and women) support which is more suitable to their own circumstances. However, there were a number of specific findings which have important implications for future research.

This research highlighted the emotional impact on some men of turning down children in the adoption process and of being turned down for adoptive

placements. As this was only a limited area of this particular research, further research could investigate what factors impact people's ability to cope with these situations and whether there are links with persevering emotional distress such as depression utilising longitudinal designs. It would also be important to consider those men and women who following these distressing experiences do not go on to adopt.

In situating the results, I have made a number of references to the context of hegemonic masculinity in western cultures and heteronormative family discourses and hypothesised their impact on the transition to adoptive fatherhood. Further research is required to substantiate these hypotheses for example by using discourse analysis. I have also critiqued the use of family stress theory as obscuring the contextual factors in the transition to parenthood. The use of systematic and in depth grounded theory across selective samples will allow further development of theory in this area which could account for this.

This research focused on the pre-adoption and early placement phase but has acknowledged that adaptation to fatherhood continues beyond this time. Therefore, future research could follow up men throughout the adoption process and further into fatherhood in a systematic manner. This would further understanding regarding the adjustments that are continued to be made after the initial placement period.

#### 4.3.2. Clinical practice

The findings in the current research have significant implications for clinical practice. This research was conducted through a clinical psychology lens and therefore implications for clinical practice focus on areas in which clinical psychology could facilitate change. For the suggestions made below, clinical psychologists could be involved in direct work with adopters or prospective adopters but also in teaching, training and consultation with other adoption professionals. Such indirect interventions would make use of the skills, knowledge and relationships possessed by other adoption professionals as well



as allow clinical psychology to influence changes in practice more widely than at an individual level.

#### *4.3.2.1. Improving access to professional and peer support*

There are important clinical implications regarding how men can access support during the adoption process. It is important that open and trusting relationships are established between professionals and prospective adoptive parents. There is a role for clinical psychologists as well as other disciplines in fostering these relationships. This may be done through consultation with social workers involved or through facilitating network meetings utilising systemic approaches to encourage the sharing of different perspectives.

Normalising support for all prospective adopters and adoptive parents may be another way to overcome the power imbalance as a barrier to support. Hudson (2006) has argued for all adoptive parents to be offered psychological services in the UK and the normalising of problems rather than parents feeling they have failed if they encounter problems and need to ask for support. This research has shown that there is still some way to go with this as fathers continued to feel unprepared and feel that formal support was lacking. Normalising parents' emotional responses to their children and preparing for this prior to placement may also lead to a smoother transition to parenthood in which expectations of the self as a parent are managed and less adjustment around parenting attitudes is required after the placement. Hudson also argues for this as a way to reduce shame and self-blaming.

Opportunities for accessing peer support should be facilitated by adoption professionals earlier in the process and made more readily accessible across all agencies and local authorities. This could involve clinical psychologists in adoption teams either facilitating such groups, or facilitating adoptive parents in setting up their service user led groups. In setting up peer support or arranging for adoptive parents to speak at preparation events, additional shared experiences other than adoption should be considered such as gender, caring role and sexuality. However, these groups should not be considered

homogeneous nor should assumptions be made about who fathers may wish to access support from. Instead, there is a role for professionals and adoption organisations in helping people to consider what type of peer support they would like to access. It is important to consider barriers to accessing such peer support, such as ways in which people may feel different to others in a group.

#### *4.3.2.2. Exploring power and encouraging autonomy*

Given the sense of powerlessness that men experience during the adoption process, it may be beneficial for prospective adopters to have opportunities during the process to explore power. This may include how they experience powerlessness, how it may be confounded by additional ways in which they may experience powerlessness in their lives or how it may be different to ways in which they have held power in their lives. Conceptualisations of power and powerlessness may be useful for adoption professionals to utilise when facilitating such conversations. Power mapping (Hagan & Smail, 1997) may be useful to consider sources of power and powerlessness in different domains of people's lives. Coordinated management of meaning (Cronen & Pierce, 1985) can also be used to formulate power in terms of the contextual force bearing down on an individual which impacts how they respond and also ways in which resistance can be acted out as an implicative force to impact high levels of context as used in liberation psychology (Afuape, 2011). This may facilitate finding ways for fathers to maintain some autonomy in the process. It will be important for those facilitating these conversations to maintain a non-expert position to allow the expertise and internal resources of the adopters or prospective adopters to be brought to the fore.

#### *4.3.2.3. Facilitating sense making*

Adoptive parents can be helped to make sense of their children's behaviour. This signifies the value in detailed and thoughtful formulations including children's developmental history and attachment. This can be used to hypothesise how this may impact children's emotional and behavioural well-being and their relationships with prospective adopters. Preparation could also

be tailored more specifically around the past experiences and particular needs of the child or children as well as the experiences and situation of the prospective parents. This may reduce parents' feeling flooded by negative stories of adoption whilst also enabling them to be prepared for the challenges they may face in becoming adoptive parents. In addition, adopters need to be prepared about how their child or children may respond to a parent going back to work taking into consideration that child's developmental stage, history and attachment. Parents can be supported to consider strategies to facilitate this transition for the whole family.

Adoptive parents can be supported to make sense of the adjustments that may be needed in becoming an adoptive parent. This may include considering their own parenting scripts, particular in relation to being fathered and being a father. If parents struggle with adapting parenting schemas through the process to detrimental effect, there is a role for clinical psychology in providing interventions. Previous research has found support for modification of parenting schemas through cognitive behavioural therapy, family therapy, parent training, attachment-based interventions and parent-infant psychotherapy (Azar et al., 2005). However, it is important that clinical psychology also considers wider contextual interventions to facilitate the changing of societal discourses regarding heteronormative parenting and masculinity.

#### *4.3.2.4. Implications for policy*

One way in which clinical psychology can influence the wider contexts which may hinder transition to parenthood is by influencing policy. Policy already exists regarding local authorities' responsibilities to provide adoption specific local support to adopting parents (DoH, 2003). However, as this research demonstrates this varies a great deal between different local authorities and many adopters remain unsatisfied with the level of support. Policy around adoption support needs to be developed further to consider the specific experiences that adoptive parents go through as well as the children in order to tailor support and ring fence finances within local authorities for this. Policy can

be updated to include how support can be offered to potentially hard to reach groups, such as for those for whom help seeking may be more difficult.

#### **4.4. Critical Review**

##### 4.4.1. Limitations of the methodology

Qualitative research has been criticised for being interpretative compared to quantitative methods, being at risk of researcher bias and having small sizes (Willig, 2013). However, the use of TA allowed for richness and nuances in the human experience of becoming a father through adoption to be explored in a flexible manner. The flexibility of TA also fitted with the critical realist position taken in which the material reality of adoptive fatherhood could be considered whilst acknowledging the social and historical context. It is acknowledged however that this study was reliant on the reports from participants about their experience and that aspects of their experience may have been missed if they did not choose to disclose it.

##### 4.4.2. Sample

Diversity in the sample included sexuality, location in the UK, care giver status, relationship status and number of children adopted. This was discussed with the director of studies before recruitment. It was felt that this diversity was important due to the exploratory nature of this research rather than making assumptions prior to conducting the research about the impact of such differences on the transition to adoptive fatherhood.

This was an opportunistic sample which relied on fathers seeing and then responding to the adverts. The men who volunteered for this research may therefore be a select group who find talking about their experiences helpful or easier than other men who may have seen the advert and chose not to respond. In fact, several men themselves commented that they thought men in general find it harder to talk than women although they themselves do not.

All but one man in this study described themselves as either white British or white non-British. This appears to be a problematic sampling bias in the

adoption literature and further research is required regarding the experiences of adoptive parents of other ethnicities. However, this may also be representative of the struggle to recruit black and other ethnic minority adopters (Selwyn, Frazer, & Fitzgerald, 2004).

By interviewing individuals on their own, this research has excluded the co-construction of experience in couples who adopt together which previous research has felt it was important to include. However, previous research has also suggested that interviewing participants together may lead to certain experiences or narratives being prioritised over others. For example, Wirtberg (1999) found that men were less likely to express negative feelings about infertility when interviewed with their partners. Interviewing men on their own, without either female or male partners may, therefore, have allowed them to speak more openly.

#### 4.4.3. Distribution of quotes

It is noted that some participants are quoted more than others in the analysis. A range in length of interviews and therefore material to draw upon may have impacted this. Another possible explanation for this variation is that I was more personally emotionally impacted by some interviews. This may have led me to be more drawn to particular quotes. In addition, I may have had unconscious biases towards particular language used by some participants over others.

#### 4.4.4. Quality of the research

I have used a framework developed by Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) to evaluate this research.

- *Owning one's own perspective.* I stated my epistemological and personal position in relation to this research in the method section and in the discussion have referred to my own stance and reflected on when and how this may have impacted my interviews, my analysis and the conclusions I have drawn. Writing in a reflective diary through the process facilitated this process.

- *Situating the sample.* This refers to providing enough details about the participants for applicability and relevance of the conclusions to be assessed. This produced ethical dilemmas regarding the extent of information that could be included whilst also maintaining the participants' anonymity. Therefore, only information that was felt to be particularly relevant to research question was provided. This included age, relationship status, sexuality, ethnicity as well as the age of the children when they were placed for adoption. Where it was not felt appropriate to include details which may contravene anonymity such as job or location, these are spoken to more generally.

- *Grounding in examples.* Throughout the analysis section I have provided extracts from the interviews to illustrate how subthemes were drawn from the data as well as additional points made within the subthemes. I have also provided a list of codes, examples of the coding process, and the development of themes through use of mind maps in the appendices.

- *Providing credibility checks.* Practical constraints did not allow for multiple coders to improve credibility, however during the analysis process I engaged in conversations with my Director of Studies about the coding process and the themes that I was constructing. This included coding a section of an interview together. I also received peer feedback on the construction of my themes.

- *Coherence.* I have included a table presenting the key themes and sub themes. Within my themes I have explained the commonalities across participants and acknowledged differences in their experiences and how these fit within the particular themes. This demonstrates a coherent analysis of the data whilst maintaining the nuances of each participant.

- *Accomplishing general versus specific research tasks.* This research has considered the general experience of men who become fathers for the first time through adoption given the lack of research in this area in the UK. In doing so I included a range of men and acknowledged the limitations of

this. I have also considered the differences between particular men and considered how these may relate to their specific difference in situations. I acknowledge that these ideas cannot be generalized to the wider population. Instead, they are useful in considering where further research is required.

- *Resonating with the reader.* I hope that I have presented the research in a clear way to engage and further knowledge of those already in the field but also those who are not by refraining from using jargon or overly scholarly language. When I write this research for publication in the form of a journal article, I will receive further feedback on this and make adjustments as necessary.

