genealogy

Adoption Experiences and the Tracing and Narration of Family Genealogies

Edited by

Derek Kirton

MDPI

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Special Issue Editor

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About the Special Issue Editor

Derek Kirton is a reader in social policy and social work at the University of Kent. His research interests, though ranging fairly widely across the field of child welfare, are mostly focused on adoption, foster care, and children in state care. In relation to adoption, he has contributed primarily to the literature on transracial adoption, where he has written a book 'Race', Ethnicity and Adoption (Open University Press, 2000), a shorter monograph, and numerous journal articles and book chapters. Some of these publications have addressed issues related to genealogy. Dr. Kirton has also conducted, with colleagues, related research involving adults formerly in care (their reasons for seeking access to care records, searching, reunions, and identity concerns through the life course). Other research and scholarly interests include the wider politics of child welfare and the place of foster care in provision for those in public care. Here, the particular focus has been on the changing nature of foster care and its 'professionalization', a term capturing moves toward regarding foster care as a job and/or profession, in turn sparking debates about how this trend articulates with parenting

Preface to "Adoption Experiences and the Tracing and Narration of Family Genealogies"

In its initial formulation, this Genealogy Special Issue "Adoption Experiences and the Tracing and Narration of Family Genealogies" invited contributions from across disciplines to explore connections between adoption and genealogical processes.

As the Editor, my hope and expectation was for articles addressing, from different vantage points and theoretical perspectives, the key issues of identity, search, and reunion; openness and closure within adoption; and, in turn, how all these intersect with life course journeys and aspects of social identity. The hopes were amply met with a diverse (methodologically and conceptually) set of contributions, including some that engaged in developing territories such as online genealogical searching and embryo donation.

This collection starts with three articles whose common ground (though they involve other dimensions) is a significant focus on reunions. Sally Hoyle's (following Stanton) autogynography, "So Many Lovely Girls" recounts her experiences as an unmarried mother in the 1960s. Her graphic account of harsh treatment in The Home (for mothers and babies) and the silence she experienced from her family shows how identity as a mother is denied (although this denial is also resisted). This both reflects and reinforces a deep sense of shame, which she says still persists despite her own awareness, a greatly changed social climate, and a successful reunion with her daughter. The article title draws from a comment made by Hoyle's mother on the occasion of her grand-daughter's lesbian wedding, providing an important example of new histories being made as described by Clapton (see below).

Marianne Novy analyses two adoption search memoirs by well-known writers Jeremy Harding and Lori Jakiela. Crucial observations relating to identity quests are that whereas knowledge may be a necessary element, it is not sufficient and that the search process itself can be an important driver of identity change. Despite their manifest differences, Novy's account shares several themes with Hoyle's. The former highlights the significance of shame in adoption histories, while also highlighting its myriad forms. Both emphasize gendered forms of connectedness through generations. Similarly, each lays bare the emotional complexity of search and reunion and, in common with other contributors, the part played by imagination and storying within these processes. Both portray three-dimensional characterization in which sensibilities and interpretive meanings are simultaneously individual and highly social in nature. Novy touches on the significance of place, class, religion, and national identity.

Gary Clapton draws on a review of extant literature and original empirical research to explore longer term relationships between adopted people and birth family members following reunions. He rebuts views advanced by some adoption scholars that emphasize the typical limits to such 'thin' relationships and hence, at least implicitly, the 'unsuccessful' nature of most reunions. Although acknowledging that reunions have varied outcomes, Clapton contends that they are often enduring in relational terms and that many adopted people find (or regain) a place of membership within their birth families. Crucial to this argument is that once (re-)established, these relationships generate their own histories and continuities. Clapton also critiques the dominant framing of adopted people's relationships within adoptive and birth families in binary terms aimed toward assessing hierarchy between the two. He argues that relationships with birth families are better seen as additional rather than re- or displacing those in adoptive families, and that the very term 'reunion' is an unhelpful one

in its connotations.

In the following two articles, issues of search and reunion intersect with those of race and nation. In their submission, "I always wanted to look at another human and say I can see that human in me", Ravinder Barn and Nushra Mansuri report from the BBC television series *Searching for Mum*. They provide a qualitative content analysis of the stories of four British adults adopted from India and Sri Lanka, one of whom is adopted by a family of Sri Lankan heritage, and the others White British families. Sants's concept of 'genealogical bewilderment' is used as a theoretical lens. The narratives underscore the significance of searching and genealogical knowledge, often in the context of broadly positive experiences of adoption. Key themes emerge including the articulation of search with concerns for identity and belonging. As with several other contributions, this includes interest in physical likeness (as reflected in the title of the paper) but also in the context of international or transracial adoption, how identity and belonging intersect with racialisation, and attendant interests in community and place. An additional feature highlighted is how the lack of (reliable) records can exacerbate feelings of abandonment and invisibility and, relatedly, genealogical bewilderment.

Rosemary Peña, who is an activist in this arena as well as a researcher, addresses the search and reunion activities of a distinct group of those adopted internationally: the biracial or mixed heritage children born to white German women and African American U.S. soldiers after the Second World War. Her study follows stories featured in *Geborener Deutscher* (Born German), initially produced as a print newsletter and later Internet forum. The adoptions are of particular interest due to their historico-political circumstances and the position of race as an overriding factor that generated 'consensus' that the children belonged in the U.S. rather than Germany, and more specifically in its African American community. As Peña observes, this is the only known group adopted internationally by African Americans. In her analysis, she explores the identity challenges faced by Black German adoptees vis a vis both Germany and racialized identities in the U.S. As is the case in most studies (including within this Special Issue), searches have produced mixed results for participants. A further crucial part of the story is how a community has developed around their search activities as both source of information and mutual support. This in turn has created connections with (non-adopted) Black people living in Germany and Black Germans within the U.S.

Sandra Patton-Imani's account of online genealogical searches similarly draws on wider political contexts, although in this instance from her own individual search activities in what she describes as feminist interdisciplinary self-reflexive ethnographic research. Patton-Imani invites us to think beyond the common 'nature versus nurture' framing of adoption to also consider the power of social reproduction. Chronicling how online genealogy makes it difficult to trace two or more family trees (something also relevant beyond the world of adoption), she observes how this is not a neutral process. Beyond privileging the biological as natural (with DNA certification as the gold standard), she argues that in its rigidities and defaults, software privileges the social norms of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and erases deviant categories such as illegitimacy (a process illustrated with reference to a history involving slavery in her adoptive family's history). Privileging the natural also obscures the role of the state and regulation. As Patton-Imani reports, her stories of origin were not those of "due dates, labor pains, and hospitals...[but rather of]...home studies and social workers, bureaucratic interviews and paperwork, and the sealing of original birth records".

The final three articles, all based on fairly small qualitative studies, involve adoptive families (or in one case, the proximate situation of embryo donation) with relatively young children, where genealogical concerns typically operate within a different context. Sarah Richards explores the perspectives of adoptive parents and children adopted in the U.K. from China via interviews and creative journals. She addresses in particular the expectations placed upon adoptive families regarding ethnic identity and cultural heritage in international adoptions. Her account examines the ways (including through various forms of storying, and sometimes artefacts) in which adoptive parents work to build genealogy. Like Barn and Mansuri, Richards notes the challenges often posed through lack of information and, in some instances, abandonment. However, she diverges to a degree from their emphasis on the significance of ethnic identity. She is critical of what she sees as the latter's dominance in legal, policy, and practice frameworks and of the primordial constructions of identity they enshrine. In this context, Richards emphasizes the agency of children who increasingly take up their own positions in relation to received genealogical narratives as they work to construct their identities. Such divergences evoke Mohanty's concept of a curvilinear relationship between ethnic identity and psychological well-being, although struggles are likely regarding its precise contours.

Sally Sales's article draws on interviews with adoptive and birth parents to address the relatively neglected (especially in qualitative terms) topic of class within adoption, which she suggests holds a complicated and contradictory place. Within this complexity, however, the power of individualization can be discerned, notably in judgements of parenting. Sales contends that middle classness operates as a silent measure for successful parenting in substitute care, not least within the discourses of attachment. Despite her adoptive participants mostly regarding themselves as working class, they often used powerful classed distinctions to denigrate their children's backgrounds. Individualization was also apparent in the testimony of birth parents, who, despite giving ample evidence of the significance of poverty and deprivation in their lives, did not use the language of class to frame these experiences.

In our final article, Fiona Tasker and colleagues investigate the perspectives of parents conceiving (or adopting) through embryo donation, with particular reference to family mapping and the positionings of donors in terms of kinship. This is explored with a small group of parents whose donations occurred through a religious (Christian) organization and where openness with respect to genealogical heritage is expected. Of particular interest here in terms of adoption comparisons is the significance of gestation and at least early post-birth care, which would apply to birth parents in adoption but not to embryo donors. Predictably perhaps, this has often served to put a greater distance between adoptive and birth families, with, for instance, lower levels of disclosure/telling. As noted above, in this instance, there were expectations of openness and contact, but Tasker et al. provide a fascinating exploration of the variable constructions of kinship on the part of the parents through embryo donation and how these are narrated. Thus, whereas some donors were seen as close family members, others were accorded a much more marginal position. Distancing was also apparent in (albeit from a small sample) a lesser weight being given to genetics, though they retained a significance and capacity to be troubling to parents. Shared religious values also emerged as an important factor in familial relationships, and more broadly, the study highlights the need to see relations of donation and receipt in wider contexts, e.g., as gift relationships or not.

Although not central foci for any articles, other important cross-cutting issues within the articles include regulatory frameworks and wider kinship networks (most notably birth and adoptive siblings and extended families) as they impact, and are impacted by, adoption.

However you choose to read articles from this edited collection, I am sure that you will find value in the authors' thought-provoking analyses and I would like to record my thanks to all of them.

Derek Kirton
Special Issue Editor

So Many Lovely Girls

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Abstract: A little over 20 years ago I was reunited with my daughter, who had been adopted at the age of six weeks. We have become friends since then and I felt I owed it to her to explain the circumstances surrounding her birth and relinquishment. I have done this as an adult, in conversation with her, but there is only so much we can say to each other face to face. She knows my adult self but I wanted her to understand how my teenage self felt about losing a child, and to understand the shame surrounding illegitimacy at the time she was born. In the 1960s in England, "bastard" was still a dirty word. My parents dealt with the shame of my pregnancy by never speaking of it. They built a wall of silence. It took me 30 years to climb that wall: The attitudes I encountered as a teenager have not disappeared altogether. The shame of teenage pregnancy is still very much an issue in Ireland, for instance. The events I have written about took place in the late 60s in England, and I have tried to give a picture of the culture of the time. Women who gave birth to illegitimate children in the 60s and into the 70s were judged harshly by doctors and nurses and treated with less care than married women. So Many Lovely Girls is an extract from a longer memoir piece, which could be termed relational, because it deals with an intimate relationship, but I prefer the classification of autogynography, a term coined by feminist critic Donna Stanton in The Female Autograph. Stanton uses the term to differentiate women's life writing from men's.

Keywords: adoption; reunion; shame; autobiography; memoir

1. 2017

I'm in *The Lass*, talking to a young woman. She's a hardline feminist—it is the first thing she told me about herself. We are bemoaning inequality. In the wider world. Not here, not in Newcastle. I should say she is bemoaning and I am nodding in agreement, because I am missing twenty percent of what she is saying. The punk band is loud and we are sitting near the speakers, so close that I mistake the vibration of the bass line for the phone in my bag. She tells me that the first thing she asks a prospective partner is whether he agrees with a woman's right to choose. If he does not, there is nothing more to say. I think there is so much more to say but I cannot go into that right now, the music is too loud, and she is on a roll. When she stops for breath I tell her I need to dance, but in truth I need to think. For now though, it is dancing only with all the other intoxicated locals. It is a sad night, a year since Tommy Ninefingers died, and the band is playing his songs. It is making the men a bit crazy. They need to cry but instead they start pushing and shoving and it is time for me to retreat.

The talk about abortion has unsettled me. It is a long time since I was a young woman, and things have changed. There is access to contraception, and there is a general acceptance that a woman has the right to do what she wants with her body. There is no shame attached to having a child outside of marriage, and there is government assistance available for single parents. If I were a young woman now, I would have the advantage of looking at my options and be able to make an informed decision. In 1964, when I was 17, in a small town in England, I was so far from being able to make an informed decision that I did not tell my parents until I was seven months pregnant.

2. 1964

"Mum. I have to tell you something."

We are on a tea break at the cleaning job we share at the Parker Pen factory in Dover where my dad works. It is only two hours each weeknight. We clean the offices and the ladies' toilets and a man sweeps the factory floor and cleans the men's toilets. The whole cold building next to the ferry terminal smells of ink. There is really no need for a tea break but she does not get much time to sit and relax at home. I am so afraid to tell her but it has to be tonight.

"I'm pregnant."

The look she gives me is designed to shrivel. She has only ever had to look at me sideways to punish me. The look contains all the elements of what she is feeling—fury, disgust, and disappointment. I am the good child, the one she has never had to worry about. I am the child who will get a good job when I leave school, who will never have to work in a factory or a shop. She likes my boyfriend, Dixie, had trusted him too.

"Do Dixie's parents know?" She is lighting a cigarette and her hands are shaking.

"He's telling them tonight."

"Well, one thing I can tell you for nothing, you're not getting married."

We wash up the tea cups and finish cleaning in silence. That is almost more frightening than her shouting at me and I wonder if she will ever speak to me again. I have seen her silent treatment in action and it never ends until she is ready. She will be thinking about my older sister, Cathy, who married at 16 because she was pregnant to a handsome and feckless Gypsy boy. That was five years ago, and she has recently been granted a divorce on the grounds of mental and physical cruelty.
When Mum does break the silence she says:

"I wanted more for you."

Mum and I finish our work at the factory and get a taxi to Dixie's house. He is in his room and his father is nowhere to be seen. I am grateful for that; he scares the living daylights out of me. He looks like James Mason but much sterner. After a career in the army he is used to being obeyed, and smartly. Dixie's mother takes us into her bedroom and we talk about what to do. The room is full of disappointment.
The next day, Mum takes me to the family doctor for a check-up. He is cold and angry. "How could you do this to your mother?" However, he does not talk about contraception. He thinks that having made this big mistake, I will never agree to sex again until I am married. He is Marianne Faithfull's uncle, but there is nothing rock and roll about him. There is no question of me keeping the baby and I will be sent to another town, to a home for unmarried mothers. Until a place becomes available I will stay with my sister who is living in Council housing with her two young children. She is at the other end of town, so I am unlikely to be seen by my mother's neighbours. Not that there is much to see. I have not put on a lot of weight, and I have always favoured loose clothes.
A month later I have a place in an unmarried mothers' home in Ashford, about forty miles away. It is the town where Dixie's grandparents live, and he asks me to avoid the town centre in case I run into them. I accept that. I understand it. I am relieved that my own grandparents are dead or they might have died of shame. In their book, being unmarried and pregnant was a clear indication of sluttish behavior. Girls in my situation were "common as dirt", common meaning low-class, badly raised, morally inferior, disgraceful. I do not know if his grandparents would think that about me, or whether they would be shocked to discover that their house had been the venue for our first successful attempt at sexual intercourse.

The night we first met, he had been sitting in the local coffee bar with Sue, a friend of mine from school who lived in the next town. The summer holidays were almost over and none of us wanted them to end. It had been a summer of swimming and tanning and smoking Gauloises with the French boys who inundated the town in the school holidays, taking menial jobs in the hotels and guesthouses. In the evening we would meet at Tony's bar, which was ideal, because it was in a basement with low lighting and booth seating, which meant we had to squash up against each other. The darkness was the main attraction, though we told ourselves it was the Italian coffee machine. Jean Pierre had asked me out for coffee, but we had ended up in a group with his friends. When some of them left I waved to Sue, and they came to join us.

Dixie looked like a young James Dean, with grey blue eyes and brown hair swept back from his serious face. He was carrying a brown leather satchel and a camera, and looked like an explorer who had spent the day documenting the town and its inhabitants. He had, in a way, gathering material for his sketchbook. Dixie's family had only recently moved to town, and he had just finished his first year at Canterbury College of Art. He was funny, despite his serious demeanour. Canterbury was not far away, but I found myself feeling disappointed that I would not see him around town. Later, as I waited for the bus, I watched him walking away—he was a bit on the short side, and his long stride looked awkward, as if he were trying to keep up with someone much taller. I did see him again. When the new school term started, I was able to say I had a boyfriend and to be surprised by the look on Sue's face.

I had had boyfriends before him. There was a serious boy who was about to join the Merchant Navy and wanted me to wait for him, his best friend who convinced me not to wait, and Jean Pierre who let me help him with his English and pedantically corrected my French. They were short, sweet friendships that went no further than kissing. My mother assumed that I would learn from my sister's mistakes, but just to be sure she would wait behind the front door at the time I was due back to be certain there were no lingering goodnights from whoever had walked me home. Her own mother had told her that kissing could make you pregnant, and if that was not true it was certainly where it all started. At 15, I knew a bit more about biology, even though I had skipped so many biology classes that the school report called me "unobtrusive". I had made some sense of my mother's instructions about where not to let boys touch me, and I was aware of the dangers of unprotected sex. However, all of that went by the board when I met Dixie. No-one had told me what passion felt like.

That Christmas was freezing cold, and the snow still lay deep on the ground days later. We were heading for Ashford to visit Dixie's grandparents, but hitchhiking was slow because no-one wanted to be on the road in that weather. I had told my parents we were getting a lift so they would not worry about me. In the early hours of the morning, we reached the outskirts of the town and headed for the woods to wait for daylight. Dixie had lived in this town some years earlier and knew a hollow tree we could squeeze into for warmth while we waited for Poppy and Horace to wake up. The tree did offer shelter, but it was standing room only, and by the time we knocked on their door we were cold to the bone, our boots and socks sodden and icy. We drifted through that day in front of the fire, playing cards and drinking cherry brandy until it was time to go to bed.

Dixie had a plan. His bedroom was next to his grandparents' room and mine was down a half landing with the bathroom in between. He was going to creep back down to my room once they were asleep. I lay awake, alert to the smallest sound, terrified and excited. When he came back along the landing I could hear his joints cracking and my own heart pounding. I wanted this. I wanted to lie naked with him, to have some feeling of being owned, possessed. I was afraid he would tire of me if we did not take this step. At the same time, I wanted his plan to fail. I was 16 and none of my friends had gone this far yet. Then he was there, standing naked in the light of the moon. Pale, shivering, smiling. He made the cold sheets colder for a while, but we were at last in a bed together instead of fumbling in dark alleys or at the end of the pier. The fumbling had been one sided up to now, so I was shocked by the size and hardness of his penis. I did not know what he expected me to do, so I did nothing except try to lose myself in the kissing moments.

The unmarried mothers' home is not what I expect. It would have been a very comfortable country house in its day, but the town has crept closer and eaten up the surrounding gardens and orchards. What remains is the house, the stables, and a large area of lawn surrounded by mature trees. There are two large bedrooms shared by the ten girls in residence, a nursery, and the Matron's private quarters. Downstairs, the impressive entry leads into a large sitting room with views onto the garden. The Matron's office is here too, at the front of the house, so adopting parents can come and go without seeing any of the residents. Everything is clean and polished, and fresh flowers are always on the hall table. Though it is run by The Children's Society, it is not institutional, except for the rules and regulations, and after a month I am used to the routines. Every minute of the day is regimented and revolves around the babies being fed at four hourly intervals. In between, the mothers clean and wash clothes, take the babies for walks, and rest themselves between two and four in the afternoon when the Matron takes charge of the nursery. The mothers-to-be are allowed out for walks in the afternoon but must be back by five, after which time no visitors are allowed. Dixie comes to visit me one afternoon, and I am so happy to see him, to see anyone who does not treat me like a prison inmate. The sun is shining, and we find a sheltered spot on the edge of a field. Either the al fresco sex or the fright of suddenly being surrounded by cows triggers my contractions, and later that night I am admitted to hospital.

"She's from the Home."

I've been placed on a trolley outside the delivery room and the nurses are checking my details. I am frightened and in pain, and the noises I hear around me are not reassuring. I am still feeling the shame of having my pubic hair shaved and being given an enema so that I don't disgrace myself when I am pushing. I can hear a doctor encouraging some other poor woman to push. His voice seems unnecessarily loud. Everything is exaggerated here. Light and sound bounce off the white tiles, hurting my eyes and my ears. My feet are freezing but I don't dare ask for a blanket. The matron has made no secret of what she thinks of "bad girls".

In my own eyes I am not bad. I am stupid, unlucky, and naïve. Like all the girls in the Home. We do not deserve the treatment we get at the hands of the nurses and doctors who deliver our babies, who tell us it is our fault we are in pain and offer no relief, who cut us and stitch us up clumsily with catgut and without an anaesthetic, who clean us up without kindness. Care and compassion is reserved for married women only, although even they have to obey the rules of confinement. Our babies are brought to us only for feeding, then taken back to the nursery. For some mothers this is a rest break, ten days in bed with someone else looking after their other children. It is ten days when they can sleep through the night, because if the newborns wake up the nurses will take care of them. For the ten days I am in hospital, I have no visitors. I am in a public ward, and curtains are pulled around my bed during visiting hours, though I doubt it is to spare my feelings. The only kindness shown to me comes from a woman in the next bed. She is twice my age, is having her first child, and her husband is overseas. He finally makes it back to England one afternoon, to the hospital, to the ward, to her bed. The nurses give them the key to the storeroom so they can be together and have some privacy. I am happy for them, sorry for myself, and angry towards the nurses who have shown me no kindness. Furthermore, I am jealous. I have just given birth to my first child too, but nobody is celebrating.

Back at the Home, my mother comes with some baby clothes she has picked up in a church jumble sale. She is a constant and very good knitter, but knitting new baby clothes would raise questions she does not want to answer. It is the final confirmation that this baby will not be coming home with me. Some part of me had thought my mother might change her mind when she saw her granddaughter, but she has avoided looking at my baby. She would see her own face mirrored there.

We are given six weeks with our babies, like mother cats and their kittens. We breastfeed them, change them, bathe them, watch them as they sleep. As well as our cleaning chores around the Home, we now wash nappies, first in a large sluice in the old stable block, then by boiling them up with Lux soap flakes, rinsing them and putting them through a large mangle to remove excess water. They must be hung on the line by 9.00 a.m. and removed from the line by 4.00 p.m., before the evening dew. I am

perpetually exhausted and one afternoon I fall asleep in the garden and add sunstroke to my list of afflictions. I am too sick to continue breastfeeding, and my baby is transferred to the bottle. It is the first step in our separation and I feel it badly.

There are older girls here who scan the newspapers daily looking for live-in housekeeper jobs where they can take their baby. They are girls who have been thrown out of their homes by parents who cannot face the disgrace. It is heart breaking. We are not supposed to get attached to our babies, but it is impossible to deny our feelings. The six weeks we are allowed are the six weeks the law decides is necessary for thorough health checks and matched placements. We are not supposed to look when our babies are taken from the Home, but I want to see the people who are taking my daughter. From behind a lace curtain in an upstairs room I see them walking across the gravel towards their car. They seem old, as old as my parents, and they have a small boy with them. I know nothing about them except that they can give my baby a comfortable home. I can give her nothing, except her name. My best friends from school have been suggesting names—Lisa, Jane, Lily—but the names mean nothing to me. I can give her nothing but her name, and I have called her Sally. I have nothing to remember her by, except two photographs Dixie has taken of us on the steps of the Home. A stranger would see happiness.

I catch the train back home by myself. Canterbury is on the way so I call in to see Dixie. He is living there now, closer to Art School and further away from me. I need some kind words and comfort from the other point of this triangle. I need him to tell me that we will always be together, that he is sorry we lost our girl. Instead he says, "It might have been different if it had been a boy".

I have missed the last term of the first year of my Business Studies course, but I can retake the exams after the summer holidays and catch up with coursework in the meantime. The only people in my family who know about the baby are my parents and my sister. Everyone else thinks I was ill. My mother treats me like an invalid but only for a short time. She is torn between punishment and compassion. She has five children and can imagine what it would have been like to lose one.

3. 1965

"Sally. Are you OK?"

I am shivering uncontrollably on the station platform, even though it is a warm spring evening. I do not know it yet, but I am in a state of shock. Serious, physical shock. I am in pain, but I still think it will be alright, that I will get on the train, go home and go to bed, and lose a lot of blood in the morning. Move on. I try to be brave but it is not working.

"I think we should call an ambulance".

He does not want to hear this but he knows it is true. He is as frightened as I am. When the ambulance arrives, the two men who help me into the back are brisk, and they talk to me in very loud voices. I do not want them to know what is wrong with me. They might have daughters my age.

"What's your name love?"

"How old are you?"

"Where does it hurt?"

I am not bleeding yet and I do not want them to think badly of me. I am in pain but I still think it will be OK, that I will get to the hospital and spend a night in bed there and lose a lot of blood in the morning. Move on. My mother need never know. It is a year since I let her down by having a baby, and this time I need to deal with it without her knowing. I have a Saturday job in a chemist shop, and I asked the older female assistant if she could help me get some quinine tablets, but she refused. Abortion is illegal and neither Dixie nor I would be able to pay for the procedure. So we decide to try a

method he has heard about, which seems less frightening than facing my mother with the bad news. In his bed-sit next to the railway line, with trains rumbling by every 15 minutes, we collude in the loss of our second child.

"What's your name, love?" The paramedic is shaking me.

"Her name's Sally."

"I need her to tell me herself. Come on, sweetie, what's your name? Where does it hurt?"

I tell them I am 18, that I have pains in my stomach, but I do not tell them the cause. I do not tell them about the bowl of hot water used to dissolve the cake of Wright's Coal Tar Soap, the plastic tube finally inserted into my cervix, the carbolic acid smell filling the room as the hot liquid fills my womb. I have to tell the doctor though. He is Indian. He is furious. I am 16 weeks pregnant. By 15 weeks, the foetus can kick, curl its fingers and toes, and squint its eyes. By 15 weeks genitals have developed so the foetus can be seen to be either a male or female child, and the kidneys are working. My kidneys are not working. We have succeeded in killing this child, but I may be joining it in heaven. If I die, Dixie will go to jail.

I am taken onto a ward, and the curtains are pulled around me. It is late now, so the other women on the ward are asleep, or resting. I am groaning with the pain, but the doctor tells me to be quiet, that I deserve the pain for what I have done. He tells me not to wake the other patients. It takes him more than an hour to remove, piece by piece, the contents of my womb. I drift into unconsciousness. The last thing I hear is the doctor saying, "There's nothing more we can do for her". There is no tunnel, but there is light and peace. Leaving would be so easy, but there is a dreadful pain in my right arm, just below the elbow. It will not go away. It is keeping me here.

"Sally! Sally!"

It is my mother, leaning into me, digging her sharp elbow into the soft part of my forearm. I have let her down again, but instead of disapproval I see pain. Instead of anger, I see love. She thinks I am dying, and she will not let me.

When I am well enough to leave the General Hospital, a doctor chases after me and catches hold of the ambulance door as it is closing.

"Haven't you got anything to say to me", he yells.

He is short of breath from running. I look at him blankly. I have no idea what he's talking about.

"Aren't you even going to thank me?"

"For what?"

I have seen only nurses all week, sitting by my bed letting me suck on ice cubes. I have been allowed no food or drink and although I am being released from this hospital, I am being sent to a Convalescent Hospital where I will be nursed until my body recovers. I have lost so much weight that even my hockey player's legs are slender.

"For saving your life," he spits at me. "I saved your life".

I do not understand why he is so angry. "Thank you", I say politely, and the door closes.
It will be many years before I understand what he did for me. By not officially admitting me to hospital that night, he was able to keep the abortion off the record, to admit me the next day with "nephritis", to save us from prosecution. And he may have saved my life, but he did not stop me from dying. My mother did.

After many weeks in convalescence, I go home in a taxi, this time with my mother, who really does need to treat me like an invalid this summer. I have been away for so long she has rented out my ground floor room without my knowledge, and I am now installed in the bedroom next to my parents.

When I have recovered, I go to Dixie's house for dinner. His mother tells me in the kitchen that he had been distraught when I went into hospital. She tells me that he was crying, but I can see she does not understand why. She thinks it was just because he was worried for me, but he was worried for himself as well. His family does not know what really happened, and I feel as if, once again, I have taken all the blame. He is about to move to London to study at the Royal College of Art. I have once again missed the last term of my course, but the Technical College has agreed to let me finish it in the autumn. So I adopt my mother's approach of "least said, soonest mended". I have no doubt that he loves me, and I am excited for him. For the three months we are apart, we write almost daily, and I keep his numbered letters in a wooden box under lock and key, where I also keep the two black and white photographs of my daughter. "Sally, I love you like krazee." Same.

4. 2017

This is what I am thinking about in *The Lass*. I am standing at the back of the dance floor now, watching the craziness that goes hand in hand with mourning. I made so many mistakes growing up. I almost died as a result of one of those mistakes. I am angry with my younger self, angry that she did not have the strength to resist the only option being presented, to resist the assumption that her life would be ruined if she kept her child, to resist the idea that a single woman with a child would remain forever single and the child forever fatherless. I did not know at the time that there were examples in my own family to demonstrate the fallacy of the "forever fatherless" child. I know now that my grandmother gave birth to her first child when she was only 14, and he was brought up in her family, as her younger brother. My grandmother's mother was pregnant with her fourth child before she married their father. My grandfather was born six years after his mother's husband died, but no-one thought he should not be acknowledged as a brother to her three older children. I cannot know if it would have been better to keep my child, if it would have been worse, but it would have been different. I would have stayed in Dover. I would have stayed in England. But right then, all I wanted to do was follow Dixie.

London created a myth of sexual freedom in the sixties. Swinging London. It was not like that for everyone. We were free to wear short skirts, but that came with the likelihood of attracting the wrong kind of male gaze. It was a time of mixed messages. A man in the street could tell me what he would like to do with his tongue, but I could report him to the police and be confident that they would look out for him. Sexual harassment in the workplace was tolerated. My boss could get away with slipping suggestive phrases into his dictation and laughing at my embarrassment. He knew who was more valuable to the company. I could look back on those experiences, and my reactions, as an indication of my repression, but I prefer to think of it as innocence. Dixie and I were an island of innocence, an island of two. We did not smoke, we did not drink, we did not live together, we were monogamous.

5. 1970

Dixie is doing well at the Royal College of Art and moves into a flat with a group of students in his year. He paints the single room white and builds a mezzanine sleeping platform at one end. We are now living within easy walking distance of each other in South Kensington. The weekends I stay in London, we walk for hours through the parks, look at art in the galleries, fill our heads with knowledge in the museums, and take in the history of a great city through its architecture. We lie in bed at night and talk about the kind of house we will live in, the kind of life we will have in the future. I cannot quite believe it. I feel as if I am in a holding pattern, waiting for him to decide what happens next. Perhaps when he finishes his course this summer. It is what I tell my mother when she asks me.

Over the last two years, I have moved several times and am now living with a married couple. The flat has all the right attributes—top floor, my own room, and cheap rent. Moving in with Dixie

would cut my expenses, but he has not asked me to do so. Dixie is not the lease holder on the flat, but I wonder why I am not an option when a room becomes free? I am not the kind of girlfriend to ask that question. I am not the kind of girlfriend to ask any awkward questions.

We have been together for eight years now, since the day before my sixteenth birthday. Surely, one day soon, he will ask me to marry him, or even live with him. I wanted this to never end. I wanted him to promise never to leave me, but I would be the one to leave.

6. 1971

"Hallo Mum? It's me."

"What's wrong?"

Phone calls and telegrams are for emergencies. She knows I am in Yorkshire for the long weekend.

"Nothing wrong. I just have something to tell you. I've met someone else and I'm going to marry him. And we're moving to Australia."

There is silence at the other end and I can tell it is too much to take in.

"Can I bring him home to meet you at the weekend?"

"Of course you can. What's his name?"

"Ian, but everyone calls him Noddy. You're going to love him."

I had met Nod at a dinner party six weeks earlier. Dixie was working on some artwork that had to be finished by the next day, so I went alone. Something happened across the table, something inexplicable. Although I told Nod I was in a relationship and could not see him again, we met a few weeks later when a mutual friend gave us a lift to Yorkshire for the long weekend. That night, the Friday of the long weekend, Nod asked me to marry him. He was leaving for Australia within the next two months and wanted me to go with him.

I went to see Dixie on Tuesday morning before work. I could have left it till the evening, when I would have normally been seeing him, but I would not have made it through the day without confronting what had to be done. Although it was early, he was sitting at his drawing board. I told him with my arms around him, and even now I am not sure what would have happened if he had asked me to stay. He did not ask me. He said, "Does he know you've had a child?" As if that would have made a difference. As if I would not have told the man I was about to marry. As if it was still a shameful secret.

It took him three weeks to ask me to stay, but by then it was too late.

7. 1981

"The doctor will see you now."

The waiting room is government grey and the Department of Health doctors work in a repurposed office building in the city. There are fibre board partitions and cheap veneered desks left behind by the previous tenants. Grey carpet tiles and bare windows. There is a definite air of Kafka. I already have the job at the Australia Council, but a medical examination is part of the Public Service contract. The doctor is rude and angry, and although his mood and manner can have nothing to do with me, it feels personal. The medical records form asks if I have ever been pregnant or had a termination. Yes. Yes. The questions feel like a judgement.

"You've got a bit of a belly on you."

I am shocked at his hostility, but I need this certificate. I need the job. Our book distribution business has suffered after a fire razed our rented city warehouse to the ground. Nod is trying to keep it running in a smaller warehouse closer to home. One of us needs to be earning money. The doctor is used to dealing with people who need him to sign that they are fit to be employed by the Government. The power must be eating him up from the inside. I want to tell him that he has a belly too, but I contain myself.

"I'm pregnant."

"Even so . . . "

For the first few years in Australia Nod and I had worked for other people, saved for trips, and relaxed into the Australian way of life. Whenever I visited my doctor for another prescription for the contraceptive pill, he told me I should stop taking it and have children. I did stop after five years, when we had set up our own business and were working from home, but it had begun to look as if I had left it too late. Though we had been trying for five years to conceive, it could not have happened at a worse time. I cannot really believe it is happening, that after all I am not being eternally punished for giving away my first child and murdering my second. It is 17 years since my daughter was adopted, and I feel as if I have been given a second chance.

I have done a good job of putting my past behind me, but something about being pregnant has released me from secrecy. At 35 I am less concerned about shame and scandal, about having had an illegitimate child, but I still tell only one friend. Marnie is pregnant at 40 with her first child, and we find ourselves crying at the smallest things. We are both afraid of being older mothers. Of not being good enough mothers.

8. 1993

Nod and I are watching a documentary about adopted children looking for their parents and birth mothers looking for their children. So many sad stories, so many rejections. There are children who do not want to know their birth mothers, who feel that finding them is being disloyal to the families who raised them. There are birth mothers who have never told anyone they had a child out of wedlock and are afraid their lives will be ruined if the secret is disclosed. There is still so much shame. There are stories of failed reunions, of vicious treatment at the hands of the Catholic Church. The British Government has set up a contact register, not so that parents can find their children, but so that children can find their parents. I begin to feel not only that I was blessed to have been born into a Protestant family, but that it may be possible that my daughter would want to find me. I would want to know about my birth mother if I had been adopted. Nod is supportive when I tell him I would like to put my name on the register, but we decide not to tell our 11 year old son Julian until my daughter gets in touch. It could be a long wait. I will tell Dixie when I go back to England. I would not try to find her without telling him. I know how much that hurts. He had sought legal advice on finding her two years after I left, without telling me, without considering my feelings. I had relinquished all rights to contact when I signed the adoption papers, and in my eyes he had relinquished any rights when he asked me if I was sure the baby was his.

Back at my mother's house a few months later, I am steeling myself to call him. The phone is outside the basement living room and I close the door behind me. With the door closed, it is dark in this cramped space between the stairs and the kitchen. There is a stool I can sit on, my back to the dumb waiter, which in Victorian times would have taken hot food from the kitchen in the basement to the dining room on the next floor and clean sheets and towels to the floors above. These days it carries whatever my mother needs to take to bed with her—her book, her glasses, and a glass of water. It is a long way up. I switch on a light so I can see my address book. Even with the light on, it not a comfortable space, surrounded by spare coats and dark, polished wood.

"Hi Dixie. It's Sally."

I could have just said hallo. We know each other's voices so well. We chat for a while, and I am working up to telling him my plan for finding our daughter, but I am finding it difficult to bring up the subject. Thirty years after the adoption, there is a big bridge to build and even all these years later I still feel the stigma attached to having been an unmarried mother in 1964. We have caught up now, and there is a pause in the conversation. I am just about to bring up the contact register when he says: "Sally, do you realise we have a 30-year-old daughter?" I could hit him with a brick.

When I go back into the living room, my mother is reading. She looks up, and she knows something has happened.

"Are you OK?"

"Mum, I'm going to find my daughter."

I say it quickly and it comes out a little coldly, as if I'm expecting her to disagree. It is painful to see your mother cry. I do not realise immediately that she is happy for me, that she wants me to find my child.

"Your dad and I often talked about her, wondered what had happened to her."

"You never talked to me about it." I am crying now.

"We thought it was better to let you forget."

I tell her about the contact register, that usually the children will be searching for mothers. The father's name does not appear on the birth certificate of an illegitimate child.

"So how does Dixie feel about it?" she asks me. She is ready to be defensive on my behalf.

"He wanted to hire a private detective, but I convinced him to try the register first. I'll send him the forms and he can go from there." I smile when I tell her this, so she does not worry about the thought of a private detective. "We agreed to give it six months before we start thinking about what we could do next."

Later, my mother and I will both lie awake, remembering, recriminating, understanding, and forgiving. She will relive the guilt she felt when she insisted on the adoption, but maybe that will be tempered with a feeling that she did the right thing. Even if my parents had been able to bear the shame and the cost of raising another child, I see now that they had wanted a different life for me.

It is not as if I was alone back then. The contraceptive pill had not become available yet, and more than one girl from my school had to leave mysteriously. We were more worried about venereal disease than pregnancy. The burning question for us was whether syphilis or gonorrhea could be contracted from a public toilet seat. We knew how girls got pregnant but it did not seem to be the worst outcome from sex. We had seen the pictures.

Six months later, my daughter adds her name to the contact register and finds both her birth parents, but because I am in Australia, Dixie is the first to hear. He calls me because he has received a postcard from Sally with a return address care of a Post Adoption Agency. It is a standard procedure, and neither of us thinks for a moment that it is her real name. It is what I called her. It is my name and the only thing I could give her at the time. I will have to wait another week before my postcard arrives, a week in which things move very quickly. Instead of following standard procedure, Dixie calls the Agency and somehow talks them into giving him contact details for Sally. It is heavy handed, it is against the rules, and for a moment I wish I had done this alone. I had assumed I would be the first one she contacted, the first one she met, and I have to acknowledge I am jealous. However, he does tell me everything. When he tells me that he had only just sent in his registration, the same week Sally

added her name, I express my amazement at the coincidence but not my irritation that he had taken six months to fill in the forms.

He says: "I spoke to her today. Her name really is Sally. She wants to contact you but she asked me to tell you a couple of things first. If you can't handle them, then she doesn't want to go any further.".

I feel sidelined by the fact that he knows more about her than I do. If these two things could preclude a relationship with me, would she still foster a relationship with him?

"Ok, what's the first?"

"She's a lesbian."

"Not a problem", I say. I had been steeling myself to hear that she was a heroin addict. Maybe that is the second thing.

"The other thing is that she's a Socialist."

"I hope you told her that wouldn't worry me? You always used to say I was a Socialist".

"I said you were a Bolshie—not quite the same thing."

We're laughing, but he is putting me in my place.

"What about her family? Was she happy growing up? Do they know she has found us?"

"I'm not sure. I know her mother died when she was 12 and her father gave her the adoption papers when she was 16. Oh, and she's got Oehlers Danloss Syndrome, which she must have inherited from you because it's not in my family".

I am taken aback by this. He has had enough time to find out what this Syndrome is, something I have never heard of, and to place the blame on my shoulders.

I have read the literature on the possible outcomes of a post adoption reunion and about the protocol surrounding first contact with an adopted child. Now I feel as if I need to talk to a professional or join a support group. The professional is not very encouraging. She tells me that children who lose their adopted mothers at an early age are carrying a lot of baggage, that there can be mental problems that may not surface immediately, that this child may have unrealistic expectations surrounding contact with her birth mother. The support group is so far out of my comfort zone that I only attend one session. All the women in this group have had very bad experiences, mostly involving rejection by their newly found children. Some of them are carrying the extra load of having been adopted themselves. Some have been rejected by their birth mothers, as if they were still a sin to remain unacknowledged.

By the time Sally calls me, I am afraid I will not measure up. She has been looking for me for eight years, but instead has found her handsome, charismatic, intelligent, creative, and, by now, famous father. I already have a picture of her in my head—she will be dark haired, intense, intellectual, resentful, and brooding—images designed to justify her forthcoming rejection of me. However, when she does call, she is charming, down to earth, funny, and a little overwhelmed by Dixie's direct approach. She has my laugh, and I can see from the newly arrived photographs that she looks sometimes like me, sometimes like him. We talk about our first letters to each other, the difficulty of knowing what to say. She tells me that her friends advised her to write, "Dear Sally, Thank you for the big bum". I think we will be OK.

I tell her about my family, that my mother knows I have been looking for her, but I ask her if she will meet me first, before she meets them. I want her feelings about me to come from meeting me in person and not be complicated by family stories or her reaction to other family members. She is keen to come out to Australia. She has been before. We may have passed each other in the street in Manly or Katoomba. I think at the time that it is unlikely, that I would have recognized her, but when I go to meet her at the airport, I approach several young women who could be her before we find each other.

In person she looks more like her father than I had realised. We get 50% of our genes from our parents, but only 50%, so the features I do not recognize must come from earlier generations. She has my body shape and height. In fact, she is a little shorter than I am, and I find myself surprised by that.

We spend the day in Manly, where I used to live and where she has been before on a previous trip. She is well travelled, has seen parts of the world I will never see. We are both nervous and polite. We cannot fall into the easy casual conversation of strangers, because we are strangers with a shared history.

Sally has come to Australia for six weeks, and because I have to work, and we live in the country, she will spend some of that time with friends of mine in Sydney. Marnie and Max are good friends and easy to like. She can let off steam, have a break from our relentless questioning of each other, and have time and space to process our conversations. While she is with me, we both have the advantage of being in the company of my husband and our son, who is thrilled to have a sister. At 12, he is old enough to understand the story of Sally's adoption and smart enough to ask me if there are any other children he should know about.

My daughter brings me photographs of herself as a child, photographs of her adoptive family. I see the people who walked away with her that day. I see the happiness in their lives. The camera captures only one aspect of our faces at a time, so Sally looks at times shy, at times determined, at times amused by the world. I look at two photographs of her aged around 11, and I think they look familiar. An old gypsy woman at Scarborough Fair once told me that I had seen my daughter, and now I wonder if she was right. However, it takes me only minutes to realise that Sally looks like Dixie's younger sister at that age. Most importantly, Sally brings me copies of the adoption papers. It is strange to see my teenage self through the eyes of a social worker:

> "Sarah (the name on my birth certificate and only ever used in formal situations) has decided that it is best for the baby to be adopted, and she hopes that her little daughter will soon be happily settled in a home of her own where she will have the love and care of both a mother and a father. Sarah's father died when she was a young baby—he was a Petty Officer in the Navy and was killed in 1946 when mine-sweeping. Sarah's mother has remarried and she is not willing to accept baby Sally into the family. The family is a healthy one."

It is infuriating to see Dixie through the eyes of the same social worker:

> "The baby's father is 19 years old and he is an Art Student at College. He has been concerned for Sarah and the baby, but is not in a position to offer marriage. His interests are painting, drawing, music, swimming and walking. His father was formerly a Warrant Officer in the Army and now has a share in a family business. His mother is a house-wife. He has two sisters aged 8 and 12, and a brother aged 17. The family is a normal healthy one."

For some reason, the use of capitals for Art Student infuriates me, as does the listing of his interests. Apparently I had none. My family is "healthy" but his is "normal and healthy". His family members are correctly itemized. Mine are not.

> "There is one sister who is divorced and has two children, and one brother."

Why mention my sister's divorce and offspring? Actually, I have three brothers. I want to shout this down the years.

> " . . . it seems likely that the friendship will come to an end".

I find enormous satisfaction in the fact that the friendship with Dixie has not come to an end. It is only a reaction, though, to the officious tone of Miss Mitchell at The Children's Society office.

Sally tells me about her adopted family, the loss of her mother, the difficulties of being treated as an outsider by her stepmother, even before the revelation of her lesbianism. She tells me that her brother is angry that she has found me, that he sees it as disloyalty to their adopted family. He would

never want to find a mother who had given him up. Everything she tells me is delivered in a careful way, filtered through her professional voice. She is a social worker and has studied psychology after several years as a nurse. She wants me to understand that she is not angry, and I feel that she means it. She tells me about her search for me and how she painstakingly examined records to find out whether I had married or whether I had other children. She had found a record of my marriage, but she had no way of knowing I had left the country. If she had only gone to the address on her birth certificate she would have found my mother.

She has met Dixie several times by now and tells me she is a little overwhelmed by him, by his lack of sensitivity. He has offered to pay for her teeth to be whitened, an offer she has no intention of accepting. She did, however, accept his offer to pay for this trip. Part of me is grateful for his generosity; part of me thinks it is the least he could do.

It is a strange time for us both. We are fascinated by our similarities and eager to absorb details of our differences. One day, sitting in the sun on the back deck, she tells me she hates her feet. When I look closely I can see her feet are the same as mine, and I cannot see what there is to hate about them. Our hands are the same, except she is left handed like her father. We both put our left hands to our necks when talking and driving. I would like to spend time just looking at her. The only chance I get to do that is when she falls asleep in front of the television and I can let my gaze linger on her fine skin and the hints of my mother in her nose and lips.

By the time she leaves, we have the beginnings of a relationship, but she is more relaxed with my husband and son, more at ease with my friends, than she is with me. I cannot assume that she will accept me, although I am desperate for it, but I cannot let her go without some physical contact. I ask for permission to hug her goodbye and she assents, but she is stiff as a board, and I feel as if I have overstepped the mark.

9. 1995

A year after Sally's visit to Australia I went back to England to visit my mother. I was looking forward to seeing Dixie too. I wanted us to be able to talk about what had happened in the past, to feel released from the secrecy and shame. I stayed with Sally and her partner, Kate, for a few days, and he came to visit us there. Most likely I had invested too much in the anticipated meeting. There should have been something about that in the literature, but there was surprisingly little about birth fathers. Perhaps it would have been better to meet him alone, so we could talk freely. Sally had met him often enough for her to suggest to me that he had mild Asperger's Syndrome, a conclusion that had startled me at first, but then had explained a lot about him. We had a lovely afternoon and evening together, but there was no acknowledgement of our previous relationship, our connection to this young woman, or the hurt that may have been held under the surface. We went to a fireworks display that evening and, under cover of the darkness and the smoke, I could no longer hold back the tears. As everyone around me oohed and aahed, their eyes to the skies, I tried to get my throat to unblock. All that hurt. All the words I wanted to say, but could not, because it would seem that I was blaming him. I had to make room for the fact that he was also a victim in the drama. He had lost children too.

Sally and I were becoming closer. She had taken up some of my hobbies, tai chi and drumming, and she always introduced me as her mother. There could have been no doubt. We shared so many characteristics it was slightly alarming—facial expressions, hand gestures, and the laugh. Our growing bond prompted Dixie to tell me he was afraid she would want to move to Australia. He asked me if I felt like her mother, if I had maternal feelings towards her. I said yes, but that was shorthand for all the emotions I could not express. He had no idea what it had meant to me to lose that baby, no idea how the memory of her had never left me. Of course I had maternal feelings, and they had been denied for 30 years.

I had been looking, without success, for the photographs I had of Sally as a baby so that she had some physical evidence of her first six weeks of life. I asked Dixie if he remembered those photographs and he told me he had them, that they were in the wooden box I had left with him for safe keeping.

It was a box of treasures from our time together, letters, cards, and photographs. Treasures I wanted to keep but did not want to take with me into my marriage. He had burnt everything except the two photographs of Sally, and he offered to make copies for me.