#### 4.4.5. Researcher reflections

I am aware of previous research which has criticised the adoption process for seeing gender and sexuality as too binary. Perhaps by interviewing only men and referring to gender in binary terms in this research I also am at risk of perpetuating societal discourses around gender and sexuality. I hope that in my write up of this research I have acknowledged that there are many ways of constructing “maleness” and have resisted constructing adoptive fathers as a homogenous group. I was also aware that by focusing on the male experience I was at risk of a bias towards deductive construction of codes focusing on ideas of masculinity. Through maintaining awareness of this risk, I was able to sustain inductive, data driven analysis.

Qualitative researchers often consider the impact of being either an insider or outsider to their research group. Others have considered this an unhelpful dichotomy and instead consider the space between that may be inhabited (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). At times I found myself positioning myself very much as an outsider to the group I was researching as a female who has neither adopted children nor is adopted and I was concerned that my participants may also do so. Early in the process I noticed that I questioned whether I should have researched a topic relating more directly to females rather than males. The enthusiasm I experienced from the participants that I was exploring male

experiences and the connection I made with fatherhood research as reducing gender inequality in parenting resulted in me feeling less positioned as an outsider. I disclosed to some participants that I had experience working with adoptive parents. I reflected that this was an attempt to inhabit a space between the dichotomous positions.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

The findings have been placed in the context of current literature and demonstrate overlap in experience with more general adoptive parenthood literature in the USA and the very limited literature in the UK. This study has also highlighted some important experiences of adoptive fathers regarding the challenges of powerlessness, feeling responsible for children's loss and in developing relationships with their children as well as the adjustments required to enter adoptive parenthood for the first time. Whilst many of these challenges and adjustments may also be experienced by adoptive mothers, by focusing on the male experience I have begun to respond to a significant gap in the transition to adoptive parenthood research. In addition, I have considered these experiences in the context of masculinity discourses.

Important clinical implications for clinical psychology include directly or indirectly helping prospective and adoptive parents to manage these particular challenges and facilitate adjustments. This research has also highlighted how adoption peer support is an important facilitating factor for adoptive fathers and how services can go to greater lengths to improve access to these earlier on in the process.



## 5. REFERENCES

- Abbey, A., Andrews, F. M., & Halman, L. J. (1991). Gender's role in responses to infertility. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *15*, 295–316.
- Afuape, T. (2011). *Power, resistance and liberation in therapy with survivors of trauma: To have our hearts broken*. Routledge, New York
- Armesto, J. C., & Shapiro, E. R. (2011). Adoptive gay fathers: Transformations of the masculine homosexual self. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, *7*(1–2), 72–92. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2011.537202>
- Azar, S. T., Nix, R. L., & Makin-Byrd, K. N. (2005). Parenting schemas and the process of change. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *31*(1), 45–58.
- Bassett-Gunter, R. L., Levy-Milne, R., Naylor, P. J., Downs, D. S., Benoit, C., Warburton, D. E. R., ... Rhodes, R. E. (2013). Oh baby! Motivation for healthy eating during parenthood transitions: A longitudinal examination with a theory of planned behavior perspective. *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, *10*.
- Belsky, J., Lang, M. E., & Rovine, M. (1985). Stability and change in marriage across the transition to parenthood: A second study. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 855–865.
- Berkowitz, D. (2011). "It was the cadillac of adoption agencies": Intersections of social class, Race, and sexuality in gay men's adoption Narratives. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, *7*(1–2), 109–131. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2011.537227>
- Bird, G. W., Peterson, R., & Miller, S. H. (2002). Factors Associated With Distress Among Support-Seeking Adoptive Parents. *Family Relations*, *51*(3), 215–220.
- Boddy, J. (2013). *Understanding Permanence for Looked After Children The Care Inquiry: Review of research for the care inquiry*. Retrieved from

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/resources/england/understanding-permanence-for-lac-janet-boddy.pdf>. Retrieved 9/04/2018

Boswell, S., & Cudmore, L. (2017). Understanding the “blind spot” when children move from foster care into adoption. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 43*(2), 243–257.  
<http://doi.org/10.1080/0075417X.2017.1323946>

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. London: Sage Publications.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <http://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. London: Sage Publications.

Brodzinsky, D. M., & Huffman, L. (1988). Transition to adoptive parenthood. *Marriage & Family Review, 12*(3–4), 267–286.  
[http://doi.org/10.1300/J002v12n03\\_13](http://doi.org/10.1300/J002v12n03_13)

Brooks, D., Simmel, C., Wind, L., & Barth, R. P. (2005). Contemporary adoption in the United States: Implications for the next wave of adoption theory, research, and practice. *Psychological Issues in Adoption: Research and Practice, 1*–25.

Buist, A., Morse, C. A., & Durkin, S. (2003). Men’s adjustment to fatherhood: implications for obstetric health care. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing, 32*(2), 172–180.

Burr, W. R., Leigh, G. K., Day, R. D., & Constantine, J. (1979). Symbolic interaction and the family. In W. R. Burr, R. Hill, F. I. Nye, & I. L. Reiss (Eds.), *Contemporary theories about the family: research-based theories* (pp. 42–111). New York: Free Press.

- Byng-Hall, J. (1995). Creating a secure family base: Some implications of attachment theory for family therapy. *Family Process*, 34(1), 45-58.
- Byng-Hall, J. (2008). The significance of children fulfilling parental roles: Implications for family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 30(2), 147-162.
- Carter, B., & McGoldrick, M. (Eds.). (1988). *The changing family life cycle: A framework for family therapy* (2nd ed.). New York: Gardner Press.
- Ceballo, R., Lansford, J. E., Abbey, A., & Stewart, A. J. (2004). Gaining a child: Comparing the experiences of biological parents, adoptive parents, and stepparents. *Family Relations: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 53(1), 38–48. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2004.00007.x>
- Courtenay, W. (2011). *Dying to be men: Psychosocial, environmental, and biobehavioral directions in promoting the health of men and boys*. New York: Routledge.
- Courtenay, W. H. (2000). Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being: A theory of gender and health. *Social Science and Medicine*, 50(10), 1385–1401. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(99\)00390-1](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(99)00390-1)
- Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (1995). Interventions to ease the transition to parenthood: Why they are needed and what they can do. *Family Relations*, 412–423.
- Crawshaw, M (2010). Assessing infertile couples for adoption: just what does coming to terms with infertility mean? In M Crawshaw & R Balen (Eds.). *Adopting After Infertility: Messages from practice, research and personal experience* (pp. 68–87). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Cronen, V. E., Chen, V., & Pearce, W. B. (1988). Coordinated management of meaning: A critical theory. *Theories in Intercultural Communication*, 66-98.

- Cudmore, L. (2005). Becoming parents in the context of loss. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 20*(3), 299–308.  
<http://doi.org/10.1080/14681990500141204>
- Dance, C., & Farmer, E. (2014). Changing lives and changing minds: the experiences of adoptive parents from application to approval. *Adoption & Fostering, 38*(2), 101–114. Retrieved from  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=jlh&AN=103836538&site=ehost-live>
- Daniluk, J. C. (2001). “If We had it to Do Over Again...”: Couples’ Reflections on their Experiences of Infertility Treatments. *The Family Journal, 9*(2), 122–133. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1066480701092006>
- Daniluk, J. C., & Hurtig-Mitchell, J. (2003). Themes of Hope and Healing: Infertile Couples’ Experiences of Adoption. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 81*(4), 389–399. <http://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00265.x>
- Deave, T., & Johnson, D. (2008). The transition to parenthood: What does it mean for fathers? *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 63*(6), 626–633.  
<http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2008.04748.x>
- Demo, D. H., & Cox, M. J. (2000). Families with young children: A review of research in the 1990s. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*(4), 876–895.
- Department for Education. (2017). *Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2017*. Retrieved from  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/664995/SFR50\\_2017-Children\\_looked\\_after\\_in\\_England.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664995/SFR50_2017-Children_looked_after_in_England.pdf)
- do Amaral Costa, N. R., & Rossetti-Ferreira, M. C. (2009). Becoming mother and father in late adoption: A case study. *Child & Family Social Work, 14*(1), 58–67. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2008.00581.x>

- Downing, J., Richardson, H., Kinkler, L., & Goldberg, A. (2009). Making the decision: factors influencing gay men's choice of an adoption path. *Adoption Quarterly, 12*(3/4), 247–271. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10926750903313310>
- Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 54–63. <http://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>
- Elliott, R., Fischer, C. T., & Rennie, D. L. (1999). Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 38*, 215–229.
- Eriksson, P. (2016). Fear of loss of a wanted child: emotional accounts of Finnish prospective adoptive parents in pre-adoption services. *Adoption and Fostering, 40*(3), 209–218. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0308575916661270>
- First for Adoption. (2017). Fertility issues and thinking about adoption. Retrieved from <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/who-can-adopt-a-child/how-do-i-decide/fertility-issues/>
- Foli, K. J. (2010). Depression in adoptive parents: A model of understanding through grounded theory. *Western Journal of Nursing Research, 32*(3), 379–400.
- Foli, K. J., & Gibson, G. C. (2011). Sad Adoptive Dads: Paternal Depression in the Post-Adoption Period. *International Journal of Men's Health, 10*(2), 153–162. <http://doi.org/10.3149/jmh.1002.153>
- Foli, K. J., Hebdon, M., Lim, E., & South, S. C. (2017). Transitions of adoptive parents: A longitudinal mixed methods analysis. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing. http://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2017.06.007*
- Freeark, K., Rosenberg, E. B., Bornstein, J., Jozefowicz-Simbeni, D., Linkevich, M., & Lohnes, K. (2005). Gender differences and dynamics shaping the adoption life cycle: Review of the literature and recommendations.

*American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 75(1), 86–101.

<http://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.75.1.86>

Gauthier, Y., Fortin, G., & Jéliu, G. (2004). Clinical application of attachment theory in permanency planning for children in foster care: The importance of continuity of care. *Infant Mental Health Journal: Official Publication of The World Association for Infant Mental Health*, 25(4), 379-396.

Genesoni, L., & Tallandini, M. A. (2009). Men's psychological transition to fatherhood: an analysis of the literature, 1989–2008. *Birth*, 36(4), 305–318.

Giallo, R., D'Esposito, F., Cooklin, A., Mensah, F., Lucas, N., Wade, C., & Nicholson, J. M. (2013). Psychosocial risk factors associated with fathers' mental health in the postnatal period: results from a population-based study. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 48(4), 563–573.

Gianino, M. (2008). Adaptation and transformation: The transition to adoptive parenthood for gay male couples. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 4(2), 205–243. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15504280802096872>

Gibson, S., & Hugh-Jones, S (2012). Analysing your data. In C. Sullivan, S, Gibson, & S. Riley (Ed.). *Doing your qualitative psychology project* (pp 127-153). London: Sage.

Goldberg, W. A. (1988). Introduction: perspectives on the transition to parenthood. In G. Y Michaels & W. A. Goldberg (Eds.). *The transition to parenthood: Current theory and research* (pp 1-20). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goldberg, A. E. (2010). The transition to adoptive parenthood. In T. W. Miller & T. W. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of stressful transitions across the lifespan* (pp. 165–184). New York: Springer Science

Goldberg, A. E., Downing, J. B., & Moyer, A. M. (2012). Why parenthood, and why now? Gay men's motivations for pursuing parenthood. *Family Relations*, 61(1), 157–174. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2011.00687.x>

- Goldberg, A. E., Downing, J. B., & Richardson, H. B. (2009). The transition from infertility to adoption: Perceptions of lesbian and heterosexual couples. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 26*(6–7), 938–963.  
<http://doi.org/10.1177/0265407509345652>
- Goldberg, A. E., Downing, J. B., & Sauck, C. C. (2008). Choices, challenges, and tensions: Perspectives of lesbian prospective adoptive parents. *Adoption Quarterly, 10*(2), 33–64. [http://doi.org/10.1300/J145v10n02\\_02](http://doi.org/10.1300/J145v10n02_02)
- Goldberg, A. E., Kinkler, L. A., & Hines, D. A. (2011). Perception and Internalization of Adoption Stigma among Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Adoptive Parents. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 7*(1/2), 132–154.  
Retrieved from <http://10.0.4.56/1550428X.2011.537554>
- Goldberg, A. E., Kinkler, L. A., Moyer, A. M., & Weber, E. (2014). Intimate relationship challenges in early parenthood among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples adopting via the child welfare system. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 45*(4), 221–230.  
<http://doi.org/10.1037/a0037443>
- Goldberg, A. E., Moyer, A. M., & Kinkler, L. A. (2013). Lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents' perceptions of parental bonding during early parenthood. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice, 2*(2), 146–162. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0031834>
- Goldberg, A. E., & Smith, J. Z. (2009). Perceived parenting skill across the transition to adoptive parenthood among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples. *Journal of Family Psychology, 23*(6), 861–870.  
<http://doi.org/10.1037/a0017009>
- Goldberg, A. E., & Smith, J. Z. (2011). Stigma, Social Context, and Mental Health: Lesbian and Gay Couples Across the Transition to Adoptive Parenthood. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 58*(1), 139–150.
- Goodman, J. H. (2004). Paternal postpartum depression, its relationship to maternal postpartum depression, and implications for family health. *Journal*

*of Advanced Nursing*, 45(1), 26–35.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82.

Hagan, T., & Smail, D. (1997). Power-mapping: Background and basic methodology. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 7(4), 257–267.

Hearn, J., & Collinson, D. L. (1998). Men, Masculinities, Managements and Organisational Culture. *German Journal of Human Resource Management*, 12(2), 210–222. <http://doi.org/10.1177/239700229801200205>

Herrera, F. (2013). “Men always adopt”: Infertility and reproduction from a male perspective. *Journal of Family Issues*, 34(8), 1059–1080. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13484278>

Hoy, S. (2012). Beyond men behaving badly: a meta-ethnography of men’s perspectives on psychological distress and help seeking. *International Journal of Men’s Health*, 11(3).

Hudson, J. (2006). Being Adopted: Psychological Services for Adopting Families. In K. Golding, H. Dent, R. Nissim, & L. Stott (Eds.), *Thinking Psychologically About Children Who Are Looked After and Adopted: Space for Reflection* (pp. 222–254). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Hughes, D. A. (1997). *Facilitating developmental attachment: The road to emotional recovery and behavioral change in foster and adopted children*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Iacono, V. Lo, Symonds, P., & Brown, D. H. K. (2016). Skype as a tool for qualitative research interviews. *Sociological Research Online*, 21(2). <http://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3952>



- Jennings, S., Mellish, L., Tasker, F., Lamb, M., & Golombok, S. (2014). Why Adoption? Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Adoptive Parents' Reproductive Experiences and Reasons for Adoption. *Adoption Quarterly, 17*(3), 205–226. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2014.891549>
- Johansson, T., & Klinth, R. (2008). *Caring Fathers: The Ideology of Gender Equality and Masculine Positions. Men and Masculinities, 11*(1), 42-62. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X06291899>
- Johns, S. E., & Belsky, J. (2007). Life transitions: Becoming a parent. In C. A. Salmon, T. K. Shackelford, C. A. Salmon & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Family relationships: An evolutionary perspective* (pp. 71–90). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Johnstone, J., & Gibbs, A. (2012). “Love them to bits; spend time with them; have fun with them”: New Zealand parents' views of building attachments with their newly adopted Russian children. *Journal of Social Work, 12*(3), 225–245. Retrieved from <http://10.0.4.153/1468017310381289>
- Keating, J. (2008). *A child for keeps: The history of adoption in england, 1918-45*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan
- Kindle, P., & Erich, S. (2005). Perceptions of social support among heterosexual and homosexual adopters. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services, 86*(4), 541–546. <http://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.3459>
- Kline, S. L., Karel, A. I., & Chatterjee, K. (2006). Covering adoption: General depictions in broadcast news. *Family Relations, 55*(4), 487–498.
- Kowlessar, O., Fox, J. R., & Wittkowski, A. (2015). First-time fathers' experiences of parenting during the first year. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology, 33*(1), 4–14. <http://doi.org/10.1080/02646838.2014.971404>
- Leach, L. S., Poyser, C., Cooklin, A. R., & Giallo, R. (2016). Prevalence and

course of anxiety disorders (and symptom levels) in men across the perinatal period: a systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 190, 675–686.

Lee, J., & Schmied, V. (2001). Involving men in antenatal education. *British Journal of Midwifery*, 9, 559–561.  
<http://doi.org/10.12968/bjom.2001.9.9.9422>

Letherby, G. (2010). When treatment ends: The experience of women and couples. *Crawshaw, M. and Balen, R. Adopting after Infertility: Messages from Practice, Research and Personal Experience. London: Jessica Kingsley*, 29–42.

Levy-Shiff, R., Bar, O., & Har-Even, D. (1990). Psychological adjustment of adoptive parents-to-be. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 60(2), 258.

Levy-Shiff, R., Goldshmidt, I., & Har-Even, D. (1991). Transition to parenthood in adoptive families. *Developmental Psychology*, 27(1), 131–140.  
<http://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.27.1.131>

Logan, J. (2010). Preparation and planning for face-to-face contact after adoption: The experience of adoptive parents in a UK study. *Child and Family Social Work*, 15(3), 315–324. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2009.00673.x>

Machin, A. J. (2015). Mind the Gap: The expectation and reality of involved fatherhood. *Fathering*, 13(1), 36–59. <http://doi.org/10.3149/fth.1301.36>

Madsen, P. (2005). Fertility speak: Language and the patient. *Fertility and Sterility*, 83(4), 844–845. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2004.11.034>

McDonald, T. P., Propp, J. R., & Murphy, K. C. (2001). The postadoption experience: Child, parent, and family predictors of family adjustment to adoption. *Child Welfare*, 80(1), 71–94.

McKay, K., & Ross, L. E. (2010). The transition to adoptive parenthood: A pilot

study of parents adopting in Ontario, Canada. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(4), 604–610.

<http://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2009.12.007>

McKay, K., Ross, L. E., & Goldberg, A. E. (2010). Adaptation to parenthood during the post-adoption period: A review of the literature. *Adoption Quarterly*, 13(2), 125–144. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2010.481040>

Miall, C. E. (1987). The stigma of adoptive parent status: Perceptions of community attitudes toward adoption and the experience of informal social sanctioning. *Family Relations*, 34–39.

Miall, C. E. (1996). The social construction of adoption: Clinical and community perspectives. *Family Relations*, 309–317.

Milliken, P. (2010). Grounded theory. In Salkind, N. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of research design*. (pp. 549-554). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Moyer, A. M., & Goldberg, A. E. (2015). “We were not planning on this, but ...”: Adoptive parents’ reactions and adaptations to unmet expectations. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(Suppl 1), 12–21. <http://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12219>

Neukrug, E., Britton, B. S., & Crews, R. C. (2013). Common health-related concerns of men: Implications for counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 91(4), 390–397.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 160940691773384. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>

O’Halloran, K. (2015). *The politics of adoption (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)*. Dordrecht, Springer,

Pace, C. S., Santona, A., Zavattini, G. C., & Folco, S. (2015). Attachment states of mind and couple relationships in couples seeking to adopt. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(11), 3318–3330.

<http://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0134-6>

- Patterson, G. R. (1983). Stress: A change agent for family process. In N. Garnezy, M. Rutter, & R.D. Ciaranello (Eds.), *Stress, coping & development in children* (pp. 235–264). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Patterson, J. M., & Garwick, A. W. (1994). Levels of meaning in family stress theory. *Family Process*, 33, 287–304.
- Quinton, D., Rushton, A., Dance, C., & Mayes, D. (1998). *Joining new families*. Chicester: Wiley.
- Ranson, G. (2001). Men at work: Change or no change in the era of the “new father.” *Men and Masculinities*, 4(1), 3–26.
- Reilly, T., & Platz, L. (2003). Characteristics and challenges of families who adopt children with special needs: An empirical study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 25(10), 781–803. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0190-7409\(03\)00079-3](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0190-7409(03)00079-3)
- Richardson, H. B., Moyer, A. M., & Goldberg, A. E. (2012). “You try to be superman and you don’t have to be”: Gay adoptive fathers’ challenges and tensions in balancing work and family. *Fathering*, 10(3), 314–336. <http://doi.org/10.3149/fth.1003.314>
- Riggs, J. M. (1997). Mandates for mothers and fathers: Perceptions of breadwinners and care givers. *Sex Roles*, 37(7–8), 565–580.
- Rini, C., Schetter, C. D., Hobel, C. J., Glynn, L. M., & Sandman, C. A. (2006). Effective social support: Antecedents and consequences of partner support during pregnancy. *Personal Relationships*, 13(2), 207–229.
- Rushton, C., & Dance, A. (2004). The outcomes of late permanent placements: The adolescent years. *Adoption & Fostering*, 28(1), 49–58. Retrieved from [http://sfx.ucl.ac.uk/sfx\\_local?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx\\_enc=info%3Aofi%2Fenc%3AUTF-8&ctx\\_tim=2018-04-07T16%3A30%3A05IST&url\\_ver=Z39.88-2004&url\\_ctx\\_fmt=infofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rfr\\_id=info%3Asid](http://sfx.ucl.ac.uk/sfx_local?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info%3Aofi%2Fenc%3AUTF-8&ctx_tim=2018-04-07T16%3A30%3A05IST&url_ver=Z39.88-2004&url_ctx_fmt=infofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rfr_id=info%3Asid)

%2Fprimo.exlibrisgroup.com%3Aprimo3-Article-sagej&rft\_va

Selwyn, J. (2017). The adoption of looked after maltreated children in England : challenges , opportunities and outcomes. *Developing Practice : The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 50 (47), 1-12. Retrieved from [https://research-information.bristol.ac.uk/files/145380045/The\\_adoption\\_of\\_looked\\_after\\_maltreated\\_childreenv2.pdf](https://research-information.bristol.ac.uk/files/145380045/The_adoption_of_looked_after_maltreated_childreenv2.pdf)

Selwyn, J., Frazer, L., & Fitzgerald, A. (2004). *Finding adoptive families for black, asian and black mixed-parentage children: Agency policy and practice: executive summary and best practice guide*. Bristol: National Children's Home and Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care.