10. 2002

If I had ever imagined I would be the mother of the bride, the picture would not have included two brides. I am sure my mother would never have imagined this either, yet here we are. Dixie, me, and our mothers, guests at the commitment ceremony of Sally and Rachel. I have not met Rachel's mother yet, but I have heard she can be difficult. I feel a little surprised that she has not come to introduce herself. I am not hard to spot in a peach silk, embroidered Punjabi outfit. It is not until the end of the ceremony, when the mothers are asked to come up and light a candle, that I see her. I smile but she does not respond. I put this down to extreme shyness, and when the ceremony is over, I find her to introduce myself.

"Hallo. I'm Sally's mother."

"Her mother? Didn't you give her away when she was a baby?"

She is contemptuous, not shy at all. I am so amazed by her response that I laugh out loud. Then I go to find my own loving, open, broad-minded mother, who has embraced the idea of a lesbian wedding wholeheartedly.

"What a wonderful day", she says. "So many lovely girls."

11. 2006

It was cool on the riverbank. We had taken our drinks over to the waterfront opposite the Tea Gardens Hotel. My new neighbour, Margaret, and I had spent the week at a course for beginning writers. It had been a liberating experience for me in an unexpected way. I had begun the week writing amusing stories about my family, because I find them endlessly funny and loveable, but the other women at the workshop were writing about the pain of their lives, the trauma of childhood events beyond their control. Every day there were tears around the table. I did not want to write about the sadness in my life. I was still recovering from the death of my husband, still devastated by the fact that I would have to sell the house that we had built because I could no longer maintain the mortgage. Furthermore, I did not have the courage of those other women, the courage to share pain and anger.

I told Margaret the story of my daughter, the joy of finding her and becoming part of her life, the sadness of being so far away from her. On the riverbank that night, I told Margaret about my suppressed fury at Dixie, his insensitivity or deliberate withholding of the photographs of Sally. I had been waiting for them for nine years. She said I should write to Dixie, tell him exactly what those photographs meant to me, and how healing it would be for me to see them. I agreed to write the following week, after my 60th birthday. I was too busy organising what would be the last birthday party in my house.

A week later, the house was packed with people in fancy dress. The dress code was op-shop formal, but a pirate or two had turned up. My son Julian and his friends had set up a corner with a drum kit and guitars. All my old friends were there, except Max and Marnie who were on the way from the Blue Mountains, a five hour drive. When they did arrive, Marnie turned me so that I was facing away from the door, so that I could not see their present. I imagined a large bunch of flowers, but when she let me look I saw my daughter standing there. There was a fraction of a second while I took this in, while my brain caught up with my eyes and everyone else held their breath. Then I took Sally into my arms. I was not the only one crying.

Sally was the best birthday present, but she also brought me a present from Dixie. A photograph of a young woman in front of a door that opens onto a welcoming hallway. There is a dark polished table and fresh flowers behind a young mother holding her child tenderly for the camera. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Sally holding her daughter before the adoption.

Class, Shame, and Identity in Memoirs about Difficult Same-Race Adoptions by Jeremy Harding and Lori Jakiela

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Abstract: This paper will discuss two search memoirs with widely divergent results by British Jeremy Harding and American Lori Jakiela, in which the memoirists recount discoveries about their adoptive parents, as well as their birth parents. While in both cases the adoptions are same-race, both provide material for analysis of class and class mobility. Both searchers discover that the adoption, in more blatant ways than usual, was aimed at improving the parents' lives—impressing a rich relative or distracting from the trauma of past sexual abuse—rather than benefiting the adoptee. They also discover the importance of various kinds of shame: for example, Harding discovers that his adoptive mother hid the close connection that she had had with his birthmother, because she was trying to rise in class. Jakiela imagines the humiliation her birthmother experienced as she tries to understand her resistance to reunion. Both memoirists recall much childhood conflict with their adoptive parents but speculate about how much of their personalities come from their influence. Both narrate changes in their attitudes about their adoption; neither one settles for a simple choice of either adoptive or birth identity. Contrasts in their memoirs relate especially to gender, nation, class, and attitudes to fictions.

Keywords: adoption; search memoir; identity; adoptive parents; class; shame; secrecy; birthmother; orphanage; Irishness; immigration; Jeremy Harding; Lori Jakiela

1. Introduction

British and American TV shows regularly ask, "Who Do You Think You Are?" and answer in terms of heredity. On Facebook and in marches, adoptee rights activists sometimes protest that the sealed records in most of the United States (US) deny adoptees the right to know their own identity. However, memoirs in which adoptees seek and contact a birthparent often do not show this contact, important as it is, of itself giving an answer to identity questions (Novy 2012). Two recent search memoirs, indeed, complicate the story further by intercalating and at times foregrounding a quest to understand their authors' now dead adoptive parents and those parents' influence.

Jeremy Harding writes in his memoir *Mother Country*, "It is one of the axioms of adoption that when you go looking for people you don't know, you begin to discover the people you imagined you knew" (2010, p. 42). This may be an axiom, but it is rarely documented as thoroughly as does Harding. And in Lori Jakiela's memoir *Belief is its own Kind of Truth, Maybe* (Jakiela 2015), a discovery about her adoptive father's childhood experience and how it may have motivated her adoption is climactically placed, and the memoir, even more than Harding's, is full of speculations about which of her qualities come from nature and which from nurture. These two search memoirs, one by a London-born man who lives in France and one by a woman born and living near Pittsburgh, both professional writers well-known in their respective worlds, also portray and analyze strained relationships with less educated adoptive parents. Harding's previous books include *The Fate of Africa* (Harding 1993) and *The Uninvited: Refugees at the Rich Man's Gate* (Harding 2000), which won the Martha Gellhorn award for journalism in 2002. Jakiela wrote previous memoirs, *Miss New York Has Everything* (Jakiela 2006)

and *The Bridge to Take When Things Get Serious* (Jakiela 2013). She won the City of Asylum Pittsburgh Prize in 2015, and that year, *Belief* won the William Saroyan International Prize. The outcomes of their birth family searches are strikingly different. But both of them reject for themselves the idea of finding identity in birth origin alone.

While in both cases the adoptions are same-race, and thus the adoptees do not have to deal with racism directed at them, both provide material for analysis of class and class mobility, exploring what has been called "the identity politics of . . . class" (Hipchen and Deans 2003, pp. 168–69). Both searchers discover that the adoption, in a more focused way than usual, was aimed at improving the parents' lives—impressing a rich relative or, at least in part, distracting from trauma. They also find the importance of various kinds of shame: Harding learns that his adoptive mother broke off the close connection that she had had with his birthmother[1], because she was trying to rise in class. Jakiela imagines the humiliation her birthmother experienced as she tries to understand her resistance to reunion. She also discovers her adoptive father's early sexual trauma and how this shaped his personality. Perhaps surprisingly, the British birthmother is much less injured by her past than the American one. Both writers, however, conjure images of their adoptive parents at their best as they find narrative closure.

Both Harding and Jakiela make careful and emphatic choices about adoption language. Jakiela, from a working-class background, where "real mother" is a term often used by contrast to "adopted mother" (for example, by a policeman, p. 124), opens her memoir by writing, "When my real mother dies, I go looking for another one. The Catholic Charities counselor's word for this other mother I want after decades to find is biological" (2015, p. 13). Soon after, she refers to "My mother, the mother who raised me" and says that "biological" makes her think of "warfare". (14) The phrase "the mother who raised me" continues until p. 95 and resurfaces once at the end. The other one is almost always "birth mother"—"birthmother" in the Catholic Charities reports she quotes and builds on later. (In the fictional improvisation on them, she becomes Marie). Harding, by contrast, rejects the term "birth-mother" (2010, p. xxii). He says he "wouldn't really want to say 'my mother' about either, even though I do" (2010, p. 5). Sometimes he calls them "Mother One" and "Mother Two", but most often, they are Margaret and Maureen, respectively. Otherwise, he uses "natural mother." Many adoption professionals have discarded that term because they think it implies that adoption is unnatural (American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Foster Care, Adoption and Kinship Care 2014). For the more intellectual Harding, the opposite of "natural" is "cultural", and he writes, "Adoption is one of the modest triumphs of human culture" (2010, p. xvii). However, he breaks down this opposition by continuing, "Another . . . is the fact that a mother may feel something like love for her biological children throughout her life, whether they are insistently present or torn away from her by circumstance at an early stage." Retrospectively, Margaret comes to exemplify this; close to the end, she becomes "my first mother, also my last" (p. 177), while Jakiela's birthmother does not.

2. Ancestry Search Stories

The ancestry search story in *Mother Country* begins with Harding contemplating his original birth certificate, which lists Margaret Walsh as his mother, with an adoption counselor. He is in his fifties, his adoptive mother, Maureen, is in the throes of dementia, his adoptive father, Colin, is dead; so, he assumes, is Margaret. He explores the addresses listed on the certificate and begins the adoptive family search as well, interviewing Colin's sister Rosemary and old friend Boris, who tells him that Colin was able to get family money after he produced a child. Harding goes to the Family Records Center to find marriage and birth records and then to the Kensington Public Library for voting records. He looks for neighboring houses and sees the name Privett, mentioned by Rosemary as someone who

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[1] Outside direct quotations, I will use "birthmother", which reform activist Mary Anne Cohen (Cohen 2010), says was popularized as one word by Lee Campbell in 1976 when CUB [Concerned United Birthparents] was founded.

had been an intermediary in the adoption. He visits Peter Privett and discovers that Peter's now dead wife, Lillian, had once been a close friend of Maureen, but had totally broken with her after adopting a little boy, who was Harding himself. This break was motivated partly by the desire to keep the adoption a secret from the aunt who would provide money and partly by Colin's desire to solidify Maureen's rise in class by removing her from her previous working-class friends. He sees a friend of the Privetts' who knew Maureen and wonders if this man is his father. He hires a professional tracer and starts calling people living near or perhaps related to some of the many Margaret Walshes he finds in the records. Eventually one calls back and identifies herself as his cousin and Margaret as a lively seventy-year old. The three meet for a very long lunch and talk, so successfully that near the end Margaret says, "We were all nervous . . . and now we're none of us nervous" (p. 177). The relationships are clearly to be continued. Other adoption memoirs show that such a meeting is the beginning of another story. It is not always a happy one, but a post-book interview suggests that his has been (Novy 2012; Kellaway 2006).

Jakiela's birth family connection story begins in a Catholic Charities office with a counselor interviewing her, first in person and then with a questionnaire with questions such as "What is your expected outcome?" (2015, p. 17). She returns home to find an e-mail saying, "I am your sister" (p. 29), but the timing is coincidental, and the e-mail is the result of gossip. The e-mails, from someone with the username Blonde4Eva, continue, and their semi-literacy dismays Jakiela. The counselor tells her not to answer. In a few days, she calls to say that the birthmother has refused any kind of contact and swore and screamed at her, as no one else ever has. About a week later, Jakiela finds many angry 3-a.m., and thereabouts, phone messages from her sister on her voicemail.

Some time later, she gets an e-mail from her brother. He has read her first memoir, which mentions her birth name and her birthmother's name, told to her long ago by her parents. He is more rational and welcoming, and they talk, first on the phone, then in person, and then with spouses and the other sister. Not long after, she receives more angry social media messages from her birthmother, oddly beginning, "I will pray for you" (p. 215). She names the birthfather, hostilely calling him "the Jew". Hate-filled messages from her birthmother and the first birth sister continue, while her brother and her second sister warmly accept her as part of the family.

After the first contact with her brother, Jakiela places an imaginative reconstruction of the early pregnancy of her birthmother, whom she calls Marie, hiding out in her older sister's closet, humiliated by the family members who knew and by their priest. Then, she provides three other imagined narratives: one of Marie's father's violence, lack of love, and paranoia; a second of the appearance, deceptions, and smooth dancing of the man who got her pregnant; and a third of her time in the home for unwed mothers, mocked by a multitude of statues of the Virgin Mary, repelled by her new baby's clubfeet, which remind her of her father's leg injury. The reconstructions come in part from Jakiela's official record, in part perhaps from what her siblings have told her; they are her attempt to understand her birthmother's rejection of her as a reaction to shame and other suffering.

Jakiela continues to be obsessed by this rejection and the hostile messages, in the hope that the mood will change, and she will get at least a family medical history. Concern with them becomes as obsessive for her as is her usual concern for her children; she later identifies her mood as grieving. Looking for her birth mother's "buried softness" (p. 239), she examines the records again and finds it. In the last reconstruction, Marie returns to the orphanage about a year later, touches the child's belly, asks if the child seems happy, and asks twice if the child will have the necessary surgeries. Jakiela writes her a long e-mail, thanking her birthmother for a good life and saying that it was the right thing to give her up to a "woman who loved [her] and who [she] loved" (p. 247). The first response she receives is the most civilized that her birthmother has ever sent: "I've thought of you often. It's just too much after all these years. What's done is done". But the second one is that she wishes she had had an abortion. After this, Jakiela finally asks her husband to send a message to stop the e-mails, and they do stop. In the epilogue, she tells us that her relationship with her brother, and to a lesser

extent, with the sister she met with him, continues, and even Blonde4Eva sends her a non-hostile message that she has a new job and is happy.

The summaries I have given of the development of the birth family connections in these two memoirs leave out much of the books, for both are filled with vivid memories and thoughtful analyses of adoptive parents. Both memoirists are trying to make sense of the meanings of adoption and family, but Harding evokes more visually his family home and routines and London's various geographies, as well as the subtleties and large patterns of class relationships and Irish immigration history. Jakiela, by contrast, recounts more of the day-to-day vicissitudes of child-rearing and partial parallels to her life in the life of other adopted and/or working-class friends and family members.

3. Class, Shame, Irishness, and Religion

The genealogy search in *Mother Country* reveals a story of class scorn and class shame, while the narrative in *Belief* reveals two stories in which class disadvantage and shame and sexual shame are combined. Harding remembers Maureen's fascination with the musicals *Oliver* and *My Fair Lady*, and this takes on special meaning as he discovers that she grew up in working-class poverty, though marriage had raised her out of it and her first husband had even paid for her to have elocution lessons (p. 106). Colin, her second, "was fiercely opposed to any social arrangement that might keep disadvantaged people alive too long and put a burden on more fortunate families like ourselves" (p. 16). Hating working-class people in general and wanting to keep away from them as much as possible, he was the crucial force in barring her from her early friends. However, her memory of their friendship may have affected the sympathetic way she described his birthmother to young Harding—as a "little girl", he came to think of as "frail" (p. 55). Harding spells out the consequences of Colin's general exclusionary attitudes in spatial terms: they were "moat people" (p. 15); when they visited other parts of London, it was important to avoid public housing projects, which, even if well-built, Colin detested (p. 14). As memoirist, Harding gives almost without comment the monologue in which Colin's old friend Boris reveals the mercenary motive for the adoption, not intervening but letting the reader imagine his feelings, to which Boris is clearly insensitive. When he tries to get more information, asking about Mrs. Privett, who had been mentioned as a possible go-between, Boris is scornful and changes the subject to Colin's bridge game, and deflected feelings emerge: "I felt unusually, pathetically eager to defend my father and perhaps inflict pain on Boris's poodle" (p. 51). Maureen had continued to be friendly to working people and temporarily enjoyed becoming a flower seller (more connections with *My Fair Lady*), but Colin stopped this job and stopped such interactions as much as he could. A few moments after telling Maureen's former friend John about the end of the flower trade comes one of the few times in which Harding stops the narration of conversation and events to reveal his feelings directly: "I suddenly felt very blue about Maureen, sad about her life" (p. 107).

Though the economic and cultural deprivation of her birth family was worse, Jakiela's birthmother and her adoptive parents are all working-class people. Her parents were, as she writes, "too old to qualify for a healthy baby girl" (2015, p. 111) but were given her because she had two clubbed feet, which required many operations. Although she knows this now, they always presented the adoption to her as their choice and growing up she often felt good about it. They were open about it, telling her her original name and that of her birthmother, but there were times when suspicion of her origins emerged. When she used at the dinner table new words she had learned by secretly reading the dictionary, her mother would say, "I don't know where you came from" (p. 34). Later on, she says, "You probably get your smart mouth from *her*" (p. 119). Though she sometimes encouraged Jakiela's search for her birth family, wishing that children and adoptive families could be better matched in personality, at other times she was hostile to them, whether because of a sense of moral superiority to a presumably unwed mother or because of fearing competition for her daughter's love with another family or, indeed, the outside world. She would say, "I want what's mine to stay mine" (p. 35), and "She'll get ideas" was an ominous prediction to her. Many of these attitudes can be associated with

anxiety about a child leaving a class, ethnic, or religious group (Rubin 1976, p. 208; Kagan 2007, p. 146; Kelly and Kelly 1998, pp. 264–68).

The idea that Jakiela had inherited her interest in words is quickly deflated when e-mail contact with her birth family begins and her sister writes, "I all ways KNEW" (p. 31). One of their mother's hostile messages, showing ignorance of how strongly Jakiela feels about her working-class identity, says, "Your ancestors were hard working and proud individuals and you just beat that down" (p. 222). All she knows about Jakiela, besides her desire for contact, probably, is that Jakiela has published a book that reveals her name and therefore the history that she has been trying to keep secret. As with the other mother, it seems, it is partly the interest in words that marks Jakiela as different. Her new brother's e-mail is more articulate and formal than her sister's, but he has "a distinct working-class accent [she's] heard all her life and tried to escape" (p. 137), because so many of its Pittsburgh speakers have treated her badly. Fortunately, his voice is softer and "sounds like [her] father" (138). They can find a commonality in singing Irish songs, but he admits to envy at her growing up without "the deadbeat piano playing father, his mother, her troubles" (p. 183).

Jakiela draws on an environment not totally foreign to her, as well as on the Catholic Charities files and information from her brother, when she imagines the humiliation of the woman she calls Marie. Hit herself in childhood with a wooden spoon by her mother and a belt by her father (p. 102), she can easily imagine that Marie's more violent father "would beat the child out of her if he knew" and that "sometimes Marie becomes her father and beats her own head" (p. 145). Jakiela's father, a mill worker, mistrusted people in general and much preferred dogs (2006, pp. 34–36); she hypothesizes the same of Marie's father, a construction worker (2015, p. 152). Such conversion of class shame into depression and generalized anger is quite frequent (Turner 2014, p. 186; Kagan 2007, pp. 146–47). Perhaps Marie's father was especially bitter, because he had lost a leg, presumably in a work accident. Similarly, she writes of her father, "Because of the terrible things that happened to my father, he called people cockroaches" (2015, p. 234). She sees much of her birthmother's shame as coming from Catholic tradition, writing of "the Irish Catholic horror I was born into" (p. 80) and imagining the many images of the Virgin Mary in the Rosalia Foundling and Maternity Home as meant to say "You can pray to us for salvation because we are what you'll never be" (p. 173). She writes, "Marie grew up in the church with her parents and their parents and so on. She knew cruel" (p. 173). She thinks of the church-run Irish Magdalene homes, which exploited unwed mothers and mistreated many of their children (p. 45), when Blonde4Eva writes that her mother, an immigrant from Ireland was raised "Very proud Irish. Catholic" (p. 48). Jakiela still ambivalently identifies as Catholic, by contrast to her "born-again Christian" in-laws but writes of the "American Catholic [perhaps implied from the above phrase, horror] I was raised in and thought bad enough" (pp. 80–81), and remembers her pastor Father Ackerman's advice that parents should make their children grateful by using "their hands for beatings, so children would feel that physical connection" (p. 115).

The Irishness of the birthmothers is emphasized in both memoirs, though with the significant difference that for Harding, who does not interview anyone Irish until he hears from his cousin near the end of his search, it has no particular associations with religion, beating, or shame. But indeed there would have been contrasts in the experience of mid-century Irish immigrants to London and children of earlier Irish immigrants to the US. Since the 1930s, many more Irish people have immigrated to Britain, especially women to London, than to the US, and they probably felt less embattled (Travers 1995, pp. 149–50; Gray 2004, p. 107). Looking through various records for Margaret Walsh, Harding sees many Irish names and notes the areas of London where they are found. Their listed occupations give him a social history of the change from immigrants to "first-generation exiles" (p. 126), and he tries to envision the lives of those in the "tough immigrant drama". He finds "Irishness" attractive but more relevant to understanding Margaret than himself. Later, when his cousin Mary asks him about Irishness, he thinks of rooting for an Irish rugby player, Mick Doyle, Irish writers, and Irish songs (pp. 174–75). He learns that Margaret had been able to keep another son before she got married, so somehow she had become able to deal differently with social stigma. It may be partly a matter

of the fact that the meeting with Margaret and Mary occurs so late in the narrative, and few details of their lives actually appear, but in *Mother Country*, apart from the pressure to have him adopted, shame appears much more in his adoptive family than in what he would call his natural one. There are traumas in their world—giving up the baby was hard, Margaret did not want to talk to the social worker afterwards (p. 34), and the father is still not to be mentioned—but she has got beyond them.

The second story of sexual shame that occurs in *Belief* is one that Jakiela actually discovered not during her search for her birthmother, but more than five years earlier. She includes it in this book, close to the end, as part of the lead-in to her father's death; the revelation occurred about a month before, as if he wanted to make sure she knew while he could tell her. He tells the story as if he were a child (he was 9 or 10 at the time): "He touched my peepee" (p. 269). It was his soon-to-be brother-in-law, Whitey. Jakiela's mother had known about this for a long time, it turns out. Jakiela's father had a beautiful voice as a child and sang in the church choir. Whitey was in a band and so had an excuse to listen to his singing, alone. Afterwards, the boy cried for a long time. No one noticed. He told no one. He stopped singing. His submission to Whitey and his failure to tell may have resulted in part from the deference to authority emphasized by both Catholic and working-class cultures, obviously overlapping (Kelly and Kelly 1998, p. 262; Wilkins and Pace 2014, p. 391). Whitey's attentions are probably paramount among the terrible experiences of her father mentioned a few paragraphs ago. Her mother tells her, "I think that's why he's always been so miserable . . . . We thought maybe adopting you would help . . . . I think it helped, having you" (p. 271). Depression is indeed frequent among child abuse survivors, so combining that shame with his class shame, it is remarkable that he was able to feel and express love for his daughter as much as he did (Kagan 2007, p. 147).

Just as Harding does not react explicitly to the news that he was adopted to help his parents' finances, Jakiela never comments directly on the revelation that she was adopted as therapy for her father. Her mother had unsuccessfully tried for years to persuade him to get real therapy. But in this case, any possible anger on her own behalf is far outweighed by compassion for her father and anger at Whitey and at his sister, who has always refused to see any signs of the abuse. The story is relevant to this book not just because of the light it sheds on the reason for her adoption and the psychology of her father, but also because of the connection she makes between her father and her birthmother: "He called people cockroaches. I think of my birth mother like that, a hard shell, refusing to die, scaring everyone she crawls past" (p. 234). She is like a cockroach but at the same time like Jakiela's beloved father in that mistreatment makes her lash out. As Jakiela writes earlier about her sister, "Cruelty is a bandage" (p. 88). Sociologists support this analysis: sexual abuse and deprivation due to class both lead to shame, repressed and sometimes expressed anger, and depression (Turner 2014, p. 186; Kagan 2007, p. 147).

4. Adoption and Identity: Changing Interpretations

Harding and Jakiela both narrate changes in their ideas about their identity related to adoption and the events of their search. Harding had, for much of his life, thought of himself as "a free spirit" by contrast to his "marooned" parents (p. 8) and "impartial" by contrast to "most other people . . . condemned to peer at the world across the obscurity of the breeding hutch" (p. 153). He had rejected the maxim "blood is thicker than water" (p. 5) and identified with water, but as he meets John Webb, who had known his mother and who he wishes were his father, he realizes that he would like to be saved from watery fluidity. The issue of possible hereditary similarities in appearance comes up briefly at that point, earlier with regard to his wonder how his parents thought they could keep the adoption secret when they were short and he was tall, and at the end with regard to his cousin, though not his mother. More importantly, he comes to realize ways he has been influenced by Colin, and in some cases, by Maureen, that he regrets—he is not as impartial as he thinks. He compares himself to Colin in letting Maureen down by not showing her affection—"a pair of undemonstrative men" (p. 80). As he walks through a public housing project near where Margaret used to live, he realizes that he shares some of their anxiety about such projects (pp. 88–89), thus having some of their class

feelings. But his attitudes begins to change. When he interviews someone who lived in Margaret's neighborhood long ago and cannot read where she belongs, he feels he has "begun falling aimlessly, or gently rotating in zero gravity, with the familiar markers of class and social identity turning gently about me like luminous debris in the aftermath of a space-probe disaster" (p. 146). And when he finally meets Margaret, he feels "robbed of the words for . . . difference or affinity by social group and background; wealth and poverty" (p. 176). While he had earlier critiqued Colin for his "them and us" attitude, it is clear that he shared some of it, even if with different divisions, but now, he feels that he is getting beyond that, ready to picnic with Margaret over "the battle lines of the British class system" (p. 176). He suddenly sees his worldly success as a sign of limitation: "I'd been able to pile up wealth, incapable of functioning in the world without the thought that it was there to fall back on" (p. 175). On the other hand, he realizes that Margaret's large family, and her closeness to them, constitute another kind of abundance.

Through most of the memoir, he describes how what he learns has made him more sympathetic to Maureen and more critical of Colin for cutting Maureen off from her friends and her flower-selling. However, he makes a point of evoking a farewell image of each in relation to his affection for them in early childhood. He imagines Colin in his gardening clothes, off on the boat to do the shopping. "We both liked the river" (p. 141). He sees that if he had just met them briefly, "they'd have seemed bracingly eccentric" (p. 172). His last image of Maureen is of her quickly reaching out to save his two-year-old son from falling into the water, showing her motherliness—the image of the falling boy is one he had applied to himself earlier in the memoir, in analyzing a photograph of his christening party.

Jakiela remembers having often said and felt that adoption was not an issue for her and even having felt good about the idea of having been wanted and chosen. However, she includes many memories of times in which it was an issue, such as a vignette of how she and her African-American cousin, also adopted, looked and felt out of place when some family photographs were taken (pp. 110–11, 114, 119–20, 121). She often felt sad about not identifying with any of the ethnicities in her adoptive or her birth family. "Until I married and had children, I was single, solitary, someone who most days wanted to take up no space at all" (p. 47). In *Miss New York Has Everything*, which includes a narrative of her time as an airline stewardess, she feels uncomfortable about the fact that the ethnicity people are most likely to attribute to her, from her appearance, is German (2006, pp. 162–69). When her birthmother refuses contact, Jakiela realizes even more fully how much she felt deprived by being adopted. She had really wanted "to know something that looked and moved and laughed and loved and was sad like me" (2015, p. 99). She often feels that whatever similarities she has to either her adoptive parents or her birthmother are painful. Hearing about her birthmother's screaming at the social worker, she thinks, "I've found my roots, the map of what I was born with" (p. 94). For decades, she writes, "I've tried not to be like my father" in his suspicion of the world (p. 265). She understands her mother's worries and fear of loss. Sometimes, she thinks, "There is so much of my parents in me I barely believe in blood" (p. 77). But when she neglects her children because she is obsessed by her birthmother's rejection, she thinks, "I am a terrible mother. Like the birth mother before me, and so on and so on. And this time my mother, my real mother, a good mother, is not here to tell me otherwise" (pp. 236–37). She does not conclude with this attitude, however. She resolves, "If paranoia and cruelty run like cancer in my birth mother's bloodline, I am hoping something else will show up to provide balance and grace" (p. 240), looks at the Catholic Charities report again, and finds the memory of her birthmother's final visit and touch. Here is the hidden kindness that she had hoped to find in her bloodline, as a sign of her own possibilities, even if her birthmother can no longer extend kindness to her.

Jakiela's memoir many times recounts with annoyance people telling her that she was lucky and should be grateful. But toward the end, she accepts these words. In escaping her birthmother, she *was* lucky and more like her birthfather. "We were both, my father and I, lucky. We made it over the wall" (p. 220, she has just referred to her father as "a German and a Jew" so implicitly crossing the Berlin wall is made an image of their other escapes). She tells her birthmother that she is grateful to her for

giving her up to a mother who would love her, and she recalls with gratitude her last days with each of her adoptive parents. Before the epilogue, updating relationships and also what has happened in her hometown of Braddock, a steel town near Pittsburgh, she writes about her daughter's perfect pitch, a tie to her father's early singing, and her daughter's hope that the last caterpillar in her daughter's science experiment will transform into a butterfly. Can she and her children keep the good things in their family history and leave behind the bitterness?

5. Gender and Nation

The contrast in what each author includes and excludes relates to their contrast in gender and nation. Although class is important in Jakiela's memoir, Harding is even more explicit about its influence, as British writers often are, and extends its discussion in larger social analyses. It is striking, in comparison to Jakiela, that Harding says very little about looking for similarities to himself in his children, just "I'd had only a few years practice in the arts of physical comparison based on kinship" (p. 100); this may be British reticence, which could also be seen as reluctance to violate their privacy. But it is also related to the general expectation and experience that children are more likely to be important to a woman's identity than to a man's. Jakiela is living with and taking primary responsibility for her children during the time recounted here. Harding apparently is mostly not; his wife and three children are in France, where he usually lives (Kellaway 2006). He says in his preface that he thinks of this book as in part for his children and particularly to "show that people were joined up, and separated, in all sorts of ways" (p. xix). But they do not figure in the book much. Jakiela frequently discusses similarities between herself and her children, as well as recounting her care for them in crises; Harding, by contrast, mentions two occasions on which he intended to buy Christmas presents for his children and bought other things instead and has them with him only on two visits with family members. The image of maternal care is important to both of them: Harding several times repeats the phrase "good care" (p. 28) found in the social worker's report on his condition in his adoptive family, and almost the last image he evokes of his mother is of her instinctive reaching out to keep his two-year-old son from falling. But this iconic memory of her does not have the same two-sided personal meaning for him that it would for Jakiela. When Jakiela recalls her adoptive mother's speaking of anxiety that the social worker would find her unfit for motherhood, she identifies with this anxiety (pp. 73–74). As her mother is dying, she says, "You were a good mother", and her mother responds, "You're a good mother" (p. 246). Harding explicitly says that he chose his title as an analogy to "Indian country" (pp. xxi), suggesting, as does the work's origin in a BBC series called "Another Country" (p. 191), that the world of mothers is foreign to him. Indeed, this may be part of the impact on him of male socialization: most of the memoirists who have written about their search for birth family are female. If Harding is unusual as a male writing about this topic, Jakiela is also unusual among female search memoirists for the large role of her own children in her narrative. Many of them have no children at the time; a few, B. J. Lifton and Jean Strauss, mention their children occasionally during their books, and A.M. Homes describes her relationship as a mother of her almost-three-year-old as more important to her than her relation to any of her four parents near the end of hers, but Jakiela's ongoing care for her children is much more a part of her story (Lifton 1998; Strauss 2001; Homes 2007).

Gender and national differences may also both be relevant to the difference in the kind of research both authors do. Harding's book was originally published in 2006 in the United Kingdom (UK), where adult adoptees can see their original birth and adoption records. He wrote a new introduction into the American paperback edition of 2010, in which he explains this national contrast: whether adult American adoptees have the legal right to see their original birth certificates depends on the state in which they were adopted. Crediting Wayne Carp's scholarship (Carp 2009), he gives a history of adoption secrecy in the US, argues that sealed birth records are outdated, and suggests skepticism about the resulting American industry of 'intermediary programs' and parent–child registers (pp. ix–xiv). Jakiela's story reinforces such skepticism. Because Pennsylvania was a closed-record state, Jakiela had

to go through Catholic Charities to get her birth certificate. While her parents had long ago told her her birth name and her mother's, she did get more material from her Catholic Charities file. However, for a long time, she felt locked into allowing their social worker, whom she did not like, to be the intermediary in any contact that she initiated. Obviously, her birthmother did not like this social worker either. By contrast, Harding had a practical and generous adoption counselor who made suggestions for research. He consulted family friends and relatives, the Family Records Office, the voting rolls, and the street directory. Theoretically, Jakiela could have, for example, gone to a records office to try to locate her birthmother's married name by looking up years of marriage records, but that probably looked like an impossible task. She did have to take care of her children. And of course, those e-mail messages from her birth family started right after her meeting with the social worker.

6. Overall Experience, Personalities, and Beliefs about Adoption

Putting these two memoirs together suggests something of the great range of results that a search for birthparents might produce. It is ironic, considering the traditional belief that class barriers are stronger in England, that the English birthmother had a much happier life and thus was much more open to reunion than the American one, though there is much evidence that the US has become increasingly economically stratified, with a theoretically possible happy poverty difficult to find. The memoirs also suggest a great range of contrast in the personalities that adoptees might have. Jakiela portrays here a life very lonely before her marriage, full of shame and self-doubt. None of her adoptee friends or relatives has a good relationship with either adoptive parents or birthparents. They are all apparently working-class, and this depression could certainly be seen as caused by growing up in an atmosphere of economic and educational deprivation, as Turner (2014, p. 193) and Kagan (2007, p. 188) would see it. But not surprisingly, she seems drawn to the theory that separation from a mother to be adopted produces a "primal wound" (Verrier 1993, p. 218), though she does not commit to it. Harding mourns the loss of his easy relationship with his parents in early childhood, but they had the resources to send him to excellent boarding schools and Cambridge University (Kellaway 2006), and he has managed to turn his sense of "never quite [being] what anyone had in mind" (p. 154) into an advantage. At times, his introspection suggests that his search is shaking up a self-confidence that might even have been excessive. In his introduction to the US edition, it is clear that he prefers the "civil rights" argument for openness about birth records to an argument based on Verrier (1993) that adoptees are necessarily wounded (pp. xiii–xiv).

These contrasts are easy to map on to the contrast between the experience of a man raised in a privileged atmosphere and that of a woman from a family with less money and little educational guidance in her youth. But it is also relevant that Jakiela was in the Rosalia orphanage for close to a year—perhaps longer than many other children, because her clubfeet made her less "adoptable"—and that year probably did have the experience basic to the primal wound theory, as she explains it, of "scream[ing] and scream[ing] for mothers who never come" (p. 218), in addition to much lonely time spent in the hospital because of operations for her legs, while Harding was transferred to Maureen's care at the age of eleven days or less. This speed may have been possible, because it was a private placement, "organized outside the normal channels" (Harding 2010, p. 28); ironically, reforms in the Adoption Act of 1976, implemented in 1982, would make this against the law (Keating 2009). However, Verrier (1993) believes that he still would have missed his first mother.

7. Fictions and Truth

Hipchen and Deans (2003) point out that adoption life writing "blur[s] the boundaries between fact and fiction", p. 167), and Margaret Homans shows that many adoptees' memoirs involve creating fictions about their origins (Homans 2013). Jakiela creates such fictions in the vignettes in which she imagines her birthmother under the new name of Marie, not to pretend that she has found the identity of a birthmother, as is often all that can be achieved because of closed records, but to help understand and forgive her. Crucially, she says, "I choose to believe in my birth mother's underground tenderness

and mercy" (p. 245). For Harding, by contrast, fictionality is mainly associated with the stories that Maureen made up for him—that she was an orphan as he was, that she had a grandmother who gave her rides in a carriage and took her to Egypt—as well as with her identification with Eliza in *My Fair Lady*. He analyzes her story of adopting him as a class fable, notes that her favorite books are about families getting separated and then reunited again, suggesting that she wanted to believe that this could happen, and calls her "terrific with make-believe" (p. 102); his discovery about her previous life shows the falsity of most of what she told him about himself and herself. When his cousin contacts him, it is important that to him that when he says, "I've no way of knowing if any of this is true," she answers, "Sweetheart, it's all true" (p. 163). This contrast maps readily onto the fact that Harding's previous books are journalism, while Jakiela's previous books are memoirs and poetry. It is in Harding that we see "the work of the genealogist and the autobiographer . . . intersect[ing in what reads like] investigative journalism" (Hipchen and Deans 2003, p. 168).

Jakiela's title, *Belief is its own kind of truth, Maybe* (her own capitalization indicating some ambivalence), indicates from the start that she has more tolerance of fiction. For her, all family life, indeed all life, involves wishful thinking. She quotes her mother as saying, "People believe what they need to believe" (p. 182) and observes this in her mother's belief that the survival of her dogwood tree is a tribute to her care (p. 58), as well as in her parents' inventing "a movie version of their meeting" (p. 182), which is a little like Maureen's stories about her childhood. She acknowledges that her own beliefs may often not have objective grounds and does not feel objectivity is always necessary: "I believe a lot of things because it's better to believe them than to believe their opposites . . . . [My parents] loved me enough to make me believe I was beautiful. The truth is, I have one of those faces people don't remember" (pp. 199–200). But for her, most important now is her relationship with her husband and children, and she thinks of this as to be maintained to a large extent by stories. As she anticipates retelling the story of the hospital room where the doctor discovered that her daughter had stuffed a toy reindeer's nose up her nose, she thinks, "This story will become one of our favorites. . . . We will tell them the way old ladies at church tick off prayers on rosary beads, which is how I think of family now, the most sacred thing" (pp. 255–56). But she is aware that sometimes family stories that are not true "are called true and these stories shape a life and that life is handed down in more stories and so on" (p. 289).

There are just a few points that suggest some appreciation of wishful thinking and family fictions in Harding. He remembers that when Maureen picked him up after his graduation, she asked him about his studies with just the word and tone a duchess might use—"for a moment there you were the real thing" (p. 184). And at the very end, after having discovered that her father was a "wine and spirits merchant's carman," when he thinks he has found the "genealogy" (using that word for the first time) of her stories of riding in her grandmother's carriage, he likes to imagine that her father "would have let her up on the dray when she was a little girl. Once or twice, surely, by way of a treat" (p. 189). With this playful use of "genealogy" to apply to stories, he signals again his view of the inadequacy of an exclusive focus on biological heredity to explain identity and implicitly concurs with a critical view like Julia Watson's of genealogy in the sense of defining humans by pedigree (Watson 2016, p. 108).

8. Conclusion: Reconstructions of Identity

Both of these memoirs turn away from the idea of finding identity in birth origin and toward something more complex—what John McLeod calls "adoptive being," which treats "bio-genetic and adoptive modes of kinship as concomitant instances of 'being with'" (McLeod 2015, p. 27). Strained as her relationships with her adoptive parents have often been, in the course of her memoir Jakiela realizes that her birth parents provide very little material through which to construct her identity. She has tried the genetic roots fantasy and found it unlivable—she is related to her birthmother's life primarily as someone who has escaped it. She has also escaped some of the limitations of her adoptive parents' lives; while she can honor what they gave her and put her efforts into the family she and her husband have created and into her writing, she can maintain relationships with some sane

people in her birth family and her working-class loyalties. The hope for her daughter's caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly is significantly placed at the end of the memoir proper, while the last page of the epilogue is about Braddock, where her mother was a nurse and her father a mill worker and where they are buried.

Harding has a less self-doubting personal and professional identity. He never mentions in this book how he used his sense of being an outsider in writing a thoroughly researched and grippingly written book on refugees. He began the book assuming his birthmother was dead and wanting to write a brief tribute to her, knowing her life must have been difficult; he briefly thinks of what sort of life he might have had if she had kept him, based on the lives of his brothers: "I'd have been the father of five children (4.3 to be exact) conceived with two partners. I'd have left school at an early age" (p. 175). None of them sound like they believe in roots, he writes, adding, ironically, "this much we had in common" (p. 174). Clearly, he, like Jakiela, prefers his current life to that one; but at the same time, meeting Margaret provides him with new relationships entirely different from those he already has, structured as they are by class and professional expectations, and he values this discovery.

These two memoirists both go through a process of reconstructing themselves in the time portrayed in their memoirs, in which they revise what they think about their relationships to all of their parents, not choosing an identity based exclusively on either birth or adoption. Though John McLeod is writing about transcultural adoptee experience and theirs is transcultural only in their partly Irish ancestry and therefore much less visible, his conclusions about the multiplicity possible in adoptive being apply to them as well. While a recent summary says that the typical adoption memoir "valorizes origins and troubles the primacy of social construction" (Smith and Watson 2010, p. 255), many other adoption memoirs also emphasize "the construction of families out of something other than sheer biology" (Hipchen and Deans 2003, p. 166). Many conclude with the acknowledgment that both their adoptive and their birth families and ancestries have contributed to their identities (Homes 2007, p. 238; Strauss 2001, p. 201; McKinley 2002, p. 288). However, few adoptees put as much stress as Harding and Jakiela on the details of adoptive family life.

Part of the reason for this difference in stress is that relatively few adoptees write search memoirs soon after their adoptive parents are dead, though that is a time when many searches begin. While in some memoirs adoptive parents figure primarily in terms of their perceived lack of understanding, Jakiela and Harding move beyond this point, and both end their books paying tribute to three-dimensional people whom they love and miss. Harding began wanting to write a tribute to his birthmother, assuming she was dead, but in the process became so moved by what he found out about Maureen that he decided not to carry the story of his relation with Margaret further after he met her. And, for even stronger reasons than with his children, because she is alive he may also want to respect Margaret's privacy. Jakiela begins her narrative writing "When my real mother dies, I go looking for another one", mocking the idea of the adoptive mother as a substitute by framing her search for her birthmother as a search for a replacement for her dead adoptive mother. In her epilogue she says, "I've never met my birth mother. I could, but I don't need or want to any more" (p. 290). Even if her birthmother could relate to her with less hatred, her dead mother is irreplaceable.

Many adoptees tell stories that put more emphasis than these on an experience of finding their identity by finding their ancestry. However, Harding's and, especially, Jakiela's memoirs give a caution against seeing identity in purely biological terms that might well be heeded by more people than white same-race adoptees. Roberts (2011) reminds us of the complex interactions in which environment determines which genes are activated (p. 203) and writes, with regard to African Americans in particular, "defining identity in genetic terms creates a biological essentialism that is antithetical to the shared political values that should form the basis for unity . . . we have considerable freedom to decide how much importance to give our genetics, family history, and social relationships" (p. 255). With regard to the desire that African Americans might have to use genetic tests to find and connect with their relatives, either African or white, Alondra Nelson writes, "DNA can offer an avenue toward reconciliation, but cannot stand in for reconciliation: voice, acknowledgment, mourning,

forgiveness, and healing" ([Nelson 2016](), p. 164); this is also relevant to adoptees. In these memoirs, we see acknowledgment, reconciliation, mourning, forgiveness, and healing mostly on the part of the authors in relation to their adoptive parents, though there is some of each with regard to birth family in both of them.

Harding's final discussion of his ancestry search story breaks down the distinction between adoptive and blood relationship: "The process that Margaret and I had begun turned into a second adoption . . . What mattered was to want to engage with another person, and to continue believing this was a good thing to do" (p. 176). With her birthmother, Jakiela can no longer believe that it is a good thing to do. Of her brother, who has his own place in her epilogue, she writes, "That I met him is its own miracle" (p. 221). She says of him, as she says of no one else, "We'll high-five each other when we say or hear something true" (p. 289). But the last sentence of her epilogue is an ambiguous tribute to the steel works of Braddock, a tribute which resonates with what she has said about her parents' love of her, the title, her continued working-class solidarity, and the power of wishful thinking: "People who are born here find it beautiful" (p. 291).

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Close Relations? The Long-Term Outcomes of Adoption Reunions

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Abstract: There has been a number of studies on the outcomes of adoption reunions, most of which have focussed on relatively 'fresh' reunions. Very few studies have looked at long-term outcomes. Fewer still have discussed reunions and kinship with controversy over firstly, the longevity of reunions, and secondly, what such reunions might engender regarding the relative kinship statuses of adoptive and birth families. This paper critically discusses the existing literature on reunions and kinship, and then reports on the long-term outcomes of 200 'matches' on the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland between 1996–2006, presenting qualitative detail from the 75 respondents who completed questionnaires and sent in stories. The paper invites us to think about how adoption can form an adoptive family and deform a birth family, and how adoption reunions re-form both and everyone included. However, it will especially focus on what a coming together of two people separated by adoption means for the way that they frame their relationship with each other and those around them.

1. Introduction

There is a growing amount of literature on adoption reunions (March 2014)[1]. As can be expected in a relatively new body of knowledge, certain areas and concerns have dominated, with consequent gaps in our understanding. The experiences of adopted people have traditionally made up most of the literature (Baden and Wiley 2007), followed by those of birth mothers (Evan Donaldson Institute 2006), adoptive mothers (Feast et al. 2011), and then, far back in the field, birth fathers (Passmore and Feeney 2009), adoptive fathers (Feast et al. 2011), and other birth relatives such as siblings (O'Neill et al. 2018). Other gaps include perspectives from within sets of reunions, e.g., the experiences of both the birth mother and the adopted person (March 1997). A dearth of knowledge also exists in relation to the time frames for explorations of the reunion process. Most studies have focussed on the experiences of the early weeks and months. A small minority of studies have explored longer outcomes (Browning and Duncan 2005; Howe and Feast 2001; March 2015).

This paper explores the long-term outcomes of reunions, and has a specific focus on kinship that examines debates surrounding the identity and status of birth family members, especially birth mothers, and the nature of the 'new-found' relationship between adopted adult and birth mother.

For decades, writers and scholars have been struggling with what sort of kinship is formed when adoptions take place. Kirk's notion of adoptive families as different, neither the same as families created by biology, nor more deficient than the latter (Kirk 1964), has been lastingly influential. With the rise of

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[1] The word 'reunion' will be used here for ease of flow; however, its usage is discussed later. Secondly, the adoption reunions that are referred to in this paper are those that have involved the 'closed', mostly infant, adoptions of the 20th century, and are not related to the contemporary adoptions of children from state care.

studies of adoption reunions, the meaning of adoption has come to the fore again. Is the adoption of a child a legal change of kinship relations (Jones and Hackett 2012)? Is it a temporary occlusion of birth relations, a question concretely posed when adoption reunions occur (Robinson 2002)? Does adoptive family life create indissolvable kinship ties that suggest a hierarchy of kinship relations with some families that are deemed to be 'primary' (the adoptive family) and others (birth family) secondary (Browning and Duncan 2005)? Do the emotions released in some reunions indicate the strength of a persistence of biological ties (Verrier 1993)? Are these complementary emotions (Verrier 1993)? Adoption reunions raise these issues (Leinaweaver 2018). This paper offers a contribution to the debates by reviewing the literature with a specific eye on kinship discussions, and shares the relevant insights from a study of long-term outcomes of adoption reunions.

2. Adoption Reunions: An Overview

The reunion of birth parent and adoptee constructs an unparalleled relationship, and is truly, *sui generis*, a totally unique emotional experience (Bailey and Giddens 2001, p. viii).

A first thing to be noted is that most writings have come out of the experiences of 'first flushes', the early days after adopted people and birth mothers have met (Browning and Duncan 2005). Another observation is that there are considerable disagreements about reunions, some of which relate to the first point, that it might be too early to assess their value (Cavoukian 2005), and about whether or not the relationships that are formed at the point of reunion will endure (Carsten 2000).

Various measurements have been applied to determine adoption reunion outcomes. Sachdev's measures are often cited to determine successfulness: how often meetings took place (frequency), the nature of the initial relationship and changes over time (intensity), the degree of satisfaction with the relationship, and overall feelings of accomplishment within the relationship (Sachdev 1992). Overall, the literature relates mostly to adopted people, and this seems occupied with two main themes. The first theme is that the reunion outcome is defined as a success, because no matter how the relationship turns out, the meeting with the birth mother was worthwhile in itself for the assuagement of curiosity, access to medical information, and acquiring the "story" of their conception and birth so as to "complete the jigsaw" and develop a more cohesive sense of identity (Browning and Duncan 2005; Howe and Feast 2003). The other theme relates to, in the event of continuing contact, the meaning and definition of subsequent relationships with birth families. As we shall see when we look at work relating to the experiences of the different parties in an adoption reunion and how this relates to familial ties, issues of time (significance of time spent in, and with, the adoptive family, time spent pre and post-birth with the birth mother, time spent in a relationship after reunion), hierarchies of families, and notions of the psychobiology of parental and filial ties recur. An interesting feature of the bulk of the literature is that it is taken up with the dynamics of the dyad of the adopted person and birth mother (Evan Donaldson Institute 2006), and neglects the other parties that are invariably involved in the coming together of two adults (e.g., their respective families, Müller et al. 2003). One thing seems settled: adoption is a process and not an event, and in keeping with this, the negotiations that follow a reunion are also likely to be a lifelong process for all involved (Browning and Duncan 2005).

As for kinship issues, it is difficult to find a substantial body of work compared to the vast amount of reunion-related literature that deals with the experiences, motivations, and feelings of the various parties. The next discussion identifies and examines the key threads in the extant literature.

3. Adopted People: The Question of Kinship Relationships with their Birth Parents

The work of Modell (1994, 1997, 2002), Carsten (2000), and Melosh (2002) represent an influential—and sceptical—perspective on adoption reunion outcomes and the (re)formation of kinship ties insofar as these writers argue that at the point of reunion, there ought to be no promise of the (re)establishment of kinship between the adopted person and their birth mother, as is often depicted in popular media accounts.

For Modell, adoption as practiced in the Western world provides a lens through which it may be seen that all kinship is made or constructed, rather than the product of biology or blood relations. In this sense, she argues, relationships created by adoption are not *sui generis*, or givens; rather, they are "made" (Modell 2002). Modell goes on to, I would argue, set up a straw man. This is that the relationships formed from reunions do not approximate that of parent–child, and at best, the biological parent (mother) might develop a role along the lines of "favourite aunt", or relative in general rather than a parent in particular (Modell 1997, p. 58). The straw man to be knocked down, I suggest, is that of the reunion as re-igniting kinship ties between the parties and displacing the adoptive parents in some hierarchy of parenthood. Perhaps this was a reaction to the literature on reunions in the 1980s and 1990s that, mostly from a birth mother perspective, celebrated a "coming home" of their adopted out sons and daughters (Hughes 1995), and is also exemplified in adopted adults' accounts: "I immediately felt a kinship with her that had no parallel in my adoptive family", (quoted in McColm 1993, p. 203).

Carsten's paper discussed her study of 13 adopted people who had met their birth parents in the "relatively recent past" (Carsten 2000, p. 688), and concluded that, "In just a few cases, my informants described being able to establish some kind of harmonious relations with their birth kin", (Carsten 2000, p. 690), and observed that, "In the majority of cases, I would say that these relations had a doomed quality about them" (Carsten 2000, p. 691). In addition to the limitations that Carsten's sample is too small to talk of majorities and there were no experiences of long-term outcomes on which to draw, there are a number of additional observations that engage with issues not already referred to in the discussion of Modell's paper. The first is the comment that Carsten's respondents had a "strong disavowal of the notion that, in the absence of such sustained nurturing, there is an automatic bond of kinship given by the fact of birth . . . interviewees strongly assert the values of care and effort that go into the creation of kin ties... In the context of adoption, birth does not imply certainty or endurance or solidarity" (p. 691). This reference to the "fact of birth" somewhat downplays the relation between mother and child that is formed during pregnancy. It also neglects that for most birth mothers, there was contact between themselves and their baby following the birth, and this carries significance of a relational nature not only for birth mothers, but also for adopted people (see for example, the words of 'Ethan' in Browning: "We didn't have a relationship for the first 20 years of my life, but we did have a relationship for the first nine months", (Browning 2005, p. 124). To return to Modell, it is suggested that the diminution of the birth mother–child tie is present in her comments about the adopted people in her study that had met their birth mothers: "the thinness of a purely biological relationship became apparent" (Modell 1994, p. 164).

Fonseca pointed to the way that official and judicial adoption processes can marginalise the birth mother and terms this "de-kinning" (Fonseca 2011, p. 307); minimising birth mothers' birth and the surrounding experiences is a common feature of many accounts of birth mothers (Kenny et al. 2012). Carlis pointed out that, "It is widely accepted in both traditional and contemporary psychological research that the earliest relationship does not begin at birth" but rather before, and this is a two-way phenomenon (Carlis 2015, p. 246). Carlis quoted Verny: "The unborn child is a feeling, remembering, aware being", and that the "nine months between conception and birth molds and shapes personality, drives, and ambitions in very important ways" (Vernay 1981, p. 15). This is in alignment with the more populist work of Nancy Verrier that posits adoption as a primal wound that separates birth mother and adopted child, resulting in the lifelong urge to mend this and re-establish ties (Verrier 1993).

Melosh is the third of the writers from the sceptical 'camp' on adoption reunions and kinship relationships that includes Modell's views that "love does not play a central part in the enduring solidarity between adoptee and birth parent" (1997, p. 63), and the best that might be is possibly that of favourite aunt/niece/nephew relationship and Carsten's 'doomed'-ness. Melosh's view is bleak: "reunited kin do not establish close or sustained relationships . . . Rarely do reunions result in radically reconstituted families . . . Faced with the daunting prospect of assuming all the mutual obligations associated with two sets of kin, many adopted persons back off" (Melosh 2002, p. 252). Again, there is a feeling of tilting at windmills here with the declaration that reunions do not result in "radically

reconstituted families". Howe and Feast provide another example of answering a question that was not articulated when in their study of long-term outcomes of reunions, they observe that adopted people's "primary relationship was still with their adoptive mother" (Howe and Feast 2001, p. 364).

This group of sceptical views towards ideas of birth family kinship ties rekindled by reunion rests on the argument that "Ties to birth kin required time as a necessary but not in itself sufficient input to establish themselves" (Carsten 2000, p. 693). The expenditure of time and effort, the "steady accumulation of everyday events" (p. 697), it is argued, is what creates kinship, and this is not bestowed by biology alone.

So, what does the literature tell us about the kinship and the biologically related parties in adoption reunions?

4. Birth Parents: The Question of Kinship Relationships with their Adopted Child

The literature on birth parents in adoption is increasing, and in the main, it has concentrated on birth mothers. The 300-page report by Kenny et al. (2012) offers one of the more recent and useful reviews of pre-1980s adoption, and includes a study of over 500 birth mothers' experiences. The report spans over 30 years of writing on the issue, and in the discussion of birth mothers, concludes and echoes all of the previous literature: the birth mother experience is chiefly characterised by abiding emotions of grief and loss that deeply affected their lives and those around them, and that their (adopted) child is rarely far from their thoughts. This is echoed in a major United States (USA) review of research relating to the experiences of birth mothers that concludes "research on birth parents in the era of confidential (closed) adoptions suggests a significant proportion struggled—and sometimes continue to struggle—with chronic, unresolved grief" (Evan Donaldson Institute 2006, p. 5). Similar emotions have been found in the few studies of birth father experiences (Clapton 2003).

4.1. Birth Mothers

It seems axiomatic from the literature that birth mothers will feel that they have a kinship connection with their adopted child. This is based on not only the blood relation that they have, but also the period between conception and adoption when they carried their child and, in most cases, had contact with them that may have included nursing and care. Comments abound relating to the problems and solutions to the question of how many children a birth mother has and the dilemmas this poses (Battalen et al. 2018), but also the commonly expressed need to include the adopted child as in "there are three children in my family" (when the first of the three has been adopted; see for example Council of Irish Adoption Agencies (2012)). This declaration of felt familial ties can be found in both the birth mother and birth father literature (Clapton 2003). Another constant feature of the literature is the frequency in which the issue of whether a birth parent is a mother or a mum (or father or dad), and this too seems to have been settled in that birth parents acknowledge that whilst they are the mother, they are not "the mum" (Kelly 2006). See Passmore and Coles (2009) on fathers: "I would love her to call me Dad, but I haven't earned that right" (p. 6).

What of the few studies of long-term outcomes of reunions for birth mothers, and what can they tell us about kinship connections once contact with their child-as-adult develops (or not)? In the study by Kenny et al., 80% of the mothers had been in contact with their adopted child for over 10 years. When asked to describe the type of contact they had with their son or daughter, almost two-thirds of mothers said they had "an ongoing relationship (64%); however, one-quarter of mothers said that although they had met their son or daughter, they did not have an ongoing relationship" (Kenny et al. 2012, p. 56). In another study of the experiences of 33 birth mothers in reunions up to 12 years old, which is "long past the honeymoon stage in their reunion relationship" (March 2015, p. 110), March discusses the conflict experienced by mothers who had a felt bond with the infant they had relinquished for adoption and contact with their adult son or daughter. March saw the conflict arising from a disconnect between the birth mother's belief in the "essentialism of motherhood" from which they had derived a sense of a lifelong bond with their baby (p. 114) and meeting an adult

stranger. This disconnect has to be negotiated if the contact between them is to develop. Although 28 of the mothers in March's study were in a relationship with their son or daughter, there were considerable differences in how these relations were viewed, from "sporadic" to similar to that of a "mother–child", with the majority describing the relationship as a "friendship" (p. 115). When asked how they saw their role, March quoted one mother who exemplified the majority: "My family is complete now. But, for me, it's not exactly a parental role. She sees us as family. That's how I think of us and our relationship. But, she has another family, too" (p. 118). So, two families, two sets of kinship relations? March concluded that whilst adoptive family kinship ties are a matter of history, present, and future, and as such are more or less set in stone, ties that birth mothers form with their adult children after reunion are experienced as provisional (there is "boundary ambiguity") in that the relationship formed at reunion could cease at any time.

4.2. Birth Fathers

Clapton (2003) and Coles (2011) pointed to instances of men "holding their child in mind" and, similar to birth mothers, dealing with the dilemma of being asked how many children they have. In Clapton's study, a number of the birth fathers had meetings with their (now adult) sons and daughters, and according to them, they were in the process of establishing relationships with each other. However, as indicated earlier, they respected the difference between themselves ("I didn't bring her up, her dad did, I'm her father"). Half of the men in one of the very few studies that has looked specifically at the reunions of birth fathers and their adopted children reported that they "had established a reasonably close relationship with their relinquished child, though more described it as a family relationship" (Passmore and Coles 2009, p. 7). The reference to "family relationship" was not explored any further, although the writers went on to note that in relation to the question of biological and social father, "these roles did converge for some birth fathers as the reunions progressed" (p. 8).

Hughes (2016) cited one of her birth father respondents as offering his adopted daughter "a safe space in which she could explore her genealogy and form her story". She goes on, "But the idea of exploration is markedly different from notions of 'homecoming' and *hierarchies of kinship systems* and knowledge to which the canon is committed" (p. 162—emphasis added). Here, Hughes implicitly critiqued both the notion of a reunion as a 'homecoming'—there had never been a physical connection between the birth father and adopted daughter, but she also referred to hierarchies of kinship systems that do not fit the relationships formed with birth fathers, and also siblings. This suggests that reunions with birth fathers (and those with siblings) both disrupt any fixed essentialist ideas of kinship between adoptive people and birth mothers, but also poses the question, as Hughes did, of the helpfulness of ideas of kinship hierarchies.

This brief overview of adoption reunions and kinship raises two central issues. The first relates to kinship in adoption as requiring time and effort, on which the emergent literature on long-term reunions might shed more light. The second refers to the notion of hierarchies, which is a more contested and sensitive matter.

4.3. Time

If kinship consists of time and effort, what happens to the relationships borne out of 'reunion' that continue for 10 years or more? Do these not (because of time/work) make this 'new' kinship earned and therefore real? On the other hand, without the daily work of mutual transmission of kinship and its memories, is the gap between birth and 'reunion' unfillable for adopted adults and their birth mothers? What happens when the amount of time spent in a post-reunion relationship is the same or longer than the time spent separated, creating another 'past' (though not as lengthy as that of adopted persons and their adopted parents)? Are the views of Modell, Carsten, and Melosh premature and speculative, because the reunions that were explored in their studies had been relatively short-term in duration?

Bergin speculated that the rule rather than exception is that post-reunion relationships benefit from the passage of time. She suggests that less than one year represents very little time in which to develop a relationship: "After three years, and more realistically around five or six, significant turning points are reached, and a sense of resolution may ensue for both parties"). Browning countered: "The idea that growing a shared history resolves all issues falls short in terms of the experiences presented in this study" (Browning 2005, p. 190). Indeed, Cavoukian (2005) argued that if a more longitudinal approach was taken, it might be found that many reunions will not continue on to become relationships. However, much of the work on long-term outcomes suggests the opposite.

Throughout the 2000s, a number of studies appeared and supported the finding of continuity of relationships after contact. Howe and Feast (2001) surveyed the experiences of 48 adopted people whose first meeting with their birth mothers was at least eight years previous, and found that 65% were still in touch with each other. Triseliotis et al. (2005) found an even higher percentage of successful relationships when they asked 93 birth mothers (70%). Kelly researched the experiences of 10 birth mothers contacted by their adopted children (as adults), and in eight cases, they were still in touch with the adopted person, although most of these relationships were under two years in length (Kelly 2006). In a large study, Sullivan and Lathrop (2004) surveyed the views and experiences of 575 birth parents and 432 adopted people who had been in touch with each other for between 12–20 months. When asked about their expectations of ongoing contact, 94% of birth parents and 91% of adopted people said that they expected to sustain a relationship. However, does 'ongoing' contact, being 'in touch' mean the (re)establishment of kinship ties?

Despite her reservations about the limitations of "growing a shared history", Browning (2005) chronicled invitations to join birth family gatherings that situate the adopted person as "a family member amongst the wider kin network". By this means, "they are often treated no differently from other family members. In this instance, the adoptee is in a 'family' situation" (p. 117). Browning's respondents were explicit about the nature of the relationships that have developed with their birth families: "I fit, I belong" (Browning 2005, p. 106). For 'Maia', "hearing family stories made her feel as if she had a 'lineage', (p. 169), "everybody's just kind of relaxed and I'm part of the fold" (pp. 169–70).

Browning's reservations were made clear when she stopped short of considering these family situations and the kinship ties that they evoked to be on a par with that of adoptive families: " . . . all others considered their birth parents to be 'like extended family', an aunt, uncle, closer than good friends, but not as close as Mum and Dad" (p. 170). She concluded that her findings "support the idea that social and biological relatedness are complementary rather than imply one is more important than the other" (p. 63–64). Although she employs the 'primary' nomenclature as in here: "The participants in this study have shed light on this question by illuminating the importance of a sense of genetic relatedness and identifying with similarities and likeness. However, by retaining a primary relationship with their adoptive parents, they have also highlighted that the social ties forged in childhood, and a shared history, are more important" (p. 194), she also opens a door to a revised model. This model is something closer to the adoptive family being primary, and the birth family being secondary additions when she comments: "It is clear too that biological relatedness with the birth family is more than a set of rediscovered relationships" (p. 194).

This status issue of adoptive family and birth family will now be explored.

4.4. Primary or Secondary Family?

The conclusion that is common throughout the literature is that the adoptive family is 'primary' and the re-discovered birth family is 'secondary' or just not primary. In other words, as posed in the discussion of Modell et al., there is a suggestion of a hierarchy of families, including ideas about their fixed order being disrupted by reunions. Jones (2008) argued against a binary (primary/secondary) approach to familial relationships by suggesting that it is possible for both biological and adoptive kinship to be experienced as real and enduring, fictive and fragile. She concluded that all forms of kinship are fictive in the sense that they are made and remade over time and have the ability to endure

or be lost (2008, p. 201 cited in Logan 2013). This opens the way to thinking about the quality of adoptive person–birth family relationships when seen over the long-term, and suggests that there may come a point where quantity becomes quality; that is, in long-lasting reunions, the primary/secondary hierarchy may shift, not to displace the adoptive family, but to become a *horizontal* set of families and familial relationships that are different but equally valued.

Anthropologist Yngvesson (2007) wrote about people who have been adopted transnationally and their reunions with birth families, and discussed the concept of 'plasticity' in relation to understanding and recalibrating kinship in adoption in terms of its helpfulness in transcending the "biogenetic versus adoptive" debates. She argued that "biogenetic kinship is both realized and complicated through what begins as a search for or 'return' to origins" (p. 571) by the adopted person. A reconfiguring of kinship inevitably takes place in reunions: "This refiguring reaches back to rework the past and reaches forward to construct the future, as well as stretching 'across' the national borders that transnational adoption has both secured and unsettled over the past half-century. Refiguring both incorporates familiar dichotomies of Euro-American idiomatic kinship ("nature" versus "nurture"; "blood" versus "law"; "biogenetic" versus "adoptive" families) and reworks them in ways that have the potential to create new forms of consciousness as well as transform everyday practices of relatedness" (p. 576). This idea of plasticity posits new forms of consciousness and transformed practices of relatedness that may transcend the binary unhelpfulness of categories such as primary/secondary families.

So, as discussed, we can surmise from the literature that whilst our knowledge of the reunion experience is growing, less research has explored the long-term outcomes of reunions, and very little research on reunion outcomes has focussed on what kind of kinship has developed, if any (Logan 2013).

5. Our Study

Our study was by means of a four page, semi-structured questionnaire containing 13 questions for adults that had been involved in an adoption reunion. The limitations of data gathering by the mail-out of questionnaires have been well rehearsed. These include a reduced ability to explore sensitive issues, poor response rates, and a tendency for non-reply from those who have not had a positive view or experience of the matter being studied (Denscombe 2014). Another limitation was that because of the predominance of studies of reunions that were under 10 years old (Browning and Duncan 2005), we chose to look at reunions that were at least 10 years old with the consequent possibility that the people who had been involved in these reunions may have moved address. The choice of length of time since the reunion was made on the basis that very few of the existing studies of long-term outcomes had looked at those of this age. Finally, regarding the limitations and influences governing questionnaire content and data analysis, the author has over 20 years of conducting research on the topic of adoption, 40 years as a practitioner, and 50 years of being a birth father. This lived experience necessarily informs my approaches. As a counterpoint to this, a birth mother and adopted person assisted in the drafting of the questionnaire, and in this sense, a member of each of the categories most directly involved in reunions was instrumental in content design.

Over 220 links that had taken place via the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland[2] were identified between 1996–2006 (i.e., at least 10 years old with some being over 20 years since link)[3]. The paper work was then sifted and inadvisable contact links were removed from the sample, e.g., those that had ended in severe acrimony and had no wish for further contact. This resulted in a settled sample of 203 links, and a list of names and addresses was compiled, resulting in 405 separate sets of names and

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[2] A database where expressions of mutual wishes for contact are held and at the point when the second party registers, a 'link' occurs and both registrants are placed in contact with each other. This mutuality dimension provides another possible limitation on the findings in that the responses are all from a population that, at least at the point of registration, shared a wish to meet each other.

[3] It should be remembered that the adoptions involved in this study date from the pre-1980s period of 'closed' adoptions in which there was no adoptive parent-birth parent contact post-adoption.

addresses. For reasons of survey mail-out complexities (e.g., having to include a USA-stamped and addressed return envelope), non-United Kingdom (UK) addresses were omitted. In total, we sent out a covering letter, the questionnaire, and a stamped return envelope to 368 people.

6. The Findings

The study findings are in two parts. The findings from the first part, which focusses upon the value of using the Adoption Contact Register, have been reported and published elsewhere (Clapton 2018). The second part gives in-depth voice to those who responded to our questionnaire, and is discussed here. We received 75 replies to our mail-out. We believe that over 20% is a successful rate of return, given that the links in our study were at least 10 years old, and some were from 20 years before. Many letters were returned 'address unknown' or 'addressee gone away'. However, those that did come back arrived in all sorts of ways. We received photographs, short notes, lengthy covering letters, follow-up emails, and a dutifully completed questionnaire. Due to the uneven nature of people's circumstances—e.g., some birth parents were deceased, they and other parties could not be found or declined to respond—there were very few returns from both parties in the initial link.

The following is drawn from three central questions that invited qualitative responses: "What happened after the link, did contact continue onwards or did it cease? What has happened in the ensuing years, does contact exist and what does it consist of? Did contact cease, and why?" These were followed by an invitation to say more, which was taken up by 58 of the 75 that replied. A specific relevance to kinship has been sought in the data.

Of the 75 returns, 58 were indicative of the continuation of a relationship). The following are exemplary extracts from the accounts of adopted people and birth mothers, and are discussed in turn.

6.1. Adopted People, Kinship, and the Long-Term Outcomes of Reunions

A large majority (37/40) of the links of adopted people with birth mothers continued onwards from the first meeting, and remained "in touch" with one another[4]. Eighteen reported that both parties participated in each other's family events such as weddings, described contact as regular, and talked of "being in each other's lives" and meetings with wider family in other parts of the world.

One respondent was jubilant:

"I see my birth mum as much as possible, we have an amazing relationship. It has been 17 years now and I feel like I have known her all my life. I treat her like a mother and I treat my step dad, B., like a father. It couldn't have gone better for us. We meet up at least every two months and I stay at their house in Yorkshire for weeks at a time. We are very alike in a lot of ways. My kids, who are 13 and 15 have always known S. and B. as their Grandparents 100%. My husband is also very close to them both."

Being in each other's lives meant a variety of what resembles kinship work: "We shared some very poignant experiences together, for example the death of my (birth) grandfather when I felt I was at last able to be a daughter to my father and support him and my (birth) grandmother". Some are as decisive about having found a family: "we have become a family 18 years on", "there is a great bond between us all". The endorsement by children was also interesting: "My children are very accepting and consider it normal to have three sets of grandparents". Greater self-knowledge was bound up with the recognition of familial traits: "I know myself so much better now from knowing my father and grandparents. Being able to recognise familial traits has meant so much to me now that they, my birth family, have gone".

For one of those reunions where contact had ceased, there was an account that was painful to read:

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4   29 women and 11 men. Space precludes fuller demographic description of e.g., age, marital, and parental status.

"Got on with mother but sister was jealous, a nightmare. Mother was weak, sister had power over her so I told them to stick it. Time later was asked back, told sister sorry. Stupid me went back. In that time father died. As older brother, I helped them. Found out my brother getting married but I was not invited. I confronted my mother, knew it was my sister's doing. Told them it's over and they disgust me. Total waste of time, they're dead to me."

Arguably, this is not so much a failed reunion as more a complex account of kinship matters, notwithstanding the negative outcomes. If our questionnaire had been more pursuant of these, or if we had the opportunity to interview this man, he might have agreed that his found family were kin to him (as well as 'dead to him').

Other expressions of loss were present: "With the highs of 'reunion' also comes deep feeling of loss at the life you didn't have with the people you were meant to be with". There is also regret: "My birth mother is now in a home with dementia and I can only visit infrequently, but I am in contact. My sister has emigrated to Florida, but we are in touch and have been out to stay. I feel we are a family although maybe not as close as we would have been if brought up together". Also, given the time span covered by the study with some reunions having first taken place over 20 years ago, and involving mature adults, deaths feature: "I am certain that if my sister was still alive, we would be in constant touch. Found we had many things in common, felt I at last 'belonged'. My brother welcomed me too, but he died in Australia—met him and stayed with him on two occasions. Discovered many similarities—genetically too". One respondent updated her questionnaire response to add that she had been left a legacy by a member of her birth family.

The comments about destiny, loss, and regret also sit alongside a point made frequently, which is that, "Obviously my adoptive parents will always be my parents". Another respondent made a comment about terminology relating to when she met her birth mother, and it is often found in the literature: "My mum is the lady who chose to have me and has brought me up".

A 'provisional' quality was detected in the nature of one or two of these relationships, with one woman wondering: "It would be interesting to find out what my birth mother's relationship with me is. I have never had the courage to ask this". This emerges more in birth mothers' accounts below.

Overall, it seems that contrary to any notions of a tailing-off contact, for the adopted people in this study, the majority of relationships that began at reunion continued, and closely approximated those in the lives of non-adopted people in that they became involved in the births, marriages, and deaths of their birth families.

6.2. Birth Mothers, Kinship, and the Long-Term Outcomes of Reunions

Unlike the positive reports from the majority of adopted people, birth mothers' accounts and assessments were more varied. Ten mothers reported that the link with their child had developed into a satisfying relationship ranging from absolute pleasure ("in each other's lives") to regular meetings and contact between both sets of family members. Five mothers reported a mixture of "positive/mixed" feelings. These were the result of post-link relationships levelling off to occasional contact by email or Facebook. Six mothers were unhappy, and reported the link and subsequent experience to have been a negative one.

The mixture of mixed feelings or dissatisfaction was the result of the cessation or dwindling of relationships where it had been expected that these would continue. Those relationships that endured produced a mix of accounts that conveyed familiarity in all senses of the word:

"It is a good feeling to know that my daughter comes and goes freely to my house and she doesn't feel left out. We remember to include her in everything and I see her about every three weeks".

and:

"My son met my sister and husband on several occasions. As time passed we met just the two of us, fairly often. We shared a lot of views about life and philosophy. After about five

years, our contact diminished and he became understandably more engaged with his young daughter. I anticipated this development and always took the view that this was not only appropriate but was representative of the rhythm of normal family life."

Expressions of a sense of kinship are often demonstrated with reference to other (birth) family members: "My whole family welcomed my daughter with open arms. She was introduced to my husband (not her father), my two daughters, my sister, brothers, aunts, cousins, friends, and people in the small village where we live. And, of course my mother—my father had by this time passed but he knew about her beforehand". And: "My son is a good uncle to my daughter's two children and a good brother to my daughter—they are very close." A sense of joining up comes over in one account: "My family were delighted to welcome her to our family and so very pleased that our relationship is as close as if we had never been apart. I always told my spouse and friends that I had had a daughter adopted. My spouse could not love her more". An endorsement by a birth mother's children echoes that of the children of adopted person cited above: "When I told my sons the news in 2001 one said: "That's great mum, I've always wanted a sister!" Both boys have become close to their half-sister".

Some of these relationships had a provisional or delicate nature, even at a minimum of 10 years after first contact emerged. Some mothers reported insufficient contact in their relationships; others wrote of the relationship being subject to external and negative influences such as hostile partners. Still others wrote of bonds, but with differences: "We keep in touch at Christmas, but we have little in common. My family ethos is quite different to the one in which she was brought up. For example, I taught English, and she has poor literacy. I found her to be quite suspicious and lacking curiosity about the facets of her adoption. So, a strange bond exists, with little affection". Another mother wrote: "Contact is occasional, which is fine for both of us. We aren't close geographically, and transport is a problem. Generally, we keep in touch by mobile phone—he's abroad a lot. It's tricky, I think we are both aware of the awkwardness of the history. And we disagree strongly about politics and various other things. Have to tread carefully. And I'm still guilty about it".

This mother captures the awkwardness that is present more than a decade after first meeting her son, but she also expresses something about the long shadow in her life that was cast by adoption.

Of the seven siblings and two birth fathers who experienced links up to 20 years ago, three brothers or sisters reported that after meeting, contact was at a "minimal" level ("Met twice—text at Christmas and birthday but no other contact"), but one went on to add that, "Even though it's only Xmas cards, it's nice to know he's there. I always thought I was an only child so knowing I have a brother is comforting". Three other siblings were very happy after they had met their birth brothers or sisters, with one making an interesting point about terminologies: "I feel so lucky to have found an amazing brother and sister. We don't like to say half brother and half sister. From the first day we all met each other, we just clicked. My brother comes to visit once a year and I find it difficult when he leaves. My sister comes over once a year with her family and I have been to Texas and stayed for four weeks".

Of the two birth fathers that joined the survey, the first reported that he and his daughter often met, and were "now a part of each other's lives"; the daughter of the second father lives overseas, but visits him when she holidays in the UK and stays overnight along with her partner and their son.

So, as far as the birth mothers in this study are concerned, less of them compared to the adopted people reported satisfaction and longevity of post-reunion relationships. March's point about reunions causing a resurfacing of grief emotions for birth mothers, and thus experiences of ambiguity towards the event, may be relevant here (March 2015).

7. Discussion

7.1. The Language of Adoption Reunions

7.1.1. Reunion

"Reunion" is often used by professionals to describe the meetings between an adopted person and birth relatives. The widespread use of the term is also notable in the academic literature. A reunion between birth mother and her adopted child is arguably, in the physical sense, an accurate description, given that the birth mother carried the child for nine months, and may have cared for their baby in a mother and baby home for days and weeks. However, reunion applies much less to meetings with birth fathers and other birth relatives such as brothers and sisters. Neither is it a word in widespread use by adopted people to describe their meetings with birth parents. More importantly, the word "reunion" implies joining together again, and therefore imposes and raises expectations all round that may not be fulfilled (Clapton 2003; March 1997; Trinder et al. 2005). Interestingly, just two of the study's 75 respondents used the word, and in one of these cases, quote marks were placed around it.

7.1.2. 'Mum' or 'Mother', 'Half-Brother'/'half-Sister'

One adopted woman wrote about her birth mother: "I didn't feel anything for her as she is not my mum. My mum is the lady who chose to have me and has brought me up". This echoed a familiar theme in the literature of the distinction between mums and mothers (Tattenbaum-Fine 2013). However, she was in a very small minority of the 37 adopted people who reported that they remained in a relationship with their birth families. The words "adoptive mum" and "birth mum" were often used, with one woman referring to her birth mother as "bio mum". As also indicated in the literature on siblings' relationships in reunions (O'Neill et al. 2018), there were very few complications in developing relationships between the adopted people and their birth brothers and sisters. Reports ranged from social media connections to "we have settled into being brother and sister as if we had grown up together", with frequent uses of the word "half" as in "half-sister". An interesting remark was made in one of the accounts about the wish to dissolve awkward nomenclature: "I feel so lucky to have found an amazing brother and sister. We don't like to say half brother and half sister".

7.2. Kinship Ties: Displacement, Replacement, or Additional?

Yngvesson (2007) challenged the long-standing viewpoint in adoption that "a child can only be one thing or the other and whose adoptability requires the cancellation of one identity, so that identity can be replaced by another" (p. 569). This paper has drawn attention to notions of displacement and hierarchies of primary and secondary families in the literature. On close examination of the dynamics of long-term adoption reunions, it has been found that displacement of the adoptive family by the birth family is extremely rare, and that what seems to be emerging are horizontal kinship networks whereby adoptive and birth families co-exist, to a greater or lesser extent for all parties. Although research has concentrated on the adopted person–birth mother dyad (Howe and Feast 2003), in reunions that continue down through the years, the role of siblings, birth grandparents, spouses, and the children of both parties has been neglected (Passmore and Feeney 2009). This research has uncovered that these groupings may play an instrumental part in the development and maintenance of kinship ties. They also may not.

We have also seen that long-lasting reunions produce a shared history of their own, and that whilst this does diminish the work of kinship involved in raising an adopted child, the relationships that develop after reunion can be as expressive of familial ties as any other.

8. Conclusions

The study of the adoption reunions discussed in this paper sheds greater light on the complex dynamics that are set into motion (or tapped into) when reunions occur. The accounts from the study

suggest that over the long-term, most reunions develop into some form of relationship that is neither a replacement for adopted persons nor as lacking in depth and meaning as simply that of "favourite aunt". A binary approach to the kinship of primary family (adoptive) and secondary family (birth) seems an inadequate characterisation. This paper has suggested that ties of a more horizontal nature seem to be forming rather than any hierarchy, and when reunions are assessed over a lengthy period, it can be seen that for most, these ties deepen and develop a longevity that carries with it many expressions of kinship.

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"I Always Wanted to Look at Another Human and Say I Can See That Human in Me": Understanding Genealogical Bewilderment in the Context of Racialised Intercountry Adoptees

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Abstract: Although there is growing literature on the situation of international adoption, there is a general paucity of research into the salience of the concept of genealogical bewilderment (GB) and racialised adult adoptees' experiences of searching for their transnational birth families. This paper seeks to explore the relevance of the much under-studied concept of GB in relation to intercountry adoption. Through a detailed analysis of a documentary film series—*Searching for Mum*—that serves as an empirical example to develop the concept of GB, this paper utilises four case studies involving adult adoptees to shed light on a number of key concerns, including motivations for genealogy search, belonging, identity, body image/mirror image, and ancestral knowledge. The paper argues that even supposedly well-adjusted adoptees may desire to search for their genealogy and heredity. Moreover, such searches may indicate a quest for belonging and identity in a world where biological ties and processes of racialisation are equated with such phenomena.

Keywords: genealogical bewilderment; ethnicity; adoption; intercountry; belonging; identity

1. Background

Those who have always 'known', never had reason to question or never had the 'truth' of their biological heritage challenged have been 'freed from the obligation to begin' (Foucault 1980, p. 51) contemplating (much, at least) the ways in which the knowledge of biological truth has come to structure everyday lives and how the absence of that knowledge has come to be recognised as an impediment to healthy development and self-actualisation within contemporary society (Ormond 2018).

The concept of genealogical bewilderment (GB) was first introduced in the 1950s, when two psychologists working in a child guidance clinic became concerned about child maladjustment in adoptive families. GB is said to be a condition from which individuals can suffer when they do not know their genetic parents. Sants (1964, p. 133) asserted that "a genealogically bewildered child is one who either has no knowledge of his natural parents or only uncertain knowledge of them". The confusion that results from not knowing about one's birth family is said to result in distress, lack of security, and mental health difficulties. In his efforts to apply the concept to a broader context, Sants argued that the uncertain state of being caused by GB can exist in families where one or both parents may be absent. Thus, GB in children may be found in many family contexts, including lone parent families, step families, and foster families. In our contemporary technological society, such a concept may be equally relevant in families created through donor conception and commercial surrogacy.

Crucially, GB needs to be understood within the framework of western cultures equating biological origins with identity and belonging (Homans 2006).

The notion of GB is not without its critics (Leighton 2012). In an article in Adoption and Culture, Leighton (2012), a philosopher who writes on bioethics, argues that the term has become a convenient label to understand difficult adolescents in adoptive families and to attack closed adoptions within the adoption community. She questions the assumptions on which GB is built to argue that the very existence of this phenomenon is dubious as it rests on a narrowly defined view of a "real" family and a "good" family. Her central argument is, "that rather than addressing the feelings of those who are distraught over what they do not know about their genetic relatives in a way that might resolve those feelings, the diagnosis 'genealogical bewilderment' is itself generative of the very conditions of such suffering" (Leighton 2012, p. 66). Leighton believes that the GB paradigm serves to hinder rather than help the situation of adoptees and donor conceived children, and others who do not have knowledge of their genetic family. It is important to note that this criticism is largely grounded within a philosophical framework, and is not based on any empirical evidence that is grounded in the lived experiences of adoptees struggling to locate and connect with their birth families. Indeed, as others have argued, a western societal context that equates biological origins with identity and belonging, and where histories of colonialism, slavery, and racialization dominate; this may contribute to situations where biological roots serve to provide the much-needed security and belonging (Homans 2006; Kim 2018).

It seems that Sants' theoretical construct is located in the cases in which he was directly and clinically involved in his child guidance clinic. He describes children experiencing GB as being preoccupied and obsessed with their "genealogically deprived" state who believed that "all their troubles would be solved by a solution of this one", that is, the tracing of the genetic link (Sants 1964, p. 133). Thus, he is arguing that children deem such genealogical knowledge to be core to their being, and can begin to search for clues generally from adolescence onwards; to the point where their preoccupation can reach "disturbing proportions". The work of Wellisch and Sants, in particular, focuses on GB and body-image formation. According to Wellisch (1952), our body-image is integral to our sense of self, like a shadow or a mirror image, and is formed through relationships with things and people that "become part of" our body-image. Sants (1964) maintains that a sense of belonging in the family can be impacted by differences in appearances which themselves can prevent children from identifying with their parents. Sants (1964, p. 134) argues that:

> At each stage he [*the child*] appears to seek to establish a stable concept of himself as belonging to his extended environment because feelings of not belonging rouse earliest, deep-rooted and disturbing anxieties of maternal rejection.

In the British context, a seminal study by the late social work scholar, Triseliotis (1973), found there was some evidence of personality problems and/or disturbed family relationships among those with a compulsion to search. This study was influential in directing the 1972 Houghton Committee recommendations that resulted in adopted children in the UK being given access to their birth certificate. Other studies have concluded that the need to search for one's birth family was related to the adoptee's marginal status rather than with an unhappy adoptive experience (Haimes and Timms 1983, 1985). In a paper tilted "*A fresh look at Genealogical Bewilderment*", Humphrey and Humphrey (1986) stress the importance of good and open communication in adoptive families. They argue that, "It is reasonable to assume that those who feel comfortable about both the child's background and their own role as adoptive parents are likely to communicate more effectively, neither glossing over the essential facts nor belabouring them" (Humphrey and Humphrey 1986, p. 136). They draw a link between the child's search for a firm sense of identity and the nature of family relationships in the adoptive family. We would argue that in the case of children adopted from overseas, where there are invariably added complications of ethnic and cultural differences, as well as limited information about the birth family, family relationships are likely to become strained when the child begins to seek information about

their biological heritage (Choy 2018). Below, we identify some key issues and concerns about the experiences of racialised adoptees in international adoption, as identified in the literature.

2. International Adoption

International or overseas adoption, in contemporary society, generally involves the adoption of poor and racialised children from the global south to affluent adoptive parents residing in the global north. The political economy of such movement of children has been discussed in the context of poverty, corruption, and influence (Briggs 2012). In the last 60 years or so, the formal practice of international adoption has created a new norm of the adoptive child and family, where birth parents and their context are invariably given little importance (Pertman 2011). Since the USA as a nation remains at the top of the table for receiving the highest number of international adoptees (Selman 2015), much of the research literature about the situation of children in such settings stems from there. Indeed, in a discussion about overseas wars and conflict (including Hiroshima, Vietnam, South Korea, and Latin America), Briggs (2012) argues that Americans learned to believe that only they could solve the problems that their intervention had caused, leading to an ideology of rescue with a de-emphasis on the child's cultural and racial heritage.

Scholarly literature on international adoption raises key questions about psychological and cultural aspects of the lives of adoptees in the transracial adoption paradox (Lee 2003). Researchers have explored the social and psychological experiences of growing up in a transracial family in terms of identity, culture, and belonging. The efforts of adoptive parents and the adjustments of children have been highlighted in the theoretical and empirical literature to help promote understandings (authors' own, Lichtenstein 1996; Lee 2003, 2016; Yngvesson 2010; Docan-Morgan 2017; Varzally 2017; Choy 2018; Rehberg 2015).

In her book, *Belonging in an Adopted World*, Yngvesson (2010) discusses the notion of a genealogical imaginary that shapes "real" family narratives. In other words, both the birth family and the adoptive family are constant reminders of the genealogical imaginary and real and fictive belongingness. The legal erasure of the birth family challenges the autonomy of the adoptive family and at the same time helps to constitute it as real. Yngvesson (2010, p. 15) argues that considerable "emotional, cultural, and legal work is required to transform adopted families into real ones". Yet, we know from the literature that a relationship that is only "legal", in this case the adoptive family set-up, is always at risk of being seen as only a paper relationship unless there is deep emotional and cultural investment. Scholarly literature points to psychological and cultural concerns and raises questions about the meaning of belonging.

A large quantitative study that compared intercountry adoptees with Swedish-born siblings, immigrant children, and Swedish-born residents reported higher rates of attempted suicide, hospital admissions for psychiatric disorder, criminal activity, and substance misuse among intercountry adoptees (Lindblad et al. 2003). Several other studies reported concern around ethnic and racial identity development and belonging (Tessler et al. 1999; Dalen 1999; McGinnis et al. 2009). Indeed, scholars have argued that, "if children are uprooted from their own culture, their sense of ethnic identity may become confused or conflicted" (Huh and Reid 2000, p. 75). It could be argued that adoptees who struggle with issues of identity and belonging may well be those who have witnessed low levels of emotional and cultural investment. Such struggles are likely to heighten feelings of the genealogical imaginary and lead to searches to trace birth families. The Evan B. Donaldson study noted that Korean adoptees found return visits helpful and that nearly half had looked for their birth families (McGinnis et al. 2009).

Given the vast literature on international adoption that focuses on children's struggle with their identity and ethnic heritage (Lee 2016; Docan-Morgan 2017; Varzally 2017; Choy 2018; Rehberg 2015), we believe that utilising the notion of GB to understand the experiences of adoptees in such settings could be beneficial. As Sants (1964, p. 140) has argued, the "acceptance of the known genealogical facts may well be essential for adequate mental health".

Study Aims and Methods

This paper's key aim was to explore the relevance of the much under-studied concept of GB in relation to intercountry adoption. Specifically, we sought to address two key research questions: (a) What can we learn from the experiences of racialised intercountry adoptees in their desire to connect with their genealogy and heredity? (b) What meaning is given by these adoptees to the importance of their genealogy and heredity?

In utilizing a BBC two-part documentary series *Searching for Mum* (aired in August 2018), as an empirical example to explore the experiences of racialised intercountry adoptees, we employed a case study approach to help advance thinking in the area of GB. The focus of these programmes on tracing one's birth mother (and other birth relatives) helped give shape to the development of the notion of genealogical bewilderment in this paper. The documentary series included four women (three of whom were transracially adopted) in search of their birth mother by visiting their country of birth. Two of the women were adopted from India, whilst the other two were adopted from Sri Lanka. All four women were adopted by British couples living in the UK.

One of the straplines of the documentary was that these four women, "are searching not just for their relatives but also for a lost identity" (BBC 2018). Another media outlet that wrote a commentary on the series posed the following two questions (Kopotsha 2018):

(1). Can you be confident in your identity without knowing who your biological family is?
(2). And how do you move on if you never find the answers? (https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/searching-for-mum 22 August 2018).

For us, the *Searching for Mum* series provided a contemporary, innovative, and empirical (visual and textual) resource from which to explore the notion of genealogical bewilderment in the context of an academic discussion. The case study approach provided a rich data source through which to discuss broader issues and concerns. Notably, over 11,000 babies born in Sri Lanka in the 1980s were adopted overseas. As a result of the dubious nature of inter-country adoption practices in Sri Lanka (Smolin 2006), the Sri Lankan government launched an independent investigation into adoption fraud and suspended intercountry adoption (McVeigh 2017). Rajitha Senaratne (Health Minister) pledged that the government would set up a DNA databank to enable adoptees to search for their biological parents and other relatives, and vice versa.

We opted to undertake a qualitative content analysis of the four case studies for the purposes of their paper. Qualitative content analysis can add value to the overall impact of a case. Media content analysis has established itself as a specialized sub-set of content analysis and is a well-established research methodology, including in the field of social sciences research. We therefore adopted this methodological approach, given that it is a systematic method and also a primary research method for studying the narrative of TV documentaries (Johnson 2016). We also favoured utilising qualitative content analysis, as it is conducive to critical and interpretative approaches. The narratives of the adoptees were transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis involving initial and focused coding in the development of key themes (Ritchie and Spencer 2002; Charmaz and Belgrave 2012). The qualitative analysis of the narratives was complemented by the visual materiality of image and affect. Whilst we delineate the themes below, it is important to recognise that there is inevitably some overlap in key areas that focus on belonging, identity, and self-image in the context of genealogy and heredity.

Our analysis of the four case studies helped identify key aspects of GB as presented in these films. It is important to recognise that whilst a documentary presents an aesthetic of objectivity and "takes real people and real problems from the real world . . . " (Trinh 1991, p. 33), it is equally important to be cognisant of the framing of the programme maker. In this case, we would like to argue that by using multiple voices and perspectives, the *Searching for Mum* series allows the viewer to be responsible for interpretation (Denzin 2004). Through visual and textual interpretation into the experiences of racialised intercountry adoptees, we sought to help contribute to the literature in the development of the notion of GB. We believe this documentary series provided us with "insider" meanings through the

four adoptee narratives. Whilst we recognise that documentary films have the capacity to influence perceptions, our focus was not on this but on the narratives of the adoptees. The reader needs to be bear in mind the limitations of using such narratives, which may be heavily selected by the programme makers to convey particular social and cultural messages.

3. Adoption Case Studies

Below, we introduce the four case studies to give a sense of the background and history of these adoptions.

3.1. A: Ria

Ria Sloan is 27 and was adopted at just three weeks old from Sri Lanka via a Dutch adoption agency. She was adopted by a Scottish couple and was raised 20 miles from Inverness in the Scottish Highlands. She describes her childhood as being happy, although she reflects that she was, "one of the only brown people in her home town". She is now a chef who lives with her girlfriend Kat near Inverness. She went on to say that she began to feel that she did not "properly belong" and felt "stuck between two identities" while growing up as the only person of colour in Inverness. This led her to begin wondering about her birth mother. Ria said, "I'm wanting to know if she's alive, if she thinks about me, if she does want to see me. I think it would ground me so much if I knew."

As a child, Ria says that she never thought about searching or even investigating her adoption:

It's only recently I've felt like I'm a bit stuck in between these two countries, and what seems like two very different identities. It's like feeling you don't properly belong anywhere. It doesn't necessary really upset me, but it's there. I always wonder what my life would be like in Sri Lanka.

Ria had a lot of apprehension about searching for her birth mother for fear of finding out what the truth might reveal. It was only when she met her partner Kat three years ago that she felt finally able to fully explore her past: "Now, looking back, I realise there was always this huge question mark—but it wasn't until I was in a really secure relationship that I felt able to try to answer it."

Ria describes her British adoptive parents as being "nothing but supportive". Ria assured them that this was no reflection on them—she just needed to find out who she was.

3.2. B: Teri

Teri (Theresa Godly), age 43, an actor, lives in Walton-upon-Thames. She was born in Kolkata on 26 December 1974. Teri grew up as an only child in South London. The only thing Teri knew about her birth mother was that she had abandoned her and handed her over to Mother Theresa's orphanage (Missionaries of Charity orphanage) shortly after she was born. Teri says that all of her life, she has struggled to understand why her birth mother decided to do this. She still has her adoption papers, signed by Mother Theresa, and had some information about her birth parents. She describes her birth mother as Anglo-Indian and has been told that her name is Yvonne. She thinks that her mother's late husband's last name was Fernandez. Teri describes herself as being "abandoned by her people". Teri was adopted at eight-months-old by Janey and Stephen Godly, who were not able to have a biological baby of their own. She was brought up in Streatham, South-East London and describes herself as "their much-loved only child". Teri says that her adoptive mother had Indian heritage, so, "you would never have guessed I was adopted from looking at the three of us", and she grew up, "always knowing that I was special and had been chosen". However, she described feeling bitter about being abandoned:

I had a real chip on my shoulder about my birth mother who I assumed didn't care about me at all, I had no idea about the situation in India, despite Mum trying to explain it to me.

Teri says that her views changed when she became a mother herself at 19, to her daughter Chloe and later to her son Luca, which made her realise that giving up a baby would be the most difficult decision for any mother to make:

> I started to understand the magnitude of what this woman must have gone through in her heart and mind. If she had been raped perhaps she couldn't bear to have a reminder of that in her life; whichever way I think about it, I know she suffered and that haunts me every single day of my life.

Teri's desire to search for her birth mother came about as a result of her seeing the film *Lion*, based on the true story of Saroo Brierley, who was separated from his birth family at the age of five in India as a result of travelling thousands of miles on a train. Saroo found himself in Kolkata, where he was taken into an orphanage and eventually adopted by an Australian couple. The film focused on Saroo yearning to trace his birth family despite a happy childhood in Australia. As an adult, he managed to locate his mother and other members of his birth family largely thanks to technology—namely, Google Earth. Teri says that this film provoked her to ask searching questions about her birth mother:

> Where is my birth mother? Is she even alive? Is she still living on the streets? Does she ever wonder what happened to me?

3.3. C: Leila

Leila is 28 years old and was born in Kolkata, and was adopted by a British couple and brought up in Brighton. She was given to an orphanage when she was just one day old by her birth mother. Her adoptive parents had been told that Leila was the result of a love affair between a domestic servant and a wealthy businessman, and that her mother was forced to give her up because of social stigma. Leila has a few documents provided by the orphanage bearing her mother's name and address, as well as a photo of her. Looking at the photograph, Leila shares her sentiments about her birth mother: "For 28 years I've wondered what happened to this lady with the sad eyes who never got to see her baby grow up."

Leila says that she only started thinking that her birth mother may have been forced to give her up in the last couple of years and that she may also be thinking that one day Leila would come back to India to find her. Her view that she "could've lived a completely different life with different parents" has become intensified. Leila was prompted to search for her birth mother as she describes reaching a point in her life where knowing nothing about her birth mother "feels like a massive void and it needs to be filled". Poignantly, Leila discovered during her visit to Kolkata that it is common for both photos of birth mothers produced by adoption agencies and "romanticised" narratives about the circumstances surrounding babies being given up for adoption not to be genuine, which causes her visible disquiet and results in her having even more unanswered questions about her origins than she did at the start of her journey.