Selwyn, J., Wijedasa, D., & Meakings, S. (2015). *Beyond the Adoption Order: Challenges, interventions and adoption disruption*. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/301889/Final\\_Report\\_-\\_3rd\\_April\\_2014v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/301889/Final_Report_-_3rd_April_2014v2.pdf)

Shelley-Sireci, L., & Ciano-Boyce, C. (2002). Becoming lesbian adoptive parents: an exploratory study of lesbian adoptive, lesbian birth, and heterosexual adoptive parents. *Adoption Quarterly*, 6(1), 33–43.

Sims-schouten, W., Riley, S. C. E., & Willig, C. (2007). Critical realism in discourse analysis: A presentation of a systematic method of analysis using women's talk of motherhood as an example. *Childcare and Female Employment*, 17(1), 101–124. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0959354307073153>

Smith, J., Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. Smith (ed), *Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to research methods*, 2nd edn (pp. 53- 80). London, Sage.

Tasker, F., & Wood, S. (2016). The transition into adoptive parenthood: Adoption as a process of continued unsafe uncertainty when family scripts collide. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 21(4), 520–535. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1359104516638911>

- Tollemache, L. (1998). The perspective of adoptive parents. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 12(1), 27–30.
- Triseliotis, J. Shireman, J. & Hundleby, M. (1997). *Adoption: theory, policy and practice*. London: Cassell.
- Vinjamuri, M. (2015). Reminders of heteronormativity: Gay adoptive fathers navigating uninvited social interactions. *Family Relations: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 64(2), 263–277.  
<http://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12118>
- Wall, G., & Arnold, S. (2007). How involved is involved fathering? An exploration of the contemporary culture of fatherhood. *Gender & Society*, 21(4), 508–527.
- Wegar, K. (2000). Adoption, family ideology, and social stigma: Bias in community attitudes, adoption research, and practice. *Family Relations*, 49(4), 363–369.
- Weir, K. N. (2003). Adoptive family “leap-frogging” patterns. *Adoption Quarterly*, 7(1), 27–41. [http://doi.org/10.1300/J145v07n01\\_03](http://doi.org/10.1300/J145v07n01_03)
- Wells, G. (2011). Making room for daddies: Male couples creating families through adoption. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 7(1–2), 155–181.  
<http://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2011.537242>
- Wilkinson, S. (1998). Focus group methodology: a review. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 1(3), 181–203.  
<http://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.1998.10846874>
- Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1956). Primary maternal preoccupation. In D. W Winnicott (Ed.), *Through paediatrics to psychoanalysis: Collected papers* (pp. 300–305). London: Karnac.

Wirtberg, I. (1999). Trying to become a family; or, parents without children. *Marriage & Family Review*, 28(3–4), 121–133.  
[http://doi.org/10.1300/J002v28n03\\_10](http://doi.org/10.1300/J002v28n03_10)

Wood, K. (2016). “It’s all a bit pantomime’: An exploratory study of gay and lesbian adopters and foster-Carers in England and Wales. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1708–1723. <http://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcv115>

## **6. APPENDICES**

### **6.1. Appendix A: Participant Information letter**

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON  
School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ

**The Principal Investigator**  
Susie Gordon-Jones  
U1525459@uel.ac.uk

#### **Participant Information Sheet An Exploration into Becoming a Father Through Adoption**

##### **What is this research about?**

This study is part of a doctoral degree in clinical psychology and aims to hear your experiences and views about becoming an adoptive father. A vast majority of the research to date about becoming an adoptive parent has so far focused on adoptive mothers and couples. I therefore wish to interview men on their experiences of becoming adoptive fathers, from the time they decided to adopt a child through to the first few months of having a child placed with them.

##### **Who will this research include?**

I am looking for adoptive fathers who:

- Had no previous experience of parenting before adopting (i.e. did not have any biological children, step children or similar prior to adopting for the first time)
- Had a child placed with them for adoption for the first time at least 6 months ago and no more than 5 years ago.

##### **Do I have to take part?**

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time, before or after you have participated and you do not need to give a reason. If you chose to withdraw after having taken part, you have the right to request the deletion of your recording, interview transcript or written material up to the point where I have completed all my interviews and start to analyse the data (this is likely to happen in February 2018).

##### **What will happen if I take part?**



If you chose to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form which states you are happy to take part in my study. You will not be paid for taking part but any travel expenses will be reimbursed.

The interviews will be approximately one to two hours long. We can arrange to meet at a location at your convenience. This could be at the University of East London in Stratford or an alternative quiet location such as a library if this is possible. Alternatively, we can conduct the interview on the phone or on Skype. There are no risks or dangers involved in taking part and it will not impact any current post adoption support being received. It is possible that interviews may touch on sensitive or potentially difficult areas. You will be able to take as many breaks as you like during the interview and you can choose to end it. I will also be able to give you a list of resources offering support to adoptive parents.

### **Confidentiality**

I will record the interviews and will keep the recording on a password protected memory stick which only I will be able to access. After the interview I will type it up into a transcript but will change any information which could potentially identify you or your family. These anonymised transcripts may be read by my thesis supervisor at UEL or by my examiners but not by any other individuals including any professionals you may be involved in. After the examination I will delete the recordings. The anonymized transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer for three years after the examination. Brief quotes from the anonymised transcripts may appear in my thesis or in any publications resulting from my research.

If you share something with me in the interview that makes me think that either you or someone else may be at risk of harm, I will need to inform my supervisor at UEL who may then need to inform other people or agencies. Should this need to happen, I would try my hardest to let you know first.

### **How do I take part in this study?**

If you are interested in taking part this study, or would like to ask any questions, please email me at [u1525459@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u1525459@uel.ac.uk) or write to me care of my supervisor Dr Paula Magee at School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. I will then contact you to answer your questions and/or arrange the interview if you agree to go ahead. Please include the following information in the email or letter:

- your first name
- your telephone number (if you are happy for me to contact you this way)
- how long you have been an adoptive father for

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the study's supervisor –

Dr Paula Magee

School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. (Tel: 020 8223 441. Email: [p.l.magee@uel.ac.uk](mailto:p.l.magee@uel.ac.uk))

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee:

Dr Mary Spiller, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane,  
London E15 4LZ.  
(Tel: 020 8223 4004. Email: m.j.spiller@uel.ac.uk)

Please keep this information form for your reference.  
Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Susie Gordon-Jones  
Trainee clinical psychologist  
University of East London

**6.2. Appendix B: Participant consent form**

**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

**Consent to participate in a research study**

An Exploration into Becoming a Father Through Adoption

1. I have the read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep.
2. I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information.
3. I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain confidential. Only the researcher involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.
4. I understand that the information I provide may be used in presentations, a doctoral thesis and any subsequent journal articles on the agreement that my anonymity will be preserved. This may include quotes.
5. I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date: .....

### 6.3. Appendix C: Debrief Letter



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ

**The Principal Investigator**

Susie Gordon-Jones  
U1525459@uel.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part in this study, it is greatly valued and I hope that you have found the process interesting.

This research aimed to explore the transition to becoming an adoptive father. Whilst your experiences of the later months and years of being an adoptive father are also important, this research focused specifically on the time from deciding to adopt through to the first few months of the child or children living with you and the factors which impacted you and your experiences around this time.

There is very little research in general in the UK about becoming an adoptive parent, and even less specifically on becoming an adoptive father. I hope that this research may be able to provide some suggestions for services and professionals involved with adoptive fathers.

Please inform the researcher if you would like to receive a copy of your transcript (available around February 2018) or an executive summary of the findings (available around May 2018).

Talking about these issues may have led you to experience difficult emotions or thoughts. If you would like to discuss this further you may wish to contact one of the following organisations:

Adoption Specific Support Services

Adoption UK	Helpline: 0844 848 7900	<a href="http://www.adoptionuk.org/one-one-support/helpline">http://www.adoptionuk.org/one-one-support/helpline</a>
PAC-UK	Advice Line: 0113 230 2100	pac-uk.org



## 6.4. Appendix D: Interview Schedule

### Interview Schedule

1. Questions to orientate to family context and collect demographics
  - How many children have you adopted and at what ages? If have adopted more than one child, are they biologically related?
  - How old are your adopted child/children now?
  - Who were you living with when you adopted? (Couple or single? any birth children? Other family members?)
  - Who do you live with now?
  - How would you describe your ethnicity?
  - Age
  
2. Thinking about the time from when you decided to adopt through to the first few months of the child/children being placed with you, can you tell me a bit about your experience of becoming a father through adoption. (Additional question added following the first two interviews)
  
3. Can you tell me about the process of deciding to adopt?  
(Prompts: Why did you decide to adopt? What was the decision process like? Did you and your partner feel differently (if adopted in couple)? What kind of support did you access while making this decision)
  
4. After deciding to adopt, what was the journey towards becoming an adoptive father like? So the period of time before your child/children were placed.  
(Prompts: Private or through Social Services? How did you prepare? What support did you access? What were the challenges? How did you manage these challenges? What expectations did you have? What were you told about your child's previous experiences?)
  
5. Can you tell what what the first few weeks of having the child placed were like?  
(Prompts: What do you remember feeling? How did the child settle in? what support did you access? What challenges did you face? How did you manage these? Did you and your partner feel similarly or differently (if applicable)?)
  
6. What were the following months like of being a dad?  
(Prompts: What were the challenges? What support did you access? What were the positives? How did it compare to what you had expected? Do you think your experience differed to your partner (if applicable)?)
  
7. Through the process would you have wanted any other support that you were not offered?
  
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we have not already discussed?
  
9. Was there anything about myself or the set up of the interview that you felt impacted how you responded or did not allow you to talk about anything as you would have liked?

## 6.5. Appendix E: UEL Confirmation Of Ethics Approval

### SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

### NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

#### FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

BSC/MSC/MA/PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES

**REVIEWER:** Josie Malinowski

**SUPERVISOR:** Paula Magee

**COURSE:** Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

**STUDENT:** Susannah Gordon-Jones

**TITLE OF PROPOSED STUDY:** Exploring the transition to adoptive fatherhood

#### DECISION OPTIONS:

- 1. APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
- 2. APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
- 3. NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

**DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY**

*(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)*

**APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES**

**Minor amendments required** *(for reviewer):*

This was a carefully thought-out application; my only recommendation is to make the protection of the researcher even tighter if it is necessary to visit a participant in their home, i.e. ensure that the person who is to be contacted on arrival and upon leaving the participants' home also has the contact details of the DoS in case they need to contact them if they are concerned, and also to make sure that visiting a participant in their home is very much a last resort (try to use the university, Skype, and public spaces as much as possible).