3.4. D: Rebecca

Rebecca Pararajasingam was abandoned as a baby (aged 3 months), outside a hospital in Sri Lanka. She was adopted by a British couple of Sri Lankan heritage and taken to live in the UK. Rebecca describes herself growing up as a precious only child that had everything. However, she comments that the notion of adoption was taboo in her community. At the age of eight, Rebecca discovered her adoption papers buried at the bottom of her parents' closet. This clearly had a profound effect on Rebecca, as she says in the documentary, "Since I found this adoption order I realised that my entire childhood had been fake and I have completely different family out there where I came from."

Rebecca is now 38 years old and is married with four children of her own. It is evident from the documentary that she has a strained relationship with her adoptive mother, in particular. Rebecca had already made two previous visits to Sri Lanka to trace her birth mother but without any success, and

this was her third and possibly final attempt, this time captured in the BBC documentary. She describes feeling that a big part of her life is missing, "because I wasn't born Rebecca, I was born something else".

The four case studies introduced above demonstrate the strong desire of each adoptee to search for their genealogy and heredity. It is important to note that current adoption legislation, policy, and practice in the UK supports the need for adoptees to trace their biological parents should they choose to do so. This has not always been the case, as the British adoption system was historically based on closed adoption principles, which generally do not favour interaction between birth families and adoptive families. This policy shift has come about as a result of changes in societal attitudes, suggesting the social construction, and the temporality, fluidity, and contextuality of the notions of belonging and identity (Hall and Gay 2006). Interest by adoptees in tracing their birth families has grown over the years, and publicity has also provided a stimulus for raising awareness and a spike in enquiries; for example, following a series of television programmes about the existence of Barnardo's records, enquiry rates from adoptees increased from about 1500 a year to "thousands a month" (Pugh 1999).

It is important to also note that the need for some individuals, groups, and communities to have knowledge of their biological heredity and, indeed, ancestral heredity has emerged for a variety of reasons. Sadly, genocide and displacement can be a motivating factor for some groups or, more specifically, a diaspora, to trace their genealogy—for example, descendants of those who lost parents and grand-parents through the Jewish holocaust are an example of this social phenomenon. A relatively more recent social phenomenon pertains to donor-conceived children and the issue of anonymity versus their rights to have knowledge of their biological identity. The South African Law Reform Commission released a discussion paper in July 2017 asking respondents if they thought the law should be changed to allow children conceived with donor sperm or egg the right to know their biological origins. The commission purported that some of these children might develop GB as a result of not having access to this information, which is congruent to healthy psychological development.

We also have a plethora of television programmes which focus on individuals (often celebrities, such as in the British genealogy documentary series *Who Do You Think You Are?*) tracing their ancestors, focusing on the human stories and social circumstances of an individual's forebears. For example, *Who Do You Think You Are?* is compelling viewing for many, as it reportedly attracts an audience of over 6 million viewers. A blogger who describes themselves as a genealogist suggests that the success of this particular programme is based on the importance of both the subject of the programme and the viewer making an emotional connection with the ancestors that have been traced (https://www.familyhistorywritingstudio.com/who-do-you-think-you-are-what-it-teaches-us-about-story/).

Finally, thanks to technological advances we are besieged by offers to trace our ancestry, often through DNA testing, which is a booming industry although not without its detractors in terms of both accuracy and meaning. Lents (2018) argues that the increasing popularity of genealogy merely compounds the position of adopted persons feeling that they do not quite fit in due to their lack of biological connections.

4. Emerging Themes

In our analysis of the four case studies, a number of themes emerged that related to genealogy and heredity. Our analysis identified the adoptees' motivations for tracing birth roots and the linkage of this to a desire to gain ancestral knowledge. Embedded within these journeys of *Searching for Mum* were the notions of belonging, identity, and self-image. The thematic analysis provided a useful framework to understand the broader context of genealogy and heredity. We recognise that these themes are not mutually exclusive and that there is considerable overlap. These themes, nevertheless, reflect the narratives provided by the adoptees, and therefore offer important insights into their experiences.

5. Motivation for Tracing Birth Roots/Heredity

The four women featured in the BBC documentary series are by no means unusual in their desire to find their birth families. A strong theme that is apparent throughout the two-part BBC documentary series *Searching for Mum* is the need for the adoptees to know the circumstances that led to their birth mothers giving them up so soon after they were born.

Ria expresses this as, "I need to know the story of the first few weeks of my life and why my mother gave me away."

She wrote a letter to her birth mother, which she is eventually able to share with her when they are reunited. She reads from it in the documentary:

> For many years I've thought about you, stared at the photograph I owned and ached for an understanding of my first days of my life. Simply looking into your eyes and knowing you're my mother will give me such comfort.

Ria relayed to her birth mother the "pain" she experienced through not having any knowledge about her, including whether or not she was still alive. As stated in the previous section, Leila described her need to know about her early life as a void that needed to be filled. In spite of three out of the four adoptees appearing to have had positive childhood experiences as a result of being adopted, not knowing the details that led to them being handed over to orphanages/hospitals as babies by their birth mothers appears to have caused them a degree of emotional trauma. Crucially, research also suggests that the majority of adoptees looking for their birth families have not necessarily had negative experiences with their adoptive families or are experiencing other significant difficulties in their lives (Müller and Perry 2001). Howe and Feast (2003) found in their study that 53% of searchers described being adopted as a positive experience. Nevertheless, the intercountry adoptees featured in *Searching for Mum* may well be exhibiting signs of "adoption stress" and GB (Sants 1964) due to their lack of knowledge about their birth families and deep-seated anxiety about perceived rejection as infants.

Ria says that one of the reasons she wanted to search for her birth mother is because she had so many rejection issues throughout her life:

> I thought I wasn't wanted at all. There's a big part of me that wants to know if I was born into this world with love ultimately, and that I was wanted.

Similarly, Teri believed for a long time that she had been "abandoned by her people", which, as stated earlier, caused her to have a chip on her shoulder for a long time. It was a great comfort to her to learn that her birth mother came back to the orphanage to visit her:

> As a mother, having felt that love, I couldn't imagine being parted from my children. Now I know she didn't abandon me.

Domestic adoptions in the UK usually involve life-story work being undertaken to provide children with some knowledge and understanding about the reasons for their adoption. Whilst there is not a great deal of literature and research about life-story work, Baynes (2008, p. 43) describes it as a social work intervention that was, "primarily developed to meet the needs of children separated from their birth families through adoption or long-term foster care . . . It comprises the creation of a written story that explains the reasons for the child's moves and gives information about birth family members; and the communication of this story to the child in a meaningful way." Ideally, life story work should provide adopted children with what Baynes terms as, "a more coherent narrative of their own lives". Fitzhardinge (2008, p. 60) maintains that it is the "way we make sense of stories" that is the "very essence of identity". Nevertheless, she also points out that coherence does not necessarily equate to neatly tied-up ends or answers to questions, but can help individuals to gain a tolerance of the unknown. In practice, the quality of life story work can be both variable and subjective, and therefore not always a satisfactory resource from a child's perspective; they may go on to trace their birth family and feel aggrieved by the version of events presented to them by the local authority responsible for

their adoption. Nevertheless, it is regarded as an important protective factor in helping children to make successful transitions in both adoption and long-term fostering, particularly with regard to the development of their sense of self (Cook-Cottone and Beck 2007).

The women featured in this documentary series were either bereft of any documentary evidence about their heredity, or conversely, what they were provided with was potentially bogus, adding to their distress and GB. As a result of their journeys, they experienced contrasting fortune, with Ria and Teri re-connecting with family members and being able to piece some of their genealogy together, whilst Leila and Rebecca were unsuccessful in tracing their birth families. In the case of the latter two, this appears to have caused them even more emotional upheaval and subsequent GB, whilst the other two adoptees appear to no longer be suffering from the state of confusion and uncertainty described by Sants (1964), but rather have been alleviated from this condition as a result of knowledge about their heredity and contact with members of their birth families.

6. Belonging

Another key theme that emerges from the case study analysis was the adoptees' need for a sense of belonging. The notion of belonging is invariably discussed in relation to social locations and identity within sociological literature. Ideas of being and becoming, belonging and longing, performativity, and intersectionality are at the core of understanding the social meaning of belonging (Bell 1999; Yuval-Davis 2006). Belonging and longing in the form of relationships, inter-generationality, and location allows for an affective dimension, and identity in relation to a reference group (Probyn 1996). Within international adoption literature, researchers have explored the meaning of belongingness in the context of space and place, and the notion of a "real" family (Yngvesson 2010).

Ria articulates this below in terms of a perceived sense of marginality, space, and belonging:

It's only recently that I feel stuck between these two countries and what seems like two very different identities. It's kind of feeling like you don't properly belong anywhere in some way. I always wonder what my life would have been like in Sri Lanka?

Rebecca and Leila express a belief that their respective birth mothers also had a yearning to find them. This belief, about the purported act of reverse searching by the birth mothers, suggests a certain pull and a desire to secure belongingness in genealogy and heredity. Rebecca affirms that, "and in the same manner I have been searching, I truly believe that my family has been looking for me."

Conversely, in the previous section, Teri described herself as being abandoned by "her people", which again emphasises the import of the need to belong to one's ancestral past.

Research also suggests that adoptees tracing their biological families are driven by "a fundamental striving for a sense of belonging" (Krueger and Hanna 1997). This is in spite of adoptees having high levels of both "a sense of belonging" and "feeling loved" as a result of being adopted. This was evidenced in a study conducted by Feast and Philpot (2003), who reported that whilst conveying a sense of comfort and belonging within their adopted family, adoptees reported feeling "different". Darongkamas and Lorenc (2008) pondered whether this sense of feeling different acts as an additional catalyst for adoptees to search for their birth families. Adoptive experiences suggest that the desire for a coherent origin story is palpable in the ways in which a myriad of sources help personal heritage practices (Ormond 2018), and that such practices need not be equated with maladjustment, but viewed as central to all people in developing a sense of belonging and identity (Sorosky et al. 1974).

The documentary series shows the experience of 27-year-old Ria being reunited with members of her birth family in Sri Lanka. As she was the only one of the four adoptees to trace her genealogy, the film depicts, through Ria's narrative, family pictures, and the presence of her relatives, the palpability of her sense of connection, longing, and belonging:

At the same time, I felt very at home there. Pictures of my cousins when they were really young are almost identical to family snaps of me and that was an amazing feeling.

Interestingly, 38-year-old Rebecca met a family who, unfortunately, turned out through DNA testing not to be members of her birth family, but she reported a felt connection with them, stating: "I can see myself in this family, I have never felt like that before."

This suggests that her need for a sense of belonging is so strong that a deep belief in the importance of genealogy and heredity convinced her of a physical likeness and familial connection. Moreover, we witness feelings of attachment to a geographical location and a society in which her birth family resides. Notably, Rebecca was raised by an adoptive family of Sri Lankan heritage in the UK and is also married to a Sri Lankan, and so presumably would have lots of contact with the Sri Lankan community in the UK, yet she still demonstrates feelings of dislocation from both a physical place (Sri Lanka, her country of birth) and human beings to whom she is biologically related. Kohler et al. (2002, p. 95) argued that there is often a need for an "internal sense of human connectedness . . . to construct a more coherent sense of self."

All four adoptees said that they wondered how different their lives would have been had they been raised by their birth families in their countries of origin. All appear to be philosophical and ultimately grateful to their birth families for providing them with the opportunity to live in the West. In the words of Ria:

> I did feel very privileged when I looked at the circumstances in which they [birth family/relatives] lived. At the same time, I felt very at home there. Although Sri Lanka and Scotland are thousands of miles apart, I no longer feel stuck and in between. I am now very firmly rooted in both places.

This is an interesting statement as it suggests a congruity, namely that by locating her birth family in Sri Lanka, not only was Ria able to establish her sense of belonging with her birth family in her country of origin, but also in Scotland, the country where she was adopted. Moreover, rather than one usurping the other they co-exist for Ria, as she appears to value her sense of belonging to both contexts equally.

7. Identity

The theme of identity was prevalent in the four case studies. A key question posed by the programme makers was whether it is possible for the adoptees to be confident in their identity without knowing who their biological families are. Leila is described in the programme as searching, "for the missing part of her identity". As a result of being reunited with her birth family, Ria's reflections are: "I totally underestimated how important my identity was until I found it."

Rebecca, on the other hand, has a very different perspective about issues to do with her identity, and purports:

> Maybe if I was happy as a child, I wouldn't be searching so hard. My identity was created for me by my adoptive mother. She made me who she wanted me to be. Finding my birth mother goes back to my primal root of who I actually am. I will now be able to form myself for what it truly is not what people want it to be.

Rebecca is clear that she has experienced conflict with the formation of her identity from the age of eight when she stumbled upon the fact that she was adopted. Her desire for authenticity and her real self is evident in her accounts.

According to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, ego identity comprises a sense of sameness and continuity in time and space, but this is not the experience of adoptees who have experienced "a discontinuity between their genealogical heritage and their upbringing" (Passmore 2004). Hence, it can be argued that the four adoptees featured in this documentary series searched for their biological families in order to try to address this early fracture in their ego identity.

Rebecca appears to be rejecting the identity bestowed upon her by her adoptive family, looking to replace it with, in her words, her "true" identity, which it would seem can only be derived from

her biological family. As Krueger and Hanna (1997, p. 197) argued, "it is through authenticity that one genuinely experiences being-in-the-world . . . it may be that the need for authenticity leads to the search." Needless to say, such authenticity is considered to be located within genealogy and heredity. Rebecca's expression of her emotions about the pain she feels about not knowing and/or having knowledge of her birth family and the impact this has had on her identity is evident in her narrative.

The documentary contained footage of a particularly harrowing experience for Rebecca, when she discovered that there was no record of her birth, as this may well have been removed to protect her biological mother. Rebecca is visibly shaken and upset by this discovery and concludes that on the basis of there being no documentary evidence of her birth that she is a non-person and that she does not exist:

> Seeing an actual book with my court case number on it but seeing an actual dash for every part of me that would have been my identity, it's like someone has completely erased my existence from this planet. I'm an invisible entity. I don't exist.

In a discussion about a young woman, called Joanna Rose, conceived by her parents by the use of an anonymous sperm, who feels that her true genetic identity is inaccessible to her, Leighton (2012) contends that whilst she recognises that individuals may be distressed by not knowing about their biological heritage, they cannot be said to be harmed by this experience. In this paper, we are not evaluating distress and/or harm, but simply reporting the meaning and importance of genealogy and heredity as interpreted from our four case studies.

Our analysis showed that the other three adoptees do not appear to share Rebecca's non-acceptance of the identities that they have forged as a result of being adopted and brought up in the UK. Rather, their needs seem to be associated with a completion of their identities through acquiring knowledge of their biological families and reasons for their abandonment at birth or as very young babies. This analysis was borne out in the Feast and Philpot (2003) UK study, which found that 77% of adoptee searchers (who contacted the Children's Society) wanted to know more about themselves, in order to gain a more complete sense of identity.

Ria's success in finding members of her birth family appears to have given her a sense of peace and confidence in her identity as both Scottish and Sri Lankan; since returning to the UK she has stated that she has plans to go back to Sri Lanka as soon as she can: "I'm very aware that we live very different lives, but that doesn't matter. I have a strong yearning to go back."

Whilst Teri's mother had passed away, she discovered after her trip to Sri Lanka that two of her sisters were still alive, which enabled her to gather a lot more information about events surrounding her birth and also after her mother had given her up for adoption. She was very interested in finding out what kind of person her mother was and, in turn, this appeared to help her to relate to her birth mother through gaining a better understanding of her life experience. Like Ria, this appears to have quelled a number of Teri's fears about rejection, as well as providing her with a much greater sense of her mother's identity and the kind of life she and her siblings had led in India.

Leila's experience of attempting to trace her birth mother, on the other hand, was quite a troubled one. The sense of identity that she had derived from the account given to her by her adoptive parents about being a child born out of a loving relationship and given to an orphanage at birth due to social taboo was brought into serious question by her visit to Kolkata. Rosenberg and Horner (1991, p. 77) contend that it is important for adoptees "to achieve a genuine integration of biological roots and the developmental experience . . . through active demystification of the original family", and that "the birth-parent romance fantasy can be laid to rest only if the integrity is achieved". Yet, this is not an easy proposition for an adoptee such as Leila, who describes the narrative given to her adoptive parents as romantic and something out of a fairy tale. As a result of her search, she is confronted with a more plausible but unseemly reality; she discovers that the adoption industry in Kolkata in recent years has been characterised by systematic cover-ups and the falsification of thousands of adoption papers, as well as having links with child trafficking. The details of mothers were often false, addresses were

incorrect, and adoptees were provided with misleading accounts by the orphanages about the reasons why babies were given up for adoption (Smolin 2006). One can only imagine how devastating this experience was for Leila, who has even less surety about her identity than she had prior to her trip to India, albeit the information in her possession was not necessarily factual. In this respect, Leila may find herself in the position of having an even greater number of issues to work through.

Leila and Rebecca's experiences demonstrate poignantly the detrimental impact caused by either the complete absence of information or misleading information pertaining to the identity of adoptees. The right to an identity is, after all, a human right: "Everyone shall have the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law" (Article 6, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Adoptee narratives in these four cases bring into sharp focus the devastation that can be caused to those lacking information about their genealogy and heredity and how this impacts their identity formation.

8. Physical Symmetry (Body Image/Mirror Image)

The need for a sense of self/mirror image in relation to finding members of their birth family was a common theme among the adoptees. As outlined above, scholarly work indicates that our body-image is integral to our sense of self, like a shadow or a mirror image, and is formed through relationships with people, places, and objects that "become part of" our body-image (Wellisch 1952). Indeed, Sants (1964) argued that a sense of belonging in the family can be impacted by differences in appearances, which themselves can prevent children from identifying with their parents. In the context of intercountry transracial adoptions, where there may be racial and cultural differences, the situation can become even more pronounced.

Whilst travelling in Sri Lanka, Rebecca asserts: "I am always looking to see if anyone looks familiar. Do they look like me? That could be me as well. That could be my way of life."

Ria describes how she felt when she comes face to face with members of her birth family for the first time in Sri Lanka: "It's really exciting. I always wanted to look at another human and say I can see that human in me."

One of the first members of her extended family who Ria met was her uncle, to whom she bears a striking resemblance.

The documentary series shows the transracial adoptees to have had very positive experiences of being raised by their adoptive families. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that they were not aware of being different to their families and the local communities in which they spent their childhoods. Ria, who lives in the least diverse part of the UK compared to the other three, noted that, "I stuck out basically like a sore thumb".

Searching for physical similarity in others is a legitimate need for some adoptees in the development of a positive sense of self, including self-esteem and even more so, arguably, in the case of transracial adoption with regards to intersectionality (Barn 2018). Kim (2018), a South Korean transracial adoptee and scholar in the USA, notes that for transracial adoptees, finding a safe, permanent family is not the end of the adoption journey. She argues that in addition to experiencing the loss of a birth family and culture, and in some cases, country, transracial adoptees may be negatively impacted by other historical and cultural factors, including colonization, slavery, war, forced immigration, and discriminatory laws and policies. She further asserts that it is important to recognise that a good home, nice family, and a stable life does not eradicate a transracial adoptee's need for racial, ethnic, and cultural support. Yet, this does not necessarily accord with the UK Government's view. In recent times, it has been highly critical of local authorities' matching processes in adoption practice in England, claiming that many Black and minority ethnic children are not being adopted or, at least, are remaining in the system too long as a result of local authorities being preoccupied with finding the right ethnic match, resulting in revised statutory guidance being issued, making it clear that a child's ethnicity should not be a barrier to adoption (see Barn and Kirton 2012). Michael Gove (whilst serving as Secretary of State for Education) is quoted in the Guardian by Oona King, former Member of Parliament, as being "determined to ensure that 'race doesn't matter' when it comes to finding families for children in care",

yet she concludes, "we mustn't ignore ethnicity if we don't have to" and that as an adoptive mother of three mixed-race children she realises that "some of the complexities of race can't be swept under the carpet" (King 2012).

It would appear that genetic resemblance and symmetry may be especially important for those seeking to connect with their birth families. In societies that continue to be race conscious, where biological origins are equated with a sense of self, genetic likeness is given considerable weight. Narratives of transracial adoptees from our case studies reveal that although adoptees may have had comfortable childhoods, their desire to connect with their past and search for similarity remains powerful. Gaps in their knowledge and understanding of their familial, social, and cultural history continue to influence their everyday lives.

9. Importance of Ancestral Knowledge

Some understanding and knowledge of their ancestry was deemed important by the adoptees to help frame a sense of belonging, identity, and connection. One of the adoptees, Rebecca, held a press conference in Sri Lanka in an attempt to publicise her search for her birth mother. She declared:

> So, I have returned to search for my mother, for my roots and essentially for myself. Not a moment has gone by since the age of 8 that I have not thought of my birth mother and my extended family who live here in Sri Lanka.

Ria, who is also searching for her birth mother in Sri Lanka, recognises that it is not just about her biological tie with her mother but also, "It's about a whole group of people". As a result of her trip to Sri Lanka, she discovered that not only did she have a birth mother, but also a grandfather, aunts, uncles, and cousins:

> It was quite overwhelming. I had no idea I was going to be presented with so many family members—and to hear that they already knew about me was really special. It was a turning point mentally in terms of everything I thought I knew.

Passmore (2004) argues that being reunited with one's biological family can help adoptees to acquire a more complete sense of identity. This includes discovering more about one's personal characteristics and how they might relate to members from a previous generation. This can help adoptees to gain more extensive knowledge about generational trends, such as the kind of professions ancestors belonged to, what talents they possessed, and whether these have continued to be prevalent in subsequent generations. Medical history is often also cited as an important feature of ancestral knowledge amongst adoptees, as this can be critical in terms of having a history of health conditions within birth families. When this knowledge is not available it can have a profound impact on adoptees, "who experienced high uncertainty and loss throughout their lives" (Powell and Afifi 2005, p. 140). The discovery of information about biological family members can sometimes be distressing and difficult to digest, such as family members living in dire circumstances. This is often portrayed in programmes about individuals tracing their ancestors. It was certainly a feature in the *Searching for Mum* series and, in particular, the case of Teri. As a result of extreme poverty, she discovered some harrowing facts about the hardship that her mother and other biological family members endured. Nevertheless, Hertz (1998, p. 103) maintains that it is important for adoptees to discover their "biological root" as a means of establishing "a more authentic sense of self" and that, conversely, "sealed records leave adoptees in a state of genealogical bewilderment", therefore, it is preferable that they have knowledge of their ancestry, including both their "inherent talents or biological weakness". Therefore, identifying with or belonging to a history or a timeline helps with identity formation and consolidation.

10. Discussion and Conclusions

Having explored the understandings and experiences of racialised adoptees in intercountry adoption above, we seek here to offer an analysis of the dimensions of genealogical bewilderment

that can help us to understand the experiences of adoptees, particularly international and transracial adoptees. Through this analysis, we aim to discuss the relevance of the notion of GB in the context of adoptee experiences.

We began this paper by identifying Sants (1964) contribution to genealogical bewilderment in relation to adoption. In particular, we stressed Sants' key arguments that a child who has limited or no knowledge about their birth family is likely to experience confusion and bewilderment about their genealogical roots. Moreover, it is possible that they may lack security, and show signs of distress and mental health difficulties. Sants argued that the importance of genealogical rootedness was core to their very being. Notions such as belonging, identity, body-image, and mirror-image in the context of familial and social relationships were also identified as central to the concept of GB.

In this paper, through an analysis of adult adoptees' search for genealogy, we were able to shed some light on their views and experiences. We used the framework of genealogical bewilderment to discuss these findings.

Our findings contribute a focus on racialised intercountry adoptees to help develop further understanding of GB. By utilising narratives from a documentary series, we explored five key areas of significance in relation to GB:

(a)   Motivation to search for birth family;
(b)   Belonging;
(c)   Identity;
(d)   Physical symmetry (body image/mirror image);
(e)   Ancestral knowledge.

Much of the adoption literature tells us that since adoption has shifted towards a more open model, adoptees who have little or no knowledge of their birth family may at some stage in their adult life be motivated to search for their birth family (Howe and Feast 2001; Müller and Perry 2001). Moreover, such a search will be governed by and manifested in a range of states and emotions, including the need for belonging, identity, physical symmetry (body image/mirror image), and ancestral knowledge. Scholars in the study of domestic and international adoption, particularly transracial adoption, have identified these areas as crucial (Barn and Kirton 2012; Barn 2013, 2018; Feast and Philpot 2003; Godon et al. 2014; Lee 2003, 2016; Yngvesson 2010; Docan-Morgan 2017; Varzally 2017; Choy 2018; Rehberg 2015). We would like to argue that searching for birth roots does not necessarily suggest serious concerns around confusion, distress, and mental health difficulties. Similarly, it also does not indicate that adoptees' childhood experiences have been traumatic to their well-being. Nevertheless, our adoptee narrative analysis showed that even supposedly well-adjusted adoptees may desire to search for their genealogy and heredity (Kim 2018). Moreover, they may report distress, insecurity, and mental anguish at the disconnectedness with their past/birth history.

Factors such as their "racial conspicuous-ity" may be the added driving force for motivation to search, as well the inhibitor to their sense of belonging and identity (Godon et al. 2014; Choy 2018). Indeed, it is possible that the racial asymmetry prevents a holistic embeddedness, leading to a longing to belong and a yearning for rootedness that can help provide ancestral knowledge and genetic familiarity. For example, the need for a "completion of identity" through acquiring knowledge of their biological families and reasons for their abandonment at birth was clearly identified by the adoptees in the *Searching for Mum* series. Recognition for such wholeness and connection is echoed in the songs of the Vietnamese adoptee, Jared Rehberg. In his album *Chasing Dragonflies*, Rehberg (2015) writes, "I want to run with ghosts, across empty fields—I'll fish on the delta with past by my side". The songs also speak of loss, bereavement, longing, belonging, and marginality. Such marginality is amplified in everyday life in western societies where these racialised adoptees reside. The processes of otherisation and marginalisation serve as a constant reminder of being an outsider. It is not surprising therefore, that even though adoptees may have had a well-adjusted, comfortable and happy upbringing, they may still wish to search for a sense of "completion of identity".

What is particularly striking about intercountry adoption is that adoptees are invariably children from poor and racialised groups from the Global South, and the adoptive parents are almost always white, affluent, and from the Global North (Briggs 2012; Raleigh and Rosales 2018). The marketisation of these children also suggests that unethical practices exist to satisfy the demand and supply economics, where adopters are given the status of client/customer. Indeed, our analysis, above, of the *Searching for Mum* series shows the heartbreak and disappointment of the adoptees when they realise that their adoption papers may have been falsified, amounting to what Smolin (2006) has called the laundering of children. The added burden of a social, cultural, political, and economic history and its ongoing ramifications may play out in the everyday lives of racialised intercountry adoptees' sense of identity and belonging (Kim 2018). This is an important intersectional insight into the experiences of intercountry adoptees and requires social work attention.

In his book *The Politics of Adoption*, O'Halloran (2006, p. 4) argues that:

Adoption addresses the act of the adopter … It's an act that brings that child into the adopter's family with all the implications for sharing in the family name, home, assets and kinship relationships which are thereby entailed. As a corollary, that act also implies a severance by the adopter of those same links between the child and his or her family of origin. But it remains an artificial and fundamentally a legal relationship. It fails to wholly displace all incidents of the child's pre-adoption legal relationships and fails to also fully subsume him or her into the adopter's family.

Our analysis of the *Searching for Mum* series illustrates O'Halloran's thinking with regard to the adoption context and its sense of relationality and belonging. Whilst the adoptees can be said to have had, on the whole, positive experiences of being adopted, they express a deep longing to know about their genealogical roots, history, and heritage. As adults, they want to re-connect with members of their birth families. In the best-case scenarios, such as Ria's and Teri's, this enabled them to have a sense of valuing the identities that were bestowed upon them from both their birth families and their adoptive families. This provided them with a greater sense of stability and sense of self. Prior to that, Ria had articulated that she did not have a sense of belonging.

In the realm of social work policy and practice, there are clearly complex and sensitive issues that have to be grappled when children are adopted from care. However, this does not negate the necessity for practitioners to contemplate the needs an adoptee will have in terms of their identity formation throughout the life course. It is evident that the central focus should go beyond integrating adoptees successfully into their new families and providing them and their adoptive parents with post adoption support. This may take the form of therapeutic services to address the trauma they are likely to have experienced as a result of abuse and neglect. Equally, life story work is a very important facet of providing children with a narrative about why they came to be adopted, but does not necessarily address in great detail issues about their genealogy. To help improve current adoption practices, we would suggest, in the first instance, that space is created for a discourse to take place at policy level and that its starting point must be the adoptee. The importance of identifying and addressing the ongoing needs of an adopted child should be at the core of good adoption practice.

As to the relevance of the notion of genealogical bewilderment in understanding international adoption, we would argue that our paper offers important contemporary insights to understand the key facets of this phenomenon. These include a focus on the sociological notions of belonging and identity in the context of ancestral knowledge, and biological symmetry. The need to trace one's birth family constitutes a crucial part of this journey. We would argue that the key facets of GB may not necessarily be viewed as distress, insecurity, and mental health difficulties, although for some adoptees this may well be the case. It is pertinent to realise that a deep sense of belonging and identity and a connection with their biological past remains a central concern for racialised intercountry adoptees.

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From Both Sides of the Atlantic: Black German Adoptee Searches in William Gage's Geborener Deutscher (Born German)

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Abstract: William Gage's Geborener Deutscher, a print newsletter distributed by traditional mail from the late 1980s until 2003, and the eponymous Internet forum Gage established in 2000 on Yahoo Groups, provide search resources and community support specifically for German born adoptees. The archived newsletters and conversations offer early insight into the search and reunion activities of many who were transnationally adopted to the United States as infants and small children in the wake of the Second World War. Among Gage's mailing list and Yahoo Group subscribers are members of the post-war cohort of Black German Americans living in Germany and in the US. Gage's archive provides a unique opportunity to begin to explore Black German adoptee search, reunion, and community development over nearly a two-decade span.

Keywords: adoption; transnational adoption; reunion; reunification; African American; Germany; Black German; Afro-German; Afrogerman; Afrodeutsch

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With respect to my authorial standpoint and socially constructed categories of difference that relate to this essay, it is important to disclose that I identify as a Black German American transnational adoptee and am the only known adoption scholar belonging to the historical Black German-U.S. adoptee cohort. My research and analyses benefit from my own adoption, search, and reunification experiences, and are informed by both my personal and my professional relationships with hundreds of members of the diasporic community of Black Germans. Importantly, as vice president and president of the Black German Cultural Society (BGCS) (2000–2011), and as founder and president of the Black German Heritage and Research Association (BGHRA) (2011-present), I have been privy to many adoptee testimonies, assisted adoptees in their birth-family searches, and represented the interests of Black German adoptees, internationally. My previously published essays represent the existing literature exploring actual Black German-US adoptees' childhoods and reunion experiences (Peña 2015, 2016). No ethnography, and only a few adoptee memoirs have been published to date. As a community leader, I designed and moderated all organizational websites, Internet forums, and social media networks for the BGCS from 2000–2011 and for the BGHRA thereafter until the present. Having archived all communications and images shared since 2000, I enjoy privileged and unequaled access to a vast amount of primary source material related to Black German adoptees reunifying transnationally. My analyses are therefore derived from many years of participant observation as administrator and member in the private online communities and e-lists hosted by the only two Black German organizations established in the U.S. Since 2000, I have also observed Black German adoptee interactions in other online communities such as those hosted by Black German organizations in Germany, and other adoption and family search related organizations. Since the mid-2000s, Black German organizations have joined other adoption related groups in establishing both public and exclusive virtual communities on the Facebook social network platform. An astute

observer is more easily able to discern those who identify as Black Germans and who belonging to multiple groups. Networking between and among groups often occurs. For example, it is likely that a Black German adoptee who emerges in one affiliate group will often be recruited by or referred to another as the circumstances dictate.

Adoptees searching for their origin stories and birth-family members typically connect with others who share in their context specific circumstances in online social networks and community-based forums. There is no way to determine how many Black Germans subscribed to Gage's printed newsletter in the earlier years or are among the 477 current members of his online Yahoo group. Not all list members reveal their personal information, and unlike social media today, no image is attached to an individual's profile. According to researchers Catherine Ridings, et al., (Ridings et al. 2006) who study online behavior for business marketing purposes, people often join online groups and remain "lurkers," they simply find the information they are seeking by reading the archives and other subscribers' postings. "Since lurkers do not post, it is impossible to gather information about them in the persistent conversation. It is important to know about lurkers, however, since they are bona fide members of the virtual community and consumers of its knowledge. Thus, they may be affected by the virtual community content even if they do not contribute to the ongoing conversations" (330). Some Black German adoptees only discover they belong to the historic adoptive cohort when they begin to search for their bilateral family roots in Germany and the U.S., and from what they learn from others they encounter in online forums and social networks. Although most Black Germans who have shared their stories with me and online are aware of their adopted status since childhood, some reveal they are late discovery—meaning they learn about their adoptions as adults. Many never saw their birth certificates or adoption papers until their adoptive parents died. Others still have no access to their identity documents and are fearful that their citizenship status in the U.S. is precarious given contemporary immigration politics; although, only one Black German adoptee is known to have ever been deported. Adoptees with access to their identity documents while their adoptive parents are alive often hesitate to discuss their intention to search for their families of origin with their adoptive parents. Many adoptees wait until their adoptive parents are deceased to initiate their searches out of fear of offending them or appearing ungrateful. Black Germans are no different from adoptees belonging to transnational adoptive cohorts born in the 1950s and 1960s in this regard. What makes this group unique are the historico-political circumstances of their transnational adoptions—solely on the basis of race, and also that the cohort of dual-heritage, biracial, German born adoptees are the only know group of children to be adopted from overseas by African Americans.

Race is a complex and nuanced topic in the Black German context. The transnational adoptions of biracial children into African American families must also be considered transracial since the research reveals that many Black Germans believe they experience(d) race and racism, particularly during their 1960s' childhoods, differently from their African American peers (Peña 2017). The proliferation of diaspora, migration, and critical mixed-race studies reveals that the experiences of persons considered to be Black and biracial are not monolithic and are context specific in terms of history, culture, and individual preference. Adoptees raised in military families, for example, were sheltered from overt discrimination in childhood and were among the first to attend integrated schools (Peña 2017). It would be disingenuous to suggest that while the children were absorbed into the African American community, per se, that they didn't stand out as visibly different from their adopted parents.

The adoptees were both biracial and of dual heritage and were born during a time when relationships between blacks and whites was expressly forbidden in many of the United States, prior to the Supreme Court decision on *Loving vs. Virginia* (1967) declaring bans on interracial marriage unconstitutional. "In the late 1940s and 1950s an interracial couple with or without a mixed-race child faced countless obstacles, many of which seemed insurmountable. In thirty out of forty-eight states of the Union during this period, interracial marriage was legally prohibited by

anti-miscegenation laws" (Lemke 345). Maria Höhn's, "GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany" (Höhn 2002) and her later work with Martin Klimke, "A Breath of Freedom: the Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany" (Höhn and Klimke 2010) illuminate not only the transnational socio-political and cultural contexts in which the interracial relationships developed, but also give invaluable insight into the lives and experiences of the men and women who became the birth parents of the Black German children. In the case of the African American GI's, some of the men that Höhn and Klimke discuss also became adoptive fathers, effectively raising the children that their compatriots left behind.

Between 1945 and 1956, an estimated 150,000 children were born in West Germany to occupying troops and German women. More than 9000 were the children of African American and Moroccan soldiers (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2003). Statistics are unreliable, and although most of the children remained in Germany with their mothers, historians approximate that in the two decades following the War as many as seven thousand Black German children were adopted to the U.S. Many of the children's generational peers were also adopted domestically and, transnationally, to Denmark. Others of their peers grew up in German children's homes and/or in White German foster families (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2012). All formal adoptions were closed, as it was the contemporary custom in transnational adoption. Upon relinquishment of their rights and responsibilities to their children, German mothers waived the right to ever pursue contact with their children in the future. Many of the mothers, who are silent in the literature, placed their children in adoptive homes under pressure from family, social workers, and community members.

There is a dearth of literature about Black German adoption and only a handful of memoirs exist. The present author is the only Black German adoptee scholar, and the only researcher to have published about the U.S. adoptees' childhood experiences growing up in the U.S. Effectually, the transnational adoptions of the Black German children to the U.S. entered academic discourse primarily through the three historical texts written by Yara-Lemke Muñiz de Faria beginning in 2005 although, Heide Fehrenbach is the first American scholar to publish a monograph on the history of Black German adoption in English. Fehrenbach's (Fehrenbach 2007) text is therefore, the most comprehensive English historical account of the postwar adoptions of Black German children. Lemke Muñiz de Faria's book (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002), *Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung: afrodeutsche "Besatzungskinder" im Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Between Welfare and Exclusion: Afro-German "Occupation Children" in Post-War Germany (2005)), has not yet been translated into English. An earlier article by Lemke Muñiz de Faria, *Germany's 'Brown Babies' Must Be Helped! Will You? U.S. Adoption Plans for Afro-German Children, 1950–1955 (2003)*, previewed her German publication. Plummer (Plummer 2003) and Rudolph (Rudolph 2003) have to a lesser extent written about the postwar adoptions of Black German children. Collectively, these historical accounts illuminate the socio-political ethos that precipitated the children's births in Germany and elaborate on the contemporary transnational debates over what to do with them. Lemke Muniz de Faria writes:

> The debate over the fate of Afro-German children as it was articulated in Germany and the U.S. between 1945 and 1960 reveals the particular importance attached to these children solely on the basis of their skin color. These children were confronted less with national or moral feelings of resentment as children of an occupying power, or illegitimate children, than with racial prejudices. Their skin color, features, and hair structure led Germans and Americans to declare these children different or foreign and consequently that they belonged not in Germany but in the U.S.—in the African-American community. Ultimately, racial characteristics served in their native country as a factor of exclusion, while in their fathers' country as an attribute of belonging' (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2003, p. 358).

Beginning in 1952, Mabel Grammer, an African American woman and foreign correspondent for the Baltimore-based newspaper, *The Afro-American*, facilitated somewhere between fifty to five

hundred "by proxy" adoptions of Black German children to the U.S. Estimates are inconsistent in the literature. These children were first introduced to their adoptive parents after they arrived in their new country. Grammer and her husband, an African American administrative officer who was stationed in Germany between 1950–1954, adopted several of the children after visiting St. Josef Children's home in Mannheim, Germany. Grammer is still honored by the St. Josef staff and members of the Mannheim community who aspire to name a street in her honor. Mabel Grammer launched a press campaign in the *Afro-American* informing African Americans in the U.S. about the children she encountered in Mannheim and encouraged married couples to adopt. Her initiative became known as the "Brown Baby Plan," and the children she placed were referred dubbed the "Grammer Babies." Thanks to Grammer, the children's controversial plight was publicized extensively in Germany and in a number of African American newspapers and magazines (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2009).

Grammer's appeals in the *Afro-American* and articles in *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines encouraged African American married couples who could provide evidence of their education and economic stability, and who would allow their stories to be printed in the newspaper, to apply to adopt. Scandinavian Airlines voluntarily transported the children from Germany to their waiting adopters in the U.S. Many more children were adopted by African American military couples serving in Germany at the time (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2009). Statistics are difficult to come by in the Black German context since after the defeat of Nazism, neither the German census nor birth records identify individuals by race. By the 1980s, many belonging to the postwar generation, who were now approaching middle-age, began searching for their origin stories and family roots on both sides of the Atlantic and began sharing their stories and discovering each other through *Geborener Deutscher*.

As a direct result in the rapid advancement of internet communications technologies over the last two decades, group-specific adoption related organizations and internet social networks like Gage's *Geborener Deutscher* have proliferated exponentially. Concomitantly, the availability of DNA testing, international family search consultancies, genealogy and public records research databases have made searching across national borders much less expensive and complicated propositions today than it was for the Black Germans in the 1980s. Before WIFI, smartphones, and social networks, Red Cross workers often referred searching German-born adoptees who wrote or called their missing persons department to Leonie Boehmer. Boehmer is a German-born birth mother and search consultant located in New Mexico, U.S., who specializes in German adoption searches. Gage, a German-born adoptee, came to Boehmer for help locating his birth mother. In cooperation with Boehmer, Gage subsequently authored and distributed a free adoptee newsletter entitled *Geborener Deutscher* (German by birth) (Gage 1988b, p. 5).

The first issue of *Geborener Deutscher* was published in 1988, shortly after Gage's search for his mother ended with the revelation that she had already passed away. Gage described his newsletter as "a new adoptee/birth parent periodical . . . designed to meet the needs, answer the questions, and otherwise provide a forum for discussion of topics of concern to German born adoptees and birth parents, particularly those residing in the United States of America." The newsletter advertised that future issues would contain search workshops, profiles of adoption reformers, first person "search journals" and progress updates. Boehmer was the first adoption activist profiled, and Gage shared his own adoption story in the premiere issue. The workshop offered instructions on how to write a letter to the Standesämter (state registries) and *Jugendämter* child welfare offices in the German state in which the adoptee was born and/or adopted. In addition to providing information on how to go about searching, requesting documents and applying for recognition of German nationality or dual German/U.S. citizenship, Gage also printed adoptee reunion testimonies.

Jenny Jansen, a domestic adoptee living in Munich, was the first Black transnational reunion story featured in the second issue of *Geborener Deutscher* in 1988. Gage describes Jenny as "a mixed-race German-born adoptee who searched for and found both of her birth parents in the U.S. and who has had her story publicized quite extensively in Germany." After sharing on Jenny's adoption details, Gage closes his essay thus:

But for all the peace that reunion with her past has brought her, questions remain for Jenny. Being half black and half white, half American and half German, she wonders where, exactly, she belongs. Jenny discovered a group of other black Germans in München—Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (ISD) (initiative of Black people in Germany)—many of whom are also adoptees. She wonders if she could live in America, in San Francisco, where she had felt comfortable with her father's family. She feels herself, however, to be more European—more "white"—with little more in common with American blacks than her outward resemblance to them (Gage 1988a, p. 2).

Geborener Deutscher was in print for three years before Black German adoptees headlined the Autumn 1991 issue. Boehmer's (Boehmer 1991) featured front page essay warned, "Biracial Adoptees Can Expect a 'Mixed' Reaction." In the center of the article in large bold print, Boehmer writes, "To this day, I, as a German-born birth mother, am ashamed to say that the attitude of Germans towards people with other-than-white skin has not changed." Boehmer further suggests that fathers are more likely to be open to reuniting with their adopted biracial children. Boehmer points out that Black Germans up until that point represented less than 10% of an unquantified number of her clients. Adoptee testimonies shared in other spaces over many years reveal a myriad of reunion experiences that challenge Boehmer's predictions though no relevant research yet exists. The first Black German transnational adoptee story in fact, seems to refute Boehmer's claim.

In the 29 February 1992 issue of Gage's newsletter, Black Germans once again made the cover page of *Geborener Deutscher*, but this time without a direct mention of race in the headline. This featured adoptee profile came in the form of a letter written to Gage from a Black German reader, Henriette Cain. Cain's letter entitled *Rockford, Il, Adoptee Finds Mother and Three Half Brothers in Virginia*, offers a closer look at the frustration involved in adoptees' early efforts to find their families before broadband internet technology was available for home users. Genealogy researchers and the adoption community have historically been early social network adopters and connected to the internet via dial-up services like Prodigy and AOL that called into Bulletin Board Services (BBS), a rather primitive real-time digital communications technology that was installed on servers hosted in private homes. Gage hosted one such service called KinQuest where searching adoptees could dial in from their home computers and engage in running conversation with other callers interested in adoption searches that were generally then archived and made accessible to future users. Cain reveals that after a challenging search, she found a consultant through KinQuest that eventually led to her finding her mother. Cain explains that her mother was tentative on the first call and claimed not to be the person Cain was looking for. The search consultant encouraged Cain to call back again and the second time the woman who answered her call admitted that she was indeed her mother. Cain's mother then disclosed that she had kept the adoptions of Cain and another biracial daughter a secret from her husband of 34 years and their four sons. Eventually, Cain and her husband visit her mother and her family in Virginia and all goes well with their reunion.

When we got ready to depart, my mother and I both cried, brother's girlfriends cried, and there were tears in the brother's eyes too. It seemed as though I have always known them, in a sense, but then again, it does seem strange to now have three half-brothers and to know my birth mother and her husband. We were overwhelmed by everyone's kindness and generosity. Mom didn't know for sure how her sons would handle it, especially since I have a Black father. She said she and her husband had always taught the boys to treat everyone as a person, that skin color doesn't matter (Cain 1992).

Cain mentions at the close of her letter that she normally finds it difficult to ask for help but appreciates the guidance she received from Gage's publication. "I want to thank you for publishing *Geborener Deutscher*. It helped me in my search. Had it not been for the ideas and tips, I would probably not have gotten this far as I did by myself. I'm just sort who likes to do things herself and always hate having to ask for help." Cain's comment is noteworthy because she will later become well known

transnationally for her work helping other Black German adoptees searching for their family members. The next Black German story featured in Gage's newsletter also had a happy ending in the U.S., this time in the same state. Again, Black Germans were the cover story.

Back to the Future was the title of the article in the Spring 1994 issue that Gage acknowledges was a reprint of the reunion story written by journalist Joann Smith that was featured in the *Atmos Reporter*, the adoptee's employer's newsletter from August 1993.

After briefly describing a happy childhood and positive relationships with her adoptive parents, Ingrid Smith from Dallas, Texas, describes how she came upon Leonie Boehmer to ask for help with her search. "I finally couldn't stand it any longer said Smith. When I called the adoption hotline listed in the Yellow Pages, the representative referred me to a nonprofit organization in Irving called Search Line of Texas." Smith said Search Line referred her to a Ms. Boehmer in New Mexico, who specializes in German adoptions. "It took me two weeks to finally get up the courage to call Ms. Boehmer and she asked me to send her my birth certificate—the one thing I had from my past." Within a few short weeks Ingrid was on a plane headed to El Paso to meet her mother and younger sister. Smith is at first disappointed when she doesn't find a physical resemblance in her mother but is pleased that they share values and a number of interests.

> After looking at family pictures, Smith and her mother decided that she looks like her maternal grandmother. Smith and her mother even share the same first name. 'My adoptive parents were going to call me Michele,' said Smith. 'But my birth mother asked them to leave me Ingrid, after her.' Smith said her adoptive parents agreed to the birthmother's request, but she never knew they actually named their daughter in good until they met. 'She named my half-sister Michelle, thinking she was giving her the same name I was using,' said Smith (Smith 1994).

As it is the case with so many reunion testimonials, Smith's story ends with the initial encounter, but the reader is led to assume the bond between mother and daughter was significant at the moment of the writing. Smith adds, "It seems as if we were never separated for 27 years" (Smith 1994). It is interesting that Smith, like Cain, gives no information about their backstories, about how their parents met and how they came into the world or why their mothers placed them in foreign adoptive homes and later emigrated to the U.S. themselves. It is especially interesting that there is no mention of race whatsoever in Ingrid Smith's story, even in the part where she focuses on her familial resemblance—or lack thereof. Readers only recognize that Smith is biracial by the included reunion photograph of the two Ingrids standing next to one another. What is illuminated in Smith's story is the importance of belonging in adoption. Belonging as a theme in adoption storytelling is amplified again in the next Black German adoptee profile appearing in the Autumn 1994 issue of *Geborener Deutscher*.

Gary Freeman's *Who I Was Is Gone* is the first time a Black German man's adoption story is featured in Gage's newsletter (Freeman 1994). Self-written, Freeman's four paragraph essay describing the devastating moment he first learned he was adopted is both powerful and provocative. Freeman leads with the exclamation that he finds his name, Gary, to be strange and asks his reader, "Wouldn't you agree? Maybe it is and then again maybe it's not. I'll let you make the call." In the next two paragraphs, Freeman describes a happy childhood with an African American soldier father he admired and respected and a beautiful African American mother who loved him dearly and whom he adored. "She always told me that I was special, and that she couldn't have chosen a better little prince. I was their son, their only son. I would carry their name and one day pass it on. This was who I was. It was good. I belonged." Freeman goes onto describe how his complete sense of Self and belonging were shattered when his mother revealed he was not their biological child. Freeman does not reveal his exact age on the particular evening when, after hearing his parents argue in another room, his mom came into his bedroom to comfort and reassure him. Apparently, what started out as a relatively frequent family scenario, this time, as Freeman explains at the end of his essay, it was a night that would change him forever.

'Mama has something to tell you tonight, Gary. You're not our son, you're adopted. Mama loves you though. It will be all right.' Who I was, is gone. Who are the strangers I live with anyway? My father was an African-American soldier, but *he* wasn't there to teach me things a father should. There were no long hours listening to *his* stories. I don't know him to love him, but I do. My mother was a beautiful German woman. She wasn't here to cuddle or nurture me. I don't know if *she* ever thought of me as her pride and joy, or *her* little prince. I don't know her. But I love her very much. I am their son. You see who I was is gone. This is who I am. My name is Gary. Not such a strange name after all, is it?

After Freeman's article only one other Black German adoption story was profiled over the fifteen years that Gage published fifty-seven issues of *Geborener Deutscher*. The fifth and final adoptee featured reveals how profoundly the need for belonging in the Black German context extends beyond biological kin. Black German adoptees are members of a diverse, multicultural, and multigenerational Black German diasporic community.

Shirley Price (Price 2000) began her story entitled *A Little Brown Baby: An Afro-German Adoptee's Story*. Price's essay was again on the front page of the Spring 2000 issue. Price's narrative offers valuable insight into the establishment of a sense of community between Black people in Germany and Black Germans living in the U.S. It was a chance meeting with a Black German woman from Germany at the Million Woman March in 1997 in Philadelphia that inspired Price's internet search for Black people in Germany even before she began searching for her birthmother. After considerable effort to locate the woman she met at the event in Philadelphia, Price discovered the website of an organization of Black women activists in Germany known as ADEFRA (an acronym for Afrodeutche Frauen or Afro-German women in English). "Certainly, like our white counterparts' assimilation into the American culture, we too have been assimilated into the (Black) American culture, and are, therefore, not too easily identifiable. Finding a website for and about people like myself, was a revelation, and an emotional revelation." What Price suggests here is that simply being Black in America did not guarantee her a sense of community with African Americans. On the ADEFRA website, Price learned about a Chicago host committee for the African-American and Afro-German Cross-Cultural Community Initiative. After contacting one of the Chicago organizers, Price was invited to accompany the group on a trip to Berlin for Black History Month. The thought of going back to Germany filled Price simultaneously with excitement and anxiety.

Initially I was very excited about the trip to Germany. I was constantly on the Internet trying to get additional information about Afro-Germans. But as the weeks went by I started to feel very panicky about the trip. Would I be accepted? Would I be mocked for not being able to speak German? Even though my family and I had talked about going to visit my birthplace one day; Germany had always been a nice fantasy place in my mind. The reality of actually going back filled me with anxiety.

After discussing with her husband and children, Price revealed her plans to her adoptive parents. While her father was supportive, her mother was less than encouraging. "My father was very excited for me and wanted me to go. My mother, on the other hand, came across as very blasé, wondering why I wanted to go since I didn't speak German and wouldn't know where to go once I got there. Needless to say, I decided then, I would not discuss the trip with her again." Price ultimately sent her son Tyson to Berlin in her stead and wrote at length in her essay about his experience and the information he brought back with him about Afro-Germans and the community in Berlin. Price was delighted to receive a note from the woman that she met at the March in Philadelphia, and they were able to reconnect.

Not long after her son returned from Germany, Price was moved to begin her own birth-family search. She found her way to Gage's new *Geborener Deutscher* online network and contacted Leonie Boehmer. When Boehmer translated her adoption papers, Price describes a sense

of relief when she learned her mother was a nursery school teacher rather than a nanny as she had interpreted the German language documents to say.

> On 19 February 1999, I received a reply from Leonie telling me she received my documents. She stated in her letter, that my mother was a nursery school teacher. That was a surprise. From reading the documents myself, I sadly thought her occupation was a nanny, not that a nanny is not an honorable profession, because it is. But the thought of my birth mother taking care of someone else's children after giving her own up for adoption . . . well I'll just say the thought of it made me feel sad.

Price ends her essay by acknowledging the community's anticipated advice while she is restlessly waiting to hear news from Boehmer on the whereabouts of her mother.

> I know you all are saying that I should be mindful that there are no guarantees. Not all searches are successful. Not all searches end with a 'happy beginning,' and I appreciate your concern. But I have a better sense of myself now. I am a woman who shows courage. And while I pray for the best, I am prepared for the worst. With the love and support of my family, and all of you, it is a chance I'm willing to take for the little brown baby in me.

Beneath Price's article, Gage adds important references to Black German organizations in Germany and recommends to readers the canonical anthology *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, edited by May Ayim Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz (1991). The five Black German adoption stories profiled in *Geborener Deutscher* reveal the bilateral nature of the search and reunion activities of the postwar generation of dual-heritage Black German Americans. Gage's newsletters also document the naissance of a virtual Black German community. While there is no adoptee-exclusive Black German organization in the U.S., there are two non-membership non-profit organizations that promote transnational community development on and offline. Cain and Price until today serve together on the Board of Directors of the Black German Cultural Society (BGCS). In 2011 the Black German Heritage & Research Association (BGHRA) hosted the first international Black German convention at the German Historical Institute in Washington-DC. three more have been held since and the videotaped panels and events are available on the BGHRA website.

Geborener Deutscher's now rather rudimentary Yahoo Group still exists online today after all these years. While Gage stopped mailing the printed newsletter in 2003, they remain accessible in the archives. Over the years new Black German adoptees have come to the list seeking advice and assistance with their searches. Information about Black German history, organizations, and events are also sometimes shared, but often without acknowledgement or follow-up discussion with other members. With the revolutionary changes in internet communications technology and the proliferation of virtual spaces available to Black Germans and searching adoptees to gather online, there have also been tremendous shifts in how, where, and when adoptees share their personal stories, and from whom they request assistance.

For example, Jenny Jansen, the first Black German adoptee featured in Gage's newsletter exemplifies the fluidity of reunion experiences over time, and how the more recent digital archives of discovery engage with the old to memorialize family encounters over time. More than a decade after Jansen was profiled in *Geborener Deutscher*, she discovered via DNA that Willie Booth, the man she found initially and was pictured with in the article, was not her father. In 2016, Price, the fifth and final adoptee featured in the newsletter, shared a link to her BGCS Facebook group where she posted Jenny's video appeal for assistance with a renewed search with a comment, "Jenny is looking for her biological father: please give her help by sharing this video from her." Jenny had posted her video appeal on YouTube and shared links publicly on her Facebook page, asking others to spread the word by sharing the link on their own Facebook pages and timelines. Jenny updated the video description on YouTube a year later in 2017 and posted celebratory photographs on Facebook when she finally

reunited with half-siblings and extended family members, subsequent to her father's death. She never got to meet him after all.

Adoption scholar Sylvia Posocco refers to the process by which the excavation and unveiling of adoption history takes place as enfleshment (Posocco 2015). "'Enfleshment' in this sense," Posocco argues, "is simultaneously regulatory and plural. Far from stable or univocal, it is processual and instantiated through varied technologies and forms of relationality at the points where discourse, embodiment, and personhood congeal into socially situated objects, subjectivities, and social relations" (569). Since nearly three decades now, as revealed in Gage's *Geborener Deutscher*, Black German adoptees are and have been participating in their own enfleshment by virtue of the digital footprint each adoptee creates when they initiate their searches or share their adoption stories online. Various forms of, "my name is, I was born in 1950 or 60-something in Germany to a German woman and an African American GI. I was adopted to the U.S. by African Americans and am just now deciding to look for my mother" appear in numerous online search forums and community networks.

It is rare that searches and reunions are publicized as intensely and as broadly as Jansen's and even rarer that we are able to follow an adoptees reunion journey over a period of years. No study exists that follows up with Black German adoptees post-reunion. As multiple generations of globally situated Black Germans relaying disparate adopted childhoods are earnestly piecing together their fragmented, intimate family histories in virtual spaces, they are also actively constructing a sense of community among themselves. At such a time of personal and political activity, and with much of it taking place on the internet, it is important to examine how and where Black Germans are writing themselves into public memory and the ways in which the unveiling of their personal life stories in internet social networks is in itself, an unwitting history-making endeavor. Thus, an examination of the Black German adoption narratives in William Gage's Geborener Deutscher is timely and relevant.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

Legitimacy and the Transfer of Children: Adoption, Belonging, and Online Genealogy

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Abstract: A great deal of both scholarly and public attention has been paid to questions of *nature versus nurture* in understanding identity and family construction in adoptees, yet much less attention has been given to the ways that power shapes the social reproduction of families through adoption. In this feminist interdisciplinary self-reflexive ethnographic research, I enter the world of online genealogy sites to critically explore the social practice of constructing a family tree as an adoptee. I explore genealogy as a culturally and historically specific representation of patriarchal heteronormative whiteness. I argue that adoptees' liminal locations between socially understood categories of nature and nurture embedded in online family heritage websites make evident the ways that genealogical templates and stories reproduce mainstream family ideology through the erasure of "illegitimacy". I consider what I found in my adoptive family history, critically exploring my "legitimate" relationship to my family in relation to the "illegitimate" (and unrecognized) relationship between my family and an enslaved child transferred as property between family members in 1813. This research makes visible power inequalities governing family reproduction at macro levels by exploring the contradictions and slippages regarding family "legitimacy" in micro level online genealogical constructions of adoptees' family trees.

Keywords: adoption; belonging; roots; genealogy; power; nature; nurture; reproductive justice; legitimacy; illegitimacy

1. Introduction

Shafts of afternoon light illuminated variegated shades of lavender and purple against shadows of the carpet's original dark blue on my bedroom floor. I sat there experiencing my first existential crisis. I was twelve. I was supposed to be doing my homework—making a family tree. The mix of shadow and sun evidenced time's passage in the fading colors of the quiet afternoon. I could not fill in the genealogical template I had been given. I felt trapped by the logic of *nature versus nurture* embedded in the question of heritage. I was experiencing what social workers often call "genealogical bewilderment" in discussions of adoption, identity, and family history.[1] I *knew* the assignment was about biological family connections. It was 1977 and talk about '*Roots*' was everywhere.[2] My sisters and parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents were easy. As an adoptee I was well practiced at redefining social definitions of "natural" and "normal". I loved my parents, so that made them my family. However the ancestors that came before them were completely unknown. By what logic could I claim them as mine, or I, as theirs? I knew almost nothing of my biological family; they were only a seething absence. I did not really belong, it seemed, to either family history.

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1   The term was introduced by psychologist and psychotherapist H.J. Sants in his 1964 article (Sants 1964). Betty Jean Lifton (Lifton 1988) embraced and popularized this concept in her influential 1988 book *Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience.*
2   Alex Haley's book *Roots* (Haley 1976) and the television miniseries released in 1977 sparked a renewed interest in genealogy in the U.S.

Questions of identity, roots, and belonging are central themes in both popular and academic discourse on adoption. Adoptees' identities and family heritage are typically framed through the language of *nature versus nurture*, or *culture versus biology* in discussions of adoption at individual, familial, community, national, and transnational levels of meaning production. Adoptees are often represented as "genealogically bewildered"—without "real" family and heritage until our birth parents are found. Many people argue that searching for birth parents is the only way to learn one's "true" self. Others argue that focusing on biology or DNA as the determinant of heritage ignores the lived experiences of family and child rearing. Anthropologist Barbara Yngvesson suggests there is an inherent tension built into the structure of adoptive families that "simultaneously constitutes and disrupts a genealogical imaginary for what a 'real' family consists in" (Yngvesson 2010, p. 15). These questions are profoundly shaped by race, gender, sexuality, and class in both transracial and same-race adoptions.[3] Indeed, questions of adoptees' "real" identities seem to embody these deep social tensions about the "truth" of family, heritage, and belonging. A great deal of scholarly and public attention has been paid to questions of *nature versus nurture* in understanding identity and family construction in adoptees, yet much less attention has been given to the ways that *power* shapes the social reproduction of families through adoption.

In this interdisciplinary self-reflexive ethnographic research I enter the world of online genealogy sites to critically explore the social practice of constructing a family tree as an adoptee. Exploring one's family tree online is a narration, a guided performance of family ideology scripted through the operating systems of online genealogy sites. Adoption is a historically and culturally specific social system and practice of child transfer, and the social definitions of family engaged and reproduced speak to larger assumptions about kinship and belonging in society. The social location of adoptees requires us to negotiate these meanings in particular ways and that process is useful for thinking about the ways that power relations are reproduced in everyday cultural practices. In this essay I seek to explore these questions: What does the experience of an adoptee creating a family tree tell us about the systemic construction of family and belonging in the U.S.? How is the engagement with online genealogy programs part of the way that structural power relations quietly shape social understandings of personhood, family, and social belonging—for everyone, not just adoptees?

Feminist scholarship on families makes evident that kinship is not "natural," but rather, is a socially constructed category that is organized differently in various eras and locations (Thorne and Yalom 1982). This framework challenges views of patriarchal white heteronormative definitions of family as natural and normal, making clear that *power has always* shaped the ways that families are organized and understood. We often think of genealogy as a neutral recorder of "natural" family ties. Genealogy is a politically and historically specific social practice that has shifted over time and space in relation to the specificities of kinship, belonging, and nation in different societies and different eras (Weil 2013). When we recognize that *families are always shaped by social power*, we can begin to see that genealogy too is a culturally specific practice that works in tandem with power to reproduce social definitions of natural and normal families. In the United States genealogy has historically been about the reproduction of patriarchal heteronormative whiteness through the social construction of particular family forms, and this is reflected in templates for genealogical legitimacy structuring the story and the performance of the family tree.

I argue that adoptees' liminal locations between socially understood categories of nature and nurture embedded in online family heritage websites make evident the ways that genealogical templates and stories reproduce mainstream family ideology and function to maintain systemic inequality. Genealogy programs may seem like impartial tools for documenting family relationships, but engaging with these systems requires engagement with hegemonic views of "normal" and "natural" families. These online systems

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[3] For in depth discussions of transracial and transnational adoption see Cox (1999, 2011); Dorow (2006); Eng (2010); Evans (2000); Haslanger and Witt (2005); Ito and Cervin (1999); Kim (2005, 2010); Nelson (2009); Oh (2012); Patton (2000); Patton-Imani (2012, 2014); Richards (2012); Trenka et al. (2006); Volkman (2005); Yngvesson (2005, 2010).

are organized through the same sets of power relations regulating race, gender, class, sexuality, and reproduction that families are. Indeed, in my view the contemporary social practice of documenting and creating family trees functions to reproduce (white middle class heteronormative) *macro* definitions of legitimate kinship and belonging at the *micro* level of lived experience.

I draw on ethnographic methods of participant-observation to critically explore the process of creating a family tree as a person with more than one set of parents—birth and adoptive. Drawing on participant-observation in the online world of genealogy, I explore the ways the structure of online programs for creating family trees reproduces and enforces societal definitions of legitimate family. I draw on intersectional feminist research on family and reproductive justice to analyze the complex relationships between reproductive politics and the maintenance of social inequalities.[4] In the final section I consider what I found in my adoptive family history, critically exploring my (legally) "legitimate" relationship to my family in relation to the "illegitimate" (and unrecognized) relationship between my family and an enslaved child transferred as property between family members in 1813.

This article is comprised of two halves. In the first few sections, I analyze the *process of exploring and creating* my online family tree. In the final section, I scrutinize the redacted history I found there. The first half puts my own life in social and cultural context, considering the ways that adoption was practiced in the U.S. in the post-World War II era as a means of regulating unwed pregnancy and reproducing idealized versions of white middle class heteronormative family. In my exploration of *what I found* in my family tree, I consider the life of an enslaved child named Julia who was transferred as property by her owner, a man that was likely her biological father. I explore the ways that reproductive policies and practices served to support mainstream definitions of family legitimacy in each era. Each of our life stories is shaped through historically and socially specific definitions of family legitimacy that bolster images of white middle class families as sexually and racially "pure" by erasing "illegitimacy".

Critically exploring the differences and parallels of Julia's and my relationships to this family in social and historical context demonstrates the limitations of the *nature versus nurture* framework. While these tensions typically organize discussions of adoption and genealogy, my analysis shows that these explanatory narratives are not sufficient for understanding the ways that social ideals of gender, race, class, and sexuality are regulated in particular historical moments through laws and policies regulating family and reproduction. *Power must be recognized as part of these genealogies*. I engage these life stories to consider the ways that race, gender, sexuality, and class operate to regulate and maintain mainstream definitions of legitimate patriarchal families in different historical moments. My legal transfer *into* this family is the other side of the coin from Julia's erasure *from* it. It is not just *nature* or *nurture* that regulates our relationships to this family, but also, *illegitimacy* and *power*.

2. Insider-Outsiders Everywhere

I entered the world of online genealogy websites as a "participant," but soon became an "observer" as well. I didn't intend to begin a new research project. In fact, I was deeply immersed in writing my second book (Patton-Imani 2019). As I was beginning my sabbatical I needed a brain break and genealogy was the alternate world I entered. The tensions I first experienced as a kid trying to construct a family tree had continued to haunt me. The desire to find a place of belonging in my family fueled a continued interest in genealogy, so I began exploring and researching, and in the process, found myself crafting an online public narrative of family. It was clear from the beginning that I was an interloper. "DNA certified" was the highest accreditation available for familial relationships in this cyber-world. White middle class heteronormativity is the unspoken template for family, and the naturalization of this family structure makes the power inequalities driving it invisible.

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[4] See in particular the work of Dorothy Roberts 1997 (Roberts 1997), Rickie Solinger (Solinger 2001), Laura Briggs (Briggs 2003, 2012, 2017), and Melissa Murray 2012 (Murray 2012).

There are two particular ways that adoption shaped my own consciousness that are relevant here, and I found that many of the adoptees I have interviewed over the years have shared these perspectives.[5] The first is what I refer to as an insider-outsider way of viewing social belonging. The second is a visceral understanding of what the social construction of family means. As I discussed in my first book, *BirthMarks: Transracial Adoption in Contemporary America*, one of the commonalities I found among the transracial adoptees I interviewed was the sense of being a perpetual interloper, of not fully belonging anywhere. This often led to the development of social practices very similar to what anthropologists call participant-observation. The origin narratives of adoptees support the understanding that we always come from somewhere and someone else. In fact, it is not just that I would have been a different person had I stayed with my birth family. A slight shuffle in the applications for adoption received in the time and place I was born might have put me into any number of different families. I always had the awareness that I could have been almost anyone. My identity feels contingent upon a broad array of social factors and a little bit of chance. In my view, this sense of simultaneously belonging both nowhere and everywhere creates the potential for a critical angle of vision on the social construction of family.

My focus on my own experience is grounded in self-reflexive ethnography. Feminist anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod discusses the importance of positionality in conducting research in one's "own" society. She suggests that anthropologists (like herself) who are feminists and/or people of multiple races and ethnicities—whom she refers to as "halfies"—are positioned in ways that are useful for critically considering how power shapes notions of self and "other" in ethnographic research.

> The problem of studying one's own society is alleged to be the problem of gaining enough distance. Since for halfies, the Other is in certain ways the self, there is said to be the danger shared with indigenous anthropologists of identification and the easy slide into subjectivity. These worries suggest that the anthropologist is still defined as a being who must stand apart from the Other, even when he or she seeks explicitly to bridge the gap. (Abu-Lughod 1991, p. 468)

She suggests that people positioned as "outsiders" or "others" have a particular angle of vision on the ways that cultural belonging is constructed in various societies, and emphasizes the complex ways such positionality shapes the construction of academic knowledge. Her discussion focuses on ethnographers whose identities locate them as insider-outsiders in fieldwork and in the discipline of anthropology. I build on this discussion of positionality to suggest that the ways that adoptees navigate online genealogy programs are useful for thinking critically about the ways that social power relations shape the construction of families.

Anthropologists have always relied on observation and self-reflection to understand how human beings in different social and cultural contexts construct meaningful lives. Abu-Lughod emphasizes the importance of James Clifford's (Clifford 1986) famous dictum that anthropological analyses are always "partial truths," and builds on this by arguing for the "recognition that they are also positioned truths" (Abu-Lughod 1991, p. 469). In other words, people who do not easily fit into social categories of identity—like people who are biracial or immigrants or adoptees—have a particular angle of vision on the constructedness of the social system at hand. This is consistent with the feminist standpoint theory that suggests that those most subjugated by a system of power are able to see the workings of power more clearly than those who benefit from such unequal relations. Donna Haraway's notion of "situated knowledges" is a useful way of thinking about how the social positionality of adoptees in relation to definitions of family legitimacy allows us to see the relations of power at work in the literal social construction of families through adoption (Haraway 1988). Adoptees navigate family in ways that differ from non-adopted people, and this shapes the assumptions about the world we internalize.

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[5]   I have been conducting ethnographic life history interviews with adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive parents on and off, as part of several different research projects, since the early 1990s.

Abu-Lughod argues for the importance of writing "ethnographies of the particular" to challenge generalizations about monolithic groups, behaviors, and cultures that often emerge from seemingly "objective" anthropological analyses.

By focusing closely on particular individuals and their changing relationships, one would necessarily subvert the most problematic connotations of culture, homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness (Abu-Lughod 1991, p. 476).

"Ethnographies of the particular" focus on how people create meaning in specific social and cultural contexts, with an emphasis on interactions between individuals and other people, communities, systems of cultural meaning, media narratives, social institutions, and laws and public policies. Those of us who stand outside the boundaries of "natural" and "normal" views of family negotiate meanings differently than those whose families adhere to hegemonic definitions of family legitimacy.

I draw on my own story not because I think my experience is "representative," but rather, because as an adoptee I make sense of my life from a particular social location and familial configuration. The specificities of my life do not represent all adoptees by any means. Yet the configuration of my family life is not random; its formation was guided by a set of rules and regulations created and maintained by governmental agencies according to social definitions of good parenting and the "best interests of children".[6] The lives of adoptees differ dramatically based on an infinite number of specificities. Yet we learn to navigate meaningful lives in interaction with pervasive public narratives about adoption, family, identity, race, gender, and class. We are positioned in similar ways in relation to social definitions of identity, family, and belonging.

The origin stories I grew up hearing did not involve due dates, labor pains, and hospitals. Rather, they were about home studies and social workers, bureaucratic interviews and paperwork, and the sealing of original birth records. I always envisioned the secrets of my origins locked in a file cabinet somewhere in the California state capital. It is easy to see the presence of the state and the child welfare system in adoption narratives. This contrasts dramatically with tales of "natural" origins and blood heritage that characterizes genealogy websites. As Jerng states, "To be adopted in the modern formulation is specifically to be at the crossroads of multiple histories, the possession of which is never certain" (Jerng 2010, p. x). Indeed, the navigation of these multiple histories is central to the experience for adoptees of creating an online family tree.

I registered with an online genealogy website that was free. I had no interest in paying to explore or document my family history. Popular sites like Ancestry.com and MyHeritage.com offer an entry-level membership for free, but in order to access the research tools they provide, one must subscribe to the service. I began with a site similar to these and found it limiting, to say the least. I stumbled upon wikitree.com in my research and was pleased to discover that their "mission is to grow an accurate single family tree that connects us all and is freely available to us all".[7] I created an account, including a login and password. And so, I began the documentation and exploration of my family histories.

2.1. The Process: "Our Tree Should Be Genetic"

I enter my name and birthdate—simple enough. Parents come next. I enter my adoptive parents' names, and search for a way to enter my birth parents too. I try entering my half-birth siblings and connecting to my birth parents through that door. It doesn't work. I have to choose either my adoptive or birth family. I explore the policies of the website, and find them unhelpful. "WikiTree only allows a person to have one mother and one father. This provides the basic structure for family trees." The only practical suggestion they offer for mediating this tension is to create two profiles for myself, connecting one to my adoptive family, and one to my birth family. I am not allowed to be one person with two sets of parents. There is a set of ontological assumptions guiding these principles that ties my identity to my parents and

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6 See (Cole and Donley 1990).
7 https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Help:About_WikiTree.

those who came before them. In this formulation, I belong to either my birth or adoptive families, but there is no framework for conceptualizing the complex ways that both have shaped me.

My identity cannot be contained within this genealogy program unless I create a separate identity—the person I might have been if I had not been adopted. Yngvesson characterizes this pervasive either/or approach to discussions of adoptees' identities as the "narrative of exclusive belongings" (Yngvesson 2002, p. 8). In her analysis of transnational adoptee "roots trips", she argues that the necessary first step toward challenging this narrow framework is to explore the lived experiences of adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents from their own perspectives. Yngvesson (Yngvesson 2005) emphasizes the importance of exploring the ways that the life stories of adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents differ from each other, yet are related to and interact with each other's stories in complex ways. She argues as well for the importance of recognizing the ways that laws and public policies in the U.S. and abroad shape the lives of these three groups very differently.

Narrow constructions of *nature versus nurture* do not accurately represent the lived experience of family for people whose families are shaped by adoption. And thus, my discomfort with wikitree's suggestion that I create an alternate profile to represent my biological identity. What would I call this other self? My birth mother had chosen a name for me, but her mother told her not to name me because it would make it harder to let go. So "Baby Rundell" was listed on my original birth certificate. Rundell was my birth mother's legal last name, yet she had always used her step-father's last name. She did not know her father or his family well. There are no relational ties to either of these family names for me. If my birth parents had stayed together and kept me I would likely have been called Nicole Goldberg. She—an unrealized self—would have likely been raised Jewish, or at least with the knowledge that that was part of her ethnic heritage. The Latinx foster family I lived with for my first three and a half months called me Jolon. I only know that they discovered my milk allergy, and they loved me and were sad when I left. I was issued a new birth certificate listing my adoptive parents as if they had been there since my birth. None of these stories fully makes sense without the others. And none of them makes sense outside the sociopolitical context in which I was born. Each of these relationships was mediated by social institutions, laws, and public policies designed to regulate the social construction of legitimate family.

I did not set up an account representing the person I might have been had I not been adopted. As it turns out, this possibility of creating a second wikitree identity is not encouraged. The site provides detailed instructions about the importance of merging the two profiles an adoptee may create at a later date "when the issue is less sensitive". The concern is with "accurate" information for future generations, and the only reason the possibility of creating two profiles is raised is because there seems to be no simpler way within this system of conceptualizing people having more than one set of parents. The biological framework is embedded in the structure of the program. "It's important that the use of duplicates be rare and unusual. It violates basic principles of WikiTree." They provide a link to their honor code that emphasizes accuracy as paramount for the creation of a "single family tree".[8] Accuracy is defined through adherence to a definition of biological ties as real or authentic. By the regulations set forth on the website, the lives of adoptees represent a "violat(ion) of basic principles".

And thus, I am reminded, as I often am, that as an adoptee, I do not fully and completely "belong" anywhere. Wikitree's instructions continue:

> This means that with adoptions, step-children, etc., a choice needs to be made. For private profiles with direct connections to living people, the family can choose which parents to include. For example, if you were adopted you can choose to enter your adoptive or biological parents as your mother and father. If your great grandfather was adopted, you should use his biological parents, if or when they are known.

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[8]   https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Special:Honor_Code.

What assumptions about kinship and identity guide this distinction? The way this is framed suggests that adoptees are not "real" members of our families. As they say, in the case of living adoptees, "the family can choose which parents to include." Yet this is less straightforward than it seems. Choices only make sense in the context of the range of options available. The wikitree guidelines state:

> For public profiles without connections to living people, genetic connections should prevail. This is a choice that our community has made: our tree should be genetic.

This "choice" offered to adoptees is illusory in multiple ways. Belonging—"real" inclusion—in the global family tree is dependent on biological connections, as per the community's decision.

People like me that were adopted in closed adoptions, have no legal access to information about biological heritage. The recovery of information about birth family history, along with searches for birth parents, has been framed as the generic answer to adoptees' questions about who we are and where (and how) we belong. The choice is not really a choice in another sense as well. We may choose to represent ourselves as part of our adoptive families on wikitree, but the instructions are clear:

> Note that if the adoptive parents are used, they should be marked as Non-Biological. This will prevent incorrect DNA test connections.

The instructions are clear: no passing allowed. We are not fully part of either family, and thus, our sense of belonging is always contingent and negotiated. Yngvesson states:

> The constant slippage . . . between real and fictive belongings positions the adoptee and the adoptive family and, in very different ways, the birth mother in a virtual space where they are simultaneously real and not real. The adoptive family is the only de facto family of the child; yet it never becomes an unmarked (nonadoptive) family. ([Yngvesson 2010](), p. 13)

Adoptees' primary connections to both our family histories—our birth and adoptive parents—are effectively labeled illegitimate, and thus, we are told to mark ourselves according to these definitions of familial inclusion. If this were a dystopian novel or movie, this would be the plot device used to out the main character as not genetically desirable, as an inferior human illegitimately inhabiting elite citizenship status.[9] ([Gattacca 1997]()). Adoptees are caught between two incomplete "choices". We do not fully belong anywhere.

It is important to be clear that DNA tells a story. Ads for Ancestry.com and other genetic testing companies are blatant about this, but they discuss genetics as if it were self-evident what narratives individual genetic encryptions actually tell. Let us be clear. Genetics is a code that is anything but self-evident. We may know what a double helix looks like. We might recognize magnified images of those symbols that make up our bodies at the chromosomal level. However, what each sequence of bars means must be interpreted by experts. Someone must narrate the story. Genetics and its meanings are the micro-level story that is supposed to tell us everything we need to know about macro-level meanings of identity, family, and society. These assumptions about biogenetic belonging are embedded in social and cultural understandings of family trees, and these assumptions are intrinsic to online genealogy programs.

The emphasis on DNA in the online genealogy websites both draws on and fosters a pervasive sociopolitical narrative that biology determines "natural," and thus, "real" family ties. Social narratives about family trees, heritability, likeness, and difference reinforce notions of family as biological, natural, and thus, unchanging. The extension of this story, of course, enshrines heterosexual reproduction as natural. Reproductive justice scholar Laura Mamo explains:

> Nature, or the 'facts of life,' is today biologized and geneticized. The conception narrative, which describes the origin of life, is webbed together with two other narratives: the kinship narrative, which explains the ties that make a family, and the genetic narrative, which explains individuals and their connections to the past and future. ([Mamo 2007](), p. 192)

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9   See for example, Gattaca (1997).

Belonging is socially narrated through familial relationships, both lived and imagined. Naturalized fictions of family and history are reproduced through the "common sense" tension between nature and nurture.

Family tree programs are not neutral, nor do they accurately represent the lived experiences of family relationships and meanings. Genealogy programs are a mainstream representation of *socially legitimate family forms*. Fictions of race, gender, class, sexuality, and kinship are embedded in the operating systems of free and commercial websites dedicated to family history research. *Genealogy is literally encoded in a computer application program that provides a template for what counts as family.* Participating requires negotiation with mainstream definitions of family legitimacy encoded in the application as biological and thus, "natural". This engagement with family history web programs *reproduces* macro-social definitions of family legitimacy at the individual and familial levels.

My experience as an adoptee in this online space demonstrates that definitions of family structuring the social practice of genealogy are more about recognizing *socially legitimate* family relationships than accurately portraying biological connections. Mamo explains:

> Nothing within biology demands the nuclear family. It is a cultural and social system enforced by regulations and reinforced by legal discourse, medical practices, and cultural norms. Yet in the United States it is the nuclear family, bound by blood and legal arrangements of marriage and adoption, that represents social order, idealized kinship, and legitimate relations. (Mamo 2007, p. 5)

Family genealogy records the official story—legitimate marriages and births. In the western patriarchal model lineage is traced through legal matrimony. Children's status as legitimate citizens is dependent on their mother's marriage to a man. Critical race scholar Zanita E. Fenton explains the connections between social definitions of "legitimacy" and power relations.

> Historically, illegitimacy status has assisted in gender subordination and control over female sexuality and reproduction; it has made social class standing all but pre-determined at birth; it has contributed to the maintenance of racial stratification. Indeed, illegitimate is an appropriate description for the effects of this legally and socially imposed status upon children. (Fenton 2014, p. 9)

Historically, legitimate lines of inheritance determine property transfer, class status, and social recognition, creating legal links between families and society (Coontz 2005). But what of the people who fall between these social definitions of "illegitimate" and "real" families?

2.2. Belonging to the Tree: "Adoption Angels"

One of the stated goals of wikitree.com is to create one family tree. "A collaborative family tree, or single family tree, is one that we all share. It's not your tree or my tree. It is our tree—a tree for the entire human family[10]. This sounds beautifully inclusive, and in a sense, is a deeply appealing prospect for an adoptee. But finding my place in my own family trees—the set of links necessary to connect to wikitree's view of the "entire human family"—proves problematic. How am I to connect with a shared family tree if my primary connections to it are contested in the very structure designed to document such links?

As it happens, wikitree has an answer for that! They have organized a group of genealogists known as "Adoption Angels" who volunteer to help adoptees find their biological family histories. The focus on a genetic family tree on wikitree defines biology as the path to connection with this "collaborative family tree". The "Angels" are here to help us lost souls find our "real" families and thus, the story goes, ourselves. Indeed, the project website provides links to resources for adoptees to search for birth parents outside of wikitree, as well as a set of basic guidelines pertaining to searching[11].

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[10] https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Help:Collaborative_Family_Tree.
[11] https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Space:Adoption_Angels_Basic_Search_Help.

This discourse is consistent with media discussions of adoption searches—both articulate sociopolitical assumptions about genetics and identity. Reunions between adoptees and birth parents have become particularly popular media narratives in the past few decades. On television adoptees' struggles with a sense of mystery or confusion about identity, family, and history typically lead to searches for a "real self" that people assume will be revealed in reunions with birth families. Anthropologist Judith Modell comments:

> Dramatized on television and reported in newspapers, reunions between long-lost kin resonate to Western literary and religious traditions. The sight of a child embracing a parent she has never known stirs the imagination, and also compels a reconsideration of love, parenthood, and relationship. (Modell 1994, p. 144)

The search is often represented as the fulcrum in life histories of adoptees–in both fictive and actual lives. Anyone familiar with daytime television talk shows or made-for-television movies could recite the typical search narrative. It is often scripted as an adoptee's quest for roots—a search for the "true" self through access to forbidden knowledge, to a previously unknown origin narrative, to a family tree, to a genetic and/or medical history, and often foremost, to the birth parents (more often, birth mother). Indeed, in much of the search literature and television discourse, searching is discussed in ways that suggest it functions as a sort of rite of passage for adoptees, a rebirth through the rewriting of the origin narrative. It is a discourse fueled by the tremendous loss that most adoptees feel in some way, but it is infused with the power of biological and genetic ways of explaining the "nature" of identity (Patton 2000).

Sociologist (and adoptee) Katarina Wegar's study of the adoption search movement in the contemporary United States found that popular search rhetoric, academic studies drawn on by search activists, and media representations of reunions among birth families focused strongly on biological sources of identity formation. In fact, she found that in psychological research on the issue, adoptees were often represented as "genealogically bewildered" and driven by "nature" to search for their biological origins. Psychology functions here as a normalizing discourse, asserting that adoptees who profess not to feel the need to search are repressing their true selves; searching is represented as an expression of a universal human need to connect and belong (Wegar 1997, p. 136).

Media stories about adoption are often framed as allegories about what shapes human identity—nature or nurture, biology or culture. Indeed, adoptees' selves are often represented in public discourse as an embodiment of the *nature versus nurture* tensions at the core of western assumptions regarding identity. This discourse is framed by ideas about family and identity that our ancestors, our cultures, our "bloodlines," determine who we are. While search and reunion narratives typically lean toward the nature side of the nature-nurture divide, there are also public discourses available that stress the importance of culture and environment. There is a broad range of opinions available on the relative importance of biology and culture in the development of adoptees' identities, however, little attention is accorded to the possibility that other social forces, such as public policy and social institutions, fundamentally shape the lives adoptees lead.

3. Reducing Complexity, Denying Power

How do these narratives get woven so deeply into our understandings of self, family, and belonging? Computer applications embedded in genealogy websites may seem to be neutral generators of family trees. However, the categories for entry are regulated by the sociopolitical assumptions about family and legitimacy embedded in social and historical constructions of genealogy. Mainstream expectations for gender, sexuality, race, and class are subtly incorporated as default categories, and biological notions of family are taken for granted as "real". We can take this analysis deeper by considering the ways that the very structure of the computer programs used on these sites reflects larger societal assumptions about legitimacy and knowledge-production.

I want to be clear that I am not critiquing the ways that genealogy websites operate. Some websites are more inclusive in regards to family form, while others are more rigid in gender representation than

wikitree. My purpose is not to suggest changes for these programs, though I am sure that would be welcomed by many people. Rather, my aim is to explore the ways these sites organize meaning and knowledge production through a set of social and structural assumptions about what constitutes legitimate family and identity. I critique contemporary politics of reproduction and family through this exploration of genealogy websites. I view these sites not only as tools for documenting family history, but also as generators of legitimate family narratives as defined in the contemporary United States. The process of interacting with this structure reproduces hegemonic definitions of patriarchal family norms.

The logistical boundaries of computer applications available for exploring and documenting family history are regulated by the computer operating systems in which they function. New media scholar Tara McPherson's analysis of computer operating systems makes evident how the seemingly culture-free realm of codes and computations is shaped and constructed in historically and socially specific ways.

> . . . the development of computer operating systems at midcentury installed an extreme logic of modularity that 'black-boxed' knowledge in a manner quite similar to emerging logics of racial visibility and racism (McPherson). An operating system like unix (an os that drives most of our computation, directly or indirectly) works by removing context and decreasing complexity. (McPherson 2014, p. 181)

Complexity is reduced by only allowing people to represent one set of parents. This simplicity enables the system to function, but it also limits that ways that people can represent the lived experiences of family. Adoptees are located in too complex a set of relationships—including those with the state—to represent through this system. It is through gender specificity that the inclusion of heteronormative sex-gender identities regulates parentage. People with two moms or two dads face a similar set of obstacles in attempting to represent the lived experience of family.[12]

The illusion of neutrality obscures attention to gender, class, and race. The ideology of "colorblindness" is literally encoded in the logics of knowledge production guiding our everyday understandings of family history in the post World War II era. The "logic" of colorblindness as a socio-legal system is that race is "merely" a biological category with no inherent meaning, and thus, any attention to racial difference is spurious. This is accomplished by separating race from power. The absence of attention to context or complexity in the operating system unix is mirrored in the ideologies of colorblindness undergirding the U.S. legal and ideological system in the post-World War II era. Dorothy Roberts explains how the logic of legal colorblindness depends upon the absence of attention to social context and power relations. While her work focuses on African Americans, her analysis of the ways that people of color are defined through rigid, ahistorical, and homogenous definitions of race are useful for thinking critically about the social locations of all peoples defined as "non-white".

> This color-blind approach to equality disregards preexisting discriminatory structures that disproportionately harm blacks even in the absence of official discriminatory motive and that may require race conscious remedies. Color blindness permits racial subordination to continue by leaving intact institutions created by centuries of official and private oppression. Viewing all government recognition of race as equally pernicious manifests an incredible blindness to current arrangements of power. (Roberts 1997, p. 366)

Roberts' incisive analysis makes clear that prohibiting all forms of racial recognition functions to reproduce and naturalize oppression by creating an illusion of neutrality and equality. Once this artifice is established, structural and institutional racism and sexism are provided a cover for maintaining and reproducing inequality.

The erasures and exclusions of this system of knowledge production—in online genealogy programs and in law and policy—are mirrored in family legitimacy as a social operating system.

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12   I discuss this in depth in *Sophie Has Five Mothers*.

The "blindness" or evasiveness of this ideology is its purposeful denial of power as a force shaping families differently based on their social location in relation to white heterosexual middle class family ideals. Yngvesson makes clear the connection between closed adoption laws and constructions of biological parents as the "natural real".

> Without the assumption that before the adoption there is a natural real, there would be no need for adoption law to cancel the prior relation of birth parent to child, for adoptees to search for a birth parent, or for the adopted child and the adoptive family to remain forever "as if." (Yngvesson 2010, p. 15)

Maintaining the illusion of the "as if" family requires the erasure of the "natural" or "real" family the child was born into. Birth parents must be made invisible in order for the new family to narrate a sense of family legitimacy. In regards to the formation of adoptive families, the erasures are central to the reproduction of heteronormative middle class whiteness.[13]

My birth represented a catastrophe in the lives of my unwed teenage parents, and this is mirrored in the stigma associated with unwed pregnancy in the 1960s U.S. among white middle class teens. Getting caught having sex outside of marriage for a middle class white girl was disgraceful.[14] And so my existence was erased and denied in those two families, while celebrated in my adoptive family. Adoption is part of a set of reproductive laws, policies, and practices that functioned to make extra-marital pregnancy invisible among white middle class people in the post World War II U.S. Reproductive justice scholarship is particularly useful for exploring the ways that power relations shape the social reproduction of families and the social meanings ascribed to them. A central tenet of this feminist scholarship is that laws and policies regulating reproduction and family-making have historically functioned as a means of responding to perceptions of social "crises" that must be remediated (Solinger 2005). Both out-of-wedlock pregnancy and infertility among white middle class heterosexual couples were constructed as social problems that must be made invisible by the closed adoption system in the U.S. following World War II[15].

The regulation of illegitimacy has been consistently framed as a "social problem" in the United States that has been defined differently in various historical eras. Historian Rickie Solinger explains:

> Reproductive politics-as-a-way-to-solve-problems reflects a belief that the social, economical, political, and moral problems that beset our country can be solved best if laws and policies and public opinions press women to reproduce or not in ways that are consistent with a particular version of the country's real needs. (Solinger 2005, p. 9)

Women of different races, classes, (dis)abilities, and sexual orientations are located differently in relation to social definitions of legitimate family and provided different levels of access to social resources necessary to achieve these socioeconomic ideals (Dill 1988). Race, gender, sexuality, class, and (dis)ability circumscribe familial legitimacy in complex and contradictory ways for mothers in different social locations. In other words, women in different social locations have access to a different range of choices (Roberts 1997). The social practice of adoption in the postwar era in the U.S. functioned to make the "deviance" of unwed pregnancy and infertility invisible. The familial complexity resulting from these social regulations does not translate into the algorithm coded into the online genealogy programs. There are no familial templates on wikitree.com that could accommodate my entire genealogy.

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[13] For research on sealed records see (Carp 1998) (Modell 2002).

[14] See (Solinger 1992) for an in-depth discussion of the different meanings attributed to white and Black girls' unwed pregnancies prior to Roe v. Wade. The different meanings and values attributed to the mothers and their "illegitimate" babies shaped how unwed mothers were treated, and provided each population a different range of options for unwanted pregnancy.

[15] In contrast, African American teens that became pregnant were discouraged from relinquishing their children for adoption because there was no "market" for their babies.

Online genealogy programs simplify this complexity in kinship relations. These erasures are facilitated by a naturalization of kinship through the options available for documenting family relationships. This program is not just a representation of social structure, but is an operational structure that reproduces these macro-level definitions of legitimacy at the micro-level of individual family trees. What are the social functions of these versions of family history? At the most fundamental level, these stories about legitimacy function as a way of justifying the exclusion of people outside mainstream definitions of legitimate family. This approach is useful for understanding the ways that white supremacy, heteronormativity, economic inequality, and gender oppression are reproduced and reinscribed in social understandings of family, equality, and nation.

Online family tree programs operationalize patriarchal family ideology, forcing exclusions by only offering narrow options for inclusion. Not only are the categories for entry rigid, but the default settings—the social and cultural assumptions guiding this construction of family—are colorblind, heterosexual, and cis-gender. Each familial entry requires that "gender" be specified, by checking the male or female box; as I have discussed, entries only allow space for one father and one mother. By collapsing gender and sex, the program naturalizes patriarchal gender expectations for men and women, foreclosing inclusion of kin whose identities cannot be contained within these polarized categories. The rigid options function as a gatekeeping mechanism enforcing ideological constructions of heteronormative gender identities into everyday understandings of family as "common sense".[16]

Yet there is another important aspect of this online system for categorizing family. These programs operationalize a set of social definitions of family and identity that is so pervasive as to be largely invisible. As each person—*adopted or not*—interacts with these programs, their family stories are channeled through the digital template created for documenting kinship. Yet, as my experience of creating a family tree shows, the structure of this program requires a particular kind of engagement. I cannot enter more than one set of parents. I cannot have siblings from different sets of parents. I am asked to label my adoptive relationships as "non-biological" (though I do not comply). Engaging with these programs continually reconstructs and maintains U.S. patriarchal definitions of family in individual genealogical records. The messages are clear for adoptees that we do not fully belong anywhere.

Yet adoptees are not the only outsiders. This system defining family legitimacy has also been used throughout U.S. history to regulate families of color, families living in poverty, and all other kinship relations "deviating" from the patriarchal nuclear family ideal.[17] Cultural Studies scholar Julia Watson emphasizes the disjuncture between western genealogical traditions and the family structures of Indigenous, enslaved, and colonized people in the United States.

> If we turn to accounts of how to map genealogy for historical 'others', it becomes clear that its practices have been formed around the normative WASP subjects who first invaded and ordered America. (Watson 1996, p. 308)

Genealogical templates for "legitimate" Eurocentric family trees cannot accommodate the multiplicity of kinship forms that have characterized families of color in the U.S.[18] There is a reason for this: genealogy functions as a tool of assimilation and settler colonialism in its adherence to "traditional" definitions of family. In his history of the cultural and historical shifts in practices of genealogy, Weil explains:

> From the 1860s to the mid-twentieth century, racial purity, nativism, and nationalism successfully dominated the quest for pedigree and gave genealogy more contemporary

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16 Ancestry.com has developed ways of representing more than one set of parents in their algorithm. One set is still designated as the default parents that appear in the family tree, but the other set can be accessed by clicking. https://support.ancestry.com/s/question/0D51500001wVrfFCAS/two-sets-of-parents. As I said earlier, genealogy website differ in the specificities of how information is accessed and represented. Yet, all of the websites still reflect and articulate ideological definitions of legitimate family.

17 Dill (1988); Glenn (1994); Gutierrez (2009); Davis (1981); O'Sullivan (2016).

18 Dill (1988).

ideological relevance than ever before. The language of race, heredity, and later eugenics invaded the genealogical spheres, helping many white Americans describe themselves self-consciously as Anglo-Saxons and claim racial and social superiority over others. (Weil 2013, p. 6)

Genealogy as social practice shifts over time and across place, imbuing intimate relationships with societal definitions of legitimate family. In the U.S., the practice is deeply embroiled in the politics of race and reproduction. Legitimacy is a socially defined category that has been used historically to regulate kinship, belonging, and inheritance (Murray 2012). What relations of power facilitate my inclusion while denying the inclusion of others? As I have discussed, biology and culture are not the only forces shaping familial belonging. Laws and social policies regulating reproduction, property, and legitimacy have functioned differently at various historical moments.

4. What I Found: Legitimacy and Redacted History

Wikitree, like other genealogy websites, operationalizes hegemonic definitions of legitimate family that support and maintain ideal kinship forms. The family tree I found there was the legitimate documentation of a complex set of relationships representing the growth and development of a web of kinship ties over time. In this section, I consider the ways that the limited system I have been discussing reproduces a redacted version of family history.

My understanding of what kinship relationships mean was shaped through interaction with public narratives about roots, adoption, and family trees that I encountered in media and social interactions. Like many adoptees, I internalized a narrative that suggested that I was not a "real" member of my adoptive family. Yet, when I was twelve or so, my grandmother told me that I was more like her than any of her grandchildren. I was confused, given the societal pressure to envision biology as the touchstone for authentic family ties. I said, "How can that be? I was adopted." She didn't miss a beat. She said, "Oh, I always forget that." She provided me an alternative story about how I belong in my family. I was grafted into a family tree and nourished by its roots. I actively sought out those roots by asking my parents and grandparents about family history.

My grandmother was proud of her Union-soldier grandfather, and his older brother who had been a well-decorated Rear Admiral during the Civil War; there was even a battleship named for this Union officer, the U.S.S. Fairfax[19]. This was as far back in her family history as I ever heard, but she laughed as she assured me that I would be eligible to join the Daughters of the American Revolution, should I think such things mattered. Her healthy disregard of class pretensions shaped our family deeply. As an adoptee, the DAR wouldn't have me anyway; their membership status is dependent on a proven biological connection to an American "patriot". Their website states: "All lineage for the DAR must be bloodline descent."[20] Adoptees are invited to apply based on biological connections to their birth families. Of course, many adoptees do not even know who their birth parents are, due to sealed adoption records so, as I have discussed, this "choice" is often not really an option.