**Major amendments required** *(for reviewer):*

**ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEARCHER** *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

HIGH

MEDIUM

LOW

*Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):*

See comments above

**Reviewer** Josie Malinowski

**Date:**



*This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee*

**Confirmation of making the above minor amendments** *(for students):*

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name : *Susie Gordon-Jones*

Student number: 1525459

Date: 15/06/2017

*(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)*

**PLEASE NOTE:**

\*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

\*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here: <http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/>

## 6.6. Appendix F: Application For Research Ethics Approval Form

### Your details

**1. Your name:**

Susannah Gordon-Jones

**2. Your supervisor's name:**

Paula Magee

**3. Title of your programme:** (e.g. BSc Psychology)

Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

**4. Title of your proposed research:**

Exploring the transition to adoptive fatherhood

**5. Submission date for your BSc/MSc/MA research:**

**6. Please tick if your application includes a copy of a DBS certificate**

**7. Please tick if you need to submit a DBS certificate with this application but have emailed a copy to Dr Mary Spiller for confidentiality reasons (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee)**

([m.j.spiller@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.j.spiller@uel.ac.uk))

**8. Please tick to confirm that you have read and understood the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014) and the UEL Code of Practice for Research Ethics (See links on page 1)**

### 2. About the research

**9. The aim(s) of your research:**

This study will aim to explore the following questions:

1. What are first time adoptive fathers' experiences during the transition to adoptive parenthood?
2. What factors influence the transition to adoptive fatherhood?
3. What support do first time adoptive fathers access?

By answering these questions, this study aims to expand on the limited research on the experience of adoptive parents in the UK, specifically that of adoptive fathers. Much of the current literature on adoptive parenting has been completed in northern America yet due to cultural, societal and political differences it should not be assumed this research can be generalised across the western world. Previous research has also focused on the views of adoptive mothers, either intentionally or as a result of volunteer bias. Research involving adoptive fathers has mainly involved couples (of different sexual identities) and there is no study to the researcher's knowledge which explores the transition to adoptive fatherhood in the UK by interviewing adoptive fathers on their own.

Understanding the experiences and processes involved in the transition to adoptive fatherhood may help inform service development and related governmental policies and funding decisions in terms of the support adoptive fathers are offered.

There are also important implications for the adopted children. Although little is known about the psychological outcomes for adopted children in the UK,

children in foster care appear to be more at risk of psychological difficulties than children in birth families (Meltzer, Gatward, Corbin, Goodman & Ford, 2003). In addition, there is a growing field of research linking childhood adversities such as sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect to later psychological difficulties including psychosis (Kessler et al., 2010, Varese et al., 2012). Many children who are adopted may have experienced such childhood adversities, particularly with the increasing number of children being adopted from care. Expanding understanding around the transition to adoptive parenthood and tailoring the support received may improve emotional outcomes for the adoptive parents and the children. It may also help reduce the risks of adoption breakdown, which has huge financial implications for the government as well as for the well-being of the parents and children.

**10. Likely duration of the data collection from intended starting to finishing date:**

May 2017 to April 2018

**Methods**

**11. Design of the research:**

(Type of design, variables etc. If the research is qualitative what approach will be used?)

This study will use a qualitative approach. Semi structured interviews will follow the interview schedule included in Appendix A. Although the transition to adoptive parenthood can be seen as a fluid process with no determined start and end points, the interview questions will focus on the preadoption period including decision making and assessment, the period of introductions where the parents meet the child and the initial few months of the child being placed. A pilot interview will be carried out with a participant who fits the criteria for inclusion and the schedule may be adapted as necessary following this. Transcripts will be analysed using the Braun and Clarke (2006) method of thematic analysis (TA). TA can be applied across different epistemological approaches and therefore is deemed appropriate for the research aims and critical realist underpinning. The analysis will be inductive, deriving themes from the data. It is acknowledged that the researcher's own knowledge, interest and values are likely to influence the analysis to some extent. A reflective diary and supervision will be used to increase awareness around this.

**12. The sample/participants:**

(Proposed number of participants, method of recruitment, specific characteristics of the sample such as age range, gender and ethnicity - whatever is relevant to your research)

Once ethical approval is gained, the aim will be to recruit 12 participants as this is the number of participants recommended by Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) to reach saturation of themes.

Criteria for eligibility will include:

- 18 years old and above
- adopters of children from care considered "late placed" (aged 2 years or above at adoptive placement)
- identifies as a male
- adopted a child while living in the UK
- Had a child placed with them for adoption no less than 6 months ago and

- no more than 5 years ago
- may include people who identify as straight, bisexual, gay or trans, single adopters or those in couples.

Exclusion criteria will include:

- Those with prior experience of parenting before adopting for example had biological children, step children or lived with their partner's children in order to focus the research on a man's transition to first time parenting.
- Adopters of children from overseas will also be excluded as the child's history may not be known.

Extending inclusion criteria if recruitment difficulties are experienced:

- The research will initially aim to recruit those whose adopted child was aged 2 or above when first placed with the adoptive father as there are increasingly more children being placed for adoption at this age. Children of this age are more likely to have experienced disruptions in their attachment and therefore adoptive parents may have a different experience of the transition to parenthood than those adopting infants. However, if under the current criteria I am not able to recruit enough participants to conduct a meaningful thematic analysis, the recruitment criteria will extend to include adopters of younger age children at placement.
- I may also extend the criteria to include:
  - Adoptive fathers who adopted from overseas
  - Adoptive fathers who adopted more than 5 years ago
  - Adoptive fathers with previous experience of parenting.
- Recruitment will be carefully monitored and the criteria adjusted as early in the process as possible if required in consultation with my Director of studies.
- Extending these criteria will still allow the main research questions to be explored.

Adoption agencies and support organisations will be approached for recruitment, such as [removed for confidentiality]. Local Authority Adoption teams and Looked After Children teams will also be approached for recruitment. If Local Authority teams require additional ethical approval from their own bodies this will also be applied for prior to recruitment from them.

### **13. Measures, materials or equipment:**

(Give details about what will be used during the course of the research. For example, equipment, a questionnaire, a particular psychological test or tests, an interview schedule or other stimuli such as visual material. See note on page 2 about attaching copies of questionnaires and tests to this application. If you are using an interview schedule for qualitative research attach example questions that you plan to ask your participants to this application)

- The resources required will be an audio recording device, an encrypted memory stick, transcribing equipment and password protected computers, all of which are owned by the researcher or accessible via UEL.
- A private space will also be required in which to conduct face to face interviews. This will be available at the University Campus, public

libraries, and may be available through the services through which I am recruiting.

- If the travel time or expense is deemed too great or there are concerns regarding conducting the interview face to face, the interviews may take place over Skype (or similar video calling method) and these will be recorded using suitable software. As it is more suitable to conduct interviews in person, this decision will be made with the Director of Studies. If Skype is used, a computer or lap top with a web cam and reliable internet connection will be required. These are accessible through UEL and also owned by the researcher.
- An interview schedule will be used to guide the interviews which is included below. This may be adapted following a pilot.

### Interview Schedule

#### 10. Questions to orientate to family context and collect demographics

- How many children have you adopted and at what ages? If have adopted more than one child, are they biologically related?
- How old are your adopted child/children now?
- Who were you living with when you adopted? (Couple or single? any birth children? Other family members?)
- Who do you live with now?
- How would you describe your ethnicity?
- Age (and of partner, other children if applicable)

#### 11. Can you tell me about the process of deciding to adopt?

(Prompts: Why did you decide to adopt? What was the decision process like? Did you and your partner feel differently (if adopted in couple)?)

#### 12. After deciding to adopt, what was the journey towards becoming an adoptive father like?

(Prompts: Private or through Social Services? How did you prepare? What were the challenges? How did you manage these challenges? What expectations did you have? How did you find out you were going to become an adoptive parent? What were you told about your child's previous experiences?)

#### 13. Can you tell what the first few weeks of having the child placed were like?

(Prompts: What do you remember feeling? How did the child settle in? What challenges did you face? How did you manage these? Did you and your partner feel similarly or differently (if applicable)?)

#### 14. What were the following months like?

(Prompts: What were the challenges? What were the positives? How did it compare to what you had expected? Do you think your experience differed to your partner (if applicable)?)

15. What types of support did you access through the different stages of the process?
16. Through the process would you have wanted any other support that you were not offered?
17. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we have not already discussed?
18. Was there anything about myself or the set up of the interview that you felt impacted how you responded or did not allow you to talk about anything as you would have liked?

**14.** If you are using copyrighted/pre-validated questionnaires, tests or other stimuli that you have not written or made yourself, are these questionnaires and tests suitable for the age group of your participants?

YES / NO /

NA

**15. Outline the data collection procedure involved in your research:**

(Describe what will be involved in data collection. For example, what will participants be asked to do, where, and for how long?)

- Participants will be asked to take part in an interview which will last approximately one to two hours.
- Interviews will be audio recorded after consent for this is gained.
- Interviews will either take place primarily at a UEL campus (either Stratford or Docklands), at the service through which I have recruited or in an alternative location such as public library or café if the participant so requests. Where the participant is unable to travel to UEL campus or a public space, Skype or telephone interviews will be used. In exceptional circumstances as a last option where interviews are unable to take place at a UEL campus, in a public space or via phone or interview, interviews may take place the participant's home after consultation with my Director of Studies. This will only be where a participant has been recruited because they have had direct face to face contact with the service they have been recruited through and therefore can be vouched for by the service. Please see Section 23 Protection of the Research for further details.
- Interviews will be transcribed using the audio recording.

### **3. Ethical considerations**

**Please describe how each of the ethical considerations below will be addressed:**

**16. Fully informing participants about the research (and parents/guardians if necessary):** Would the participant information letter be written in a style appropriate for children and young people, if necessary?

- Participants will be provided with an information sheet prior to the

interview outlining what will be involved and that they are free to withdraw at any time. The letter will be written in lay terms in order to ensure it is understandable and participants will also be offered the opportunity to ask any questions about it. This letter is included in Appendix A.

**17. Obtaining fully informed consent from participants (and from parents/guardians if necessary):** Would the consent form be written in a style appropriate for children and young people, if necessary? Do you need a consent form for both young people and their parents/guardians?

- Participants will be asked to read and sign a consent form after reading the information sheet and before the interview is started.

**18. Engaging in deception, if relevant:**

(What will participants be told about the nature of the research? The amount of any information withheld and the delay in disclosing the withheld information should be kept to an absolute minimum.)

N/A

**19. Right of withdrawal:**

(In this section, and in your participant invitation letter, make it clear to participants that 'withdrawal' will involve deciding not to participate in your research and the opportunity to have the data they have supplied destroyed on request. This can be up to a specified time, i.e. not after you have begun your analysis. Speak to your supervisor if necessary.)