Years ago, when I asked her about our family history, my grandmother told me "Aunt Bird and Aunt Bell always said we were related to Lord Fairfax. But he didn't have any children". She laughed about the pretensions of caring about such things. It was apparently a bit of a family joke in my grandmother's era that we were descendants of Lord Thomas Fairfax, the only British peer residing in Colonial America, and proprietor of the vast Northern Neck Territory in what became the state of Virginia. The premise of the humor was both that ours was not a wealthy family, and that we were Northerners whose family had been in Pennsylvania for generations, and thus, certainly had never enslaved anyone. That we are a "white" family was an assumption so fundamental that to have considered otherwise was unheard of.

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[19] https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Fairfax-288.
[20] https://www.dar.org/im-adopted-can-i-still-become-member.

I assumed my family had always been Northerners, until I learned my great-great grandfather and his brother were the only members of their prominent Southern slave-holding family to enlist in the Union military during the Civil War. When they left the South for good, they left those family stories behind. This discovery links me to a meticulously documented lineage available on wikitree (and many other websites), where I find histories, including kings and queens and lords and ladies and founding fathers. Once I found the details of my great great grandfather's birth, it was clear that the aunts were correct. Edwin Cary Fairfax[21] was the son of a wealthy Virginia planter who enslaved human beings and used them for their labor. When the Civil War began, Edwin followed his older brother's footsteps North and enlisted in the Union Army. He proudly served under Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox. He named his oldest daughter, my great grandmother, Nellie Grant Fairfax,[22] after the daughter of General Grant. He made a modest life as a carpenter for himself and his family in Pennsylvania, and erased all connections to the history of slavery as best he could. Along with knowledge of these prominent historical figures comes a disturbing history of enslavement and oppression, that some of my ancestors were apparently eager to rebel against. What is my connection to this history? As an adoptee, I already have a troubled relationship to the very notion of genealogy—not belonging fully to either my adoptive or birth family histories. My identification leans toward the insider-outsider kin, like Edwin and his brother. Thus, I went looking for more life stories. If my own inclusion in this family tree is grounded in definitions of "legitimacy", then I have to consider whose stories may have been excluded from the family genealogy in order to maintain this illusion of social legitimacy.

The process of racializing-as-white my family genealogy depends first, on the omission of slavery in our oral family history, and second, on the legal and social fictions of genealogical legitimacy that erase enslaved ancestors from the genealogical record. Laws regulating marriage, adoption, inheritance, anti-miscegenation, labor, and property-transfer support social views of legitimate family relationships as natural, traditional, and unchanging. This construction of whiteness—intimately tied throughout U.S. history to legitimacy—obscures awareness that social categories of identity and family are shaped by power relations that shift over time, to accommodate the needs of the state. Constructions of the ideal white patriarchal family are the hinge upon which the outsiderness of "others" is defined, and thus, this public narrative of whiteness-as-purity must be critically explored.

How does one find people and stories that have been erased from history? I started looking for other ways people's lives may have been documented. It was clear that I had to move beyond the mainstream narrative represented in wikitree. I scanned documents from The Freedmen's Bureau archives, searching for family names. The property transfer records in 1813 in Alexandria, Virginia (Alexandria, Virginia Property Records 1813) provided clues to several family members' lives. On 24 December 1813, Wilson Miles Cary,[23] a newly discovered grandfather seven generations back, "conveyed by deed of trust" three enslaved girls: "Sally and Charlotte two negro girls . . . and Julia a mulatto girl" to his son-in-law, for "the use and benefit of his daughter."[24] Were these girls Christmas gifts for his daughter? The precision in legally recording the racial identity of these three girls reflects the significance these categorizations of race had in regards to personhood and citizenship in the antebellum era. Was "Julia a mulatto girl," his daughter too? Did he send her away to remove the reminder, for his wife, that he increased their wealth by raping and impregnating enslaved women?[25]

Virginia law dictated that the race of the child followed the race of the mother. The children enslavers fathered with the women they raped were legally "mulatto" and enslaved like their mothers. Dorothy Roberts explains:

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21   https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Fairfax-283.
22   https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Fairfax-282.
23   https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Cary-835.
24   (Alexandria, Virginia Property Records 1813). http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/importation.shtml.
25   See Davis (1981); Dill (1988); Collins (1991); Roberts (1997).

Racism created for white slaveowners the possibility of unrestrained reproductive control. The social order established by powerful white men was founded on two inseparable ingredients: the dehumanization of Africans on the basis of race, and the control of women's sexuality and reproduction. The American legal system is rooted in this monstrous combination of racial and gender domination. One of America's first laws concerned the status of children born to slave mothers and fathered by white men: a 1662 Virginia statute made these children slaves. (Roberts 1997, p. 23)

Julia's mother is completely erased in this property transaction. Under what circumstances did a white man rape this unnamed enslaved Black woman? How did he justify his brutal behavior? He likely engaged what sociologist Patricia Hill Collins calls "controlling images" like the "Jezebel" to convince himself she wanted it (Collins 1991). Narratives of Black women's deviant sexuality have functioned as justification for rape in public discussions of race, gender, class, sexuality, and family throughout the history of the U.S.[26] She is an illegitimate mother, and thus, she is erased from the historical record.

It is important to make visible the ways that sociopolitical narratives support the scaffolding of social law regulating reproduction and family, and critically explore the ways that these complex definitions of family operate through legal fictions of exclusion that are reproduced in subtle and overt ways in everyday life. In her award-winning book, *The Hemingses of Monticello*, historian Annette Gordon-Reed discusses family legitimacy under slavery.

Slavery simply provided families in the South with many more ways to be bizarre than in regions where it never took hold or was abandoned early on. Fathers owning sons, brothers giving away brothers as wedding gifts, sisters selling their aunts, husbands having children with their wives and then their wives' enslaved half sisters, enslaved black children and their free little white cousins, living and playing together on the same plantation—things that by every measure violate basic notions of what modern-day people think family is supposed to be about. (Gordon-Reed 2008, p. 559)

Fictions and erasures of kin function in relation to laws defining family members beyond the pale as illegitimate. Constructions of whiteness were, and are, central to social definitions of legitimate family and citizenship in the U.S., both then and now. Recognition of Julia as family challenges the sociopolitical narratives designed to make slavery appear normal and natural. Within the terms of this kinship system she cannot be acknowledged without undermining the premises undergirding the entire social structure of that time and place. And her story continues to be erased by the configuration of online genealogy programs, contributing to a whitewashed view of history.

In each era, laws, policies, and cultural understandings of legitimate family regulate belonging. "Illegitimate" children—those born outside the socially sanctioned category of legal marriage—are erased from the family tree. In 1813 in Alexandria, Virginia racial identity defined the boundaries of personhood, family, and legitimacy. Julia never became part of the official family tree because her existence would challenge ideologies of whiteness as purity, and expose the common social practice—particularly after the 1770 law banning the importation of slaves into Virginia—of white men increasing their wealth by raping women they enslaved. This reproductive practice was made invisible through erasure and denial. The transfer of Julia as property from her biological father to her biological sister was facilitated by laws defining her outside of familial relations and outside of personhood because she was "illegitimate"—born outside the sanctioned kinship system. This property transfer and its absence in the genealogical record supported white supremacy by maintaining political narratives about pure white families. It continues to narrate a redacted form of history that denies the existence of power and oppression within families and between families and the state.

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[26] See Davis, Dill, Collins, Roberts.

Julia's identity and lived experience of family were shaped by societal definitions of race, sexuality, gender, legitimacy, and personhood in the U.S. in the historical moment in which she was born. Census records in the early 1800s recorded only the gender and age of enslaved people. The only trace of her existence is the documentation of a legal transaction. This property transfer is the only record of her life that I have found. Why does this story speak to me so profoundly? She is likely to have been a biological member of my adoptive family, though she was defined out of the family by social definitions of illegitimacy tied to race, gender, and capitalism. She was born outside of sanctioned relationships—under duress and oppression—and so her identity as a family member was denied at every level of meaning production.

What is my relationship to Julia? By the legal terms of family in the United States, we are not related because she has been excluded. According to genetic definitions of family, we are not family because I do not genetically belong to our family. Yet, when I consider the affiliation I feel with her based on our shared status as illegitimate, I must claim her as kin. What can we learn by looking at our different relationships to this family and its history? We were each born outside of sanctioned marriage and thus were defined as illegitimate. A legal transaction marked each of our exclusions from biological family. She was the child transferred out of the family in the antebellum era in order to ensure the illusion of wealthy white Southern families as pure and untainted by miscegenation or illegitimacy. The legal papers documenting her transfer from one family to another were recorded in the property records office, not the family Bible[27]. I was the child assimilated into the family through adoption in the post-World War II era, signifying a sort of redemption from the stigma of infertility for my adoptive parents and of illegitimacy for my birth parents. The legal documents detailing my actual birth are sealed by the state and unavailable except by court order. Neither of us is accurately documented in the family tree. Sociopolitical stories and legal fictions erase all traces of the legitimate transactions that defined our lives.

I wonder who Julia considered family after she was taken from her mother. Who told her stories that made her feel that she belonged somewhere? What genealogy did she claim for herself? How did she understand the meanings of race, gender, and property that regulated her life? How did she make sense of the relationships between herself and the biological relatives that enslaved and exploited her? The genealogical assumptions operating in that era would never have allowed for the inclusion of Julia in the family tree. Her absence is an effect of power. My erasure in my birth family histories is also an effect of power, as is my inclusion in the family history Julia and I share.

5. Conclusions: Claiming Roots and Belonging

Given the emphasis on genetic determinism in the contemporary U.S., people tend to assume that "real" genealogy is about biology and blood. For me, it is more about enculturation and stories. It is not in spite of adoption that I am interested. It is because of adoption. The insider-outsider social location of adoptees, in relation to both our birth and adoptive families, makes a connection to genealogy that is much more important to me. As Sarup explains, "the person with roots takes them for granted, while the person with no roots whatsoever is vividly aware of them, like some phantom ache in an amputated limb" (Sarup 1996, p. 4). Yet, the notion of "roots" (and what constitutes them) is profoundly shaped by social context. Power shapes constructions and understandings of kinship as surely as nature and nurture do—perhaps more, because its presence is so frequently invisible.

The tensions between exploring my birth or adoptive family history cannot be resolved. If I have to choose, I go with the people I love. The family that raised me feels real, whereas my birth parents feel like strangers. The sisters and parents I grew up with shaped my sense of self and the world in clearly identifiable ways. The stories my family told me, the ways my parents socialized my sisters

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27 See Weil for a discussion of the common practice in the 19th century U.S. of documenting family births, deaths, and lineages in the family Bible.

and I, was rooted in their own family histories. The lived experience of kinship is conveyed in stories and memories that establish connections between people to whom we are "related".

For me, the lived experience of kinship far outweighs the genetic scripts of possibility encoded in each cell of my body[28]. The meaning and articulation of the genetic codes my birth family passed on to me took shape and grew as part of the family that loved me and socialized me. The biggest influence of my birth parents was their absence and a lack of information about my biological family history. The relationships I have with my birth parents feel like shells of loss and unmet expectation. Social categories of parent and child did not play out according to the scripts any of us were raised with. Their children do not feel like siblings. Their identities and families do not constitute the "truth" of myself, yet my adoptive parents do not hold the sole key to my sense of self either. These are not either/or questions. I have been influenced by both families, in different ways. Nature and nurture matter, but they are not the entire story.

I read the social practice of genealogy as an operationalizing narrative enforcing normative constructions of legitimate families and identities. It shapes individual documentation of family to fit the structure of its template. These genealogical templates correspond to social and legal definitions of legitimate kinship. The structure of the family tree online programs literally enforces a normative public family story. The gaps between the genealogical template and the lived experience of family are useful for thinking about the ways that "difference" from this norm is regulated and erased, further entrenching this view of family as "natural" and "normal".

My research makes visible power inequalities governing family reproduction at macro levels by exploring the contradictions and slippages regarding family "legitimacy" in micro level online genealogical constructions of adoptees' family trees. Patriarchal family structures are naturalized and normalized in family tree programs, and the erasure of people outside the boundaries of "legitimacy" is necessary for the reproduction of socially ideal families. The nature versus nurture framework for identity limits our understandings and obscures attention to power inequalities driving the social practice of adoption.

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28 This is not necessarily a common view among adoptees. In fact, many of the adoptees I have interviewed over the years have not felt a sense of belonging in their adoptive families, and thus have invested more meaning in biological views of identity and family than in cultural and relational views. Much of the public and academic discourse about adoption stays within this framework. Some people embrace biological explanations. Others believe culture and environment shape identity and family. This "commonsense" framework for understanding identity and family is rarely questioned.

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"I'm More Than Just Adopted": Stories of Genealogy in Intercountry Adoptive Families

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Abstract: In contrast to the historical 'blank slate' approach to adoption, current policy places significant emphasis on providing children with knowledge; family history; biological connections; stories, a genealogy upon which to establish an authentic identity. The imperative for this complex, and often incomplete, genealogy is also explicit within the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption established in 1993 to ensure that intercountry adopted children will be provided with a genealogical 'heritage'. Yet, despite the recurring dominance of this approach, 'heritage' remains an ambiguous dictum which holds the expectation that adopted children should have access to any available birth/first family information and acquire cultural competence about an often distant and removed birth country. Providing such heritage becomes the responsibility of intercountry adoptive parents. It is therefore unsurprising that this role has become part of how intercountry adoptive parents perform and display their parenting and family practices before and after adoption (Richards 2014a; 2018). Such family work is explicit in the stories that parents and children coconstruct about birth family, abandonment, China, and the rights of adopted children to belong first and foremost to a birth country. Using qualitative data provided by a social worker, eleven girls aged between five and twelve, and their parents, this article explores the role and changing significance of narratives as familial strategies for delivering such heritage obligations. Outlined in this discussion is the compulsion to provide a genealogical heritage by adoptive parents which can ultimately be resisted by their daughters as they seek alternative and changing narratives through which to construct their belongings and identities.

Keywords: Belonging; Intercountry adoption; China; Narratives; Genealogy

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1. Introduction

Despite the contentious and controversial practices which take place under the name of intercountry adoption, it continues to be a welfare option available for a few children internationally. As a practice, intercountry adoption extends our understanding of adoption and is defined as being the legal process by which a child habitually resident in one country or state (origin/sending) is moved to another country or state (receiving) as a result of permanent adoption by a person or persons habitually resident in the receiving state (ArcAdoption 2013; Department for Education 2011). An added and frequently provocative aspect to intercountry adoption is a transracial element. This term is clarified as being an adoption 'of a child of one race by parents of another' (Triseliotis et al. 1997, p. 160, see also Barn 2013; Barn and Kirton 2012).

Intercountry adoption (ICA) is commonly (but not exclusively) regulated through the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption established in 1993. It usually (but, again not exclusively) involves the transfer of children from Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, to North America and Western Europe (Leifsen 2008). In 2011 Rotabi and Bunkers (Rotabi and Bunkers 2011) claimed that approximately one million children have been adopted internationally since the Second World War. Recent statistics however, show a significant decline in

ICA since 2004 with numbers dropping by half (Selman 2017). In England the number of intercountry adoptions has always been, and remains, very low with just 58 application received by the Department for Education in 2017 and 60 adoptions. Less than 5 of these adoptions were from China. Despite this small number, China has previously been one of the most popular sending countries for the UK and the focus of a number of previous studies such as the British Chinese Adoption Study (Feast et al. 2013; Rushton et al. 2012).

Significant research exists concerning the potential impact of taking a child from one country and incorporating them into another through adoption (Juffer 2006; Smolin 2004). Less is known about the ways that intercountry adoptive families actually manage the undoubted challenges that this represents (Jacobson 2008; Juffer and Tieman 2012). Allen (2007, p. 125) argues that a 'lack of knowledge and insight into racial and cultural issues' portrayed by intercountry adopters is a valid cause of concern. Yet, Selwyn and Wijedasa (2008) argue that in England little research has taken place with adoptive families to identify how ethnicity, culture and belonging are facilitated. Given the critical discourse and polarised debates which surround this practice (see for example Bartholet and Smolin 2012), it is perhaps unsurprising that the voices of those most affected by intercountry adoption are seldom heard (Gibbons and Rotabi 2012). My research explores how the complexities of belonging are managed, displayed, and performed by adoptive families (Richards 2014a; 2018). This qualitative research focused on the stories of nine families and ten girls aged between five and twelve years and one social worker who specialised in ICA and was involved in the application process of some of the families who took part in this PhD study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with parents and a creative journal activity with the girls where they were able to tell stories, draw pictures, add photos and other small artefacts to illustrate their narratives. These methods sit within a child focused methodological approach and were supported overall by a feminist ethic of care (Cockburn 2005). The families live in England and have adopted children from China. It was not my intention to focus only on girls in the study but the families who came forward to participate all had daughters. Explanations about the prevalence of girls available for adoption from China are complex and under researched, though it is often assumed to be a response to the implementation of China's one child policy (now abolished). It is the stories of these very young adoptees that I sought to highlight in response to their lack of voice elsewhere in the field.

There are a number of relevant studies about intercountry adoption which include discussions on identity. Volkman (2005, p. 32) research with transracial adoptees in Sweden illustrates the 'complex transformations in identity' within the adoption process. Dorow (2006, p. 4) conducted research with adoptive parents and argues that identity narratives for children are both complex and 'relational'. Howell's (Howell 2006) research, set in Norway, includes the voices of adult intercountry adoptees who claim an over emphasis is placed socially on their adoptive status. Feast et al.'s (2013) study provided accounts from adult Chinese adoptees living in the UK where, like previous research, fluidity in identity is suggested (see also Malhotra 2013). Furthermore, Howell (2006) argues that differing aspects of identity can be emphasised in certain social contexts. Echoing Howell's findings, Moinian (2009) study on identity, though not about adoption, also illustrates that certain identity traits can be more salient in specific contexts.

Such research reminds us that our identity narratives are not fixed, can be contested, relate to the past, and also, to a potential 'myth of origin'. These narratives help explain the present and hold a plan for the future too (Yuval-Davis 2011, p. 14). Nevertheless, it is commonly a fixed, essentialised, and naturalised understanding of identity and belonging that is prevalent in adoption literature and practice (Richards 2012; 2014a). These natural belongings are regarded as primordial ties and position ethnic and biological ties as pre-social and pre-cultural (Shils 1957). Such fixed biological, familial connections facilitate a sense of continuity, where identity is assembled through narratives of generational succession (Warner 1991). These blood-based connections are associated with belonging to a nation state, a birth place, and they create prescribed bonds between biological and familial belonging which have come to be essentialised as integral to identity (Bartholet 1999). These

'primordial components' (Yuval-Davis 2011, p. 409) of identity dominate adoption discussion, policy, and practice (Richards 2012). 'The naturalised biological family, with its privileged status (both socially and politically) as a location for authentic belonging is a powerful discourse which creates a particular truth about how we should belong, and to whom' (Richards 2018, p. 55). Geertz (1963, p. 108) describes these 'congruities of blood' as 'overpowering' and coercive where obligation in one form or another to these ties is a universal experience.

Without 'blooded belongings', adopted children and adults are socially constructed as lacking complete identity narratives and thus risk the development of an authentic identity (Richards 2012). Such 'genealogical bewilderment' (Sants cited in Volkman 2005, p. 26) must be compensated for (Richards 2018). In intercountry adoption this compensation begins with genealogical stories; narratives of belonging both to birth families and adoptive families, to birth country and adopted country. These narratives must also attempt to move beyond ethnic and racial boundaries. Such genealogical narratives are threaded together from known and assumed personal history. For girls adopted from China concepts such as abandonment and orphanage care become focal points of their early narratives. These components structure the genealogies constructed for, with, and about adoptees and 'script' their belonging stories (Richards 2018, p. 56).

Adoption policy in England makes the necessity of heritage explicit. Under the dictum of best interests, English law allow those who are adopted to research their background and birth families and gain access to records of their adoption (Mignot 2017). Life books are an accepted and expected activity which utilises the knowledge held about birth families and adoptive families (Watson et al. 2015). Social work practice therefore reproduces this primordial heritage imperative through providing genealogical life stories and access to a birth culture, in the name of children's best interests (Richards 2014b). In consequence, adoptive families, seeking to support their children's identity development and belonging, develop stories, strategies, and family practices to facilitate their children's complex genealogical belonging through birth, blood, country, and adoption.

This article sets out the significance of heritage as an adoptive birthright before outlining its emphasis in relevant legislation. The centrality of this focus is then explored by using data from parents and their children which highlights the ways in which genealogical knowledge is facilitated in these intercountry adoptive families.

2. The Imperative of Genealogy as a Birthright in Adoption

The shift from a previously dominant blank slate approach in adoption, to a stance where familial knowledge, adoption circumstances, and cultural heritage are expected to be available for adopted children, occurred in part as a result of changing ideas about childhood and the best interests of children. The principle of the best interests is now central in all legislation surrounding children and underpins adoption discourse (Aldridge 1994). Increasing emphasis on rights discourses also continue to inform welfare provision for children and adoption policy in England. However, Roby (2007) succinctly contextualises the associated ambiguity of a rights based discourse in intercountry adoption by differentiating three stages in the adoption process which rely upon rights to justify policy and practice. Before adoption: rights to a family, birth culture, and access to adequate health care, along with the right to survive, are emphasised. During adoption: the child has a right to be adopted, to be provided for by a family which has been suitably prepared and assessed, and to be able to consent. Post adoption: access to a birth culture and adoption records, social acceptance, and full family membership within adopted country are required. This last set of rights makes explicit the role of genealogy as being both a right and in the best interests of the child (Richards 2014b) and speaks to the complexity of the belonging narratives.

The genealogical aspect of identity formation is particularly challenging in intercountry adoption as often little, if any, knowledge is available about the biological family. In China, it is generally assumed that a number of infants become available to adopt as a result of abandonment. For children adopted transracially and intercountry, this severance of genealogical ties has commonly induced silence, making

discussion about birth family and origins very difficult to broach (Volkman 2005). A blank slate therefore contradicts both the best interests of the child dictum, kinship ideology, and rights discourses as enshrined in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC). It is these rights that are used to shape The Hague Convention (1993) through which adoptions between China and England are organised, articulated most succinctly in the Subsidiarity Principle. In accord with this principle, UNCRC place intercountry adoption as a suitable option only when all domestic options including fostering and suitable institutional care have been exhausted.

Children's right to access their heritage holds a recurring emphasis in adoption policy and practice. I argue that heritage in this context refers to a continued acknowledgment of primordial, essentialised identities attributed and fixed through birth and a biological family. In this prevailing discourse children's successful identity formation thus becomes inextricably linked to an ethnic, cultural birthplace in adoption policy and practice, which seeks to protect this identity.

3. The Presence of Heritage in Policy

Hollingsworth (1998) has previously highlighted five broad professional principles in adoption policy and practice. These include the significance of ethnic heritage; the primacy of the biological parents and relatives in raising children; that children should not lose their biological families through economic hardship alone; and that effort and preference for same race adoption should be pursued, with alternative arrangements (such as transracial and intercountry adoption) only acceptable if a child is otherwise deprived of a permanent family and home. 'These fundamental principles have become key narratives (Bruner 2004) of adoption and have informed national and international policy development' (Richards 2018, p. 56). The role of adoption policy has been to enable children to be re-incorporated into a family structure and to provide the most appropriate care for the wellbeing of children (Keating 2009). Such reconstitution embeds children into the institution of family but, as the principles above indicate, through inferior or subordinate attachments which lack genealogical roots. These are the belongings of paper rather than blood, of choice rather than fate. As a result, adoptive families, described by Gailey (2000, p. 296; see also Schneider 1968) are suggested to hold a 'diluted' 'sense of belonging'. From a primordial perspective nature or blood will always be privileged over nurture (Hawkins 2016).

The Hague Convention (1993) evokes these key belonging narratives. Through the Subsidiarity Principle, it identifies the importance of birth family preservation, and the importance of programmes working towards the reunification of children with birth families in sending countries. The Convention also stipulates that in the majority of cases children's best interests are best served by keeping them within this birth family unit. In this, the legislation reflects the prevailing privileging of the biological family as being the natural and most appropriate place for children to be:

> . . . the philosophy of the body must be that its work is child-focused and the body [accredited agency] respects the priority given in the State of origin to family preservation and reunification of children and their birth families. (Hague Conference on Private Law 2012, Chapter 6, Sec. 6.1, p. 47)

The rarefied status of the biological family is explicit. Identity essentialised through birth and origin is protected and prioritised. Intercountry adoption is implicated not only in risking the authentic identity of individual children, but also risking the preservation of 'families of origin, language, culture, and religion' (Ja Sook Bergquist 2012, p. 46).

The task of the professional as identified in the legislation includes formal assessment of applicants ensuring that adopters are sufficiently prepared (Hoffman 2013), suitably matched and can offer ongoing support to children severed from family and heritage. Such preparation includes an emphasis on the possible impact of the loss of family, culture, and country for a child and how to facilitate reconnecting these ties. This is where the 'obligation' of primordial connections (Geertz 1963, p. 108) is transferred to adoptive parents. Jacobson (2008, p. 2) argues that an emphasis on 'culture keeping'

features extensively in adoption legislation and professional advice which instructs parents to educate adopted children about their birth country and culture in order to assist the development of a 'solid ethnic identity'. Such expectation and emphasis is explicit in the early stages of the application process as highlighted by the social worker in my data below:

> Anne. Beginning the process with a couple who do not know the country or perhaps have not even visited the country, is more difficult. I have always tried hard to encourage people to go and visit, I use the example of going to China where it is a difficult thing; it's in your face, busy, the smells, the dirt, and the friendliness of people, the huge things there. If you have not been there it would be foolhardy to go out to collect a child and see all these aspects of the country and culture for the first time at that point.

> I do lengthy interviews and as many as are needed. I try not to stay with people too long but I am certainly willing to because I talk, I ask questions to draw people out, because unless you actually get under the skin of people you cannot really know them. I have to get some feeling about how this person is going to cope with the practicalities and emotions of bringing up a child who comes from a different culture and maybe has a different skin colour, or a totally different ethnicity. Obviously there are some straightforward questions that one has to ask but I think that you have got to know more and delve deeper than that and find out how people tick. I think I am pretty intrusive, not in delving into people's personal thoughts necessarily but I need to feel that I have got to know these people.

Throughout the intensive application process, adopting parents are made aware of the complex weaving of biological and adoptive belongings that they must construct for their children's wellbeing. One adoptive father (below) speaks about trying to establish this belonging. Harry begins by describing letter writing to a daughter not yet adopted. These letters are used to establish a connecting link with daughters but also to facilitate a sense of family 'history' as he describes it.

> Sarah. Angela has described how you both wrote pre-adoption letters to your daughters prior to their adoption, can you tell me about your motivation for doing this?

> Harry. We had written letters to them because it was part of us doing something in the wait. Also, writing a diary we just called her 'my Darling'; but there was a level of engagement and attachment from that which was reinforcing and it focused on her.

> Sarah. Had you been told that letter writing was something that was good to do, or did you just feel motivated to do this?

> Harry. I don't remember being told to do this; it came out of who we are as people and out of our lived experiences. We are not trying to compensate for their massive personal loss, to lose absolutely everything, but how we might give them something to, not replace what they had lost but a sense of belonging to a family I suppose. We had wanted to be parents for so long that once you had the child you were on a high really, that's what I felt, a high that lasted quite some time, I felt quite invincible. Once you had your child you feel that you've climbed Everest and were coming down to a welcome committee. People who had shared the journey with us, friends who were on the adoption video and shared the story with us are important to have.

> Sarah. Do you often watch the video?

> Harry. Yeah, well the girls really like to watch it, we put on the video, which highlights the journey while we were there. They love watching it themselves and seeing really significant events.

> I guess we are sowing the seeds for the future really, doing this now so that we can give them a history, helping them now but also giving them something in the years to come. I have a

box that belonged to my grandfather and it is important to me, I want them to feel the same connection to him as I feel, that he is their great grandfather and that they feel connected to him through the box and me.

Overall (1997) demonstrates the privileging of the biological, genetic connection through identification of similarities with one's children that enables a sense of continuity and history to be felt; an identity to be constructed through a 'narrative of generational succession' (Warner 1991). Individual identity is constructed as being embedded within familial identity (Lawler 2008) and here the relationship between a 'natural' biological identity and a 'cultural or social' belonging of adoption are both articulated by Harry. He actively constructs a social belonging for his daughters whilst simultaneously declaring aspirations that his own biological belongings will also be significant to them. His obligation to primordial ties and adoptive ones are explicit.

The importance of preserving information relating to children's origins, background, and family history is highlighted throughout the Hague Convention, though in practice this information can be quite limited and leave many gaps in the knowledge that children, and the adults they become, might seek. Adult adoptees speak of the importance of having this knowledge described as being, 'big information' but also, 'little and seemingly insignificant' details about their past (Richards 2014b, p. 9). The Convention states (2013) that this historical knowledge about origins, identity, and culture help to establish or maintain connections to a birth country and culture. Adoptive parents are both tasked, and personally motivated to support their children's wellbeing in attempting to provide such connections. With very young children this belonging is developed and initially performed through storytelling.

4. The Performance and Display of Heritage in Families

Adoption stories are powerful narratives which not only connect the adoptive parent to the child and child to place and race, but play a role in maintaining the moral and social order (Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000). In biological families, narratives play a key role in perpetuating family lineage and reinforcing the role of blood and biology in the normative family structure. In adoptive families, they emphasise the social importance of the biological family by situating the child in this family before any adoption narrative can be told.

4.1. Birth and Biological Stories

Birth stories seek to anchor children to a biological family, birth country, and culture; a starting point from which identity and alternative belongings can emerge. These stories also serve to retain the primacy and privilege of the biological, blood belongings so dominant in familial ideology. Lawler (2008) reminds us that blood ties are not ties in themselves but socially constructed and therefore symbolic of connection. Yet, as Shils (1957) contends, a primordial discourse is given a status of natural and therefore more powerful than social. Such symbols of connection are created in these adoptive families through relations which begin in an orphanage (known or assumed), birth province, birth country, and adoption date. The social context makes such stories compulsive telling and the wellbeing of adoptees is assumed to be based upon such origin stories. These are the stories articulated in the adoption process, that 'good' adoptive parents must perform in their children's 'best interest' (Richards 2018). They form part of the culture making activities that these families engage with, and through which these families recognise and understand their belongings.

Part of the adopted parent role is to establish a biological familial link, to facilitate a kinship with a biological mother and family, whose absence in the girls' lives is described by Dorow (2006, p. 164) as 'loud'. The biological family is commonly symbolised by an idealised maternal figure. In this kinship work (Traver 2009), the adoptive mother becomes the means by which the biological mother as a symbolic figure is maintained. In the picture below, the affective labour of the adoptive mother has provided a daughter with a birth mother narrative that she can use to build an imagined biological

family and so assist her to become familiar with this biological link and her relationship to it. The birth mother has the largest of the heads and is the starting point from which the rest of the narrative flows: See Figure 1.
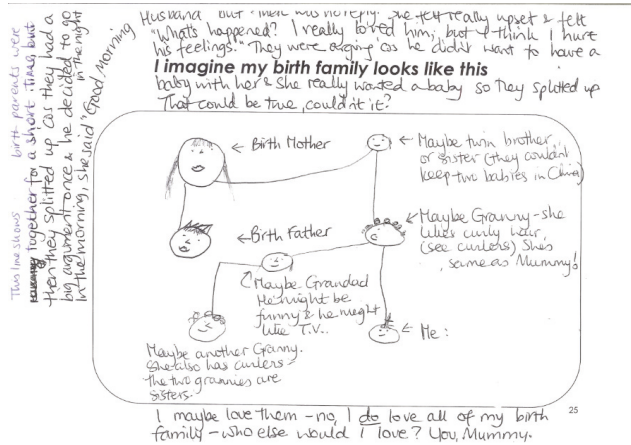

Figure 1. Amy's imagined birth family.

The story told with this picture explains Amy's absence from this imagined birth family and provides a key role for the birth mother. Amy's adoptive mother wrote the story on the picture at Amy's request:

> Amy (aged 7yrs) My birth parents were together for a short time before they splitted up because they had a big argument once and he decided to go. In the morning she said "good morning husband" but there was no reply. She felt really upset and felt "what has happened? I really loved him but I think I hurt his feelings." They were arguing because he didn't want to have a baby with her and she really wanted a baby so they splitted up. That could be true, couldn't it? [she asks her adoptive mother]

The story above provides a birth family and sets the scene for an abandonment narrative which attempts to explain the separation of child from biological family. Kinship making requires another key activity commonly ascribed to the mothering role in adoption discourse, attempting to fill the gaps that the absence of a biological family can incur. Dorow indicates the significance afforded this role:

> The affective labor of creating an originary identity for the child tells us how blood and culture speak to each other, through gendered kinship, racialised fantasies, and national imaginaries. (Dorow 2006, p. 165)

Rosenblum et al. (2006) identify this role as both complex and unique to adoptive families. However, within adoptive families this task is construed as normative and facilitated through the telling of stories. Genealogical gaps are said to undermine the adoptees' authentic identity and adoptive parents are tasked with teaching their children to manage this loss and offer what they can to fill the gaps (Lacher et al. 2005). Below an adoptive mother highlights the recurring relevance of her daughter's connections with her birth family that her affective labour helps to support;

> Angela. We created a page in her life book that became a conversation about genetics and how she would always be connected to her birth family through her genes.

Angela's daughter Lisa (aged 8 yrs) confirms this influence of her genes in her picture of her birth family where the figures wore glasses. As she drew she explained that this is where her own short sightedness comes from. See Figure 2.
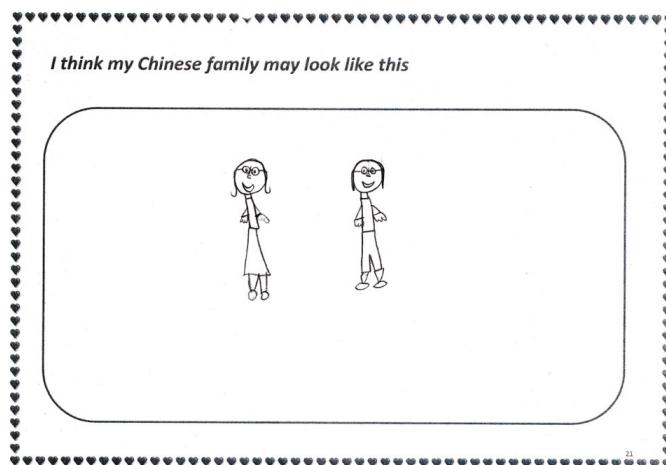

Figure 2. Lisa's birth family drawing.

4.2. Abandonment Stories

It is commonly assumed that many of the girls adopted from China have been abandoned before coming under the care of local orphanages. Such details are frequently given to adopting parents at the time of the adoption. How, and when, to share this information with daughters is something each family has to individually decide. Below, Angela speaks of her anxiety about telling her daughter Lisa that she was found at the orphanage gate in a cardboard box:

> Angela. I just didn't know how I was going to be able to tell her. Then one day when she was about three she said 'let's play Mummies and Babies'. I said 'okay' and she said 'I'll be the baby and you can be my Chinese Mummy'. I was a bit nervous about this but we began this play acting and before I knew it I was acting out her abandonment. I was holding her in my arms on the floor, hugging her and saying 'I love you so much but I cannot look after you, what can I do? I have to put you somewhere safe so others can take care of you'. Tears were streaming down my face as I acted out putting her in a box, saying 'this will keep the wind and the rain off you, it will keep you safe'. The amazing thing was that as I was playing this part, the box really did become a source of refuge for her rather than something to be thrown away as I had always thought. I was sobbing buckets by now. Lisa put her hand against my cheek and said 'Don't worry Mummy, my English Mummy is coming soon and she will look after me'.

Others choose to follow guidance about how to explore this topic with their children as Ruth highlights:

> Ruth. We have some terminology that we decided as a family: Birth mother and birth father, the conventional British, suggested adopted term. We never use the term abandoned; we always use the term found. We tell her no lies but simply the truth as we know it in language that she understands. We lean on the positives rather than the negatives so we say, -'you were in a safe place to be found and put there by your birth mother'. The facts only; and if we don't know the answer than we say we don't know. That is what I have been advised by others and this is what we are going to do.

Though approached in alternative and individualised ways each family has an abandonment story which is told in order for the adoption story which follows to make sense as part of these children's heritage narratives. See Figure 3.
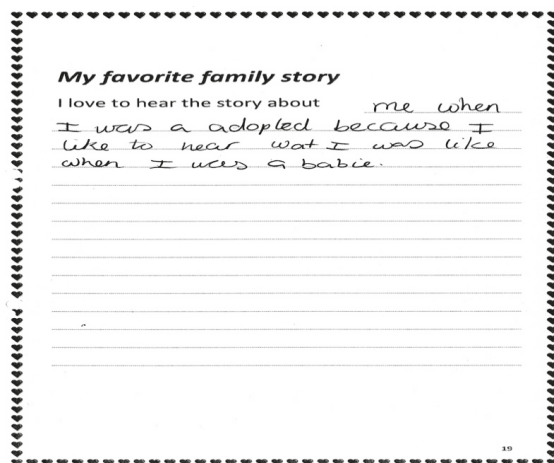

Figure 3. Louise (9yrs) depicts the significance of family stories for her.

4.3. Adoption Stories

How children came to be in their adopted families is vital belonging story which often begins with a first meeting. This first meeting in China is also when the baby is first placed in the care of the adopters. It is understandably traumatic. Sally tells her story below:

> Sally. We arrived and were told we were going to meet her the following day and then there was a knock at the hotel door and the guide was there and he said, 'baby coming in half an hour', so it was a bit of a shock and we were jet lagged and hungry. And half an hour later she was at the door screaming. They handed her to me and she went very quiet and was looking around to see where the orphanage director and carer was but she was not crying. But after they had gone she just latched onto my husband and decided to only go to him. The rest of the week that we were in China she would not come to me.

'First meeting' stories are told to the girls to help them begin to comprehend where and to whom they belong as a result of adoption. The girls themselves speak of the same events and similar key figures, but with alternative explanations. Whilst mothers such as Sally speak of strangeness, and rationalise rejection (a common experience), the girls position themselves as babies to explain their initial rejection of their adoptive parents. Wim (Sally's daughter) tells her version of the same story:

> Wim (9yrs). When I was in China, I was a baby so I don't really know what happened. I didn't like Mummy so Daddy had to carry me when we were in China. But when we got back home, Mummy gave me a chocolate biscuit and I liked her then [she laughs] Mummy thinks it was because Daddy had darker eyes and Mummy has light blue eyes and I might have been used to Daddy's colour eyes.

Lisa (7yrs) also recounts a story of initial rejection and again food is used to make a first connection. Lisa's younger sister Jane (5yrs) interjects to explain her elder sister's behaviour:

> Lisa. I cried. I remember when I kept stealing the biscuits. Well Mummy and Daddy gave me a biscuit and I ate it and then they gave [orphanage director] a biscuit and I took it because she was right next to me. They were pink ones.

Jane. You didn't understand. You were just a baby

Lisa. My Mummy calls me Peaches because when she got me I had a hole in my bottom [split in trousers traditionally used in China] and when she held me for the first time she said it was as smooth as a peach

Being 'a baby' explains the inexplicable, the rejection of the parents they now love and trust. Both girls laugh about this response to their parents and use humour in telling how the eldest also got her family nickname. Lisa claims these accounts as her memories. This perhaps is not surprising as she has been told these stories over the six years since her adoption, and has seen the video of it taking place frequently. She has participated in the telling of the story with her family members (as does her younger sibling despite being absent, and not even born when the event took place).

It is common for parents to use archived material such as video clips. Archive materials were variously used in the interviews to show me something, or provide information.

Rosie (7yrs). We watch the video about our adoptions. We took our video recorder and my Mummy and Daddy filmed it. I was sad when Mummy and Daddy adopted me

China as an imagined home space and England as home seem to be fluid in these narratives. Wim speaks of getting 'back home' after her adoption. Rosie reveals in the extract above, the collective ownership of the video recorder by the term 'we took'. The phrase also demonstrates a plurality 'we' and that she too travelled from England to China. Rosie situates herself as belonging with her family even as she talks about her adoption from her birth country and her emotions at the time. The girls know these stories because they have been told them repeatedly and as they tell them the stories shift and are restoryed (Cresswell 2008).

One father speaks of the imperative to begin telling these stories:

Frank. One of the things we got from all the application process in both domestic and intercountry adoption is that you talk about adoption before they can talk about it, you talk about it to them, and it has never been a topic that we don't talk about.

Frank's wife then adds a story which corroborates Frank's claim by telling me about the first time her daughter said 'adoption':

Thelma. She was about two years old sitting in her high chair and she said 'dopted' for the first time with a big smile on her face and this went on to become 'dopted, China'

Birth, abandonment, and adoptive narratives are used by adoptive parents to connect their children to birth families and countries as well as adopted ones. Gathering 'big information' and, 'little and seemingly insignificant' details about their past (Richards 2014b, p. 9) is part of how primordial and adoptive belonging is performed and genealogies created in these families.

4.4. Building a Genealogy

Creating a coherent and informed life narrative is a necessity if one is to be a good adoptive parent (Richards 2018). Archives, in particular, can articulate people and places from the past, they also identify our connection to these people and places, and so help us to understand who and how, we belong in the present (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005). When outlined in these terms it is unsurprising about the extent to which the families in my study engaged with archiving. The transcript below describes Tina's extensive archiving work and also her display of this ascribed role:

Tina. We are still in close contact with the manager of the hotel where we stayed [in China] for the adoption. He had breakfast with us each morning; he'd sit and tell us about his family, his children, and his wife. We still send and get emails from him. We have made it very clear that they are part of this history and that we want him to stay close to us.

Sarah. Why is this so important to you?

Tina. Because I want to maintain as much of [daughter's name,] history with us in a tangible way. I have kept the laundry receipt from the hotel; I don't know what it says as it is in Mandarin but if I can keep these things and keep these relationships then maybe instead of just me telling the story to her, maybe there can be somebody else who will say 'what my perspective was'. It's all in boxes, the jewellery that was given to her, and every card that was sent to her, even Christmas gift tags. I am in the recording business! We are going to have to buy a bigger house. I haven't parted with anything that crossed our path from the time we walked out of this house to go and get her to today. I am not quite sure yet how to compile it because if I sit down and put together a narrative it would be just that, it will be me speaking through my lens and I don't want that. I want her to see the evidence.

Tina as the archivist identifies key roles for casual strangers who happened to be at the scene of this adoption. She describes her retention of minute details and artefacts as part of the adoption story of her daughter. Such details articulate the story of the formation of her family. Anagnost (2000, p. 409) argues that the 'sentimentalization of certain objects', such as the laundry tickets and gift cards mentioned above are, constructed in anticipation of a subject who will need a record of a past and a point of origin, readily retrievable in a form 'already made up' for him or her.

The parents, particularly the mothers in my research, demonstrate explicit knowledge of this archiving role. However, anxiety about whether it is sufficient is also evident in their discussions as Janet describes:

Janet. I hope we do enough, we keep articles and keep life books and story books and read lots of books. We go to CACH [Children Adopted from China organisation] and Chinese summer school each year and we really try to keep on top of it; but it is never too late to learn. We go out on the significant dates and watch movies about adoption and read books about it and China. So we watch stuff like that and we encourage them to go to where the stuff is all kept, and read them or watch the videos whenever they want. We do not put it in their rooms because we think it is all too precious. So I try to keep it all where I can keep an eye on them because so much of it is very sentimental and irreplaceable. We also look at their Chinese adoption files with the stuff in sometimes.

Riggs (2012) argues that too little is done by adopters to comprehend the loss of a child's biological family and birth culture. Trying to balance the loss represented by this absent family for their child is one of a number of challenges for adopters in a social context which already reifies this absent yet mythical biological family. Some mothers speak either remorsefully of not yet completing the archiving (if this is actually something that is ever completed) or lapsing in some way. There is an evident feeling of compulsion or 'obligation' (Shils 1957, p. 108) on the part of adoptive parents to construct a cultural identity and archiving accords with this. Anagnost (2000) claims that this activity stems from an anxiety on the part of these parents to facilitate a secure ethnicity that they cannot provide through biology. However, I argue that it speaks of a starting point, an origin, a place where the known story can begin. It can and does (perhaps inevitably) develop into a cultural identity story in these families but it is also simply telling the story of the birth of any family. It becomes keyed (Goffman 1974) into the wider frame of adoption discourse through its formalisation into what good adoptive parents should do, even in the face of criticism for its inadequacies. Yet, the origins of this activity lie in the normative display of what families 'do'. The imminent arrival of a baby in a family can generate the archiving of artefacts that are emblematic of this event: the ultrasound image, the photos on the bookshelf, the video recording of the birth, and the retention of congratulatory cards. As Frank (2010) argues:

Stories accompany us through life from birth to death. They do not merely entertain, inform or distress us, they show us what counts as right or wrong and teach us who we are.

All families archive and tell stories using artefacts which relate to family identities. Such stories are multiple, plural in the telling and contingent, but there are always family stories as part of the way that families are constructed and displayed: the narratives of and for family life in all its diversity.

5. Narratives of Belonging

5.1. The Girl's Stories

As Frank (2010, p. 5) argues, stories remind us that we have to live with complicated truths. When asked to draw birth families, many of the girls placed themselves in these pictures. Identities which these pictures illustrate are shaped by stories told to the girls and reshaped by them as they tell them to others. It can make for a complex and conflictual space in which to determine who one is and to whom and where one belongs. See Figure 4.
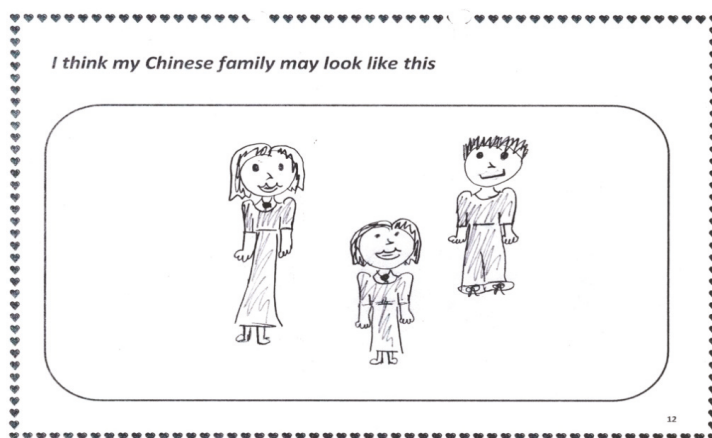
Figure 4. Louise (9 yrs).

Yngvesson and Mahoney (2000, p. 80) argue that 'proper stories need proper beginnings; [children] must be placed (in a mother's womb/on a native soil)'. This beginning is notable in many of the younger children's stories. As seen earlier, the younger girls create detailed family accounts which weave together imagined family and adoptive family belongings. Their responses also include key narrative structures, such as the orphanage, and key figures such as the police. Davies and Harre (1990) argue that individuals hold multiple social identities which are variously prominent. However, whilst some aspects of these identities can be negotiated, other attributes are imposed by dominant groups (Geertz 1963). Whilst the younger girls in my study accept and reconstruct origin narratives, some of the older participants are more resistant to creative narration and reduce the story they have been told by parents to a temporal progression to adoption and their life now.

Most participants remain willing to repeat it but not always willing to embellish or create imaginative detail:

> Louise (aged 9). I was found on a doorstep and somebody took me to the local police station. The police sent me to the children's home. The children's home arranged fostering for me and so I was fostered for about a year. A month before I was adopted, I was taken back to the children's home. I was then adopted and taken back to England

Yngvesson and Mahoney (2000, p. 78) describe adoption stories as 'broken' with attempts to fill the gaps being a way to 'generate order from disorder'. Failure to do so they claim, induces anxiety when a 'fixed point of origin cannot be supplied'. Some participants left the pages blank in my research

where the origin stories/drawings might be told and these silences are powerful narratives in their own right (Richards 2012; Richards et al. 2015; Richards and Clark). Some girls provided questions such as the one below:

May. (8yrs) where was I found? Who was I found by? Where was I taken? And who took care of me in the orphanage?

Louise (9yrs) I would like to know what happened to my birth Mum and birth Dad and why they could not keep me. See Figure 5.

Figure 5. Memories of visits to China.

These quotations eloquently depict the inadequacy of the earlier 'created' origin stories for some of the girls. Asking poignant questions is evident in the data along with the occasional challenge to the way the origin narratives have been told (see Richards 2012). The fluidity of these narratives is realised as the girls themselves tell their stories. The activities such as those described here, inevitably place significant emphasis on an ascribed heritage and genealogical narratives. Yet my research with these young girls suggests that, as they grow older they seek alternative narratives through which to situate their identity. Such findings are supported by previous research. Howell (2006) provides accounts of adoptees challenging essential identity traits. Gray (2009) study with young adult Asian adoptees in Australia also indicates that adoptees seek a broader identity narrative than 'transracial adoptee'.

5.2. Alternative Belonging Narratives

Some girls in my study indicate that essentialised stories of identity which always emphasise or reinvest in an origin narrative are no longer sufficient to identify who they are. Some of the stories indicate a desire by the tellers to move beyond these ascriptions (Richards 2012). A desire to be seen as a more rounded individual than the ascribed 'Chinese Adoptee' is evident for example, in Mel's (10yrs) statement made in response to me explaining the research to her again as part of her ongoing consent;

I am more than just adopted; I don't feel like I am different to everyone else just because I was adopted.

Interesting to note here is the past tense which Mel uses to describe her adoption. This is in contrast with the present tense used in much social work adoption literature. Adoptees seem to be burdened not only with ascribed identities which mark them as different from normative family kinship but also the enduring presence of adopted status. As Frank (2010) argues, stories can become more fate than choice. Mel eloquently placed the act of adoption in her past and puts her current self in the present 'I am more'. Such adoption stories can reveal the dis-ease of being forced to a hard game of identity difference in the context of powerful narratives that compel us to situate ourselves in one place or another '(Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000, p. 78).

Other activities such as football, swimming, and interacting with boys, if only to annoy them, are also evident in the quotations below and used to inform me of their identities:

> Jess. (9yrs) I like to hang out with my friends and go shopping. I like to go swimming club and football club. I like to do sporty things. I like to put on mini shows. I like going to my gang show rehearsals.

> Louise (9 yrs) My special friend is Sasha because she is my best friend and very nice. We like hanging out and chasing and annoying the boys.

Friendships become important belonging narratives too:

> Mel. (10 yrs) I love school! I like my friends and my teachers and I don't really like half terms because you don't see you friends every minute of the day like you would on a regular school day.

> Jenny. (12yrs) School is fun because all of us, my friends, all go round in a big group talking, playing, and laughing.

> Jess. (9 yrs) School is okay because you get lots of work but it is fun too because you have most of your friends there.

6. Have We Got the Genealogical Emphasis Right?

Genealogical narratives in intercountry adoption are complex, commonly ascribed, and seem to present an element of compulsion or obligation (Shils 1957) to construct on the part of these parents. As they grow older, the girls in this study look for opportunities to resist these origin narratives and seek instead to create other stories about the ways in which they belong. Allowing these children to decide how and when genealogical narratives are important seems to contradict both policy imperatives, family practices, and primordial assumptions. But I argue that an over emphasis on genealogical narrative risks ongoing belongings and identity formation. The necessity to comply with current policy informed by rights discourses and the children's best interest ensures that the emphasis on such origin narratives dominates the lives of these young adoptees. To secure their children's identity formation and wellbeing parents will tell and retell these stories to situate and anchor their children's belonging. Indeed, tension occurs in families as children begin to refuse or resist these stories as I have highlighted elsewhere (See Richards 2012; 2018). Gilbert (2005, p. 65) reminds us that:

> Identity cannot be described, explained, or categorised . . . what should be understood is that identity may be strategic, uneven, unstable, fragmented, heterogeneous, always in a process of change, never static, always in a state of 'becoming'. Indeed any attempt to resolve the question of identity is a fallacy.

The following account is provided by Sue, a mother who professes a desire for genealogical identity in adoption to be more pragmatic and for adoptees to have the capacity be more agentic in identity formation:

> Sue. The adoptions today are on the back of those earlier transracial adoptions when the children were told nothing, which was so, so bad, so they [social work profession] rewrote

the book and ensured that children are now told everything. But where does that leave them about where they actually belong? Maybe it is time to rewrite the book again. My father was Australian, my mother American; I regard myself as Spanish because that is where I grew up and the language I spoke. We should be the generation of adopters that say, "well actually we are going to allow our children to ebb and flow, between one and the other so that it is okay if they don't talk about their birth mother every day, that they know what they need to know when they want to know it".

The normative categories of belonging through biology, ethnicity, and country are dominant categories of the cultural space occupied by these girls, and their status, when defined through such traditional categories becomes ambiguous and difficult to classify. The uneasy fit of the girls' belongings is evident at times in their stories. Undoubtedly their adoption marks these girls as different, and on occasion, as they grow up, this difference can conflict with their desire to be the same as their peers (Friedlander 2003). Parents can feel compelled to reduce this othered nature of adoptive belongings for their daughters through stories which connect children to normative, essentialised belongings of birth, biology, and country. But I argue that these genealogical stories eventually become the narratives which exemplify difference rather than reduce it and some of the girls have become less willing to perform these identity narratives. The expectation to tell such stories and situate adoptees in the 'social order' is explicit in adoption literature (Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000). The liminality of adoption is one that wider society imposes on these adoptees and then a role that it expects them to perform. Be adopted if you wish to belong, this then is the social and political belonging of adoption that is imposed on adoptees and their families. However, these girls are not only produced by social context, they are also productive and need not be constrained by the limitations of these narratives or the absence of normative belonging that they reveal. These stories can be perceived as a starting point to move beyond, not a constant presence as adoption is commonly perceived. 'I was adopted' should perhaps be the linguistic term that we allow these girls and others to claim. Belonging can also be viewed as a threshold state where new identities and culture is formed and new social structures emerge, a boundary from which something can begin rather than end (Bhabha 1994).

Our belonging narratives need not be fixed nor should they constrain our identities, rather we should perceive them as ever-evolving carrying not only the legacies of our birth, biology, and culture but also our choices and experiences which shape who we are, who we wish to be and where we belong. As Wim (9yrs) eloquently, powerfully, yet softly stated:

'I'm more than just adopted'

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

Damaged Attachments & Family Dislocations: The Operations of Class in Adoptive Family Life

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Abstract: This paper is an initial exploration of an under researched area in the field of contemporary adoption—the impact of class on adoptive family life. The first part of the paper argues that whilst class is structurally present in adoption work, the effects of class difference have been a neglected dimension of practice. This neglect of class in adoption reflects its elision in the wider social field. It isn't that class stratification has materially or economically disappeared but that the inequalities it installs are concealed through a new privileging of individualism. This individualizing of social problems places new regimes of responsibility upon both individuals and parents. This section concludes with an exploration of the intensive field of contemporary parenting, where social background is considered unimportant. It is argued that attachment theory has become a dominant paradigm for parenting in both adoption and the wider social field because its classed notions of parenting are concealed. The second part of the paper draws upon a small scale qualitative study with one local authority adoption team where adoptive parents and birth parents were interviewed about class and parenting. Working classness assumed a structuring importance in terms of the interview material, as most participants were from this class background. Two areas are particularly foregrounded: the degree to which adopted children's class differences are interpreted as attachment difficulties and the degree to which middle-classness operates as a silent measure for successful parenting in substitute care.

Keywords: class; adoption; parenting; attachment; working-class

As a way of introducing this paper, I have four quotations from my research project on class and adoption.

The first is from two adoptive parents:

When we started the process I thought we had to be middleclass, living in a mansion house with a garden, had that in my head, one thing that slowed us down with adopting. They won't want two manual workers and ones who are still building their house

The second is from an adoption manager:

Adopters social backgrounds are irrelevant—it is whether they can parent according to PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, empathy) and how they score in attachment interview

The third is from an Adoption social worker:

It is funny you discussing class. I have had struggling adopters tell me that once their children go to school, they are drawn to play with children from the same background as their birth family. What is so surprising is that these children were removed very early from their first families

And the final quotation is from a birth mother:

I am not middleclass, I am working class; I am hoping my kids will have a bit more than working class, an education

These four quotations give four very different but related accounts of the complicated and contradictory place that class occupies in contemporary adoption. In the first quotation a working class couple are surprised that they would be acceptable adoptive parents. In the second quotation an adoption manager confirms that social background is irrelevant provided adopters have the right kind of attachments in their parenting. In the third quotation a social worker acknowledges the enduring mark of working classness in adopted children and in the final quotation a working class birth mother hopes her children's origins will be improved by adoption. All the quotations reveal a view of working classness as second class, an inferior social position but one that leaves an enduring mark that not even adoption can eradicate. Yet alongside this acknowledgment of working classness there is also its elision. Central to adoption work is the view that parenting is a class free activity and that how we parent is not informed by class. Yet the privileging of an attachment model of parenting promotes a particular classed notion of what it is to be a parent, a silent measure against which working class parenting must struggle or fail.

This paper is an initial exploration of an under researched area in the field of contemporary adoption—the impact of class on adoptive family life. It is part of a wider research study that is exploring the impact of class on contemporary open adoption, a project that develops previous research in this area. The objective is to find out more about the lived experience of class in adoption and how class attitudes and experiences operate within substitute parenting. Whilst class is enjoying a new visibility within sociology (for example: Devine et al. 2005; Atkinson et al. 2012; Biressi and Nunn 2013) and there is substantial research on mothering and class (for example: Lawler 2000; Walkerdine et al. 2001; Lareau 2003; Gillies 2007), it has been a neglected area within adoption social work. The classed nature of adoption is often commented upon, but there has been no research undertaken on how class is a significant structuring in terms of how both adoptive parenting and attachment is understood and practiced.

The paper will be in two parts. Part one will be a brief overview of how we can understand the neglect of class in adoption work. Part two will draw upon a small scale qualitative pilot study with one local authority where adopters and birth parents were interviewed to explore class and parenting in contemporary adoption.

1. The Neglect of Class in Adoption

Given that since the 1970s adoption has largely been about the transfer of working class children to middleclass families (Parker 1999; Bridge and Swindells 2003), one would expect the effects of class difference to be informing placement practice. However, whilst parenting and child welfare are central to adoption, their classed constitution is given little attention[1]. In the contemporary era of open adoption, class differences are starkly evoked, as usually middleclass educated and materially comfortable adopters sustain some kind of tie for their children with working class, impoverished and under educated birth parents. Yet there has been little research on the effects of these profound class differences. One quite obvious explanation is the nature of adoption as an intervention. Since its inception, adoption has operated to sever and remove a child's first history and to replace it with a new family culture. Whilst there have been all sorts of other changes to its practices, adoption is still understood as an intervention that can remove an original social background. This understanding was

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[1] Whilst class isn't mentioned, a recent paper (Selwyn and Meakings 2015, Vol. 39, pp. 294–302) exploring the issue of smell within the context of adoption disruption, is clearly about class. A number of adoptive parents interviewed had said that from the beginning their children 'didn't smell right' and this clearly inhibited the process of attachment. The paper did not explore the relationship between the 'wrong smell' and class differences, arguing for more essentialised biologisticbiological explanations. Yet there is a long history of the working classes being understood as the stinking poor, the great unwashed (Barret-Ducrocq 1991), which surely is contributing to these adoptersadopters' revulsion.

endorsed in the interviews with adopters where there was a strongly held view that their children's original class background would be eradicated by adoption. However, the neglect of class in adoption is not reducible to the replacement family culture that it operates. I want to now go on to explore a number of significant changes in the contemporary social field that makes the acknowledgment of class and class differences extremely challenging.

The 'disappearance of class' in western cultures has been a much explored and debated issue within political and social sciences (Bauman 2000; Žižek 2000; Butler 2004; Skeggs 2004; Tyler 2013). Of course, it isn't that class stratification has materially or economically disappeared but that the inequalities it installs are concealed through a new privileging of individualism. We live in an era where social problems are individualized, understood as caused by the actions or choices of individual subjects. There is now the view that class as a social structuring is irrelevant to how a person progresses—or not—in their life. Everyone, if they work hard and use opportunity, can get on and achieve and we all now bear an enormous responsibility for the lives we lead. It is not poverty or disadvantage that is holding people back, it is their poor self-management. By situating failure as personal not social, it has become much more difficult to both recognize and so resist the forms of inequality and injustice that contemporary class stratification produces. Bauman (2000, p. 135) captures very well this atomizing of the social:

> 'The matter of improvement is no longer a collective, but an individual enterprise. It is individual men and women on their own who are expected to use, individually, their own wits, resources and industry to lift themselves to a more satisfactory condition'.

There has been a related transformation in the field of parenting. Today parenting is defined as so determining a practice that social issues are no longer considered factors in how children are raised. This new centrality of parenting means we now commonly speak of failures of mothering, not failures in the wider socioeconomic field. In her book, *Marginalised Mothers*, Gillies explores the impact that this contemporary 'disappearance' of class has had on working class mothers.

> 'Without the language of class to explain their lives, such mothers are set apart, misinterpreted and ultimately blamed for the socio-economic marginalisation that characterise their lives'. (Gillies 2007, p. 19)

Without a framework of social and economic inequality, these mothers blame themselves for their struggles with parenting. Furthermore, whilst parenting is understood as outside of social class (Lawler 2000; Gillies 2007; Faircloth et al. 2014), the silent measure for all parents is a middleclass model:

> 'For the sake of their children's future, and for the stability and security of society as a whole, working class parents must be taught how to raise children who are capable of becoming middleclass'. (Gillies 2007, p. 7)

Clearly this contemporary culture is significantly oppressive for working class mothers, but as my interviews revealed, for the unfit working class mother the consequences are far graver.

Finally, what accompanies this new centrality of parenting is an intensified and risk averse parenting culture. There is a growing literature (Hays 1996; Nelson 2010; Faircloth et al. 2014) on what has been described as this new 'intensive motherhood' (Hays 1996) with the child's attachment a central concern and the avoidance of risk a key structuring practice. Burman (2008, p. 98) describes how 'the greater segregation, protectionism and surveillance of children' has led to not only an increase in childhood conduct disorders, but in children's protracted dependence. Many commentators (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; Skeggs 1997; Lareau 2003; Gillies 2007; Nelson 2010; Faircloth et al. 2013) have argued that this new parenting culture where children's dependence is both fostered and extended requires the kind of time and money only available to middleclass parents.

Since the 1970s attachment theory has incrementally established itself as the central organizing paradigm for this intensive parenting culture. At a time when the child at risk was becoming a cultural concern, attachment theory's emphasis on the maternal 'secure base' would offer the ideal framework to protect and nurture that child (Sales 2012; Faircloth et al. 2014) Attachment theory has now become such a normalized part of cultural understandings of parenting that its classed basis goes unnoticed. As Burman (2008, p. 140) elaborates, 'The apparatus of attachment theory naturalizes class and cultural privilege'. Furthermore, it reduces the social to the interpersonal, making a particular kind of mothering the primary and determining focus for the production of 'good' citizens (Burman 2008, p. 132).

Attachment theory is, also of course, a dominant paradigm within adoption and the primary way of understanding both the dysfunctional parenting of birth parents and the re parenting tasks of adopters (Quinton and Michael 1988; Howe et al. 1999; Schofield and Beek 2006).

In my interviews it was clearly a way that most of the adoptive and birth parents understood their parenting, its challenges, its successes and its failures. Any sense of the differences that class might inflect on parenting had been colonized by the dominance of attachment thinking. Within this framework the child's working class family of origin can never be a resource and the child's working class birth heritage is always positioned as a deficit.

I have argued here that the culture of adoption and the culture of the wider social field work together to elide the place of class as a both an experience and an explanatory framework for parents and children involved in adoption. My research aims to return class to the field of adoption and to expose its currently silenced operations.

2. The Pilot Research Project

The aim of this pilot study was to explore the impact of adopted children's class background on their new adoptive family. There were two areas of enquiry:

The degree to which adopted children's class differences are interpreted as attachment difficulties

The degree to which middle-classness operates as a silent measure for successful parenting in substitute care

This research was undertaken with a rural local authority adoption team in the UK. The study received approval from University of West of England ethics committee and from the participating local authority research governance department. There were a number of meetings with the local authority to discuss both the nature of the research and recruiting for the study. A mailing was then undertaken by the local authority to all domestic adoptions from care in the last five years, where there was either direct or indirect contact. The mailing went to both adopters and birth parents involved in each adoption and included a letter explaining the project, an information sheet for participants and a consent form with a stamped addressed envelope to the researcher. The following is a list of the respondents: See Table 1.

Table 1. Research participants.

Participants	Gender	Ethnicity	Identity
1	M & F	White British	Adoptive parents
2	M & F	White British	Adoptive parents
3	M & F	White British	Adoptive parents
4	F	White British	Adoptive single parent
5	F	White British	Adoptive single parent
6	M	White British	Birth father
7	F	White British	Birth mother
8	F	White British	Birth mother
9	F	White British	Birth mother

All the participants who responded were from working class backgrounds, except for one adoptive father. I was interested that apart from this one adopter, no middleclass adopters self-selected for this particular research. This raises questions about why this study did not interest middleclass adopters and what might need to be changed in terms of the project design in order to engage them in the future? This meant that working classness has assumed a structuring importance in terms of this study and has certainly indicated some findings for a bigger piece of research.

3. Defining Class

This study placed an importance on the self-reporting of class by the respondents. However, as the interviews show, only the adopters were able to define their class identity, with birth parents struggling with this question. The researcher, then, drew on a number of indicators to define the class of the four birth parents: Educational background; employment; family background and family history; language use; aspirations.

Recent work on widening the scope of class analysis (Skeggs 2004; Reay 2005; Atkinson et al. 2012) has also contributed to how class has been thought about in this study. The work of Bourdieu, particularly his work on class taste in Distinction (Bourdieu 2010) moved class analysis away from economic inequalities to cultural and symbolic forms of domination (Atkinson et al. 2012, p. 1). The cultural and social capital of working class subjects are not accorded the same level of recognition as middleclass capital; indeed forms of working class capital are often shamed and denigrated (as the interviews below reveal). This tension is clearly evident in the working class adopters, who all have taken on a middleclass life style but still insist on their working class identities, setting up a complex and paradoxical position for them in relation to their children's working class background.

4. Interviews

The interviews were conducted by a sole researcher, who has a background in adoption and is also a psychoanalyst. They took place in participant's homes except for the interview with participant 6, who was interviewed at a family center. The interviews lasted between 2 and 3 h and were semi structured around the following questions:

- How would you describe your class background?
- How would you describe the class background of your children?
- Adopters only: Describe how your children came into your family
- What kind of contact do you have with the children's birth family?
- How does the contact help or hinder your children make sense of being adopted?
- Birth parent only: Describe what happened to your children
- What kind of contact do you have with the children's new family?
- How does the contact help you with the loss of your children?

The two questions around how children came into or went out of families were deliberately open in order to find out more about how parents understood their parenting.

All participants were assured about the confidentiality of the research and that any use of the material would be anonymized and their identities concealed. Whilst these protocols are foundational to any research interviews, they have an even greater importance within the culture of adoption where secrecy and confidentiality are foundational to its operation. The interviews were digitally recorded (with all participants granting permission for this) and subsequently transcribed and anonymized for analysis.

5. Methodology

Both the interviews and the analysis of the interview material are understood within a psycho social framework. This means that the psychological and the social are understood as imbricated (Butler 2005, p. 5), when so often in adoption research there is a privileging of the

psychological. The interviewer, as a practicing psychoanalyst, is very accustomed to conducting intimate conversations within a relational field of conscious and unconscious communications. Whilst the interviews are not regarded as psycho-analytic sessions, there was an awareness of the transferences that the position of researcher produces, as well as an acute sense that talking about class stirs up a very intense affective field where shame is commonly provoked. There is not the space in this paper to address this dimension of the interviews.

Walkerdine et al. (2001, p. 83) discuss how their own working class backgrounds enabled them to create a 'different discourse' for reading the operations of class in their research interviews. They emphasize two aspects of their position: working class experience is not read as either lacking or pathologized against a middleclass standard and questions not normally posed were able to be asked. The interviewer's own working class background was hoped to be a similar resource in interviewing a largely working class sample.

6. Class and Parenting in Adoption

Adoptive Parents on Class

All the adoptive parents identified as working class, except for one adoptive father who described himself as middleclass. They were all keen to communicate about their class, and expressed pride in their working classness. Some of the adopters had been through higher education, but still felt tied to their working class roots. All the adopters saw their working classness as a resource in their lives.

> 'I am working class, grew up in a council house, first one in my family to go to university. Mum and dad didn't know about university, an alien world, but I still feel very working class myself, proud of it'. (Adopters 3)

> 'I would say I am definitely working class, my dad was a painter and decorator, mum stayed at home, a very local life; I moved back to the same village when I adopted; I want my son to have the same kind of upbringing I had, freedom, go to the beach'. (Adopter 5)

All the adopters lived in secure housing that they owned, all worked and could be described as part of the professional/managerial class. They all drew attention to how well they had done for themselves, how far they had exceeded their own parents' lives. In spite of this so called social progression, they all remained very clear about their working class identity. Clearly these participants are not using an economic model for understanding their class position, as by their own description they have moved into what could be designated a middleclass professional place. This sense of their working classness seems more tied to an affective sense of belonging. This is what Bourdieu would describe as a class aesthetic, a form of taste that has been unconsciously installed, creating a deep sense of class belonging (Bourdieu 2010, p. 169). Furthermore, this enduring sense of working classness is consistent with recent research on working class culture. In a recent collection on class Devine et al. (2005, p. 99), cited numerous research studies that showed how little difference there is between the affluent and the unskilled working class in terms of their culture.

> 'It proved difficult to sustain the view that there were fundamental differences between the affluent working class and the unskilled working class. Other studies argue that it is difficult to find any clear differences between skilled and unskilled workers, and show that the working class is still demographically coherent'.

However, the interviews revealed a less homogeneous picture of working class culture than that suggested above. For some of the adopters, it was important to differentiate their working class identities from those more disadvantaged working class birth parents.

All the adopters emphasized close and supportive ties with their extended working class families, most of whom lived very local to them. Indeed during two of the interviews, grandparents turned up

to either bring back or collect grandchildren. The traditional extended working class family was well represented amongst the adoptive parents in my sample, with all parents emphasizing the importance of these kinship connections. However, whilst all of the adopters had this inclusiveness around family, there were marked differences in how far they wanted to include their children's birth families. I will return to this point in more detail later.

Given that all the adopted children were from working class backgrounds, this could be then seen as a helpful match. Sharing a class background might help the adopters understand or empathize with the birth parents, might help them understand aspects of their children's heritage. However, a much more complicated picture emerged during the interviews. For three of the five adopters, the children's working class background was something that they dismissed, denigrated or marginalized. I will give some examples from these three families.

I asked Adopters 1 to describe the class background of their two adopted children; the adoptive father (the one middleclass adopter in the sample) said:

'Same as ours, adoption completely lifts the girls out of that cycle, the only thing that can do that, fostering you still have the links'.

I asked again about the background:

'We know the area they grew up, it wasn't that they weren't loved, but history of people not knowing how to parent, not a lot of opportunity to get out, nobody really working, that sort of life style'.

It was striking how much the parents did not want to talk about the class origins of their children; I had to persist with my question to get it answered. In answering, the adoptive father identifies some key elements in the children's class background—a lack of work, a lack of social mobility and an ignorance around parenting. Their working class origins are seen as a source of limitation and waste, making no positive contribution, so there is no loss for the children in replacing this background with a new adoptive family. This impression was confirmed when I asked the adopters about how the children's social background came into their home life with them. Again the adoptive father answered:

'Hasn't been hammered out of them, but they have nice middleclass table manners now. We did have to tell them that all the McDonald's were closed'.

This interesting communication suggests that the children's class background has been rigorously removed and replaced by a different middle class mode of being. This may reflect the father's own middleclass position, but it was also apparent with some of the working class adoptive mother's communications. She said:

'They are both so clever and that would have been wasted if they had stayed where they were'.

To illustrate this, she tells me what the children's birth mother wanted for the girls in terms of their new adoptive family. The birth mother said she wanted them to be able to go to the park and the beach. The adoptive mother saw this response as having 'narrow ambitions for the girls' it could be argued that the birth mother has different ambitions for her children, ambitions formed through a rather different class experience[2].

Indeed there was a strong sense that these adopters conducted some surveillance of their children's behavior for signs of their original class background in order to correct and replace these behaviors.

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[2] There is now a growing literature on the differences of working class subjectivity (Walkerdine et al. 2001; Skeggs 1997, 2004; Gillies 2007) differences shaped and formed through structural inequality and lack of recognition. Gillies (2007, p. 77) makes the point that working class ambitions are shaped by fitting in, not standing out, whereas middleclass ambitions are tied to visible achievement. If you lack middleclass legitimacy, then standing out is very challenging.

These adopters had different class positions, but in terms of their adopted children, it is the middleclass position that is the more desirable.

They were not the only adopters who saw McDonald's as a signifier of low grade working class taste. Adopters 2 complained to me about the presents their two adopted children had been given by their birth parents:

'Lots of stuff arrived with the children, plastic tat, nothing had any meaning, lots of plastic free gifts, kind of thing that you get with McDonalds, nothing of value'.

Here there is again a denigration of the children's working class culture, which the adopters dismiss as cheap and valueless. Yet these were the adopters that had been surprised that they were allowed to adopt because of their working class background.

In my final example, adopters 3 were very uninterested in their children's class background, telling me it was unimportant. When pressed I was told that their children's birth mother was a working class drug addict, still living in the same town as themselves, alongside her wider family. This proximity was very troubling for the adopters and they had changed their children's names to protect their privacy. Again, they very much wanted to totally replace their children's background and showed little interest in having knowledge about the children's early life. The adoptive mother said 'Anything the children want to know we have' There was a strong sense of closing the family lines, and shutting out the children's earlier history. The birth mother was presented to me as nothing more than an addict

'We keep track of the birth mother via the local paper; she is 36, petty crime to support her habit'.

When it came to discussing contact arrangements, the same conflicted and denigratory relationship to the birth parents circulated. Adopters K did an annual letter but seemed dismissive and disinterested in this form of contact and unsure about who it was for

'I do a letter, but no-one picks it up and I don't know who it is sent out to; I didn't do last year's but just about to do this year's'.

They are similarly disregarding of the children's life story books, where there is a lot of uncertainty about whether they even have them. There is a strong sense that this earlier history and heritage is less important than the children's new life with their new family.

I want to now think about what we can make of these (largely) working class adoptive parents in a relation of denigration and marginalization to other working class parents?

In spite of a shared cultural heritage, these adopters were expending a great deal of energy and commitment to pointing up huge differences between themselves and these other more failing working class parents. I would argue that in a culture that still denigrates working classness, working class people find it imperative to separate themselves from those others who are lower down on the working class ladder. Bourdieu, writing in Distinction (Bourdieu 2010, p. 33), says

'It must never be forgotten that the working class 'aesthetic' is a dominated aesthetic which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics'.

It was clear that all the working class adopters in my sample identified with the dominant middleclass aesthetic, whilst still endorsing their working class origins. Their homes and their life styles were clearly modelled on middleclass taste, an aspirational standard against which their working classness was a source of failure. So whilst working classness was a resource for these adopters, it was also a cause of concern, as it created a proximity to a more troubled form of working classness in their children. This troubled working classness touched something in them about their own class position. This meant that rather than operating as a source of empathy, it operated as a source of revulsion. This can be seen in the ways that the children's class behaviors, or class attachments have

to be remade or removed from adoptive family life. We could say that the injurious class identity of working class adopters is mobilized by the adoption of working class children, which leads to a denigration/rejection of the children's working class background.

For two of the adopters there was a very different relationship to their children's class background. These were two single adopters (participants 4 and 5), who very much embraced their children's class background and wanted to include the family of origin as a positive for their adopted children. Both these adopters found the exclusive culture of adoption difficult and challenging. Both came from large close knit working class families, where family gatherings and family relations are important and this is very much their relationship to their children's birth family. These adopters were critical of what they experienced as the 'rigidity' of the local authority letterbox system, complaining that they were not 'allowed' to write extra letters and include photographs. Adopter 4 was upset and frustrated that her daughter did not have visiting contact with her birth parents: 'My daughter would say to me, 'I am still getting used to it here and I want to see my mummy and daddy'. This adopter linked the lack of visiting contact with her daughter's very slow capacity to settle. With these two adopters there is not the same mobilization of class injury in relationship to their children's class background; indeed they embraced their working class children's heritage. A follow-up study, with a larger sample would allow a greater and more in-depth exploration of how these differences within working class adopters can be understood.

7. Birth Parents on Class

'It was a fact, I was never going to get my kids back, even if I had won a million pounds on the lottery, it was a fix, right from the moment they were taken off me, to it ended. It is one rule for them and one rule for me'.

The above mother captures very well the position of an unfit working class mother today. She understands the enormous gulf that separates her world from the world of acceptable mothering. This mother has been defeated by the rules of a culture that she has been powerless to challenge. All of the parents interviewed knew that there was an enormous difference between their lives and so-called 'normal families' but this difference was never described in class terms. The four birth parents struggled to answer the question about their class background. Here are their answers:

Birth mother 7: (Laughing) 'I haven't thought about it' (looking at her mother also in the room).

Birth mother 8: 'Don't know what you mean. I see myself as a down to earth person, help people when they need it'.

Birth father 6: 'I am working class. All my family were my world and I just worked for them, farming'.

Birth mother 9: (laughing) 'I am not middleclass, I work, my husband works, now I don't have the children I look for work, so working class I guess'.

It was clear that these four parents were working class, a definition based on the following information communicated in the interviews: economic position, employment, family background and history, aspirations, education, language. However, unlike the adopters, they do not understand their lives in class terms. Indeed, they didn't really understand the question and even the two parents who said they were working class, were taking the term very concretely, and understanding the question to be one about their status as workers. In talking to the parents, there was a profound sense that their histories were characterized by the precarity of deprivation, abuse and poverty, but the language of class inequality and injustice was never used to describe themselves or their background. This means that, unlike the working class adopters, their class backgrounds were not a resource or an explanation for their lives. This raises some important questions about how working classness can be a resource for some parents, but not for others. Unlike the adopters, the birth parents in this study were not resourced by either family, education or work. Two of the parents mentioned their family—indeed one of the

mothers was interviewed with her mother present—but these family ties did not operate as a source of support, meaning or stability. Most importantly, the social condemnation that failed parents receive, powerfully prevents their class background being anything except a source of shame and denigration.

Commonly the parents framed their experiences in individual family terms—their families had failed them and they had then failed as parents. Here are two examples:

An exchange with birth mother 9 who had five children adopted:

Why do you think the children were adopted?

'My own stupid screw ups, didn't have the best start in life, abused when I was a child, didn't have the right upbringing, the right tools to cope with children'.

What was missing?

'A family really, it's like you can only trust so much and I couldn't trust my family, in a normal upbringing you would have the keys, you would learn from mum and dad, had none of that, I made a lot of mistakes'.

Birth mother 8, who had three children adopted, was very forthcoming about her family background, and like birth mother 9 related this to her own difficulties with her children. Her mother was violent and neglectful, but no-one removed her until she was 14. She lived with her gran, then in foster care, then a children's home. At some point in social care she was sexually abused.

'We didn't have a stable environment like normal families, we were just wild because we had no chance of a home'.

Both these birth mothers have a notion of a 'normal' family where they would have had the 'right' upbringing. This would have supplied them with the tools and the keys to have been better mothers themselves. We could say that they are using the language and the references of middleclass mothering as a measure, against which they have failed. There is a clear correlation in these communications between abnormal/working class and normal/middleclass. Within such an opposition their mothering can never be understood as any kind of contribution for their children. Furthermore, as there is no wider social framework for them to understand their experiences, they blame their own families, and then themselves for what has happened to their children.

8. Adoptive Parents on Parenting

The interviewer was interested in exploring whether these working class adopters had taken on the dominant attachment model of parenting. The local authority manager had already made it clear that, in line with most adoption teams in the UK, they use an attachment framework. This issue emerged in the interviews when parents discussed how family life has been since the arrival of their adopted children. Adopters 3 used the language of attachment most directly. The adoptive mother had been to attachment training and some workshops 'to put her mind at rest' and she then used the language of attachment to describe the two adopted children. Here is how she describes the older daughter, who was 8 months old when placed:

'L has attachment difficulties; she was in a busy foster placement, busy household, lots of children. The foster mum said L had attachment difficulties. L's attachment took a long time. She has an insecure attachment, she goes nowhere by herself; she cries when I leave her at a school; it has taken her a long time to attach to me'.

In contrast, her younger sister who was placed at 4 weeks from hospital, has no attachment difficulties and is described as more robust and more secure than her sister.

Adopters 1 also used attachment to capture a difference between their two children. Their oldest daughter had 'experienced abuse' but the youngest was removed so early 'she had less attachment difficulties'

Adopters 2 also made a difference between their two children, who were 2 and 5 months when placed.

'My oldest A, was a real struggle at first, she had been neglected, but he was removed at birth. A hadn't been looked after, wasn't fed properly, passed around the family'.

With these three families the notion of forming a singular attachment to two parents means the favoring of the youngest child, the one who has the least attachment to his/her former life. The oldest child in each case is seem as struggling because she has taken longer to form an attachment. In each of these cases the older child's relationship with the birth family was an issue, with questions that couldn't be answered. Are these children's kinship ties to their first families being pathologized as attachment disordered behaviors?

Adopters 1 reported to me that the oldest daughter was incredibly curious about her history:

'L wants to know where she was before Sue [the foster carer]. She is devastated because we don't know her first spoken word, whereas for her sister, A, we were there for the first everything—first word, first step. Because A never lived at home, removed from birth, she is so different. She cannot remember a time before us, but we have gaps for L'.

The adopters tell me that L is very persistent about wanting information

'She wants to know why we can't phone up her birth mother and ask what her first word is. When we say we don't where she is, L wants to know why? Can we find out where she is and can we visit her?'

For these adopters there is clearly a conflict between the kind of family attachments they want to achieve, and the demands of their oldest daughter, with her continuing curiosity and attachments to her first family. Whilst these adopters are very angry at the lack of information they have for their daughter, they will not entertain any possibility of finding out this information from the birth family itself.

Adopters 2 have a similar conflict about the place their children's former attachments occupy. The adoptive mother became very emotional telling me about her family tradition of giving all new babies a teddy bear. She turns to her adopted son and asks him about his teddy bear, but the little boy starts telling me about Rabbit, a stuffed toy that his birth father had given him. He becomes extremely animated and starts asking for Rabbit in a loud voice, which brings his sister into the conversation. She has Fluffy, she tells me, Fluffy is so important that he never goes out of the house. The adoptive mother, now looking very distressed, tells me her daughter has had Fluffy since her birth, a stuffed animal given to her by her birth mother.

Clearly these two stuffed toys, Rabbit and Fluffy, have enormous importance for the children as important ties to their birth history, but for the adoptive mother they are complex signifiers of her children's attachment to their first family. Within the attachment framework, there is no room for attachments elsewhere, setting up profound conflictual difficulties for adopted children. Furthermore, the contested position of the birth family in adoption work installs a complex paradox for adopted children; they sustain links with simultaneously endorsed and refused parental figures. For working class adopters these former attachments touch all sorts of issues including their own class identities.

My argument here is with the kind of model of family life that contemporary attachment work promotes and whether that model is the best one for adopted children. The current attachment literature has an insistence on the building of new bonds and on parents developing empathy with their children in order to enforce a singular, familial relationality. This raises a number of questions for working class adopters: Are they comfortable with this attachment model of family life and how different is it to their own working class experience of family? What has to happen to the differences of their own working class backgrounds in order to become such an adopter?

There was a marked contrast with the two other working class adopters. They didn't use the language of attachment to describe their relations with their adopted children and they had a more

spacious and open attitude to their children's history. It has been argued that an attachment framework and open adoption practices are irreconcilable (Sales 2012, pp. 120–125) and it is not therefore surprising that adopters are more open when they are not drawing upon attachment thinking in their parenting. Adopter 4 reported that her adopted daughter told her early on 'I am from a different country' and she knew that respecting this difference would be foundational to her daughter settling down.

9. Birth Parents on Parenting

All three of the birth mothers used the language of attachment to describe their parental deficits. As all of the women had had periods of time in a mother and baby unit as a support to their parenting, they had clearly acquired some of this language. However, there was often considerable confusions about how they understood the purpose of the placement, the expectations of them and why they had failed. Running through all of the extracts is class differences, and how difficult it is for these mothers to understand and participate in the middleclass culture of parenting.

This is an exchange with birth mother 6:

'The mother and baby unit, was this to help you hold onto your girls?'

'Yeah, it was to show my parenting skills, which was going fine, but I got postal natal depression and then wasn't bonding with them or something and they used that against me'.

'Did you know they would be placed for adoption after the mother and baby unit?'

'No they didn't tell me that'.

And the following exchange about her son:

'C tooken off me at 6 months, domestic violence related, I was in a holding placement, which is like before court proceedings, before they put him up for adoption, but I wasn't allowed to do nothing for him, it was weird, like, I could feed him and all, they would have him in their room'.

'Was the idea that they would help your parenting?'

'I didn't get a chance to bond with him, every time, like in the first placement, I got to bond with him at the hospital, but the second I left, after that social were just in control, I got to feed him, but I was told about my baby all the time'.

This birth mother is using the language of the professionals—bonding, parenting skills, post-natal depression—to try and communicate to me about how she failed the numerous placements with her children. Of course, separated from the wider social context of this woman's life, these expressions communicate very little, but what she has understood is that her mothering has fallen far short of these professional standards. Here we see very clearly how parenting is divorced from the wider social field and distilled into a series of detachable universal skills that all mothers need to acquire if they want to keep their children.

Birth mother 8 spoke at length about her failures in various mother and baby placements. Here is her description of a foster placement with her son:

'Not allowed to do much, she wouldn't let me cook, and I had to eat lot of weird stuff, one day vegetarian, I wanted to be my own parent, I had always lived independently, and sometimes I didn't want to out with I if it was cold but I had to, do you remember that snow back in 2009, we had to go down to T . . . that day, frightened of an accident'.

This birth mother captures how difficult she found the culture of the placements, the food, the emphasis on exercise and fresh air, the surveillance of her as a mother, this is a culture that is so other to her life. Like birth mother 6 there is an increasing sense of imprisonment, detention, judgement, with very little understanding of how she should be mothering and how she is failing in these placements.

In contrast, the interviews were full of practices of parenting where the parents communicated about the numerous ways they continued to care about their absent children. All the parents I interviewed expressed worries about their children. Birth mother 8 tied her worry to her maternal position: 'I wouldn't be a mum if I didn't worry' whilst birth mother 9's concerns were to do to with her knowledge of her daughter: 'I am worried about J who doesn't like change, worried how she copes with living with two women, L is young enough he can adapt to anything, but J more confused being that bit older'.

As none of the four birth parents had face to face contact with their children, the letterbox communications were an important way of sustaining their tie to their children. The three birth mothers all had special places for the letters they received, as well as photographs of the children in albums and displayed on walls and surfaces in their homes. The practice of writing letters was reported as challenging for all the parents involved. Birth mother 8 expressed her difficulties: 'It is hard for us mums to write to our own flesh and you have to write it in a stranger's way, it is awkward, know what I mean'. Birth mother 9 explains how she tries to keep up her maternal place: 'They are not allowed to call us mum, but I try and keep the letters as family orientated as I can really'. All the parents complained that they had been forbidden by the local authority to fully communicate their love for their children. Birth mother 9 was upset that the local authority wouldn't let her give her daughter a ring from her and the father with the engraving 'daughter we will always love you'. Birth mother 6 had written an 'unacceptable' letter where she says 'you are always in my heart and I am missing you so much'.

All the parents expressed a wish to see their children and a desire to be ready when they reach 18 and can legally search for them.

The above practices get little or no recognition within the wider culture of adoption. Adoption has disqualified these parents from a parenting role, so the ways they continue to show love and concern for their children receive very little acknowledgment or are given very little importance. However, it was very clear that there were many ways in which these failed parents still practiced parenting with their absent children.

10. Conclusions

This paper set out to explore the under-researched area of class in the field of adoption through a small scale study interviewing birth parents and adopters. Working classness assumed a structuring importance in this study as the majority of the self-selected participants were from this class background. This produced two particular findings that would reward further exploration. Firstly, with three of the adoptive families, their injurious working class identity was mobilized by the adoption of working class children. This had a negative impact on their relationship with the children's birth family and contact arrangements, resulting in a wish to replace or minimize the children's birth heritage. Secondly, three of the adoptive families embraced the attachment model of parenting, interpreting their children's difficulties with belonging through this particular framework. This had a number of effects: a privileging of the younger adopted child who had less history with previous parents; an emphasis on the building of bonds within the adoptive family; a refusal to address the older child's birth attachments through contact arrangements. Two of the adopters, in marked contrast, were more embracing and open towards their children's birth heritage and didn't draw upon attachment thinking in terms of their parenting.

The interviews with working class adopters clearly then showed differences in both class and parenting attitudes, but the sample is small and a larger sample would provide more information about these differences. What has to happen to the differences of working class parenting in order to take on attachment thinking? How can we understand the differential operation of class where some adopters are clearly more comfortable with the working class background of their children? Unfortunately, my sample didn't represent middleclass adopters and in any future study this would be an important inclusion. Do middleclass adopters parent more easily within the attachment model? Finally, there was ample material that showed marginalization and pathologization of failed birth

parents. What are the effects of this pathologization of their backgrounds on adopted children? How far are attachment difficulties in adopted children a response to being kinship and class conflicted?

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Receiving, or 'Adopting', Donated Embryos to Have Children: Parents Narrate and Draw Kinship Boundaries

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Abstract: Existing research suggests that embryo donation (ED) may be seen as similar to adoption by those who donate or receive embryos, or it may not. Our qualitative study explored whether having a child via embryo donation initiated kinship connections between embryo donor and recipient families as interpreted by recipient parents. Interviews were conducted with five parents from four families whose child(ren) had been born via embryo donation. All four families had an open-contact relationship set up with the couples who donated their embryos through an agency in the USA. Narrative thematic analysis of interview data and visual family map drawings were used to explore kinship conceptualizations. We conclude that the dilemma experienced by parents who have a child via embryo donation is to decide how to reconcile their child's different genetic heritage, when gestation and upbringing both clearly boundary family membership solely within the recipient family. While some families were still struggling with this dilemma, one solution embarked upon by some parents when drawing their family map was to expand family membership, not only on the basis of genetics, but also via an appreciation of shared family and community values too.

1. Introduction

Genealogical techniques and interviews provide rich opportunities to research the ways in which families narrate their identities far beyond collecting names, dates, occupations, and geographic location (Smith 2017). While acknowledging the many varied definitions of family within present-day western societies, Smith defined family members as "those located somewhere within the family 'tree,' or network" (Smith 2017, p. 1). Other authors have noted that traditional western concepts of kinship drawn as a family tree or a pedigree are too constraining for many contemporary families. For example, in practicing critical genealogy to build ethnic identity, Scodari has argued against taking a genetics-only approach to collecting family history (Scodari 2016). Also, researchers exploring the family relationships formed by LGBTQ people have introduced conceptions of kinship based on

families-of-choice (Swainson and Tasker 2005; Tasker and Delvoye 2018, in press; Weeks et al. 2001; Weston 1991).

The research presented here concerns how one group of heterosexual couples who had received donated embryos to have children, designated and described their social and genetic relationships as family (or not) through a new genealogical technique—family map making (Tasker et al. 2018). In open adoption, social services are asking adoptive parents to help their child to remain in contact (however minimal) with birth relatives, thus challenging adoptive parents to broaden their concept of kinship and family to include their child's birth family members (Jones and Hackett 2011). Likewise parents-to-be who receive donor sperm, donor eggs, or both as in the case of embryo donation (ED), to start a pregnancy are encouraged by assisted reproduction clinics and, under some jurisdictions mandated, to disclose this information to resulting children at some point. In New Zealand, potential donors and recipients are required to meet and negotiate future contact before embryo donation is allowed to proceed (Goedeke et al. 2015). In several states in Australia, birth certificates will include the notation 'further information available', which, while not directly disclosing the child's embryo donation origins, underlines the child's 'right to know' as parents are required to register that the baby was donor conceived at time of birth certificate (Kelly 2015). The donation of remaining embryos created as a product of in vitro fertilization (IVF) has been likened to prenatal adoption, particularly in Christian circles, with clinics in the USA receiving donated frozen embryos and acting as an agent between donor and recipient parents to give each embryo a chance of life and keeping in contact with each other (Taylor-Coleman 2016). In our research we address the question: are in-contact embryo donors and their relatives deemed family members by recipient parents, and if so, to what extent?

1.1. Embryo Recipients and Adoptive Parents

Using donated embryos to begin a pregnancy was first recorded in 1983 (Trounson et al. 1983). In embryo donation neither the egg, nor the sperm that fertilized it, are the genetic gametes of the recipient parent or parents. Embryo donation may be seen as similar to adoption by those who donate or receive embryos (Goedeke et al. 2015) or it may not (Millbank et al. 2017). Most embryo donation appears to take place as a by-product of IVF when couples have produced more viable embryos than they want to implant and decide to donate the remaining embryos to another recipient family (Golombok 2015). Double donation sometimes occurs with the intended parent or parents commissioning the IVF treatment using either donated sperm, or donated eggs, and then donating some of the resultant embryos on to a further recipient. Embryos also can be created from donor gametes for the express purpose of embryo donation, although the extent of this practice varies and it appears to be relatively uncommon in Europe (Prag and Mills 2017).

Having children through receiving donated embryos has implications for family relationships that are both similar to, and yet crucially different from, those encountered in adoptive parenting. Often heterosexual adults wanting to adopt will have contacted adoption agencies after several attempts at fertility treatment. Of the heterosexual couples who had adopted in the Cambridge Adoption Study, 90% had been unsuccessful in trying assisted reproductive technology prior to adoption, whereas far fewer lesbian or particularly gay adoptive parents had previously done this (Mellish et al. 2013). Similarly, parents of children from donated embryos may have experienced many previous attempts at fertility treatment using their own gametes (Soderstrom-Anttila et al. 2001).

Both children of embryo donation and adopted children have an originating family network in their background. For adopted children, their originating family network comprises their birth family relatives, although this may be complicated through parental separation and family reconfiguration. For children born from embryo donation, this network will be based upon their gamete donors, the other children of the gamete donors, and also the genetic relatives of the gamete donors. Furthermore, just as adopted children's knowledge of and contact with birth families varies according to state policy (Jones and Hackett 2011), children conceived by embryo donation may have different knowledge of donors under different legislative and value contexts (Frith and Blyth 2013).

When donated embryos have been formed as part of IVF treatment for the genetic parents it is plausible that their genetic parents will want to have a stake in keeping in touch with their genetic offspring, who are also full genetic siblings to their own children. However, some IVF couples donating embryos may want donor information strictly controlled because of fears that donor children may try to contact them; one Australian survey indicated that this concern was a key reason why some IVF couples decided not to donate remaining embryos (Millbank et al. 2013). In essence three possibilities exist in terms of the openness of embryo donation: (a) open where the gamete donor(s) and the recipient(s) know one another; (b) closed, albeit with the possibility for children to access information about their gamete donor(s) when they reach adulthood; and (c) semi-open where anonymous donor–recipient contact is mediated by an agency, although participants may later open the relationship and be in-contact. For example, in the UK closed situation, once the donor(s) have decided to donate, the decisions regarding who receives embryo donation are made by assisted reproduction clinic staff and regulated according to law. The donor is allowed to express some preferences but this right is balanced by equality legislation, for example, the donor cannot exclude potential recipients on basis of any protected characteristic. Donors receive no information about the recipient and limited information about resulting child(ren) and vice versa, nevertheless since April 2005 donors cannot remain anonymous from their donor conceived offspring upon adulthood (Frith and Blyth 2013; HFEA 2004).