- Participation is completely voluntary. If the participant decides to take part, they are free to withdraw at any time, before or after they have participated and they do not need to give a reason.
- If the participant chooses to withdraw after having taken part, they have the right to request the deletion of your recording, interview transcript or written material up to the point where I have completed all my interviews and start to analyse the data (this is likely to happen in February 2018). This information will be included in the information letter and consent form.

**20. Anonymity & confidentiality:** (Please answer the following questions)

**20.1. Will the data be gathered anonymously?**

(i.e. this is where you will not know the names and contact details of your participants? In qualitative research, data is usually not collected anonymously because you will know the names and contact details of your participants)

YES / NO

**21. If NO what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of participants?**

(How will the names and contact details of participants be stored and who will have access? Will real names and identifying references be omitted from the reporting of data and transcripts etc? What will happen to the data after the study is over? Usually names and contact details will be destroyed after data collection but if there is a possibility of you developing your research (for publication, for example) you may not want to destroy all data at the end of the study. If not destroying your data at the end of the study, what will be kept, how, and for how long? Make this clear in this section and in your participant invitation letter also.)

- All materials containing confidential information including consent forms, transcripts and recordings will be kept in locked cupboards, on password protected files on password protected computers or on a password protected encrypted memory stick. The only people with access to these will be the researcher, Director of Studies and examiners. Audio recordings will be deleted after successful examination of the thesis.

Transcripts will be destroyed three years later. This will be explained in the information letter.

- The limits to confidentiality will be explained to the participants prior to the interview. Confidentiality may be breached if the participant is deemed to be at risk of harm to themselves or others. This will be done in consultation with the Director of Studies.
- All identifying information will be changed to ensure anonymity in the transcripts, the thesis and any resulting publications. This will include removal of names of services as well as people. Participants will also be reminded that any support services they have been recruited through will not view the transcripts.

## **22. Protection of participants:**

(Are there any potential hazards to participants or any risk of accident or injury to them? What is the nature of these hazards or risks? How will the safety and well-being of participants be ensured? What contact details of an appropriate support organisation or agency will be made available to participants in your debrief sheet, particularly if the research is of a sensitive nature or potentially distressing?)

N.B: If you have serious concerns about the safety of a participant, or others, during the course of your research see your supervisor before breaching confidentiality.

- Participants will be asked if they have any special requirements regarding access to the interview location and this will be organised accordingly.
- It is possible that taking part in the interview may stir up feelings and possibly distress some participants. Care and attention will be paid to everyone who takes part, and an opportunity to reflect on the process of the interview will be offered to everyone who is interviewed.
- In addition to this debrief, people can be signposted to further sources of support if they wish. These will include the following organisations:

### Adoption Specific Support Services

Adoption UK	Helpline: 0844 848 7900	<a href="http://www.adoptionuk.org/one-one-support/helpline">http://www.adoptionuk.org/one-one-support/helpline</a>
PAC-UK	Advice Line: 0113 230 2100	<a href="http://pac-uk.org">pac-uk.org</a>

### LGBT parenting

Pink Parents	<a href="http://pinkparents.org.uk">pinkparents.org.uk</a>	
Stonewall	Help line: 08000 50 20 20	<a href="http://www.stonewall.org.uk/contact-us">http://www.stonewall.org.uk/contact-us</a>
New Family Social	Helpline: 0843 289 9457	<a href="http://newfamilysocial.org.uk">newfamilysocial.org.uk</a>

### General support services

Samaritans	free helpline: 116 123	<a href="http://www.samaritans.org">http://www.samaritans.org</a>
------------	------------------------	---

If you feel you are struggling in general with low mood, anxiety or other emotional difficulties, you may wish to discuss this further with your GP who should be able to refer you or sign post you to appropriate services.



- If the participant informs me of information which leads me to believe they or someone else may be at risk of harm, I will inform my Director of Studies.
- There are no other risks associated with taking part in this research.

### **23. Protection of the researcher:**

(Will you be knowingly exposed to any health and safety risks? If equipment is being used is there any risk of accident or injury to you? If interviewing participants in their homes will a third party be told of place and time and when you have left a participant's house?)

- If the interview is conducted using Skype in the researcher's home, the researcher will ensure there is no personal information in view of the camera. A work skype account will also be set up for which these interviews will be the sole purpose and the account will be deleted after completion of all the interviews.
- If the interview is conducted at the University campus, security will be informed of the meeting and where it is taking place. The researcher will have a phone to contact security or emergency services if required.
- If the interview takes place in a quite public space such as a room in a public library, the Director of Studies will be informed of the time and the place of the interview and will be the only person in addition to the researcher to have access to the name of the participant which she will only access in an emergency. The researcher will also contact her partner or next of kin to inform them when they arrive at the interview and when they leave.
- Where it is not possible for the participant to attend the University Campus, another public space or via Skype or telephone and where it has been agreed with the Director of Studies that the interview can take place in a participant's home, the Director of Studies will be informed of the time and the place of the interview and will be the only person in addition to the researcher to have access to the name and address of the participant which she will only access in an emergency. The researcher will also inform a relative, friend or partner of the time, date and approximate location of the interview and will inform them when they arrive at the interview and when they leave. I will assess the risk as I enter the home and if I feel at risk of harm at any time I will leave. I will have phone contact with the participant before the interview and if there are any concerns the interview will not go ahead.
- In all circumstances I will not provide the participant with any personal details about myself such as my address or personal phone number. If phone contact is required I will withhold my number or not use my personal phone.

### **24. Debriefing participants:**

(Will participants be informed about the true nature of the research if they are not told beforehand? Will participants be given time at the end of the data collection task to ask you questions or raise concerns? Will they be re-assured about what will happen to their data? Please attach to this application your debrief sheet thanking participants for their participation, reminding them about what will happen to their data, and that includes the name and contact details of an appropriate support organisation for participants to contact should they experience any distress or concern as a result of participating in your research.)

- Participants will be given a debrief sheet at the end of the interview thanking them for their participation and explaining in brief the aims of the study and what it hopes to achieve. It will also include signposting for relevant support organisations as explained above. It also includes a reminder about what will happen to the person's data. This is included in Appendix C.
- They will also be given time at the end of the interview for the participant to ask any questions and to reflect on the process of the interview.

**25. Will participants be paid?**

YES / NO

If YES how much will participants be paid and in what form (e.g. cash or vouchers?)

Why is payment being made and why this amount?

**26. Other:**

(Is there anything else the reviewer of this application needs to know to make a properly informed assessment?)

I will reimburse participants' travel costs as the university have agreed a budget of £100 per student. I will limit this amount to £20 per person.

**4. Other permissions and ethical clearances**

**27. Is permission required from an external institution/organisation (e.g. a school, charity, local authority)?**

YES

If your project involves children at a school(s) or participants who are accessed through a charity or another organisation, you must obtain, and attach, the written permission of that institution or charity or organisation. Should you wish to observe people at their place of work, you will need to seek the permission of their employer. If you wish to have colleagues at your place of employment as participants you must also obtain, and attach, permission from the employer.

If YES please give the name and address of the institution/organisation:

I do not yet have written permission from the organisations I am going to recruit through. Some may be waiting for me to confirm I have UEL ethics approval before confirming I can recruit through them. I will not proceed with recruitment until I have written permission from the organisations.

Please attach a copy of the permission. A copy of an email from the institution/organisation is acceptable.

In some cases you may be required to have formal ethical clearance from another institution or organisation.

**28. Is ethical clearance required from any other ethics committee? May be**

If YES please give the name and address of the organisation: - as yet unknown

Has such ethical clearance been obtained yet?  
YES / NO

If NO why not?

- For recruitment through Local Authorities, approval from the Social Care Research Committee may be required. This has not been applied for yet as I am in the process of waiting for confirmation from the individual services as to whether they require this. It is possible they will accept UEL ethics approval but if approval is required from the Social Care Research Committee this will be applied for and I will await approval before proceeding with recruitment from that particular service.

If YES, please attach a scanned copy of the ethical approval letter. A copy of an email from the organisation is acceptable.

**PLEASE NOTE: Ethical approval from the School of Psychology can be gained before approval from another research ethics committee is obtained. However, recruitment and data collection are NOT to commence until your research has been approved by the School and other ethics committees as may be necessary.**

**29. Will your research involve working with children or vulnerable adults?\***

YES /

NO

If YES have you obtained and attached a DBS certificate?  
YES / NO

If your research involves young people under 16 years of age and young people of limited competence will parental/guardian consent be obtained.

YES / NO

If NO please give reasons. (Note that parental consent is always required for participants who are 16 years of age and younger)

\* You are required to have DBS clearance if your participant group involves (1) children and young people who are 16 years of age or under, and (2) 'vulnerable' people aged 16 and over with psychiatric illnesses, people who receive domestic care, elderly people (particularly those in nursing homes), people in palliative care, and people living in institutions and sheltered accommodation, for example. Vulnerable people are understood to be persons who are not necessarily able to

freely consent to participating in your research, or who may find it difficult to withhold consent. If in doubt about the extent of the vulnerability of your intended participant group, speak to your supervisor. Methods that maximise the understanding and ability of vulnerable people to give consent should be used whenever possible. For more information about ethical research involving children see [www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/involving-children/](http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/involving-children/)

### **30. Will you be collecting data overseas?**

YES / NO

This includes collecting data/conducting fieldwork while you are away from the UK on holiday or visiting your home country.

\* If YES in what country or countries will you be collecting data?

**Please note that ALL students wanting to collect data while overseas (even when going home or away on holiday) MUST have their travel approved by the Pro-Vice Chancellor International (not the School of Psychology) BEFORE travelling overseas.**

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/>

**IN MANY CASES WHERE STUDENTS ARE WANTING TO COLLECT DATA OTHER THAN IN THE UK (EVEN IF LIVING ABROAD), USING ONLINE SURVEYS AND DOING INTERVIEWS VIA SKYPE, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD COUNTER THE NEED TO HAVE PERMISSION TO TRAVEL**

## **5. Signatures**

TYPED NAMES ARE ACCEPTED AS SIGNATURES

### **Declaration by student:**

*I confirm that I have discussed the ethics and feasibility of this research proposal with my supervisor.*

Student's name: Susannah Gordon-Jones

Student's number: u1525459  
28/03/2017

Date:

### **Declaration by supervisor:**

*I confirm that, in my opinion, the proposed study constitutes a suitable test of the research question and is both feasible and ethical.*

Supervisor's name:

Date:

## 6.7. Appendix G: Change Of Title Confirmation

### ResearchUEL

#### [Change project title - Miss Susannah Gordon-Jones](#)

The Psychology Research Degrees Sub-Committee on behalf of the University Quality and Standards Committee has considered your request. The decision is:

Approved

Your new thesis title is confirmed as follows:

Old thesis title: An exploration of the transition to adoptive fatherhood

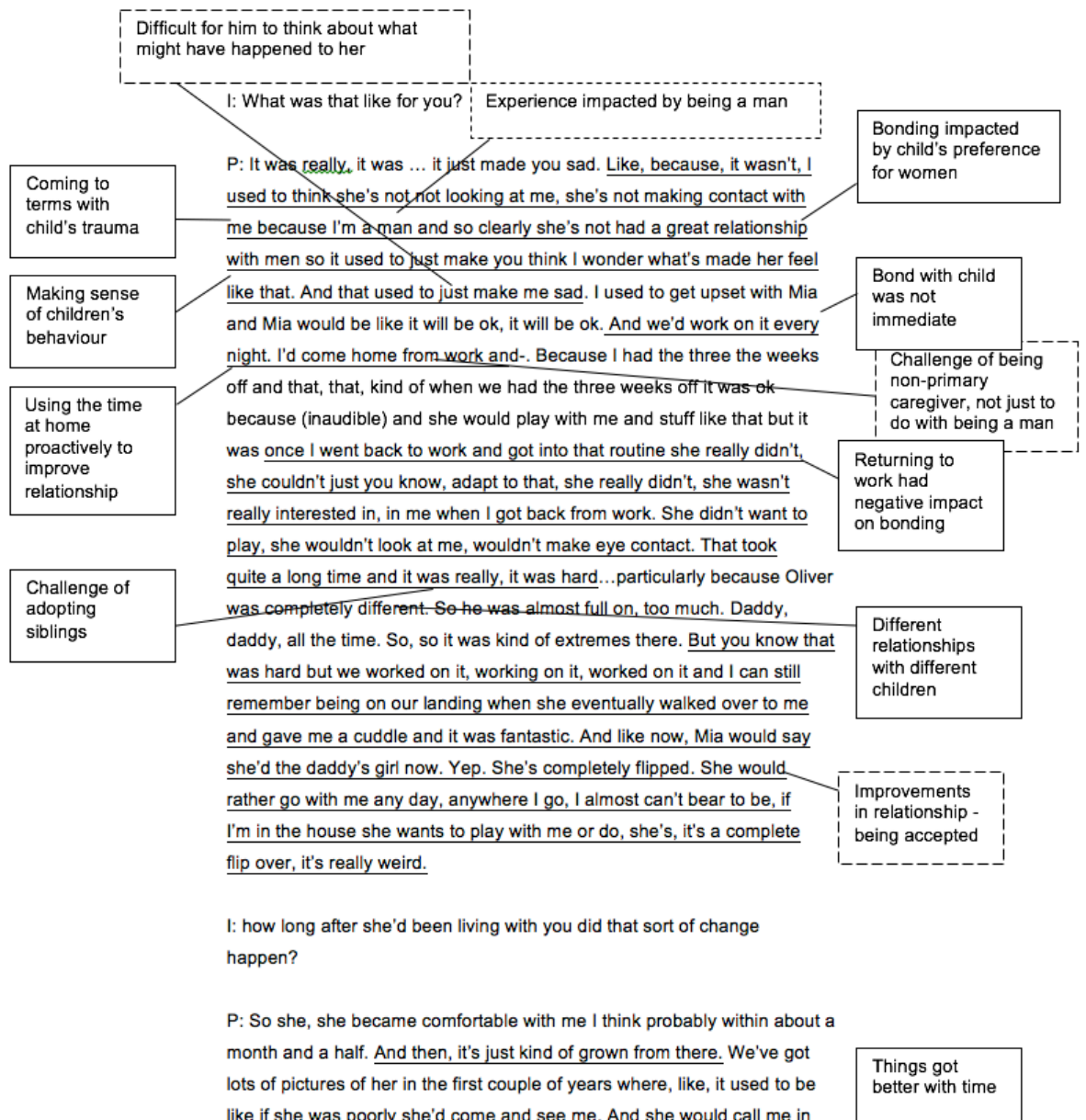
New thesis title: The transition to first-time fatherhood through adoption

Your registration period remains unchanged.

### Change project title - Miss Susannah Gordon-Jones

## 6.8. Appendix H: Example Transcript Extract

Initial notes and Nvivo entries are integrated in this example. Initial notes are show in boxes with dashed lines and NVivo codes in solid lines.



## 6.9. Appendix I: Coding Manual

1	A lot of the time it's just normal parenting
2	Accessing family and friends for support post placement
3	Accessing specialist support to cope with emotions
4	Adjusting to not being able to be biological father was hard without solid reasons
5	Adoption is different to biological parenting
6	Adoption was always an option for becoming a father
7	Adoptive families aren't all that different
8	Ambivalence in desire to have children
9	Ambivalent defences
10	As a man feeling more resilient to withstand difficult experiences
11	Assessment as cathartic
12	Avoiding thinking about the possible reality
13	Balancing different roles is hard
14	Balancing staying positive with not getting hopes up
15	Barrier to help seeking
16	Being proactive
17	Being rejected was hard
18	Being the driving force in the couple towards adoption
19	Being unprepared was a struggle
20	Bond with child was not immediate
21	Bonding facilitated by time off work
22	Bonding impacted by child's preference for women
23	Bonding was different with different siblings
24	Bonding was positive and quick
25	Bonding with child was difficult
26	Breaking traditional gender roles
27	Challenge of making joint decisions
28	Challenge of partners' sadness
29	Challenges of adopting siblings were unexpected
30	Challenging relationships with social workers
31	Child's trauma triggered of own anger
32	Children's difficulties emerged over time
33	Coming to terms with child's trauma
34	Conflict with social services has emotional toll
35	Coping by acknowledging feelings
36	Coping by avoiding feelings
37	Coping by having disengaging makes it worse

38	Coping by having distance
39	Coping by staying engaged
40	Coping by talking with friends
41	Coping by talking with partner
42	Coping in early placement by having breaks
43	Decisions about fatherhood in the hands of others
44	Desire to feel acceptance from child
45	Difference to other adopters barrier to peer support
46	Difficult to maintain motivation to keep going
47	Difficulty of strangers in my home
48	Discrimination or marginalisation or result of being in no dominant group
49	Doubting ability as a father
50	Emotional openness facilitated process
51	Emotional toll of early placement
52	Exhausted by looking after toddler
53	Expecting challenges but expecting to be supported
54	Expecting challenges but only same as biological parenting
55	Experiencing stigma as gay men adopting
56	Fear of fatherhood being taken away
57	Fear of impact of children's history and genetics
58	Feeling guilty for not meeting own high expectations of self
59	Feeling had it easier as a man
60	Feeling he made mistakes in parenting
62	Feeling in battles with the local authority
63	Feeling in competition with other parents
64	Feeling judged and presenting in a way they think they should
65	Feeling let down by social services
66	Feeling misled by social workers
67	Feeling powerless in the system
68	Feeling powerless in the system - sexuality discriminated against
69	Feeling powerless regarding the length of process
71	Feeling prepared for change in life
74	Feeling prepared for isolation helped
75	Feeling side lined as a man
76	Feeling societal expectations were different for him as man
77	Feeling supported by work facilitates transition
78	Feeling the children's past experienced were minimised
79	Feeling under pressure to make a decision
80	Feeling unprepared for competitive nature
81	Feeling unprepared for how hard the matching process was



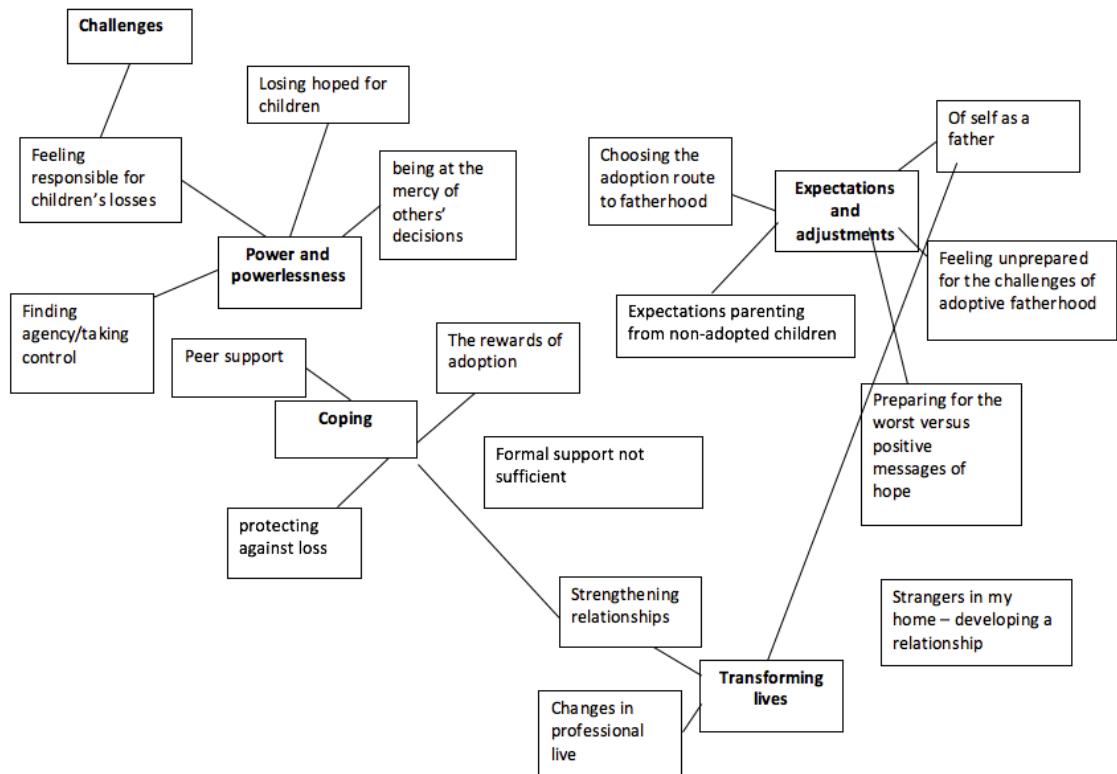
82	Feeling unprepared for how much support would need
83	Feeling unprepared for impact on life
84	Feeling unprepared for meeting the children
85	Feeling unprepared for networks emotions when matched
86	Feeling unprepared to start the adoption process
87	Feeling unvalued as adopters
88	Feeling views not respected by social workers
89	Feeling were managing early placement well
90	Finding stress release through exercise
91	Finding talking about self difficult
92	Finding their way through the adoption system
93	Friends helping through the pre adoption process
94	Frustration at not being able to access the infomation about the children
95	Frustration with length of process
96	Frustration with social workers
97	Frustration with the judgement - its unfair
98	Getting advice and support from adoption organisations to navigate process
99	Getting more support is a battle
100	Getting to know the children as people
101	Getting to know the children as people maintained excitement
102	Giving ultimatums to sws
103	Going back to work made bonding difficult
104	Guilt at rejecting children
105	Guilt at taking the child from a good foster home
106	Guilt for not being good enough father
107	Happy for Social Services to take control
108	Happy to wait for right child
110	Harrowing experience of infertility and IVF
111	Having ability to parent affirmed helped
112	Having expectations managed facilitated waiting
113	Having siblings facilitated role as father as one had good relationship
114	Having to change attitude towards parenting
115	Hearing positive stories as well as negative helped maintain excitement
116	Impact on relationship - change in roles, no longer equal
117	Impact on relationship - difficulties having children putting it under strain
118	Impact on relationship - less intimacy
119	Impact on relationship - less time together
120	Impact on relationship - more conflict
121	Impact on relationship - more time together