Frith and Blyth (2013) have contrasted the state-regulated UK situation with embryo donation agencies in the US, many of which are run by pro-life Christians, who tend to view the embryo donation as the adoption of a potential life. Furthermore, these faith-based agencies allow embryo-donating couples to specify that they want to keep in touch either via the agency (semi-open) or openly and to choose the couple who will receive their embryos from the profiles they are sent. Thus, like adoptive parents, those who receive donated embryos often undergo scrutiny by the agency and by the originating family, albeit without the extensive vetting and parenthood training engaged in when children are placed by adoption services. Frith and Blyth have argued that this is an example of a specific selecting, non-anonymous model of embryo donation. When embryos were implanted the recipient families in the current study had all been donor-selected and had contact arrangements in place mostly via agency mediation (semi-open) which may or may not have moved to open contact. We have characterized this as an in-contact model.

Two important distinctions between parents having children through embryo donation and adoption need to be highlighted. First, the donated embryo is implanted in the mother-to-be's uterus. Thus, unless a surrogate mother is employed, the mother will have a biological connection to her embryo donated child through gestational motherhood. In the case of embryo donation to a couple both of the child's parents will have been there from birth and in most jurisdictions no distinction will be made on the child's birth certificate to indicate a third-party via assisted reproductive technology (ART) birth. Embryo donors release rights to possible parenthood and a potential child when they sign over the batch of embryos prior to transfer. In contrast, even in an early adoption there will have been relinquishment of the baby by the birth mother.

Second, the struggling situation of the birth family whose child has been taken into care, or more rarely, the birth mother who has given up her baby for adoption, is usually markedly different to that of the adoptive parents looking to have a much wanted child. In contrast embryo donors donating remaining embryos from their own IVF treatments may particularly empathize with the recipients of their embryos: the donors themselves had endured infertility and finally had much wanted children against the probable odds of IVF success. Furthermore, those who donated remaining IVF embryos via a faith-based embryo adoption agency may be particularly motivated to keep in touch with the embryos that could have the potential to become full siblings to their own children, but were 'adopted' by much loving families with similar values. Embryo donation is likely also to be experienced differently from single gamete donation (egg or sperm); gamete donation is seen not

as giving a chance to life itself, but as helping in part of the reproductive process or as a financial transaction (Provoost et al. 2009).

Research studies generally point to the benefits of open adoption with continued contact between the adopted child and birth family relatives; one review concluded not only that children found post-adoption contact beneficial, but also that the majority of birth relatives and adoptive parents did too (Triseliotis 2011). Yet longitudinal research on adopted children growing up has suggested that heterosexual adopters, birth relatives and adopted children have a variety of experiences of post-adoption direct and indirect (letter-box type) contact and that open communication within the adoptive family rather than contact per se is often key to children's well-being (Neil et al. 2015; Von Korff and Grotevant 2011; Grotevant et al. 2013). Furthermore, research on the transition to adoptive parenting has indicated that heterosexual adopters often struggle to resolve their expectations of a fresh start to family life with their child's pre-adoption history and their child's conceptualization of family (Tasker and Wood 2016). Jones and Hackett (2011) have pointed to the challenge for adoptive parents to come up with a new model of kinship that sustains both adoptive family and birth family connections for the child.

Intriguingly, the situation of children born from embryo donation has been relatively under-explored relative to the growing number of studies on the physical well-being, psychosocial adjustment and family relationships of children born through gamete donation (Golombok 2015). Previous studies of parents of embryo-donated children have typically sampled parents who have had very limited information about the donors. For example, a longitudinal UK study following up parents and their children from pre-school to elementary school found that those conceived via embryo donation received high levels of nurturing, warm, and child-centered age-appropriate parenting, similar to that experienced by comparison group families with adopted children or genetically related children conceived via IVF (MacCallum et al. 2007; MacCallum and Keeley 2008). Thus, there was no evidence that indicated that genetic or gestational links necessarily made a difference to positive parenting and findings on children born through embryo donation were comparable with general findings from other studies on children of gamete donation (Golombok 2015). However, in MacCallum et al.'s study striking differences were found in terms of actual and planned disclosure of children's origins between parents whose child came from embryo donation when rates of disclosure were compared to those of parents of IVF or adopted children. At the follow-up point in middle childhood only 3/17 mothers of children in the embryo donation group had already told their child something about embryo donation with a further four mothers expressing an intention to disclose at some point (MacCallum and Keeley 2012). In contrast, all of the adopted children in the study already knew they were adopted and only three of the parents of the IVF children had decided not to tell their child, or were still deliberating disclosure. However, while the ED children in the sample were unlikely to have been told about their embryo donation origins, nearly 75% of mothers in the sample had disclosed to another family member (often their own parents) that their child originated from a donated embryo (MacCallum and Golombok 2007).

Researching in the open donation context of New Zealand, Goedeke et al. (2015) interviewed both embryo donor and recipient families and reported that both parties viewed the shared genetic connection between donors and embryo-donated children as creating a lasting and meaningful social link with the donor family (Goedeke et al. 2015). Furthermore, Goedeke and colleagues indicated that both donor and recipient families drew upon concepts of extended family and open-adoption to understand their experience, although using these terms added complications too. Likewise, Blyth and colleagues (in press) who conducted a qualitative survey with donor and recipient families recruited via a USA Christian agency also found that both parties referred to embryo donation creating multiple family memberships, but stated that careful negotiation of family boundaries was necessary to ensure that contact between families proceeded smoothly (Blyth et al. 2018). Nevertheless, neither Goedeke's nor Blyth's research teams specifically concentrated on systematically exploring family membership implications with genealogical research techniques.

1.2. Genealogy, Family Trees, Genograms, and Family Maps: Visual Narrations of Family Membership

Genealogical techniques have rarely been employed in social science research (Nash 2017). When discussing the absence of genealogy in research studies, Nash noted the tension between the radical demographic potential of genealogical research and the traditional pull of essentialist ideas about kinship, which might be emphasized in visual depiction. Genealogical techniques, such as pedigrees or more colloquially family trees, may yield valuable information, especially when there may be differences between family members in terms of who counts as family and how close each family relationship is. As Kretsedemas has asked: "What new forms of cultural agency and filiation does it [genealogy] make possible? (And just as important, what possibilities and historical memories does it rule out?)" (Kretsedemas 2017, p. 1).

Genealogical techniques, namely genograms and their derivatives, also have been developed and promoted within systemic psychotherapy to be used both in assessment and intervention in a wide variety of family systems (McGoldrick et al. 2008). Just as Nash (2017) noted the absence of genealogical reference in the social science research, Rempel and colleagues expressed similar surprise at the absence of genogram techniques in clinical research (Rempel et al. 2007). Conventional genogram notation has struggled to keep pace with contemporary developments in family formations. Consequently, both clinicians and researchers have kept the genogram aim of charting intergenerational family relationships as emotional, social and cultural markers or resources, but allowed clients or participants to define and visually depict family in a wider way (Milewski-Hertlein 2001; Swainson and Tasker 2005; Tasker and Granville 2011; Tasker and Delvoye 2018, in press). In particular the Family Mapping Exercises developed by Tasker and colleagues have enabled both adult and child family members to articulate family membership in a genogram form with minimal constraint on inclusion criteria (Tasker et al. 2018).

1.3. Research Aim

Our purpose in this paper is to explore how parents who have a child from a donated embryo consider family membership for themselves and their children and to contrast this with the situation in open adoption. More specifically we considered what role genetic relationships played in connoting family membership in relation to genetic donors and those who shared the same genetic heritage: could family membership be determined purely on the basis of shared genetics, or were there other psychosocial markers that formed boundaries within family subsystems, or denoted a boundary between family and others?

In order to explore the concepts behind family membership employed by parents of a donated embryo child we selected participants from a wider sample of families who had donated or received embryos. From this sample our strategy was to select participants from two-parent heterosexual couples where the mother had undergone pregnancy and gave birth to a child who was not genetically related to her or her partner. These selected embryo recipient families also were in a comparable situation to open adoptive parenting because recipient parents all had an initial contact agreement with the embryo donors. These embryo donors had donated remaining embryos from their own IVF treatment, from which they already had children.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Parents from four families with children conceived through embryo donation were interviewed: four mothers and one father who was interviewed together with his wife. One of the parents (Melissa) was interviewed together with one of her sons (Rhys) who had been born through embryo donation but only Melissa's data has been included in this paper. All four families were two-parent heterosexual couples in which both parents had graduated from university; two couples were of mixed ethnic

heritage while the other two couples were white. Brief demographic details for each participating family can be seen in Table 1. All of the participants were from the USA and lived in different states.

Table 1. Summary of participant information.

Main Participant's Pseudonym	Additional Participant's Pseudonym & Relationship	Mother's Age at Time of Interview (Years)	Number of Children and Their Ages (Years)	Donors Have Made Further Donations to Other Families
Judith	N/A	45+	Son (aged 5) & daughter (aged 3) from the same donors	Yes
Ella & Jamie	Jamie (Ella's husband)	40+	Daughter (aged 2)	NB embryo donor couple used donated eggs to create embryos and egg donor may have donated elsewhere.
Anne	N/A	40+	Son (aged 7) and twins (aged 5) from the same donor	No
Melissa	Melissa's son (Rhys) present at Melissa's interview.	35+	Son (aged 12) and son (aged 10) both from different donors + sister (aged 21) domestic adoption	Yes

Prior to receiving donated embryos one couple had first tried to conceive their own children and then tried IVF with their own gametes; in fact Anne and her husband were still trying to conceive using IVF. Two families described themselves as having married late and were recommended to try embryo donation after discussions with a fertility specialist. Melissa and her husband had a child via the domestic adoption system prior to their first fertility attempt with donated embryos.

All four families had received a donated embryo through a faith-based (Christian) agency that facilitates the adoption of frozen embryos that would otherwise be discarded. The agency assisted in the profiling and brokering of agreements between embryo donors and embryo recipients, organized the legal transfer documentation from donors to recipients, and facilitated the transportation of embryos between medical facilities (Blyth et al. 2018).

2.2. Interviews, Materials and Procedure

The research project recruitment and qualitative interview procedures, confidentiality and data storage procedures were approved by an Institutional Review Board. All participants gave their consent for the audio recording of the interviews and also completed a brief socio-demographic questionnaire. The face-to-face interviews, which lasted between an hour and two and a half hours, were conducted over a video call with a member of the UK-based research team. Each interview started with an open invitation from the interviewer to encourage each participant to speak about their experience of receiving a donated embryo, and the interviewer then followed up with further questions seeking further details of the person's experience. The session included the family map exercise towards the end of each interview.

Each participant was asked to draw a map of their family using the adult family map exercise described by Tasker et al. (2018). In the couple interview Ella drew the family map and Jamie watched and sometimes commented or suggested ideas. At the start of the family map exercise participants were asked "When you think about your family now, what comes into your mind and who comes into your mind?" Participants were then asked to draw a map of their family, putting a symbol or drawing for each family member on a blank sheet of white A4-size paper. Participants were also reminded that everybody's family is different and that sometimes it was not easy to represent them. While participants were drawing, the interviewer encouraged the participant to talk about who they are drawing (e.g., how would you describe that person's relationship to you?) and to think out loud when making their decisions about who to put on the map next and where to put them. When the initial map had been drawn the interviewer then asked whether there was anyone else the participant

wanted to include. The participant also was encouraged to review their map both verbally and visually by editing or redrawing their map. Thus, the aim of the family map exercise was not to establish a genealogical record, but to access a representation of the participant's psychosocial representation of their family in both visual and verbal form.

2.3. Data Preparation and Qualitative Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and prepared for analysis with any identifying information removed. Each hand-drawn family map was then transposed into a Microsoft Word document (matching size and shape proportionate to the original A4 size drawing). All the names and any identifying details on the family maps and interview extracts presented here have been changed to preserve anonymity, but otherwise wording and pictorial representations remain the same.

The interview transcripts were subjected to a process of narrative thematic analysis in relation to the family maps (Riessman 2008; Tasker and Delvoye 2018, in press). The order of placement of family members was noted as were the various lines, relational groupings of members, and any notable visual features. Each individual transcript was analyzed through the process of open coding: beginning initially on the section of the interview when the participant was drawing their family map and then spreading across the entire interview. In open-coding, participants' phrases were summarized initially using the key content and meaning words (thus prioritizing rich descriptive terms used by the participant). Concurrent with this process of summarizing, any interpretations or thoughts directly prompted by the data were added to the open-codes. When all four transcripts had been open-coded by the first author, the second author then reviewed the transcripts with each open code indicated alongside the relevant interview segment and made additions or amendments to enrich and refine the open codes. The next phase of analysis separated the open codes from each transcript and simultaneously reviewed the entire set of open codes across all four transcripts to sort these by similarity into groups (sub-themes). The sub-themes were then interpreted to form coherent themes generated inductively from transcript analysis. We then focused on the themes pertaining to the visual family map data and our specific research questions on the role of genetics and/or psychosocial markers in denoting family membership.

3. Results

Our themes are delineated below under their respective thematic subheadings: immediate family (the ones you care for); extended family (the need for people beyond the immediate family who know your family story); a genetic link is not enough for family membership, but does need to be recognized; the lack of a genetic connection may trouble family relationships (how can we best manage this?); family connection through the sharing of common family values and the gift of children's lives. As we indicate below in our description of each theme, the themes are represented to a greater or lesser extent in all four interview transcripts and family maps. As our analysis has been thematically focused across all four interviews we have not ordered our presentation of evidence below as a series of case studies. Instead, we have ordered the interview material presented under each theme to represent the subthemes that contributed to the theme.

3.1. Immediate Family (the Ones Who You Care For)

When the interviewees began to draw their maps, they drew themselves, their partners, and their children first, constituting a domestic group at the centre of each participant's map and at the heart of their stories (their immediate family). In each map the immediate family was akin to a nuclear family often separated by a boundary from other family members, as was evident in Ella and Jamie's drawing (Figure 1). In Figure 1 Ella has drawn herself and her husband Jamie and then a semi-circle around their daughter Charlotte and their two cats. Ella said: "Charlotte is the centre of our family universe and changed our life [...] now we are a family of three and we have two cats". Jamie then added "that would make it a family of five".

Ella's concept of a precious immediate family could also be observed in the maps and interview data produced by other participants too. When Judith started to draw her family map, she first put her children (Charlie and Amelia) and then her husband (Simon) and herself into "literally our immediate family" circle (Figure 2). Melissa described and drew her concept of family as a tree (Figure 3). Melissa and her husband (Richy) formed the trunk with their three children (Tammy, Rhys, David) placed in a line immediately underneath them in the branches, with her married daughter (Tammy) also placed next to her husband (Jack). Anne referred to her immediate family as "just us": her husband (Jim) and their three children (Albany, Tilly, Alma) who were distinct from 'true' family defined on the map by as Anne and her husband Jim's genetic relatives (Figure 4). Anne laughed as she explained her family map: "[the] solid line is [. . .] maybe like our true family, not immediate, 'cos immediate [family is] just us but erm-, like our real family".
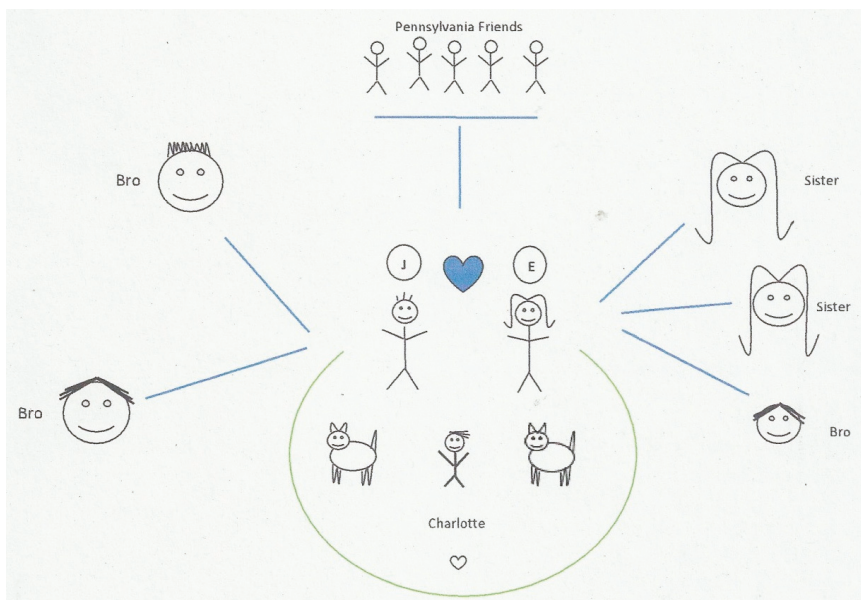
Figure 1. Ella and Jamie's family map.
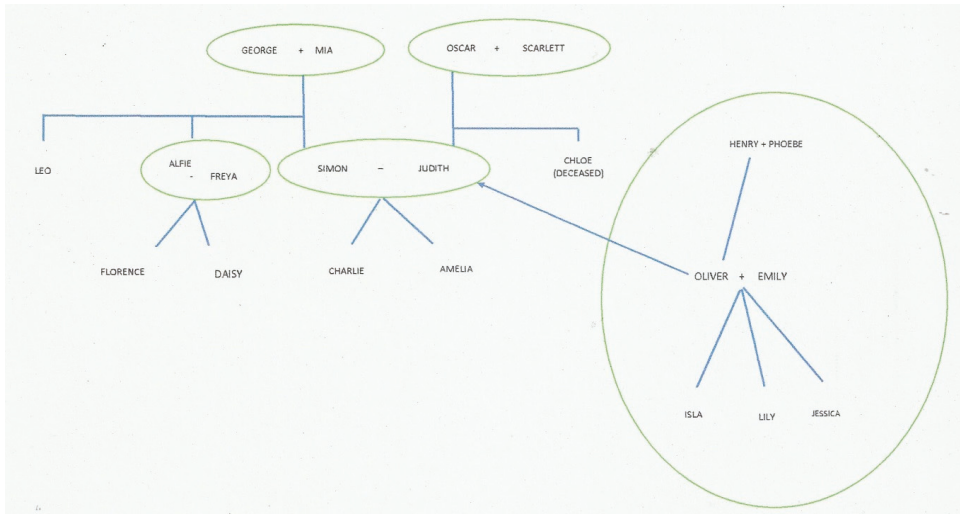
Figure 2. Judith's family map.
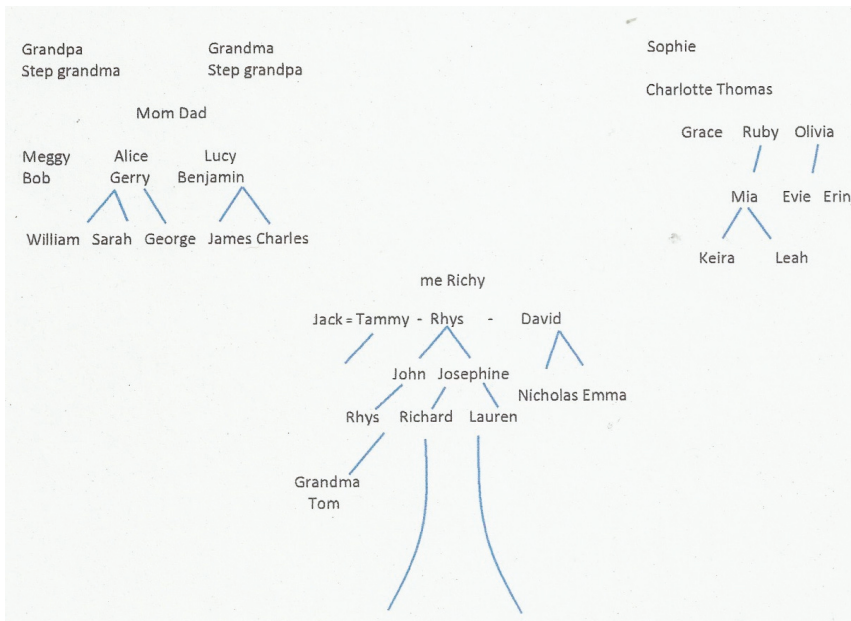
Figure 3. Melissa's family map.
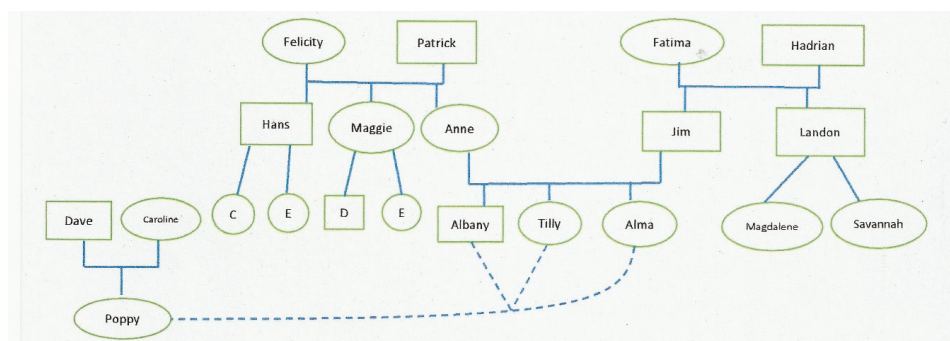
Figure 4. Anne's family map.

3.2. Extended Family: Generational Stakes and the Need for People Beyond Immediate Family Who Know Your Family Story

All the family maps drawn by our participants included not only immediate family, but also extended family, namely the siblings and parents of the participants, who fanned out around the centrally positioned hub of immediate family. Except for Ella and Jamie, who had both experienced their parents' deaths, participants included their parents on their family maps but family generations stopped here. Furthermore, none of the four family maps included participants' own uncles and aunts or cousins. Ella and Jamie depicted their own siblings but did not include or mention the partners or offspring of their siblings, whereas other participants did.

Ella and Jamie also were the only participants who included friends as family on their map. Ella explained that this was because friends "are our chosen family and they have taken my siblings' place since we moved in Pennsylvania". At another point in the interview Ella also explained that "we had to get a couple of letters of recommendation for the [embryo adoption] process [Interviewer: yeah] we needed a few people to like write us letters [Interviewer: okay] so they knew right away". Ella and Jamie talked about their friends as a group and they were drawn as a grouped block, without the detailed features that Ella gave to either her siblings or Jamie's brothers. In response to a question about how their view of their family had changed, Jamie simply said "family matters". Ella then expanded upon how their view of family had changed with the void left by the double bereavement she and Jamie had experienced with the loss of both sets of their parents:

"Well with the loss of my parents, and then the loss of Jamie's parents, there was like a vacuum and it made us realize that we really are older parents. Because a lot of times when you talk to people that have kids [you realize] that grandparents are involved, and they help so, and we don't have that kind of help. So I think that our family maps have changed and the biological family has gotten smaller but they, our friend family, has gotten bigger."

The competing demands of strong narratives about family could be glimpsed through Jamie and Ella's account of who in their family needed to be told and why they needed to be told. Initially, the relayed commentary of Jamie's brothers loomed large in Jamie's account of fertility treatment. Here we noted Jamie's embarrassment about Ella not becoming pregnant and then his seemingly contradictory confusion about what needed to be said within his wider family about continuing the family line. As Jamie stated:

"I felt it was kind of a private thing between the two of us and, erm, I kind of wanted to leave it like that, you know. When we were trying to get pregnant I was hearing comments from my brothers 'well obviously you're going to need help' [Interviewer: right] Well what does that mean? So at that point I thought: You know something this is our private life! And at this point with some people I felt like this could be a private thing between the three of us.

And erm-, there are a ton of people that do know about it and I love to tell the story, I think it's a great story."

With some hesitation Ella then explained how Jamie had reached his final uncomfortable position about "the ton of people" who knew about the embryo donation, despite wanting to keep this as "a private thing". Ella's account helped to explain why Jamie seemed to feel the need to be upbeat and positive regardless of his embarrassment with his brothers, almost as if Jamie was trying to convince himself, Ella, and the interviewer of the positive side. Ella said:

"At the beginning, erm, we were not going to tell anyone. [Interviewer: okay] and then through the adoption agency they told us that there were studies that showed that-, that erm-, you kind of needed to tell the child [. . .]. And Jamie accepted it and I accepted it and we realized at some point we were going to tell Charlotte".

Ella then immediately went on to talk about her own position regarding infertility and the type of ongoing relationships she had with her sisters. Here Ella focused on a different family-related narrative, but one which seemed equally as strong as Jamie's need to continue an unquestioned family line. Ella described her need to receive family support and the common interest she shared with her sisters in raising the next generation of their wider family:

"So at that point Jamie really wasn't-, wanting me to talk to my family about it [Interviewer: right] and I have a different relationship with my sisters and my brother than he has with his brothers [Interviewer: okay]. So I felt a little restricted by the fact that he didn't want me to tell them (.) and then finally I just said I really needed their support [Interviewer: okay]. And I talked to them about it. But it was kind of late in the game [Interviewer: okay, yeah]. After we had been going through fertility treatment for a long time [Interviewer: okay]. So I think it was confusing about who to tell and who not to tell".

Later on in the interview Ella said:

"I think my sisters were really excited for me, 'cos I think they thought that we weren't going to have children [Interviewer: okay]. And erm-, I think they were excited that we were planning to have a child [Interviewer: yeah]. So, for them they were really excited, and every time I went through something at the doctors I would be texting them and saying what she looked like, you know, and what her heart rate was and this and that [Interviewer: okay]. So they were very excited for me and for Jamie."

Anne included just her siblings and her husband Jim's siblings (none with partners) with each sibling depicted in a classic family tree formation with their children. Judith concentrated on accurately representing her husband's siblings: an elder brother without a partner and a second brother with a partner and two children. Judith also talked lovingly about her sister Chloe who had died of a serious illness whilst Judith was expecting her first child. Judith felt there was a close connection between her daughter Amelia and Chloe:

"Chloe knew that we were going through this process and was going through the final months of her life and she actually donated, you know, not a lot of money but some money to help towards the adoption costs. And that was part of her way of giving since she wasn't going to be around. And as my sister was facing the final days, and we were finalizing days for the first transfer, my sister was lamenting that she wasn't going to meet them and I said "well wait a minute, you're going to meet them first, 'cos you're going to cross in heaven. You'll get to meet our children before we even do, because they're waiting in heaven for us to be born". And so really that warmed her heart and helped ease her lamenting a bit about that."

3.3. A Genetic Link Is Not Enough for Family Membership, but This Does Need to Recognized

The position of the other parents who were interviewed was that a genetic link was not enough for family membership, but it did need to be recognized. Nevertheless, both Judith's and Melissa's views on the importance of a genetic link for denoting family membership were very different from those expressed by either Anne or Ella and Jamie. Judith and Melissa both had open relationships with their donor families, which were represented in their family maps (Figures 2 and 3 respectively). In contrast, Ella and Jamie's map did not include members of the donor family and Anne only partially linked the donor family to her family with a dotted line (Figure 4).

Melissa's family history was more complex than that presented by other participants. Melissa's family contained three "biological families": Tammy (Melissa's daughter from a domestic adoption) and Melissa's sons Rhys and David, who were conceived following two separate embryo adoptions. All three of Melissa's children had contact with their respective biological families. Melissa argued that contact with each biological family (via pictures, messages, and in person) was fundamental to each child's sense of identity as it gave "that whole sense of family history and similarity". When describing the occasion when she and her son Rhys met up with his donor family, Melissa said: "They have so much in common. It was really a cool thing to sit down and have dinner and [ask] 'what are you interested in?' [. . .] but like the dead-same exact things." Melissa's said that all three children's biological families "feel like family to me" but she said she did not place them on her family tree until she had met them (Figure 3).

Judith described the embryo donors and their relatives as genetic family, and indicated that the two families had a close relationship, which she indicated by adjacent placement on her family map (see Figure 2). Judith's family map had totally changed during her embryo donation pregnancy because of her sister's serious illness and subsequent death. The passing of her only sibling, whom Judith had been very close to, and the arrival of her first child meant Judith both: "lost a [family tree] branch, and gained a greater family branch". On her family map Judith has drawn a strong link between herself and donor family. In direct contrast to Anne's positioning of the donor family off to the side with a tenuous dotted line, Judith gave the donor family a prominent place next to her depiction of her deceased sister. The donor family was drawn immediately after Judith's finished drawing her immediate family and the donor family was drawn with generational detail to include genetic grandparents. Judith thought the donor couple was like an uncle and aunt for her children, and their children were seen as cousins. Judith described her children as being very close to their biological sisters. Indeed, Judith also argued that if other frozen embryos were adopted and developed from the same batch that had contained her son and daughter (and the donor family's offspring) then these new children would also be part of the same set of siblings.

Judith said she had learnt to manage and then accept her feelings about not being genetically related with her children: "I think again I went through it so quickly and there was so much going on like emotionally because [of] dealing with the loss of my only sibling." Also, Judith explained that for her the experience of pregnancy and giving birth to her child conceived via embryo donation created a "clear line of parentage" and also helped her to overcome the feeling that she might not have a right to parent her children. Judith contrasted what she saw as the certainty of embryo adoption with adoptive parenting and the uncertainty surrounding placement, if a birth parent changed their mind about the adoption:

"I think getting to experience pregnancy was really the biggest reason why we wanted to pursue embryo adoption, erm, there was a clear line of parentage. So we both separately, before we got married, had friends going through traditional adoption and [some who were] in that process. I mean here I don't know how the laws are in the UK, but here in the US there is a certain time the parents had to like 'whoops I didn't realize!' they changed their mind, they call it the 'change the mind' kind of time period. [Interviewer: Okay] And parents would change their mind. In fact I had one friend because of her unique situation had the

baby an entire year and they, the parents decided oh no we want the baby back. [Interviewer: Wow]. And I just knew in my heart I couldn't go through that. [Interviewer: Of course]. That would just break my heart."

Ella and Jamie both played down the importance of genetics in terms of family relationships, but in contrast highlighted the importance of genetics for the health and vitality of their daughter. In fact the healthy genetic contribution made by the donor embryo, plus the fact that neither of them had a genetic advantage by sharing their genetic heritage with their baby, made adopting an embryo an attractive route to parenthood. As Ella told the interviewer:

"We decided you know what if we were going to get an egg [Interviewer: yeah] and use Jamie's sperm, then why don't we just get an adopted embryo and be that neither of us was, you know, participating in the genetic make-up, and we would have a fresh embryo. [Interviewer: okay] You know, like a fresh sleeve.

"Interviewer: Yeah, okay, so there's something about the equality of neither of you being the genetic parent?

"Ella: Right, and plus, you know, I've been watching all the studies and it seems like not only maternal age but paternal age could have an impact on, erm, issues with autism and I felt like you know what let's be safe and get, erm, a baby that has a very young mother and a very young father. [Interviewer: okay] And then she'll be very healthy. [Interviewer: okay]. You won't have to worry about any of that during the pregnancy. [Interviewer: okay] Which was nice, which it was really nice not to have to worry about that."

The importance of knowing about genetics for health loomed large in Ella and Jamie's interview. Ella had told their health care providers about their daughter Charlotte's embryo donation heritage: "to get her care, so I feel like they should know". Despite his reservations about telling others about his daughter's origins, Jamie stressed the importance of telling his daughter about her genetic origins: "because I think it's extremely important. [. . .] after they [the adoption professionals] had told us different stories about different families and the impact that has on people, you know, I've realized. She needs to know the true story."

Nonetheless, Jamie also played down the importance of genetics marking family relationship as he argued that "the DNA might not be as big [a factor in creating family resemblance] as we think it is". Jamie then indicated that the absence of a genetic link with his daughter had troubled him previously, but this feeling had subsided because of the undoubted similarity between them: "You know, it did at the beginning, but now it is what it is, you know. [Interviewer: Yeah you're kind of used to it?] Believe it or not she does kind of look like the two of us [laughter]". Anne also emphasized the careful matching of physical characteristics between donors and recipients and thought that one of her daughters (Tilly) "looks almost exactly like me. The twins don't, but Tilly does, and all three of my kids don't look like Poppy the donor family daughter. Everyone comments about it all the time."

Although two recipient families had little contact with their donor family, both Ella and Jamie and also Anne could not ignore the presence of the donors in their lives. Ella and Jamie had never met the donor couple and had never had a contact with them outside of agency-mediated contact. It was clear that the donor family was not part of Ella and Jamie's life and they were not included in Ella's family map. Nonetheless, Ella conceded that the children of the donor couple (whom Ella named as "Charlotte's biological siblings") could be considered part of Ella and Jamie's family, if their daughter Charlotte wanted this when she was older. The absence of the donor family in their lives was justified by Ella and Jamie as a consequence of both the agency's hands-off approach to mediated contact between donors and recipients, and the donor couple withdrawing from contact. Ella attributed the donor couple withdrawing to them perhaps having some complex issues involving "double disclosure". That is to say that Ella and Jamie had received a batch of embryos from a double-donation, i.e., the batch of IVF embryos received had been created using a donor's eggs, not

the commissioning mother's eggs. Ella explained: "I didn't know if she was going to tell her children about whether, erm, [Interviewer: Okay] they used a donor's egg, so she had some issues with making it an open process". Nonetheless, the donor family's withdrawal from contact did accord with Ella and Jamie's desire not to have any intrusion into their parenting, and Ella and Jamie felt that it was sufficient that they had agreed to let Charlotte know "how she got here and who her parents are."

Anne said that she had initially wanted a "non-open donation". Furthermore, Anne still did not like the open-contact relationship, which had been set up largely upon the instigation of the donor couple. Anne said she had worried about their excessive involvement into her parenting:

"My initial feelings on it were like with adoption that I didn't want anything to do with the donating family, because it just seemed better to keep it clean.

"Interviewer: What was your fear around that?

"Anne: that they would want to be involved in the children's lives, or that they would somehow try and take them away from us [laughter] so, erm, or that we would have to accommodate them somehow in our lives."

Nonetheless, Anne felt she had to represent the donor family on her family map despite her reservations. Graphically, Anne included the donor family in her map but offset to one side. Furthermore, Anne's children were only directly linked to Poppy, the donor family's daughter, and not directly linked to their genetic parents. Moreover, the line that connected Anne's children and Poppy was not a normal line, but was dotted or partial, quite unlike the solid line with which she connected her "true" or main extended family. Anne hesitantly explained:

"The dotted line are people who are related to us somehow, but they're not actually a part of our like main family [Interviewer: okay] They're-, I don't know, auxiliary family. [laughter]. I wouldn't even call them family, but they're-, they're connected to us, they are connected to us somehow, but they're not part of our main family."

Anne also said that she thought of the donor family's child, Poppy, as the "natural sibling" of her children, like a niece, and connected Poppy with one dotted line that then branched off to each of Anne's children, thus emphasizing the link between genetic relatives. Anne thought of the donor family couple as good friends and regularly included them within the children's story book about a child from an embryo donor that she read to her twins and her daughter: "There's a story book we read, erm, and they talk about how their child was conceived as donor embryo". Anne also felt a sense of guilt about her success with embryo donation in relation to the donors: Anne said she had "three of their genetic material kids and they [the donors] have only one daughter". Anne knew that the donor family presented Anne's family to their daughter, Poppy, as adult friends of theirs who Poppy does not know ("she told me that she tells Poppy that we're like her dad's drinking buddy"). Furthermore, the donor mother has not told Poppy that Tilly, Anne's daughter, is in fact her genetic sibling. Anne then worried about Poppy's lack of knowledge: "I did voice my concern that Poppy might be mad [angry] if she finds out too late that she has these three, erm, donor conceived kids that are directly genetically blood linked to her. So I sort of mentioned it [to the donor family]."

3.4. The Lack of a Genetic Connection May Trouble Family Relationships—How Can We Best Manage This?

Despite Jamie's downplaying of the role of genetics in creating physical and personality resemblances within families, there were other indications that he was troubled by the lack of a genetic connection through having a child via embryo donation. Namely, Jamie conveyed that the lack of a genetic connection was information that needed to be carefully managed to avoid embarrassment. For Jamie telling someone that his child was born from an adopted embryo might be inviting the other person to think that "she is someone else's child". Consequently at points during the interview Jamie argued that it was best only to tell if there was a direct reason for telling someone about the embryo donation:

"the rest of them [acquaintances, friends and family] don't know, erm-, in my mind do they need to know? [Interviewer: okay]. You know, you don't walk around with a shirt saying 'Oh by the way we've got an embryo adoption: it's somebody else's child!' It's a conversation at the right time in my mind when it comes up."

Anne also expressed her ambiguity about the absence of a genetic link between her and her embryo donated children. Sometimes Anne thought: "wait, she or he is not my genetic child". The same thought bothered Anne when anyone casually commented upon a physical resemblance between her and her children. Anne also still desired to have genetically related children with her husband and they were on yet another IVF cycle using their own gametes when Anne was interviewed. Nonetheless, Anne was adamant that she and her husband could never supplant their embryo-donated children with a genetically related child: "I think there's still like a sense of loss that I don't have genetic children but-, like I would never trade what I have now".

Each family used a specific name for their embryo donors, which reflected what the participants thought about the donors and how involved the donor family was in the participant's family life. Both Jamie and Ella, and also Anne, did not use the term parent for their child's genetic relatives. As Anne said:

"it's kind of awkward but, erm, I think [the agency we went through] calls them genetic parents [but] they're not Tilly's parents so we don't call them parents [Interviewer: yeah]. We call them, erm-, the donor family couple like the donor family mum the donor family dad [Interviewer: yeah] and the donor family daughter."

In contrast, Judith and Melissa both referred to the embryo donors as their children's genetic parents. In fact Judith made a point of not referring to them as the donor family because she said she had a wonderful open relationship with them and she felt her children did too. When talking to their children both Judith and Melissa usually used first names when talking about the genetic parents and referred to their children's "sister" or "brother" in the donor family children. Nevertheless, Judith made a distinction when she referred to the genetic father's grandparents, who Judith thought were not grandparents.

3.5. Family Connection through the Sharing of Common Family Values and the Gift of Children's Lives

An underlying theme that flowed more or less strongly through all the interviews was the shared gift of children's lives, which were created and nurtured in various ways within a common set of values, which could be based on faith or shared ethnicity. Perhaps our identification of this thematic strand was not surprising in our sample, given the theme's congruence with the faith-based mission of the embryo adoption agency from which all four families were recruited. Clearly some families were more committed to a Christian pro-life viewpoint than were others. For example, the view that both donor and recipient families together enabled a child's life—through creating the embryonic person and then giving that person the crucial chance to develop—was most evident in Judith's narrative. Judith described the values and Christian purpose that she felt she shared with the donor family while undertaking the embryo transfer to achieve a pregnancy:

"What was really cool by the way was the night before the transfer, 'cos Oliver and Emily are also Christians they called us, and we all prayed together for the transfer and that was just-, again there's been a lot of confirmations. And I'm skipping as far as why this was right for us, but that was one of those pivotal like yeah this is why this is why we chose this method. Erm-, . . . the transfer went beautifully."

Melissa mentioned her Christian values much less than did Judith in her interview, but Christian beliefs were clearly fundamental to how she thought about family and how embryo adoption was incorporated into her family concept. In describing her feelings at seeing the connection between her son Rhys and his genetic family Melissa was clearly moved as she added:

"And I really was, erm, so grateful that they're Christian families with the same values, and so I feel like we're relatives and I trust them like I-, you know, they're-, yeah, yeah, I really trust them and I love how much they love Rhys and all of them are like really-, you know even the-, well Ron's mom, so Rhys's genetic Grandma [genetic father's mother]"

Anne's conversation featured her ethnic identity, which she also shared with the donor family, rather than her Christian beliefs. The ethnic identity that both families shared and the common family traditions stemming from this, such as celebrating children's birthdays across the two families in a similar way, contributed to a feeling of shared values within a wider sense of family. However, in other respects Anne felt somewhat isolated and on the margins of the wider Christian values "family" concept as fostered by the embryo adoption agency: "I don't participate very often [in agency activities] it's very, very Christian, so people are like, erm, prayers and God bless . . . we go to church on the weekends, but it's a little bit over the top for me". Because of her non-Christian religious identity, Ella possibly felt even more apart from the embryo adoption agency, and perhaps also from the donor family who had given her and Jamie embryos. Ella thought that when she and Jamie initially registered with the agency their profile had been set aside by some families with embryos to donate: "I felt like erm-, we were being judged by some of the families and I'm not Christian and I felt like there was some bias there, [...] and this is a Christian organization so I didn't like that part of it."

4. Discussion

Our in-depth interview data and family maps from four families have demonstrated interweaving, and sometimes competing, themes about what makes family membership when a child has a gestational connection and an unbroken history of growing up with their adoptive family. Whether or not a family relationship was entailed because of the genetic link between the donors and the child of embryo donation was a complex issue for recipient parents and they had found a variety of ways of including, or excluding, the donor family. The hand-drawn family maps vividly depicted how to a greater or lesser extent recipient parents subscribed to a broader conceptualization of family with donor family members grafted, or not grafted, onto their genealogical family tree.

Although more recent cohorts of parents using third-party reproduction to have a baby seem more likely than earlier cohorts to disclose to their children, most heterosexual parents of gamete-donated children have found it difficult to broach the subject of genetic origins with their children (Golombok 2015). Some parents of a child conceived through embryo donation in one UK sample seemed to be especially reluctant to disclose and existing research has suggested that few children know about their origins as they grow up (MacCallum and Keeley 2008). While the medical history advantages of disclosure are often emphasized, assisted-conception clinics have offered far less guidance on how to disclose and what the ramifications of disclosure might be for families. Our findings from our small sample of four families, who received a donated embryo via an agency brokered semi-open in-contact agreement with their embryo donors, appear quite different from MacCallum and Keeley's findings. In the four cases we sampled, parents with the youngest child had the clear intention to tell and the remaining three sets of parents had already told the story of embryo donation to their children, if not actually met the donor family. Thus, our findings seem closer to those found in studies of adopted children where some form of contact with at least some of the child's birth family is often stipulated at the start of the adoption and woven into adoptive family life, regardless of how difficult this may be (Jones and Hackett 2011; Neil et al. 2015).

One way of making sense of our analysis is to consider family as being formed upon three main dimensions: commitment from a shared history of the giving and receiving of care, gestation, and genetics. In families who have given birth to genetically related children and brought them up, these dimensions all point to sharing the same genealogical lineage. In adoptive families only the first dimension (history of care) contradicts the other two dimensions, but there is a more or less clear story to explain to the child and others in the wider adoptive family. However, for children from donated embryos the information from both the first and second dimension (history and gestation)

are congruent but family relationship is contradicted by the third dimension: parental awareness of an unshared, potentially invisible but ever present, genetic heritage that lurks psychologically if it is not acknowledged. In both Judith's and Melissa's interview descriptions, different ways had been found to resolve the conundrum of the three dimensions in families with an embryo-donated child, but in Anne's and Ella and Jamie's interviews active dilemmas based upon the three dimensions were evident.

Of the five parents we interviewed Melissa most often stressed genetic relatedness as the underlying theme that broadened family membership to include the donor family. Nonetheless, Melissa said she did not place her children's genetic relatives on her family tree until she had met them (implying that getting to know them in person was an important part of recognizing family membership). Meeting her son Rhys's genetic family had helped Melissa to understand why Rhys is as he is. Melissa's account therefore emphasized similar benefits from open contact embryo donation to those seen for adopted children, and indirectly their adoptive parents, of open adoption. Namely, the increased flow of information and contact prompted family communication and helped children as they grow up to answer questions of origin and identity (Von Korff and Grotevant 2011).

In Judith's interview, an understanding of the genetic connection was evident, but not emphasized in the way that it had been Melissa's account. Judith acknowledged and included the donor family as part of her family on her family map: in fact, the largest subsystem circle indicated on Judith's family map was drawn around the donor family subsystem. But Judith stressed that the donors' genetic connection with her children did not give them a parental connection; she was clear that she had parentage through gestation and giving birth. Instead, the family connection for Judith was mainly formed on the emotional supportive link between the two families, which in turn was founded upon a shared set of beliefs and values around both families giving and receiving the joint gift of children's lives. In other words, the sharing of embryos itself meant that the donor and adoptive families were bound by a common interest and shared religious family values in the embryo-donated children's lives and in the lives of the children from embryos that grew up with the donating couple. In Judith's case, the gift of the children's lives, and also the faith-based emotional support she received from the donor family at the distressing time of her close sister's death, had helped to cement a very special family connection. Melissa also mentioned that the Christian family values shared by her and the donors helped to make the donor family feel like relatives and contributed to Melissa's trust in Rhys's connection with the donor family. Thus, Melissa felt that Rhys and the donor family's children were cherished in the same way.

In two of our four interviews, we saw parents of embryo-donated children struggle on occasions with how to place a boundary around their family because the information from the three dimensions—the shared history of the giving and receiving of care, gestation, and genetics—was contradictory. For example, Ella and Jamie's solution to the contradictions between these dimensions was to downplay the troubling absence of a genetic connection between them and their daughter. No mention of the donor family was made when Ella drew their family map. Yet Ella and Jamie had resolved to tell their young daughter, Charlotte, about her genetic origins, because they agreed with the embryo adoption agency about the importance of knowing your genetic heritage for medical reasons. Having agreed with this principle it was then unthinkable not to tell Charlotte. Anne likewise was somewhat unresolved about the absence of a genetic underpinning to parentage and family membership. Also, like Ella and Jamie, Anne emphasized how much at least one of her children resembled her and how little any of her three children resembled the donor family's child. Anne drew a dotted or partial line, specifically between her three children and their genetic sibling, the donor family's child, to indicate a tenuous connection on her family map; no direct connection was indicated between Anne's family and the gamete donors. The difficulties of integrating the adopted child's birth family connection with adoptive parents' narratives of closure on previous attempts to have children and making a new start have been noted in other studies of children adopted from the social care system (Jones and Hackett 2011; Tasker and Wood 2016). The dilemma of genetic heritage was evident

in our study of families with children from embryo donation, albeit played out in a different way to the dilemmas faced by adoptive parents in traditional adoption who lack both an early life and genetic connection with their child.

One intriguing narrative thread underpinning family relationships in our families with a child conceived by gamete donation was the recognition of the importance of sibling relationships. Freeman et al. (2009) noted that most of the parents of children conceived via donor gametes who were motivated to consult the Donor Sibling Registry did so because of their desire to find donor siblings for their offspring. The importance of cross-generational sibling connections in the minds of the families we interviewed also coincides with the emphasis in UK social work on keeping groups of adopted siblings together or at least in touch with their genetic siblings (Dance and Farmer 2014).

In our study, difficult narrative threads involving extended family and concerning family continuity and future generations could be seen competing in the interviews and positioned on the family maps. On one side Jamie experienced the pressure of continuing a "pure" family line and feared being open with his brothers who had taunted him. On the other side, Jamie's wife Ella feared the void of being unable to connect with her sisters because she could not share in making the next generation of family. Positioning himself as a progenitor, Jamie clearly experienced expectations and pressures from his brothers to have children: could Jamie's children continue the family line if they were not genetically his? Had Jamie let the family down if he could not do this himself? No less pressing than Jamie's concerns, were Ella's feelings about keeping secrets and so being cut off from family support. Ella was desperate to share her anxiety and disappointments about fertility with her sisters, whom she knew would support her because of their shared family history and stake in future generations. Much of the emotional pain of fertility treatment for the couple was because having children concerned not only the want-to-be parents but also their wider families. Thus, one dilemma of fertility treatment with donated gametes is that this touches upon each prospective parent's connections with wider discourses about what makes family through the generation. Is family denoted by shared genetics, or a shared history and commitment to socioemotional support through the generations? In traditional adoption it would be extremely difficult to keep adoption completely secret from extended adoptive family members. Much of the family work that adoptive parents do both prior to and after adoption concerns reconciling extended family members' family scripts with those the adoptive child may hold (Tasker and Wood 2016). Considering the findings from our study, we suggest tentatively that examining inter- and intra-generational family scripts in relation to extended families may be useful for those undertaking parenthood via embryo donation too.

5. Conclusions

Our small in-depth study focused on parents who had a child using embryo donation in a context similar yet distinct from adoption: with donor couples specifically selecting a recipient couple to donate their embryo to within an agency-brokered agreement in which both couples are in contact with each other. All the parents in our study either were already open with their child or intended to tell their child about their embryo donation origins. Nonetheless, the genogram technique of family map making showed that some recipient families found it easier than others to form a connection with the donor family or integrate the donor family into their concept of family, while others still struggled with family boundaries.

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