122	Impact on relationship - strengthening by making lots of decisions together
123	Impact on relationship - strengthening through getting to know each other better
124	Impact on relationship - strengthening through going through it together
125	Impact on relationship - strengthening through more responsibility
126	Impact on relationship - trauma related behaviours putting it under strain
127	Informing self
128	Informing selves about adoption and trauma
129	Informing selves increased confidence in selves as parents
130	Interaction of sexuality and adopter
131	Interaction of sexuality, gender and single
132	Introductions were emotionally shattering
133	Isolation
134	Isolation in introductions was hard
135	Joy in parenting despite the challenges
136	Lack of emotional support for infertility
137	Lack of emotional support from LA
138	Lack of specialist support for pre placement challenges
139	Lack of support from LA
140	Learning to use non-traditional parenting
141	Letting go of masculine narratives about having birth children
142	Loving the child not immediate
143	Maintaining hope helped cope with rejections
144	Making own plans for placement
145	Male peer support helps transition
146	Men more vulnerable to isolation
147	More positive feelings about parenting through adoption than wife
148	More time off work facilitated transition
149	Needing a balance of positive and negative stories of adoption
150	Negative impact on spousal relationship of disengaging
151	No support in place for the children
152	Non adoptive parents don't understand
153	Not knowing the system
154	Not used to being emotionally open
155	Only other adopters understand
156	Placed value of ability to have biological children
157	Positive start to placement facilitated by perceived good attachment
158	Prep or training groups not preparing them enough
159	Preparation too negative
160	Problem solving

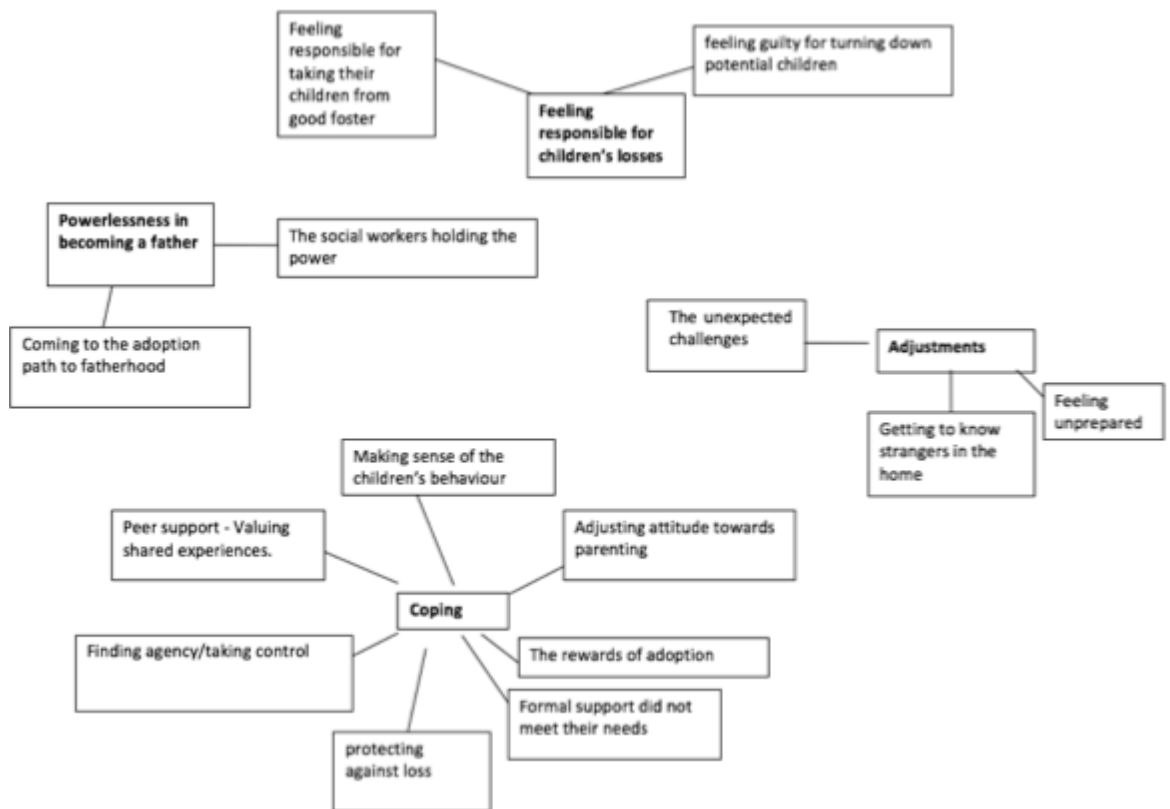
161	Problem solving - driving the decision for siblings
162	Professional life being transformed by fatherhood
163	Psychological resilience and adjusting well
164	Reality of adoption changed view of self
165	Reducing expectations on self helps adjustment
166	Rejecting children was hard
167	Resolved the adoption will continue despite challenges
168	Returning to work after short time hindered transition
169	Returning to work had negative impact on bonding
170	Seeking advice from friends
171	Seeking advice from others
172	Seeking gay affirming agency
173	Seeking more information about the children
174	Specialist support helped post placement
175	Suddenness of transition was a challenge
176	Support - felt supported by SS though the process
177	Support - felt supported by SS, facilitated good intros
178	Taking action by seeking contact with organisations helped with powerlessness
179	Taking control by preparing selves
180	The adoption process as draining
181	The highs and lows of the process
182	Things got better with time
183	Traditional gender roles for time off work
184	Traditional male role of breadwinner
185	Understanding children in relation to their past experiences
186	Unexpected challenges of older child
187	Unexpected emotional challenges
188	Unexpected positive
189	Unprepared for how different it would be
190	Valuing their child
191	Wanting a deeper connection with children
192	Wanting expert help

## 6.10. Appendix J: Mind maps

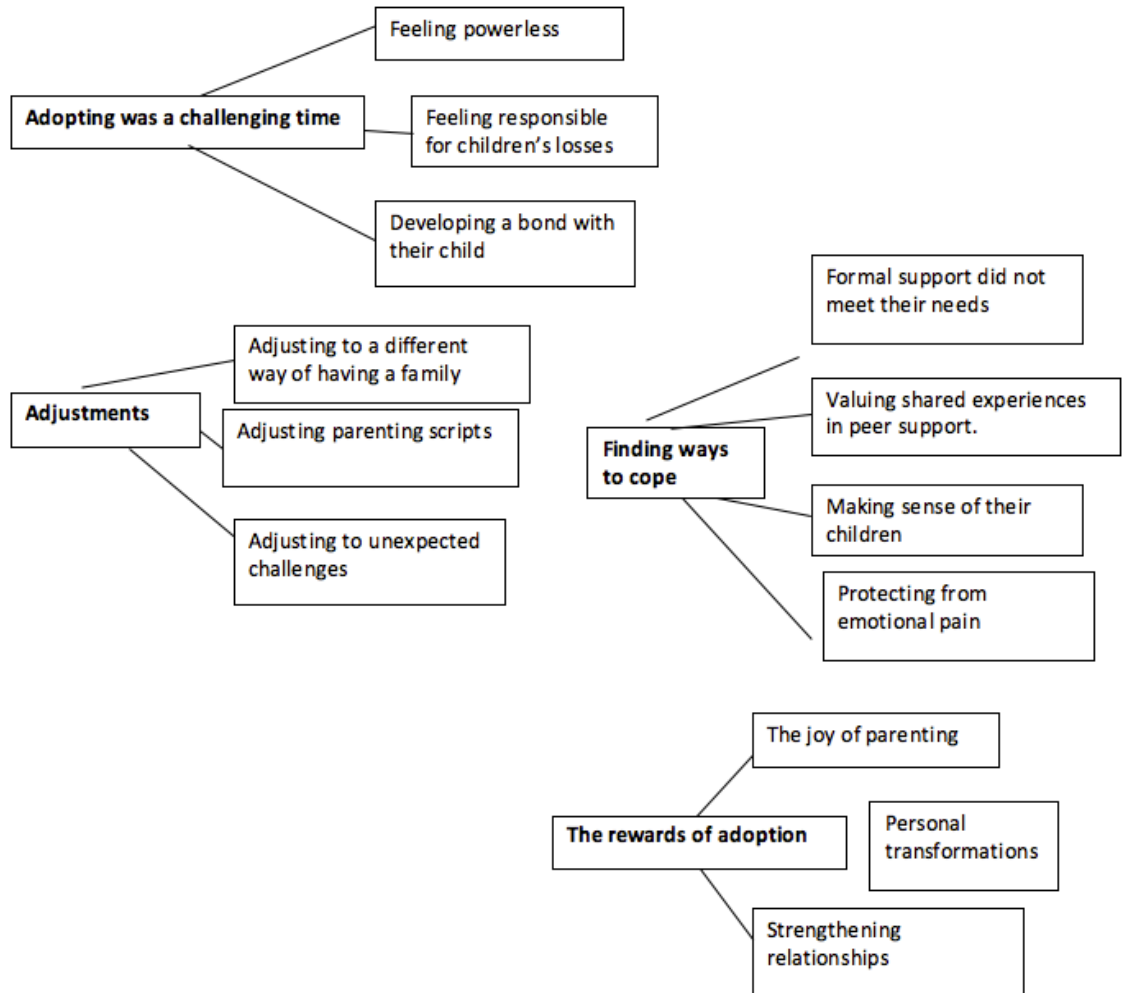
Mind map 1



Mind map 2



### Mind Map 3



## 6.11. Appendix K: Reflective Diary Extract

After interview 7

I found the participant very articulate, reflective and interesting. Lots of really interesting themes from this interview and I feel excited about the research again. Realise I get in a cycle of feeling despondent, wondering if what I'm doing is worthwhile (compared to others who are researching more obviously marginalised groups) and then during and after an interview I feel passionate about my topic again. He talked about some really useful ways adoption prep groups could be better, how adopting has impacted his professional life (is a child protection social worker, theme could be transition as iterative process, impacting professional and personal life as well as professional and personal life impacting transition).

His reasons for adopting made me reflect on own life and whether I could adopt I felt somewhat guilt regarding wanting biological children not adopting. This was the first man younger than me. Made a big impact, more inspiring but also more of an impact on me. His wife was the same age as me which I think also made me consider my own responses to adoption more than previous interviews.